

**Final Report:**  
**Distance Learning Program Review**

**Prepared For:**  
**Distance Learning Unit**  
**Instruction, Curriculum and Assessment Branch**



**Prepared By:**

**proactive**  
INFORMATION SERVICES INC.



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**June 2008**

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## - INTRODUCTION -

### A. Background to the Project

The Distance Learning Unit (Instruction, Curriculum and Assessment Branch, Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth) supports a variety of learning opportunities, integrated with teaching and learning in Manitoba through a number of delivery modes and technologies. The system is designed to support equitable opportunities for student learning and the acquisition of course credits.

Currently, the Distance Learning Unit is developing goals and strategies to inform the future of distance learning in Manitoba. As part of the process, the Distance Learning Unit wanted to undertake a review which included; the secondary analysis of internal documentation related to current distance learning programs, a brief literature review, results of an environmental scan of other Canadian jurisdictions, and consultation with users of distance learning programs. In addition, personnel working in Adult Learning and Literacy were consulted regarding the delivery of distance learning programs to adult learners.

In response to a Request for Proposal, Proactive Information Services Inc.,<sup>1</sup> submitted a proposal and was awarded the contract to conduct this project. This report represents the culmination of the project process. Information from project activities has been synthesized and incorporated into this report which concludes with directions for the future of distance learning in Manitoba.

### B. Project Objectives

This project is intended to provide information to the Distance Learning Unit, which will assist with the development and articulation of future goals and strategies for distance learning in Manitoba. The current distance learning programs are assessed in terms of their perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges (SWOC).

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<sup>1</sup> Proactive Information Services Inc., a Manitoba-based company, was established in 1984 specifically to provide research and evaluation services to clients in the public and non-profit sectors. Proactive's clients include ministries of education, school divisions/districts, educational organizations, foundations, and other NGO's across Canada, as well as in Europe and South America. Proactive has worked extensively in the area public education. For further information on Proactive, please visit [www.proactive.mb.ca](http://www.proactive.mb.ca).

The objectives for the project are:

- to assess the current Distance Learning programs supported by the Distance Learning Unit, including an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges;
- to locate current and future Distance Learning programs in what is currently known as effective distance learning practice, taking into consideration the realities of the Manitoba context; and,
- to articulate future goals and strategies for distance learning in Manitoba towards 2010.

## - METHODOLOGY -

### A. Methods

Despite the short timeline for the project, a staged or phased approach was used. The methods were developed according to the three phases, as outlined in the Request for Proposal.

#### Phase I

##### **Consultation with the Distance Learning Unit**

Consultation with the Distance Learning Unit was ongoing throughout the project and began with the initial meeting at the Distance Learning Unit's office. Email and telephone communication supported the implementation of project activities. Prior to the facilitated session (see Phase 2), the consultants from Proactive also met with the Director of Instruction, Curriculum and Assessment, teleconferencing with the Coordinator of the Distance Learning Unit to finalize the agenda for the stakeholder consultation session.

##### **Review of Current Programs**

Existing materials as well as consultation with the Distance Education Unit assisted in reviewing the status of the three distance learning programs currently in use. Background information included documents, information on development, implementation and delivery processes, as well as enrollment statistics and financial information.

##### **Literature Review and Environmental Scan**

A brief literature review was conducted in support of the project, focusing specifically on effective (validated) and promising practices in distance learning with a Canadian focus. Journals used included; Education Canada, Educational Leadership, and Educational Researcher. In addition, associations and consortiums were accessed using the internet such as, the Canadian Association for Distance Education, the Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation, and the Sloan Consortium.

The Distance Learning Unit provided information for the environmental scan, which Proactive enhanced through a Web-based search of distance learning programs in use throughout other Canadian jurisdictions.

### **Consultation with Adult Learning and Literacy**

The Proactive consultants met with representatives of Adult Learning and Literacy (Manitoba Advanced Education and Literacy) to discuss the use of Distance Learning for adults in Manitoba. Adult Learning Centres are an important vehicle for the delivery of educational programming to adult learners who may have both similar and different needs from children and youth. The information was supplemented by a telephone interview with a representative from a rural Adult Learning Centre in Manitoba where courses were offered to learners outside their community.

### **Phase II**

Phase II was focused on the consultation with school division teams, educational partners and other stakeholders. The consultation occurred in Brandon on March 14, 2008. A total of 40 people attended the consultation, representing 16 school divisions/districts and five educational partners,<sup>2</sup> as well as 13 staff of Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, and five staff from Manitoba Science, Technology, Energy and Mines (STEM).

Two consultants from Proactive facilitated the session which included presentations by staff of the Distance Learning Unit and representatives from STEM, as well as a variety of small and large group discussion and feedback activities. (A copy of the Agenda and the PowerPoint presentation by DLU are found in Appendix A.)

As an added component, staff from the Distance Learning Unit also contributed by completing a SWOC exercise in follow-up to the consultation.

### **Phase III**

Phase III included synthesizing and summarizing the information collected through the first two phases, culminating in the final report. The report identifies future directions for distance learning in Manitoba, including both short and long term strategies that address development, implementation, and delivery.

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<sup>2</sup> The educational partners in attendance were: COSL, MASS, MAST, MTS, and the University of Winnipeg.

## **B. Challenges and Limitations**

The primary challenge of the project was to undertake as comprehensive a review as possible within the project parameters. Consequently, the literature review and environmental scan, while they provide information on Canadian trends and practices in distance learning, cannot be viewed as comprehensive.

Another challenge was that the infrastructure to obtain statistics uses different formats for all three distance learning programs, leading to difficulties in extracting data. Therefore, comparative analysis is limited. Where information appeared to be conflicting, the most recent source was utilized. Finally, more feedback from learners using all programs would have enriched the report.

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## - REVIEW OF CURRENT PROGRAMS -

This section of the report examines Distance Learning Programs through various lenses, including existing information, feedback from users (in multiple forms), as well as the input from the Distance Learning Unit staff.

### A. Description of Distance Learning Programs

In Manitoba, distance learning programming delivered through the Distance Learning Unit can be accessed using three options; Independent Study Option, the Teacher Mediated Option, and Web-based Course Option.

The **Independent Study Option** (ISO) enables learners to complete a course independently; without a teacher or having to attend a school. ISO is a print-based system which includes courses for students in Grade 1 through Grade 12. The ISO is used by school age learners, both those attending and those not attending school, including home schoolers and students on medical leaves from school. Adult learners also access the ISO. Registrations are based on a continuous intake system with twelve months to complete the course, regardless of whether it is a full or half credit.

Each subject is assigned a Tutor/Marker who is available 12 months a year to provide support to the learners. Support is most often provided through the use of the telephone (an '800' number) and email. There is an ISO School Facilitator in each school to support students. A Distance Learning Consultant provides support to students, parents, the school facilitators, and school administrators. In addition, as a text-based system, the Grade 7 through Grade 12 learning materials are often purchased by educators for use as reference support materials. Courses are available in both English (71 courses) and French (17 courses) – approximately 20% of the courses offered are in French, while none currently provided are in an Aboriginal language. Currently, three courses are undergoing revision, 12 are undergoing field validation, and 21 are under development.

The **Teacher Mediated Option** (TMO) provides instruction through audio teleconferencing using ISO courses scheduled into the regular school year. The TMO is available to students attending school in Grade 9 through Grade 12. TMO courses are available only in English and are taught by instructors. The course is completed during a shortened academic year as instruction occurs over 80 minutes per 6 day cycle. Communication between instructor

and student occurs twice a week.

Students also have access to the instructors through facsimile, telephone and/or email. Schools having students enrolled in TMO course delivery have a TMO Proctor. The Distance Learning Consultant provides support to the TMO Proctors through conference calls, telephone and email 10 months of the year. In addition, the Consultant undertakes audio monitoring of classes. Currently, the primary users of the TMO are Hutterian Colony schools with the general school population largely unaware of this option.

