



Distributed Learning School Internal Review Guide: *Reflecting on Practice for Quality*



**Ministry of Education
Distributed Learning Unit**

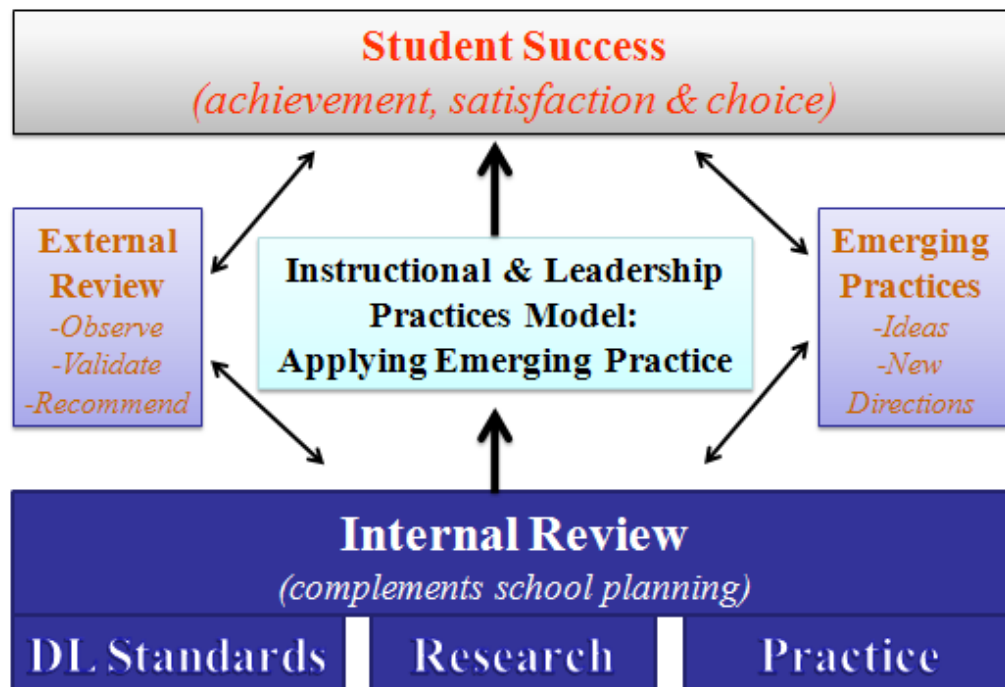
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Introduction

The Ministry of Education is fostering improved student achievement, choice and satisfaction through Distributed Learning (DL), encouraging development of a “quality, dynamic and engaging learning environment... not limited by schedules, calendars, facilities, or location” (www.bced.gov.bc.ca/dist_learning/vision.htm). DL instructional practice spans a variety of methodologies including online courses utilizing learning management systems, virtual classrooms, video streaming and web-casting technologies, as well as paper-based materials. The Ministry’s vision for DL is to “utilize new teaching practices that can engage students and lead to improved achievement” (www.bced.gov.bc.ca/dist_learning).

A fundamental issue in this drive toward choice through DL is how to foster quality learning experiences through DL. What instructional practices stimulate student engagement, satisfaction, and achievement? How will we know if students are engaged in quality learning experiences? These questions are central to the Ministry’s *Quality Review*. The *Quality Review* builds on prior work including the development of DL Standards, DL policy, research on the use of educational technologies, and field-based action research on emerging instructional practice in online environments conducted over several years in BC schools. The ultimate goals of the *Quality Review* are to foster improved quality in distributed learning practice while ensuring effective implementation of DL standards.

Quality Review Model



The internal review, as the starting point, is central to the *Quality Review* process. Documentation supporting the internal review is based on the BC Distributed Learning Standards, research and growing descriptions of emerging practice in DL. All schools are involved in a school planning process, and the internal review is intended to complement the planning process for DL schools. The internal review is supported by this Guide, which focuses on instructional and leadership practices validated through research, the growing body of DL achievement data collected by the Ministry of Education since September 2006, and descriptions of emerging practices in the DL and online learning fields. The Guide is intended to support personal and group reflection on quality instructional and leadership practices leading to improved student success in achievement, satisfaction, and choice in learning.

