

Towards a model for successfully delivering web-based courses to high-school students with implications for post-secondary education

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Distance course delivery in Newfoundland and Labrador is an integral part of the education system, particularly (and historically) at the post-secondary level in the university and college system where an increased clientele rely on web-based courses for their degree and diploma programs. However, since the 2001-02 school year, a number of specifically developed senior high school web-based courses have been developed and delivered to primarily small rural high schools in an attempt to provide a comprehensive core program that would otherwise not be feasible to offer due to the lack of teacher resources and, or very small school enrolments. Currently 30 such courses are available to about 97 schools. Delivery is organized by the Province's Department of Education through a relatively new Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation (CDLI). The latter is specifically responsible for the needed technological infrastructure, course development, instructor hiring and preparation, and in decisions concerning which schools would be involved. Current instruction is focused on synchronous communication between the E-teacher (electronic teacher) and students using various software packages such as *Elluminate Live* along with typical asynchronous communication between "lessons" utilizing *Web-CT*. Within each school, students are assisted by an M-teacher (mediating teacher) or M-team of teachers.

To a large extent this and other forms of distance education have proven to be reasonably successful with those students who are highly capable and who possess the necessary attributes and dispositions to work in this mode of educational delivery. It is less clear, however, how the average student or a wider range of students will perform in online learning, particularly as the need for web-based courses increases in small schools to help accommodate the graduation requirements for all students. This emerging challenge resulted in a funded study by the author to investigate current CDLI course organization and delivery and to (a) propose a model for e-learning (web-based course delivery) that would accommodate a wider range of students; and (b) provide a practical set of recommendations directed at maximizing student success in the distance-delivered portion of their high school program. The research centred on groups of learners who had already experienced CDLI course along with the E-teachers, M-teachers, parents, school administrators, and CDLI personnel. Analysis of data collected through surveys and focus group work resulted in the development of a conceptual model framework. An examination of this framework will form the basis for the proposed presentation along with a brief summary of the research, the recommendations made, and an examination of the implications of successful (or non-successful) participation in high school web-based learning for those students who choose to pursue post-secondary education options after high school.