An informal partnership exists between the MECY and host school divisions. MECY develops the courses and provides finance and administration leadership. The host divisions collect and hold the registration fees from the participating schools. The host divisions serve as the funding repository to pay the instructors that MECY has recruited. There are currently 24 courses available through the TMO option.

**Web-based Courses** (WBC) in Manitoba are available to high school teachers. Learners attending Adult Learning Centres have limited access to this option. They were first developed for the Ministry in 1999. Under the guidance of the WBC Development Consultant, new courses have been made available each year since 1999. The review and updates of older courses have occurred depending upon need and resources available. WBCs are designed to be delivered in the Blackboard Learning System (formerly WebCT). While being delivered through the internet, these courses are taught by a teacher who may be off-site. Courses are to be completed during the regular academic year/semester. There is a WBC contact person in each school division who supports local teachers and is involved in coordinating WBC implementation. The Distance Learning Consultant provides support to both the divisional contacts and to teachers through on site training, telephone, and email support. The courses are available to teachers, both for instructing students on-line and as a resource, at no cost. While courses are available in both English and French; currently 10 percent of the total offerings are in French. None are available in an Aboriginal language.

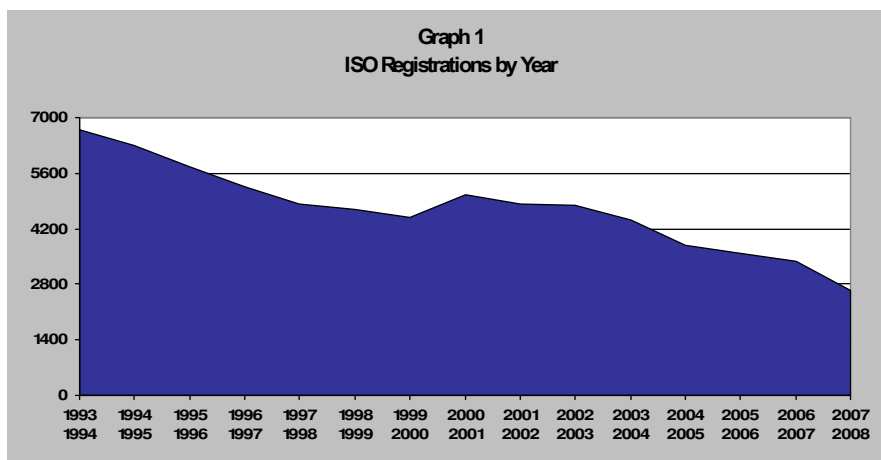
An informal partnership exists between the Ministry and school divisions whereby the Ministry develops courses, purchases the Blackboard software licence, and hosts courses for school divisions. Divisional staff offer the courses and teach the students. There are currently 43 courses available through the WBC option.

## B. Enrolment

Registrations for the **Independent Learning Option** peaked in the mid 1980's at approximately 10,000 registrants. Except for a slight increase between 2000 and 2003, registrations in the ISO have continued to decline<sup>3</sup> (Graph 1).

ISO programming is being utilized in 248 schools<sup>4</sup> and in 36 school divisions/districts.

In 1993-94, 56% of the learners registering for ISO were attending school.



In comparison, in 2006-07, 44% of ISO registrants were students under the age of 18 attending school. Furthermore, the 2006-07 profile of registrants indicated that, overall, 78% of the ISO registrants were from rural Manitoba, while 54% of all registrants were adult learners 19 years of age or older.

The **Teacher Mediated Option** was implemented in 1992-93 and had 524 registrants. In 1992-93, there were 63 schools, five Hutterite colonies, 31 school divisions, four independent schools, and one school district participating in TMO. At that time there were 18 courses being offered through TMO. In 2007-08, there are seven schools, 31 Hutterian colonies, 10 school divisions, and two independent schools. At this time there were 24 courses. Enrolments peaked in the 1995-96 at 949 enrollments. In 2007-08 there were 540 registrants in the TMO – all of whom are from rural Manitoba. A continuing decline in TMO enrolments is anticipated as school divisions move away from TMO to other distance learning options.

<sup>3</sup> 2007-2008 numbers are for the period September 1, 2007 to March 31, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Schools include public, private, independents, institutional, and Band operated schools, as well as Adult Learning Centres.

Enrollments for **Web-based Courses** show a gradual increase on a daily basis as students and teachers continually request access to web-based courses, and as new web-based courses are developed and made available. Between August 1, 2007 and April 8, 2008, 1043 sections of courses were created out of 43 course templates. There are 220 course sections in which approximately 2,000 students are enrolled. However, these numbers may include students and teachers who are not currently accessing their course(s) as it is difficult to obtain explicit data based on the current structure of the database.

## C. Feedback from Users

### 1. Learner Questionnaires

#### ISO Course Withdrawal Questionnaire

Sixteen students completed the **Course Withdrawal Questionnaire**. They were most likely to have enrolled in their course because it was either not offered at their school ( $n=7^7$ ) and/or it was compulsory ( $n=4$ ). Ten of the sixteen reported they “never got started” in the course. Three individuals starting a course withdrew because they did not believe they could succeed. Furthermore, there were questions regarding the flow and organization of the course from which they withdrew. All six students that started the course believed the reading was relevant and the answer keys were correct and explained in sufficient detail.

#### ISO Course Completion Questionnaire

While there were 3380 students registered in ISO courses in the 2006-2007 school year, only 20 completed the **Course Completion Questionnaire**. Ten of the students completed Grade 9 Mathematics 10F, while 10 had completed Grade 12 Applied Mathematics 40S. Students attending school were more likely to have completed Applied Mathematics 40S ( $n=7$ ), while those not attending school were more likely to take Mathematics 10F ( $n=7$ ). While 10 students reported becoming “bogged down in the course,” students were generally positive about all aspects of their course (Table 1).

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<sup>7</sup> Numbers referred to in the text can be found in Appendix B.

<b>Table 1 Learner Agreeing* With Statements Regarding Their Course by Course</b>		
<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mathematics 10F</b>	<b>Mathematics 40S</b>
<b>TUTOR/MARKER</b>		
Tutor/Marker easy to reach	8	8
Tutor/Marker helped me.	6	8
<b>COURSE</b>		
Course always told me what I was supposed to do.	8	9
The course was well organized	8	8
<b>LESSONS</b>		
The lessons were written in a way I was able to understand.	7	8
The lessons included enough examples	9	10
The lessons included enough detail.	6	10
The lessons included enough practice questions.	8	10
All the material I was asked to read was relevant to the coursework.	9	8
The exercises helped me practice what I had learned.	10	9
The answer key helped me understand my wrong answers.	9	10
<b>MAIL-IN ASSIGNMENTS</b>		
The mail-in assignments matched the content of the course.	9	9
The mail-in assignments were clearly explained.	9	8
The instructions for submitting mail-in assignments were clear.	9	10
<b>EXAMS</b>		
After I completed the course I was ready for the exam.	6	7
The exam was fair.	7	6

## 2. Divisional Feedback

Sixteen school divisions/districts were provided feedback forms and were requested to complete them to as a way to provide initial feedback regarding distance learning programming. Representatives from 11 divisions brought their completed forms to the consultation session in Brandon. A variety of responses were received when discussing the delivery options as they relate to course development and program delivery.

## Independent Study Option

The options that ISO provides students (n=2) and the perception that ISO is well designed/planned (n=2) were most often identified as aspects of ISO that are working well. Most frequently mentioned improvements to ISO included; the need to better incorporate technology (n=2), dealing with those courses that overwhelm students (n=2), and making adjustments to ISO to different learning styles (n=2).

Five of the divisions responding indicated that ISO was working well with independent learners. In addition, the supportiveness/accessibility of the Distance Learning Unit (n=4), and the flexibility (n=3) of this option were also frequently provided as examples of what is working well.

The need for a better support system for less independent learners (n=3) and an increased number of courses in French (n=2) were most often identified as aspects of ISO needing improvement.