The internal review, while central to the *Quality Review* initiative, is only one part of the overall process. The *Quality Review* process includes the development of a description of emerging distributed learning instructional and leadership practices. This description is iterative, and anticipated to become an evolving document. New practices emerge regularly, particularly as new technologies and research influences existing practices. A [private wiki](#) supports ongoing discussion and sharing of practices focused on quality in DL. Posted on this wiki are the internal review documents, discussions, and a growing list of emerging practices in distributed learning for DL schools to consider as part of their own improvement, planning, and development cycles. When placed against the growing body of DL achievement data collected since September 2006 by the Ministry of Education, this document will help describe successful approaches that DL educators could adopt within their own DL schools. Finally, an external review, where DL professionals conduct site visits to validate quality initiatives undertaken by DL schools, completes the foundation of the Quality Review initiative. The Distributed Learning Quality Reviews – Background document describes the external review process in more detail.

This document has been a collaborative project of DL educators involved in the January to June 2008 *Quality Review* pilot project. The document is intended for use by DL educators as part of their own annual internal planning processes, and is based on the [Standards for K-12 Distributed Learning in British Columbia](#). Questions derived from research on leadership, standards for online learning, and effective online pedagogy are integrated with the published DL standards to create a document to guide internal DL school review and reflection. In particular, [Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's \(2000\)](#) Community of Inquiry framework and Leithwood's (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000, 2005) transformational leadership theory frame the questions for this Internal Review guide. The focus of the guide is on the current DL Standards, but also reflects new research in online learning standards published since the development of the BC DL Standards.

DL educators can use this Internal Review document as a guide to foster reflection and dialogue about instructional and leadership practices that improve student engagement, achievement, and satisfaction in Distributed Learning schools in the province of British Columbia.

Conceptual Models for the Internal Review

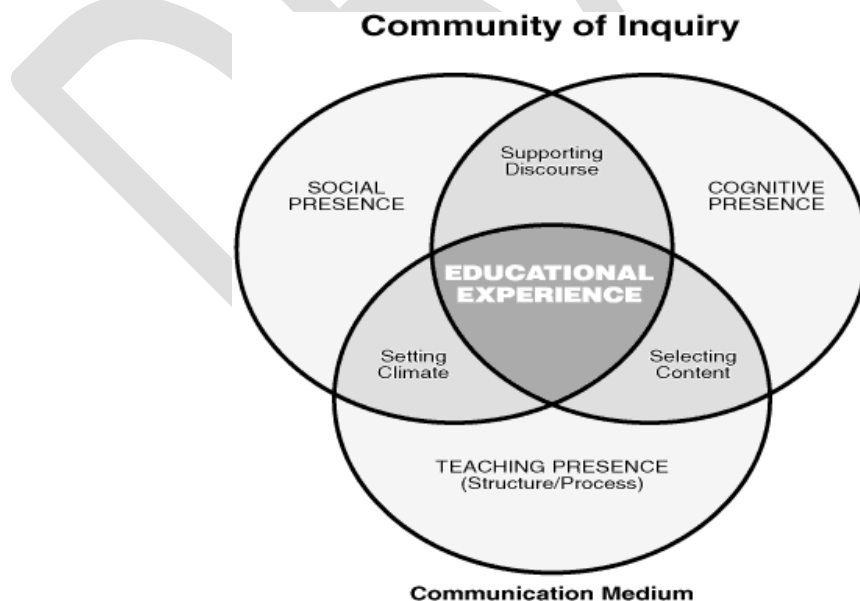
The reflective questions for use in the internal review of instructional and leadership practices, based on the DL Standards, derive from two conceptual models: Garrison, Anderson, & Archer's "Community of Inquiry", and Leithwood's Transformational Leadership theory.

