
Chapter IX

The Management of Virtual Classes in School District Digital Intranets

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Abstract

As rural communities and schools decline in size educational policy makers often question their viability. In the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador and in New Zealand, new educational structures based on digital networking, using the Internet, have been developed for the delivery of education to rural schools. Within these electronic educational structures senior students in rural high schools have been provided with extended curriculum choice through a combination of on-site and online instruction. This has led to three challenges: the administration of electronically inter-connected rural schools, the integration of physical and virtual classes, and the need to find pedagogy that is appropriate for e-teaching and e-learning. The new educational

structures in rural Newfoundland and New Zealand have extended traditional classrooms in terms of time, space, organisation and capacity.

The Management of Virtual Classes In School District Digital Intranets

As rural communities decline in size, educational policy makers often question the viability of the small schools located within them. Traditionally, senior rural high school students have been encouraged to complete their studies in larger institutions, including boarding schools, most of which are located in urban areas. In many instances, small schools have been closed and their students transported by bus to schools in larger centres.

A problem common to small schools throughout the world is the issue of curriculum choice for senior students. It is difficult to justify the appointment of specialist teachers for very small numbers of students in rural schools. Accordingly, rural high school students often do not have access to the same range of curriculum choices enjoyed by their urban peers who are educated in schools located in larger communities.

The educational policy dilemma of providing resources for small schools in ways that ensure their students have access to educational and, indirectly, vocational opportunities comparable to their urban peers is compounded in countries where it is necessary to maintain viable educational institutions in areas where there are significant economic resources. In Canada, Australia, New Zealand and many of the Nordic countries, schools in small and remote communities are vital to the national economic infrastructure as they are often located near mines, forests, fisheries or agricultural activities. However, it is difficult to attract and retain professional and service personnel in rural areas if local schools are not perceived to be at least as good as those in cities.

The Development of Virtual Classes in New Zealand and Atlantic Canada

When schools are electronically linked so that they can share their teaching resources, often over considerable distances, a much wider curriculum for

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