## Teacher Mediated Option

Most of the individuals responding mentioned they were either unaware of TMO or that given TMO is only available in English and, therefore, is not applicable to the DSFM. The three individuals replying cited that using MECY curriculum works well, as does the flexibility of TMO.

The ease of teacher-student communication (n=2) and increased course options (n=2) were most frequently identified by divisions as needing improvement. The lack of awareness of TMO as an option, coordination with the school timetable, adjustments to assessment tools and equipment were all cited as needing improvement.

Scheduled contact with the teacher and the flexibility of TMO providing students with course options they otherwise would not have were cited as aspects of TMO that works well.

The need to increase students' awareness that TMO is an option was most frequently cited as needing improvement (n=2). Other aspects of TMO identified as needing improvement included the communication burden placed on teachers with large classes and the limited control teachers have over students. There was also a perceived need for improved access to technology.

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## Web-based Courses

It was suggested that students like using the technological aspect - its ease of use (n=3). In addition, students taking WBC like learning independently (n=2). The fact that MECY develops the courses and provincial curriculum is used was also frequently identified as working well (n=2). A number of other characteristics were also identified as working well including; flexibility, being up-to-date, the ease of teacher-student communication, and the early establishment of timetables allows for advance school planning.

The improvement most often suggested dealt with the need to make WBC courses more appealing to non-visual learners (n=3). In addition, there was a perceived need to increase the number of courses offered in French, deal with the technical difficulties, align all courses with the curriculum, and to increase teacher interest in this option.

The flexibility (n=2) and the free training provided to divisions using WebCT (n=2) were most often viewed as working well. Furthermore, the ease with which teachers can modify courses, student teacher interaction, the increased variability in course options available to students, as well as the accessibility and helpfulness of Distance Learning Unit staff were identified as working well.

The most frequent suggestions for improvement were the need for increased staff (n=2), increased support for weaker students (n=2), and ways to deal with the technical problems (n=2).

## 3. Adult Learning and Literacy

Staff from Adult Learning and Literacy explained that ISO courses are not highly used in Adult Learning Centres. People attending the Adult Learning Centres (ALC) are not usually people who have been successful as independent learners; therefore, they attend an ALC so they can receive personal assistance. The ALCs are not set up for independent study, so in the ALC context ISO material is most often purchased as a resource, particularly in small centres where two teachers may be responsible for six to eight subjects. In such instances, the ISO material is providing teachers a “starting point.”

A number of issues were raised in conjunction with the discussion on ISOs, such as the difficulty in getting numbers of adults using ISO and the perception that the material was geared to younger learners. There was also a question raised regarding the ISO completion rates for adult learners.

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WBC requires the learner to be enrolled in an ALC to access the course, although this option is still more often used as a resource for learners who come to the Centres. Often learners think the Web-based course is like the print-based course which was viewed as the “biggest misconception.”

One suggestion to deal with the shortage of specialist teachers in certain areas of rural Manitoba was to have a cohort of learners across the province that could start on a WBC together. Physics was cited as an example because of the number of people who are taking Physics post-diploma in order to be eligible for Manitoba Hydro jobs.

Currently three ALCs have the ability to accept learners from outside their communities; Midland, Lord Selkirk, and Sunrise. The Coordinator from one of these centres was interviewed in follow-up. S/he stated that with ISO courses *“you know what you are getting, the quality – how it works and it has great support.”* It was suggested that WBC has to become more like ISO, more consistent in terms of quality and support. When questioned about TMO, the individual indicated the first time s/he had heard about TMO was at the session in Brandon. S/he regretted not knowing about this option prior to Brandon as *“I could have used it in the high school” (s/he worked in a high school setting prior to becoming the ALC Coordinator).*

One individual believed there is a need for more WBC to be developed on a provincial level. This individual suggested there are benefits to teachers who deliver Web-based courses, *“you don’t have the discipline problems like you do in the classroom.”* However, from an administrators perspective it was argued that having staff deliver Web-based courses may be a challenge as *“you can’t give teachers more release time, you don’t receive compensation from the school division for the teacher’s time that might be benefiting a few students in the division and a lot of students outside the school division. So there is nothing in it for me.” (This sentiment may not reflect experiences of the larger population but does point out a potential challenge when considering wider implementation of WBC.)*

Web-based courses are seen as a useful alternative to provide students with options, but it was cautioned that they should not become cost prohibitive.

#### 4. Consultation

The consultation which was held in Brandon (March 14, 2008) had a strong focus on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges of the three distance learning platforms. The Teacher Mediated Option was the least well known, while the Web-based Courses generated the most discussion. The following table highlights the feedback on the three options.

<p align="center"><b>Table 2</b> <b>SWOC – Comparison of Options</b></p>			
<b>SWOC</b>	<b>Independent Study Option</b>	<b>Teacher Mediated Option</b>	<b>Web-Based Courses</b>
<b>Strengths</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Flexibility (start dates, access)</li> <li>● Variety of courses &amp; grades</li> <li>● Options for certain types of students (mobile, independent, remote, home-schooling)</li> <li>● Expands options for small schools</li> <li>● Helpful as a teacher reference</li> <li>● High school diploma possibility for adults in remote areas</li> <li>● Newer courses well designed</li> <li>● Assistance from DLU is excellent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Contact with a human/ teacher</li> <li>● Opportunity for high school specialty credits in one room schools</li> <li>● Curriculum exists and is easy for students to follow; paced delivery</li> <li>● Flexibility and appropriateness for Hutterian schools</li> <li>● High completion/ success rate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teacher can modify course (“belongs to the teacher”)</li> <li>● Involvement/inter-action between teacher and students</li> <li>● Asynchronous &gt; students are in charge, have choice and flexibility (repeat, catch-up)</li> <li>● Supports small schools with teaching principals</li> <li>● Exposes students to life long learning skills (functioning on-line, strong IT component)</li> <li>● Potential collaboration with other schools and access to specialists (helps keep small schools open)</li> <li>● Opens up global opportunities</li> <li>● Can support/blend with instructional television</li> <li>● Ability to track students on-line (and share with parents)</li> <li>● Resource for new teachers</li> </ul>

**Table 2**  
**SWOC – Comparison of Options**

<b>SWOC</b>	<b>Independent Study Option</b>	<b>Teacher Mediated Option</b>	<b>Web-Based Courses</b>
<b>Weaknesses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Assessment too limited</li> <li>● Too text-based (must be a good reader); does not fit all learning styles</li> <li>● Students need to be self-motivated &amp; independent</li> <li>● Not enough supervision/ monitoring at school</li> <li>● Lack of student opportunities for discussion/ collaboration</li> <li>● No way to make adaptations for students</li> <li>● Not inquiry-based</li> <li>● Back-ordered materials/supplies from MTBB</li> <li>● Some expectations too rigorous/unrealistic</li> <li>● Perception of being “second rate”</li> <li>● Administration time</li> <li>● Not enough courses in French</li> <li>● Need to address success rate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Timing; difficult to timetable; tied to a time of day</li> <li>● Never hear about the courses or how to access them</li> <li>● Still need someone in the school (teacher time)</li> <li>● Courses get cancelled due to lack of numbers</li> <li>● Difficult to adapt to different learning styles/student needs</li> <li>● Without supervision, problems with student behaviour</li> <li>● If classes larger than 20 then causes problems for the teacher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Need to be less text-oriented and more multi-media. Print simply transferred to a new environment</li> <li>● Errors in grammar, old content, etc.</li> <li>● Lack of French courses</li> <li>● Small school try to broker courses themselves; need to be done more globally</li> <li>● Schools still have to provide teachers (staffing issue)</li> <li>● Change to BB version 6.2 has meant some slow down</li> <li>● Lack of p.d./support for teachers in the environment</li> <li>● Makes assumption that students are digitally competent; platform needs to be student-friendly</li> <li>● Costs to students in some cases for students to take courses outside their own division</li> <li>● Difficult for teacher-student and student-student interaction</li> </ul>

**Table 2**  
**SWOC – Comparison of Options**

<b>SWOC</b>	<b><i>Independent Study Option</i></b>	<b><i>Teacher Mediated Option</i></b>	<b><i>Web-Based Courses</i></b>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Combine ISO/TMO/WBC to create a “blended model”</li> <li>● Use other delivery models and types of media/technology (consider how kids communicate)</li> <li>● Promote on-line tutorials</li> <li>● Suggest timelines for sections of the course in all courses</li> <li>● Quizzes/assessment on-line for all courses</li> <li>● Email for all tutors</li> <li>● Update instructional design, pedagogy and assessment</li> <li>● Increase serving adult populations</li> <li>● More local supervision of ISO students to increase success rate</li> <li>● Collaborate with other provinces</li> <li>● Develop new courses with supporting materials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Combine with other options/delivery modes</li> <li>● Use “mediated” part to support delivery</li> <li>● Look for timetabling alternatives (outside the school day, regular slot)</li> <li>● Do the timetable in May so more students could be accommodated</li> <li>● Continue offering the recording feature for use/access at a later time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A teacher can revise and make courses more multi-media</li> <li>● Integrate different tools (social networking)</li> <li>● Fills a need for student credits, including dual credits and articulation</li> <li>● Enhances curriculum</li> <li>● Allows e-learning campuses and virtual campuses</li> <li>● Education for a global world</li> <li>● Opportunities to maximize teacher strengths and use co-teaching</li> <li>● Easier to manage multi-grade situations</li> <li>● P.D., sharing, and networking opportunities for teachers</li> <li>● Offer courses beyond high school (college and university)</li> <li>● French Immersion availability to rural schools</li> </ul>

**Table 2**  
**SWOC – Comparison of Options**

SWOC	<i>Independent Study Option</i>	<i>Teacher Mediated Option</i>	<i>Web-Based Courses</i>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Keeping courses content current (cost, time)</li> <li>● Using current assessment practices</li> <li>● Monitoring student progress</li> <li>● Difficult to adapt</li> <li>● Learner needs more immediate feedback/old-fashioned delivery</li> <li>● Not adult-oriented</li> <li>● Difficult to recognize prior knowledge</li> <li>● Difficult to support individual students</li> <li>● Development and translation of courses into French</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Classes get cancelled because of small numbers</li> <li>● One telephone in a Colony school (two courses need to use the same phone)</li> <li>● Issue that staff are paid on a per student basis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Paradigm shift for teachers (and some students)</li> <li>● Monitoring quality control (find problems too late)</li> <li>● Keeping up with curriculum</li> <li>● Accessing other parts of the world (time zone issue)</li> <li>● Students with dial-up or limited infrastructure at a disadvantage</li> <li>● Quality of instruction is dependent on the teacher</li> <li>● Demand for new ways of teaching in both asynchronous &amp; synchronous</li> <li>● How to offer WBC for home-schooling</li> <li>● Lack of awareness</li> <li>● Consistency in format/structure of courses</li> <li>● Coordinating within and across divisions is difficult</li> <li>● Misunderstanding of on-line courses, particularly ALCs</li> <li>● How to support interaction and socialization?</li> </ul>

Generally, the strengths of ISO were the variety of courses, the flexibility and ISO's accessibility throughout the province. Limited assessments, the text heavy documents, the need for students to be self-motivated and lack of opportunities to collaborate were identified as weaknesses of ISO.

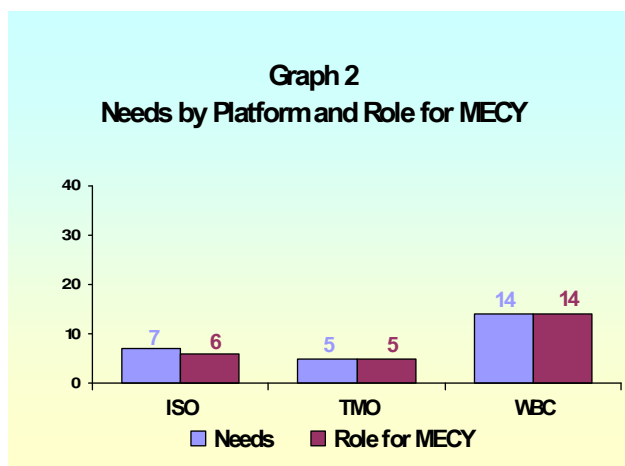
The prospect of developing a blended model, collaborating with other provinces and updating instructional design, pedagogy and assessment were perceived

being ISO opportunities. Assessment practice, keeping current and providing more immediate feedback to learners were cited as ISO challenges.

TMO provides students with teacher contact and is flexible enough to be appropriate in a variety of settings. In addition, the high student success rate and existing curriculum were cited as strengths of the Teacher Mediated Option. Difficulties fitting TMO in with the timetable and the lack of awareness of TMO were perceived as weakness. A timetable developed earlier and one that allows for program delivery outside of the school day were identified as opportunities for TMO. Furthermore, the blending TMO with the other delivery methods also was seen as a potential opportunity. The lack of telephones, the frequent cancellation of classes, and the model for instructor payment were identified as challenges to TMO.

Web-based courses were viewed as providing an interactive environment in which students have the flexibility to move at their own pace. Additionally, WBC is a teacher resource. Teachers can modify courses and the web allows for the possibilities of large scale collaboration.

Weaknesses identified by participants included; WBC being too text heavy, the lack of a student-friendly platform and incorrect assumptions about students' digital competency. Furthermore, WBC requires staffing, and in some cases is a cost to students if taken outside of their division. There is also a perceived need for increased teacher p.d./support to implement WBC. Conversely, WBC enhances curriculum and teachers' strengths, fills a need for student credits and allows for teacher networking opportunities. This method makes virtual campuses a possibility as well as offering courses beyond high school.



In addition to the small and large group discussions, participants at the consultation were asked to complete a short one-page questionnaire at the end of the session. Of the 21 people who responded, it was clear that the major area of need and corresponding desire for MECY to play a role in this area was in Web-based courses (See Graph 2).

The most frequent request (n=10) was for MECY to take a leadership role in the coordinating the delivery of distance learning across Manitoba. While much of the discussion focused on WBC, there was a desire for increased leadership by MECY regardless of delivery method. Final comments reinforced this sentiment, “coordination of programming” (n=9) was the top priority for MECY, followed by “infrastructure development/support” (n=6).

At the consultation, priorities for MECY were discussed in relation to learners, teachers, organization/system needs, resources/materials, and “other.” The following priorities were identified:

- Professional development for instructors (e.g., how to address engagement and understand learners at a distance),
- Development of partnership opportunities (e.g., MTS, post-secondary),
- Provincial coordination and leadership from MECY,
- Collaboration/cooperation with other Canadian jurisdictions,
- More course development including courses in French and Aboriginal languages,
- Support for and coordination of infrastructure development, and
- Develop a vision for Distance Learning and raise public awareness of the options.

## **D. Feedback from the Distance Learning Unit**

The staff of the Distance Learning Unit was asked to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of the various distance learning options, to complement information from the consultation session in Brandon.

**Table 3**  
**SWOC – Comparison of Among Options from Distance Learning Unit Perspective**

<b>SWOC</b>	<b>Independent Study Option</b>	<b>Teacher Mediated Option</b>	<b>Web-based Courses</b>
<b>Strengths</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Serves attending and non-attending home schoolers</li> <li>Internal student records data base</li> <li>Cost effective</li> <li>Speed/response time for registrations</li> <li>Year round registration</li> <li>Students work at own pace</li> <li>Development template for courses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asynchronous and synchronous (recording feature)</li> <li>Cost effective and inexpensive</li> <li>Higher success rate</li> <li>Consultant and administrative assistant located together with ISO so cross-training of staff</li> <li>Instructors can adapt course material</li> <li>Instructors have assessment flexibility</li> <li>Students/instructors have ISO material</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Template for course development</li> <li>Resources are embedded in the course</li> <li>Teachers can modify/flexible/adaptable</li> <li>Number of courses</li> <li>Resource for teachers</li> <li>Free</li> <li>No mailing time/printable</li> <li>Asynchronous technology</li> <li>Teachers can keep courses for multiple years</li> <li>Fast enrollment turnaround</li> <li>Consultant &amp; staff together</li> </ul>
<b>Weaknesses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cannot keep up with revisions</li> <li>Mail slow &amp; inconstant</li> <li>Tutor markers not on-site (slows turnaround time)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Payment system for instructors</li> <li>Partnership between MECY and host divisions leaves program vulnerable</li> <li>Instructors not employed by school divisions</li> <li>Reliance on phone &amp; fax</li> <li>Difficult to recruit instructors and can quit at any time</li> <li>Tied to 6 day cycle</li> <li>Need to pull out sensitive material from ISO</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Link rot</li> <li>Access to bandwidth</li> <li>Security (cannot confirm identity for assessments)</li> <li>Prints only text &amp; images</li> <li>Needs more multi-media</li> <li>Students cannot reset their own passwords (function of Blackboard)</li> <li>Peak time issues</li> <li>Teachers can lose data</li> <li>MET numbers not validated</li> <li>Lack of school/division support for teachers</li> </ul>

**Table 3**  
**SWOC – Comparison of Among Options from Distance Learning Unit Perspective**

<b>SWOC</b>	<b>Independent Study Option</b>	<b>Teacher Mediated Option</b>	<b>Web-based Courses</b>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Have desk-top publishing on-site</li> <li>● Change course format (i.e., CD, on-line)</li> <li>● Create on-line registration (over 18, purchase orders)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Access by non-Hutterian students</li> <li>● Teaching outside the school day</li> <li>● Support instructors better (toll free numbers, mailing service)</li> <li>● Creating eligibility list for instructors (advertise in newspapers)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teacher on-line support system (FAQ)</li> <li>● Great appeal to students</li> <li>● Student-teacher interaction (direct connection)</li> <li>● Blend synchronous modes with asynchronous technology</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Keeping current (course material, assessment)</li> <li>● Print-based (paper)</li> <li>● Steadily declining enrollment (more adults)</li> <li>● Changing technology (software, links)</li> <li>● Tutor/marker flexibility (assessment)</li> <li>● Recruiting exam supervisors and tutor markers</li> <li>● Hiring writers</li> <li>● Instructors paid on fee for service basis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dual timetabling</li> <li>● Only one phone line in small schools</li> <li>● Technology unavailable (email/internet access)</li> <li>● Change funding structure (direct service from this office)</li> <li>● Instructors are paid per student per courses from a host school division that collects fees from participating schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Challenge to get some learners to “buy in”</li> <li>● Class size</li> <li>● Lack of school/division support for teachers</li> <li>● Drop out rate is high</li> <li>● Not as accessible for non-attending students</li> </ul>

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## - EFFECTIVE AND PROMISING PRACTICES IN DISTANCE LEARNING -

### A. Literature Review

#### 1. What is Distance Learning?

Sources from Canada and United States have similar definitions of distance learning. Defined quite broadly in the literature, distance learning is described as courses of study where learners and teachers are in different location: “les apprenants ne soient tenus de se rendre sur place.”<sup>9</sup> This may include different styles of presentation or platforms, ranging from Web-based courses to videoconferencing.

#### 2. Distance Learning: An Expanding Audience

Although various types of distance learning have been in existence for some time, Revenaugh reports increasing use of distance learning opportunities by Kindergarten to Grade 8 learners. In the United States, distance learning is now being more frequently accessed by students with special needs, particularly students who are medically complex or may have to spend time in hospital; by elite athletes who have specific needs due to training and travel/competition schedules; as well as by students living at a distance from school and who would otherwise have considerable travel time.<sup>10</sup>

Anderson and Rourke also highlight videoconferencing as a way of meeting needs of special populations. In addition to providing educational options to learners in remote communities, these authors mention videoconferencing as a means of “assist[ing] youth re-enter their schools and communities after periods of incarceration.”<sup>11</sup> Visually-enhanced distance education was described as useful for learners who are deaf or hard of hearing.

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<sup>9</sup> D’Ortun, F. (2004). La Formation à distance; pistes de réussite pour l’apprenant et l’université. *Education Canada*, 44(3), p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Revenaugh, M. (2005/2006). K-8 Virtual Schools: A Glimpse into the Future. *Educational Leadership*, 63(4), p. 60.

<sup>11</sup> Anderson, T. & Rourke, L. (2005). *Videoconferencing in Kindergarten-to-Grade 12 Settings: A Review of the Literature*. Alberta Learning, p. 13.



### 3. Effective and Promising Practices from the Literature

Not surprisingly, effective learning at a distance involves the same principles as effective learning in the classroom. The technology or platform of distance learning should be seen as a tool or method; however, the principles of effective learning remain the same. Tom Clark, in his study of virtual schools in the United States, reminds educators to “focus on the learning rather than the technology,”<sup>12</sup> and to “seek to make the student services for virtual students equivalent in quality to those provided for face-to-face learners.”<sup>13</sup>

In fact, Theirry Karsenti, Associate Professor at Faculty of Education at Université de Montréal, contends technologically-based learning can expand the possibilities of effective practice:

...as these innovations [ICTs] greatly augment the possibilities of network implementation and of individual and group learning, the most basic teaching theories and principles such as Thorndike (law of effect and law of exercise), Dewey (learning through action), Piaget (construction of knowledge) and Vygotsky (learning as a socio-interactive process) can be applied more readily and more frequently.<sup>14</sup>

The American Distance Learning Consortium’s<sup>15</sup> guiding principles for distance learning provide a starting point for the elements of effective delivery of distance learning. This consortium elaborates that distance learning opportunities should be:



-  Designed for active and effective learning,
-  Support the needs of learners through orientation to the process of learning at a distance, tutorial support, student advising and counseling, technical support, library information and access, and problem-solving assistance,

<sup>12</sup> Clark, T. (2001). *Virtual School: Trends and Issues: A study of Virtual Schools in the United States*, p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Clark, T. (2001), p. 26.

<sup>14</sup> Karsenti, T. (2001). *From Blackboard to Mouse Pad: Training Teacher for the New Millennium. Education Canada*, 41(2), p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> The American Distance Learning Consortium is an American non-profit distance education consortium composed of 65 post-secondary institutions and developed to promote the creation and provision of high quality, economical distance education programs and services to diverse audiences. For more information see <http://www.adec.edu/admin/aded-background.html>.

-  Develop and maintain technological and human infrastructure to ensure the provider of distance learning has the technology plan and human resources, and
-  Sustain administration and commitment to quality distance education.

In addition, other sources further highlight the need for “timely feedback to help ensure student motivation and completion,”<sup>16</sup> as well as for qualified and professional teachers.<sup>17</sup> Finally, Anderson and Rourke’s literature review of videoconferencing highlighted ‘best practice’ in this medium which could also be applied to distance learning in general. In addition to the principles already mentioned, these authors draw attention to the need for leadership and vision to guide distance learning initiatives, as well as emphasize the importance of equitable access, simplicity of operation, clearly outlined participant costs, effective interaction between students and teachers, timely service provision, and clear communication of behavioural expectations when using distance learning opportunities.<sup>18</sup>

Although referencing post-secondary study, D’Ortun outlines that distance learning systems have to offer a range of courses to allow learners to follow a course of studies to credential or graduate. This author further states that success in distance learning requires motivation and preparation on the part of the learner.<sup>19</sup>

#### 4. Models

Recent Canadian educational literature focuses on networked schools as a model for distance education. Thérèse Laferrière, professor at Faculté des sciences de l’éducation de l’Université Laval, has conducted considerable research into Quebec’s Écoles éloignées en réseau (networked school in remote locations), a network of 22 school boards and over 100 schools started in 2002. An initiative of the Ministry of Education and the Centre francophone d’information des organisations, this network increased access to quality learning opportunities through teleconferencing over the internet (using computer, webcam and microphone) linking students and providing different learning situations.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Clark, T. (2001), p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> Revenaugh, M. (2005/2006), p. 61.

<sup>18</sup> Anderson, T. & Rourke, L. (2005), p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> D’Ortun, F. (2004), p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> For more information regarding Écoles éloignées en réseau, see Laferrière, T. (2007/2008). L’École éloignée en réseau, une approche qui prend racine en sol québécois. *Education Canada*, 48(1), 30-31 and Laferrière, T. (2004). L’École éloignée en réseau, une école sur la voie de l’amélioration. *Education Canada*, 44(3), 42-44.

Similarly Newfoundland and Labrador's Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation creates networked virtual classrooms through high speed internet:

This model permits aboriginal and other students in our most northerly communities to learn mathematics in the same class with students in communities on the island or in other parts of Labrador . . . Students and e-teachers communicate with one another in real time and use a computer screen in the same way that a traditional teacher could use a chalkboard, with technology known as graphire tablets.<sup>21</sup>

Networked learning creates a virtual community of learners. Oliver, Herrington, Herrington, and Reeves indicate this enhances online learning experience:

More and more, students in online learning settings are taking ownership of their learning and being encouraged to work collaboratively with their peers and others as an integral part of the learning experience. The advantages and opportunities that stem from communities of learners and collaborative learning activities have long been recognized as important, and shown to provide considerable learning opportunities . . . Learning can be enhanced through the dialogue and discussion that is involved and the collaboration itself can help generate learning communities that offer tangible forms of support for the learners.<sup>22</sup>

While the literature clearly recognizes the growing possibilities of technology to link learners and teachers, to create virtual communities of learners, and to expand the possibilities of effective practice, the focus of any distance learning delivery system must remain on the learning, rather than the technology.

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<sup>21</sup> Press, H., Galway, G. & Collins, A. (2003). Maintaining Quality Programming in Rural Newfoundland and Labrador: A Case Study in Policy and Structural Change. *Education Canada*, 43(3), pp. 23 & 38.

<sup>22</sup> Oliver, R., Herrington, A., Herrington, J. & Reeves, T. (2007). Representing Authentic Learning Designs Supporting the Development of Online Communities of Learners. *Journal of Learning Design*, 2(2), pp. 1-2.

## B. Environmental Scan

When looking across jurisdictions, one sees distance learning programming being provided using a mix of platforms including; print, online asynchronous, synchronous, and video. Print and online asynchronous appear to be the most common methods for delivering distance learning programming (Table 4).

**Table 4**  
**Distance Learning Opportunities Available In Canadian Jurisdictions\***

Jurisdiction	Print	Online Asynchronous	Online Synchronous	Video Conferencing	Other Information
<b>Alberta</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Called "Print Delivery"</li> <li>-Uses "booklets" with lessons, modules, and lab kits, audio CDs, textbooks</li> <li>-Student/teacher/tutor communication by phone or email</li> <li>-Single semester or year-long</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Called "Online Delivery"</li> <li>-Students use internet tools such as email, online chat, audio conference, shared whiteboards</li> <li>-Must have own equipment</li> <li>-Submit assignments electronically</li> <li>-Some Immersion courses also offered for students enrolled in FI prior to Grade 7</li> <li>-élèves francophones de 7e à 12e année. Les cours sont offerts sous forme asynchrone (en temps différé) pour te permettre de travailler à ton rythme à partir de ton école, et ce, avec l'appui d'un enseignant et d'un aide pédagogique. En 2007-2008, tu peux t'inscrire aux cours suivants : français, mathématiques, sciences, études sociales, religion, carrière et vie et études professionnelles et technologiques</li> <li>-Single semester or year-long</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Called "Virtual Classroom"</li> <li>-Students and their teacher meet online at designated times. Each person is able to speak to all the others as well as draw or write on the shared interactive whiteboard. Students "raise their hands" when they wish to speak. The teacher then opens the microphones to allow them to speak, draw, or text chat with the class. Sessions are recorded and can be viewed later.</li> <li>-Certain courses are available at high school and junior high in pilot phase</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Instruction is dependent upon equipment and bandwidth of partnering schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Call "Custom Services Delivery"</li> <li>-Blends print and online delivery with various combinations of email, website interaction, team teacher, synchronous teaching</li> <li>-Done by special arrangement to meet particular need</li> </ul>
<b>British Columbia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Called "Print-based materials"</li> <li>-Students work independently at their own pace</li> <li>-Students can enroll anytime</li> <li>-Some are semester some are year long</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Called "Online resources"</li> <li>-Students work independently at their own pace</li> <li>-Some courses have scheduled sessions while others are independent</li> <li>-Students can enroll anytime</li> <li>-Some semester; some year long</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Students are sometimes brought together to attend classes. Not sure if this means students are networked and if there is peer collaboration? Not clear on website</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Any school-aged or non-graduated adult, who is a resident of BC or temporarily out of the province, can take distributed learning courses.</li> <li>-Distributed learning offers a full range of courses from Kindergarten to Grade 12.</li> </ul>

Jurisdiction	Print	Online Asynchronous	Online Synchronous	Video Conferencing	Other Information
Labrador/ Nfld		<p>-Called “e-learning Asynchronous Instruction” It is assumed that the Web-based resources are complete in the sense that they fully describe what the student must do to achieve the course outcomes.</p> <p>-Offered using WebCT platform which has Course Calendar, email, threaded discussion forms (for students to engage in cooperative learning activities) student records</p>	<p>-Called “e-learning Synchronous Instruction”</p> <p>-Networked, real-time instruction</p> <p><b>-Class List Display</b> allows the teacher and students to see who is online, allows easy identification of group members, and shows visually who is responding. Tools include a ‘raised hand’ to indicate that a student wishes to speak; indicators to give students access to messaging, audio, and white board</p> <p><b>-Messaging Window</b> permits students to type responses to questions asked by the person talking or to ask questions themselves</p> <p><b>-Audio Window</b> permits students to hear and talk to the teacher and other students</p> <p><b>-White Board</b> is visible to all participants. Teachers and students use a graphics tablet to write and draw on the white board in real-time. Content can be pre-done and opened as needed</p> <p><b>-Graphing Calculator</b> is another built-in tool that permits easy display of graphs</p>		-Available to ‘high school students’
NWT	Link provided not working – Department of Education website at <a href="http://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/">http://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/</a> has no reference to distance learning, distance education or e-learning. Education website not searchable				
Nunavut	Link provided not working – Nunavut Department of Education website currently under construction, therefore limited information available. Not able to find any reference to distance learning, distance education or e-learning. <a href="http://www.gov.nu.ca/education/eng/index.htm">http://www.gov.nu.ca/education/eng/index.htm</a> . Education website not searchable.				
Nova Scotia	<p>-Called “Correspondence Study Courses”</p> <p>-Available for grade 7 through 12</p>	<p>-Currently piloting “online courses” and referred to as “virtual school”</p> <p>-No information available regarding how these courses are delivered</p>			-Students who are over 16 years of age who may or may not be in school

Jurisdiction	Print	Online Asynchronous	Online Synchronous	Video Conferencing	Other Information
New Brunswick	-Although all DL courses are referred to "online" they seem to be exclusively print-based courses (correspondence courses) where the materials are offered online	-Also referred to as "online" this type of course is more like a usual Web-based course.  -No mention is made as to whether these are offered at scheduled times or not, or whether there is real time interaction or not.  -Peer interaction not clear on website, <i>"The course requires students to interact with a wide variety of written, spoken and visual texts and to complete assignments ranging from interviews and surveys to essays and PowerPoint presentations."</i> (See English Language Arts 112 <b>Course Code:</b> 1200032)		-Video conferencing is available, although there is no mention of the number of sites or what courses	-Available to high school students 40 courses available  -All required grade 11 and 12 courses  -All courses are referred to on website as Distance Learning Online Courses, although these appear to vary in their delivery.
Ontario	-Ontario Educational Resource Bank provides digital learning resources for K to 12, although it is not clear from the website if entire courses can be accessed this way (like print courses available on the web).  -It appears these are digital resources for online courses and possibly home schooling	-Provided by the Provincial Learning Management System, this provides online secondary school credit courses  -Electronic whiteboard, chat, blogs  -No mention is made as to whether these are offered at scheduled times or not, or whether there is real time interaction or not.  -Peer interaction not clear on website			-Elementary and secondary students
PEI	-Only one reference to "print" although it is not clear from the website if entire courses can be accessed this way (like print courses available on the web).	-Only one reference to "computers" although it is not clear from the website if entire courses can be accessed this way (like print courses available on the web).	-Only one reference to "computer networks" although it is not clear from the website if entire courses can be accessed this way (like print courses available on the web).	-Only one reference to "audio-visual" although it is not clear from the website if entire courses can be accessed this way (like print courses available on the web).	-Available during the school day  -Available to students in any grade

Jurisdiction	Print	Online Asynchronous	Online Synchronous	Video Conferencing	Other Information
Quebec	<p>-Doesn't seem like they offer any print based courses.</p> <p>-CEJEP courses available on CDRom.</p>	<p>-All courses needed to receive a high school diploma are available online</p>	<p>-Some CEJEP courses available in virtual classroom format</p> <p>-Seems from Laferriere's articles that high school classes are available as well.</p>		<p>- DL administered through Société de formation à distance des commissions scolaires du Québec, a non-profit org. that partners with Ministry of Ed to produce materials, offer courses, and publicize DL</p> <p>- Secondary students and adults</p>
Sask.	<p>-Students registered with a school division who do not attend a school may enroll for correspondence education upon the recommendation of the superintendent/director of education.</p>	<p>-Called "online" course, this has a teacher and a registered group of students. Students can register anytime during the school year</p> <p>-“Full service” refers to students who receive full instruction and evaluation through Technology Supported Learning</p> <p>-“Tutorial service” available Mon. through Fri. to get help with your online course through phone, email, fax, or by WebTrain (virtual whiteboard).</p>		<p>-Satellite delivery of courses through television broadcasts facilitated by Saskatchewan Communication Network (SCN). These courses are scheduled on the semester system. Students require access to an SCN receiving site</p>	<p>Available to high school students and adults</p>
Yukon				<p>-Video conferencing available</p>	<p>-Also have teleconferencing</p> <p>-Site provided describes what is available through Yukon College (post sec for adults) but DL courses are available in Developmental Studies area (which is high school upgrading)</p> <p>-Appears through BC website that other DL opportunities may be available in Yukon but not clear on website what they are</p>
* - Information accessed through jurisdictional websites, March 2008.					

In addition, it was found that fees vary by jurisdiction (Table 5).

**Table 5**  
**WBC/e-learning/Online Fee For Service Courses for Attending, Non-Attending, and Adults \***

OPTION	ALBERTA	SASKATCHEWAN +
Offered by	Non-government agency connected to a school division to service the province. Funded by the province.	Ministry of Education
Program duration	Distance Learning 80 years: print based was the original program (still 65-70% of clients order print based)	DL Programming for 80 years
Program Service	Development and Delivery	Development and Delivery
Courses Created by	Alberta Distance Learning Centre (ADLC)	Technology Supported Learning
Courses offered by	Alberta Distance Learning Centre	Technology Supported Learning
Courses facilitated by	Onsite DL teachers and off site tutors throughout the province	Onsite teachers
Grade levels supported	Grade 1 – 12	Senior years only (grade 10-12)
Teaching Staff	Employees of ADLC	Employees of Sask. Education
Primary Targeted Student	Attending, Non-attending, adults, out of province and international students	Attending, Non-attending and adults – Saskatchewan Residents Only
Program duration	Continuous entrance - 12 months	Continuous entrance - 12 months
Registration process	Forms are online but mail, phone, fax registration with payment	Forms are online but mail, phone or fax registration with payment
Course selections/ offerings	Website, print book <a href="http://www.adlc.ca">www.adlc.ca</a>	Website, print book <a href="http://www.learning.gov.sk.ca/TSL">www.learning.gov.sk.ca/TSL</a>
Learning Management System	Desire2learn with illuminate and symposium	BlackBoard (WebCT 6.2)
Attending school	\$225. is the average cost as each subject is sold at a different fee according to resources and course	\$525. (school pays for this program through funding transfer)
Not attending school or adults	\$600. is the average cost as each subject is sold at a different fee according to resources and course	\$300. (over 16 years of age and not attending school)
Other DL Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Print for attending, non attending, adult and international students</li> <li>• Team Teaching - Classroom teacher support with use of print of online DL courses</li> <li>• Synchronous teaching over web with students from one or more schools (or from home) with scheduled timetable</li> <li>• Video conferencing using bridgit and smartboard services for schools when the school has created a class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Print based distance learning (as online courses are available the print is discontinued)</li> <li>• Reference sales for print courses only</li> <li>• Interactive Television Instruction (semester based program)</li> </ul>
Credit allocation	Issues transcripts, report cards and credit granting	Issues transcripts and report cards to Sask. residents only

\* - source: Distance Learning Unit

- **BC** offers free distance learning to attending, non-attending and adult learners through the distance learning schools in each school division throughout the province.
- **Ontario** does not offer fee for service online distance learning courses to non-attending or adult learners (print based only)
- **Manitoba** Education, Citizenship and Youth does not offer fee for service online distance learning courses to non-attending or adults online distance learning courses (some Adult Learning Centres are using WBC)

+ **Saskatchewan** Education will not be providing direct Distance Learning Services effective April 1, 2009

Furthermore, the learner population served varies across jurisdiction (Table 6).

<b>Table 6: WBC / E-learning / Online Primarily for Students Attending School*</b>					
<b>Option</b>	<b>MB</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>SASK</b>	<b>BC</b>	<b>ONTARIO</b>
<b>Courses Created by</b>	Ministry of Education and posted centrally in French and English <a href="http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/dl/wbc/coursesfordelivery.html">www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/dl/wbc/coursesfordelivery.html</a>	Each teacher, division creates their own course	Teachers in the Saskatoon Catholic School Division (Independent School) create specific courses <a href="http://blog.scs.sk.ca/generalinfo/course_list">http://blog.scs.sk.ca/generalinfo/course_list</a>	Each teacher, division creates their own course	Courses created by Ministry of Education and posted centrally 29 English and 29 French Courses <a href="http://www.elearningontario.ca/eng/courses/courses2007_08.aspx">www.elearningontario.ca/eng/courses/courses2007_08.aspx</a>
<b>Courses offered by</b>	Various schools in the province	Funded DL school in each division	Saskatoon Catholic Cyber School	Funded Distance learning schools in each division	Various schools in the province
<b>Courses facilitated by</b>	Facilitated by a teacher employed at a school in a division.	Facilitated by a division teacher who may work at home or at DL school	Facilitated by a teacher employed by Saskatoon Catholic School District	Facilitated by teacher employed at a school division who is located at the DL school	Facilitated by a teacher employed at a school in a division
<b>Primary Targeted Student</b>	Attending school within school division	Attending or non-attending students within school division	Attending students within the Saskatoon Catholic School system	Attending, non-attending students & adult learners who are BC residents (screening criteria)	Attending school within school division
<b>Program Duration</b>	Semester – Sept to June	Semester – Sept to June	Non-semestered: Sept to June	All year	Sept to June
<b>Out of division attending registrations</b>	Divisions may charge & price varies. May or may not accept students from other divisions.	Do not accept out of division students.	\$500. per course for students attending other divisions Set fee by Catholic school board	No charge Ministry grant funding travels with student and can attend any DL school in the province	\$600. per course if attending another division Fee by Ministry for all divisions to use the same \$ value
<b>Non-attending &amp; adult access</b>	No access for non-attending and adult learners	Free to non-attending students in own division, no adult access	\$500. per course for student non-attending and adults	Free to non attending students and adults at any DL school in province	No access for non-attending and adult learners
<b>Who runs Registration</b>	Ministry of Education	Done by each DL school	Done by the Cyber School	Done by each DL school	Done by each school Division
<b>Online registration</b>	Yes: Teacher access to enroll students	No	No	No – student contacts division	Yes – a division posts open seats to other School Division
<b>Course selections/ offerings</b>	Each school or division determines the courses they will offer.	Internally on each school/divisions website	Courses posted on central website that is public	Courses on central website for students to select courses throughout the province but contacts the division to register	Posted on central system that is not public
<b>Central Coordination</b>	Some divisions post openings	Not available	Yes – run by 1 school division	School divisions all post on Central website	Ministry supports infrastructure but divisions run the site
<b>Coordination website</b>	<a href="http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/dl/wbc/outsideregistrations.html">www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/dl/wbc/outsideregistrations.html</a>	-	<a href="http://www.scs.sk.ca/cyber">www.scs.sk.ca/cyber</a>	<a href="http://www.learnnowbc.gov.bc.ca/course_finder/course_finder.aspx">www.learnnowbc.gov.bc.ca/course_finder/course_finder.aspx</a>	Demonstration available <a href="http://reserve.elearningontario.ca/cr/">http://reserve.elearningontario.ca/cr/</a>
<b>Who hosts website</b>	Ministry	-	Catholic Cyber School	Ministry	School divisions
<b>Who updates website &amp; availability</b>	Ministry	-	A person in division	One person assigned in each division to update the central system	School divisions
<b>LMS</b>	Blackboard	Desire2learn	Blackboard	Blackboard	Desire2 learn

\* Source: Distance Learning Unit.

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## - THE FUTURE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION -

### A. Context

Supporting student learning and engagement must be at the heart of any educational initiative. Distance learning programs provide a means of supporting the success of learners (both high school age and adult) within the context of their home communities, with the possibility of linking these same individuals to a broader virtual learning community.

In rural and northern Manitoba, small schools often struggle to provide an array of programming for their students in the hope that their children and youth have the greatest possible access to quality educational opportunities. With adults, issues of equity and access also come into play. Education as a sequential process needs to be challenged so that we find ways for learners of all ages – and abilities - to engage with educational programming that meets their individual needs.

The use of new and emerging technologies holds much promise for education and, in particular, for distance learning opportunities. However, it must be recognized that not all learners – and not all teachers/instructors – have the technological expertise nor may they have the necessary access to infrastructure. No one delivery method can accommodate the vast array of learning styles, to meet every need.

Finally, some learners require the mediation and expertise of teachers to support their success, while others prefer an independent experience, either because of learning style or personal situation. Learners of both types may or may not thrive on interaction with other learners which can be accomplished through a variety of ways. All these contextual aspects must be considered when setting the strategic directions for the future of distance learning in Manitoba.

### B. Summary and Analysis of the TMO/ISO and WBC

The decline in ISO registrations commenced when Adult Learning Centres opened and Web-based courses became available. The increased options for adult and attending school students caused the decrease in registrants in ISO courses. The decline in the TMO program is also due to other distance learning options that became available such as Interactive

Television. In addition all school divisions were given the option to have their own 6 or 5 day school calendar and not follow one centralized school day calendar. The TMO program operates on a six day school calendar with 40 minute periods that will not coincide with many divisions schedule.

## C. Goals

Arising from the review process a number of goals for the Distance Learning Unit have been identified. These goals can be addressed through short term strategies, moving towards a longer term vision.

1. To create equity and access to Distance Learning opportunities across the province by MECY enhancing their leadership and coordinating roles,
2. To create new partnership opportunities, both within the province and with other jurisdictions,
3. To increase the integration of multi-media/technology into Distance Learning courses moving towards a blended model,
4. To develop a shared vision and framework for Distance Learning that supports student achievement through high quality Distance Learning opportunities.

## D. Future Directions

### 1. Short Term Strategies

In the short term, a number of actions emerge as priority strategies for MECY and, in particular, the Distance Learning Unit. However, it is recognized that the Distance Learning Unit already has courses at different stages in development which will impact on their short term activity.

- Form an Advisory Team composed of stakeholders, as proposed by the Deputy Minister at the Brandon consultation, with the mandate to make recommendations that will result in the creation of a more coordinated, managed environment for the development and delivery of Distance Learning opportunities in particular web-based courses.
- Ascertain which technologies are most friendly for course delivery to northern, remote and other communities that lack high speed access.
- Increase integration of media/technology into new courses.
- Support educators in their use of various technology tools that enable interaction with distance learners.

- Implement a process for the ongoing review/revision of distance learning courses to ensure quality, accuracy and effective practice for the three distance learning options available.
- Expand the number of courses available in French (preferably developed in French).
- Determine which courses are most needed in Aboriginal languages. (One strategy might be to connect with WNCP Aboriginal Languages and Cultures).
- Enhance teacher professional development to address the needs of distance learners.
- Facilitate collaboration between Adult Learning and Literacy and school divisions on possible partnering for course delivery.
- Publicize the existing Distance Learning options with clarity on how they are delivered and who is best served by the various options.

## 2. Longer Term Vision

Distance Learning opportunities provide increased access to courses for learners, both youth and adult. In order to meet the range of learner needs and situations, flexibility is crucial, as is the accessibility of quality courses that integrate effective instructional and assessment practices.

Therefore, in the longer term, it is recommended that the framework for Distance Learning be renewed. Currently, the Independent Study Option is asynchronous where the intention is that learners complete the course independently. The second option is the Teacher Mediated Option (primarily synchronous) where the learners are supported by direct contact with a teacher. However, the third option, Web-based Courses, focuses on using on-line technology (Blackboard Learning System) to deliver courses to classes of students taught by a teacher, who may be in a different community. These courses may be accessed asynchronously by students and teachers.

In contrast, the Distance Learning Unit should focus the centralized development of high quality courses that take advantage of multiple technologies, in addition to print. (This still assumes a continued need to produce Manitoba print-based courses.) Indeed a certain curriculum may lend itself more to text, while another might benefit from a range of multi-media.

These courses could then be accessed either “independently” or with teacher support/mediation.

An independent learner should be able to access the same course as a student in a teacher-mediated setting. The independent learner should be able to work from a paper-based document, on-line, or by using a CD Rom or DVD. Independence may indeed require tutor support which is currently available through various modes of communication (e.g., email, telephone, text-messaging). The “Independent Learning Option” and “Web-Based Courses” are asynchronous.

The learner who prefers to work with the support of a teacher might, in different contexts, access the teacher’s class via telephone, web-cam, videoconference, or be part of a classroom where the DL teacher is physically located. Adults could access this option from an ALC, the same way a student in a remote school would access the lesson. The “Teacher Mediated Option” is primarily synchronous.

In any case, there should be the availability of learner-to-learner interaction, be that in an actual classroom setting or through a virtual learning community (supported by text messaging, wikis, email, blogs, social networking sites, etc.).

Therefore, the Distance Learning framework should not be “ISO, TMO, and WBC,” but rather should be conceptualized as a learner choice between independent learning and teacher facilitated learning, using whichever media or combination of media are most appropriate each specific course. The course structure and media remain the same; the choice is whether the learner wishes to learn independently or be supported by a teacher.

This vision of Distance Learning places the learner at the centre of the enterprise. Quality courses are key, courses that take advantage of multi-media and various delivery mechanisms. Interaction with a tutor or teacher remains a core element, although independent learners access this expertise in a different manner. Opportunities for learner interaction with other learners are almost limitless. In fact, virtual learning communities can be created that reach well beyond the borders of Manitoba with students accessing global expertise. Manitoba Education Citizenship and Youth has the opportunity to move to these realities quickly, particularly through engaging the support of other educational stakeholders in the Province.