Instructional Practice

The idealized view of education, as a critical community of learners, is no longer just an ideal, but has become a practical necessity in the realization of relevant, meaningful, and continuous learning. It is within such a community of learners that the potential of e-learning will be fully realized.
Garrison & Anderson, 2003, p.3

Since its publication in *The Internet and Higher Education*, [Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's \(2000\)](#) Community of Inquiry framework has generated substantial interest among online learning researchers. A significant body of research has developed that supports the community of inquiry model, particularly amongst online learning researchers. A review of the literature from 2000 to 2008 found that 252 authors referenced the Garrison, Anderson, and Archer Community of Inquiry model with 57 papers discussing it at length.

The essential elements of a community of inquiry for learners are teaching, social, and cognitive presence¹. Teaching presence involves instructional management, facilitating discourse and direct instruction. It is the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for realizing learning outcomes. Social presence establishes a feeling of trust, belonging, control, and engagement. It is the ability of participants to identify with the community (e.g., course of study), communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop inter-personal relationships. Cognitive presence is the collaborative construction of meaning and focuses discussion on key issues, stimulates with questions, identifies issues in responses, challenges ideas, precipitates reflection, and facilitates meta-cognitive awareness. Learners are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse in a critical community of inquiry.



¹ This brief description has been adapted from online postings at the [Community of Inquiry](#) website and presentations by the principle authors.

Leadership Practice

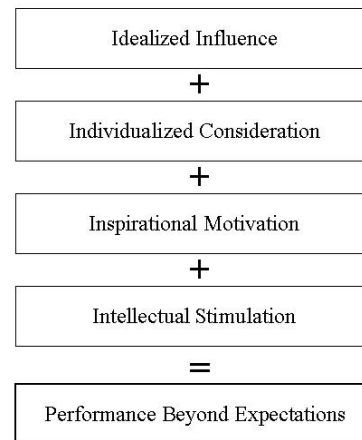
What is exciting and encouraging [is that] with appropriate instructional leadership by principals, technology can be an effective catalyst for educational reform. Creighton, T. (2003)

New research on leadership and implementation of educational technologies recognizes the key role leaders play in successful use of educational technologies in schools (Davidson, 2003; Foster & St. Hilaire, 2003; Creighton, 2003). Sound leadership and good management practices are critical to successful adoption of distributed learning programs. Recent leadership studies focus on relationships within community and a leader's ability to cope with complex change. Leadership practice within the BC distributed learning community reflects many characteristics of transformational leaders. Transformational leadership research (Burns, 1978; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000, 2005; Silins & Mulford, 2002) describes the complex and dynamic change required in distributed learning environments, particularly with implementation of educational technologies. Transformational leadership requires participation, vision, collaboration, and reflection – a community to share responsibility for leading and learning.

Transformational leadership invokes change, and is more about innovativeness than innovation, less about strategy and more about strategizing. It is shared leadership, where everyone involved in the organization are leaders. This requires participation, vision, collaboration, and reflection – all of which necessitates a sense of community and a direct link between leading and learning (Lambert, 2002). In his meta-analysis of the research on transformational leadership, Leithwood (2005) concluded that, “as an image of ideal practice, transformational leadership currently is challenged only by instructional leadership in both practitioner and scholarly communities” (p. 2).

Leithwood and Duke (1999) describe seven dimensions of transformational leadership:

1. Creating a shared vision,
2. Setting goals,
3. Providing intellectual stimulation,
4. Supplying individual support,
5. Modeling effective practice,
6. Meeting high expectations, and
7. Developing a positive culture, and creating structures that support active involvement in decision making



Transformational leadership is a relevant theoretical frame from which to look at leadership practices and behaviours within DL schools.

In Summary

Questions for reflection related to the published DL Standards derive from the community of inquiry and transformational leadership models. Situating the Internal Review reflective questions within educational theory strengthens the validity of the process and the standards it is based on.

Instructional Practices – Questions for reflection

As a distributed learning teacher, what do you do to create a **teaching presence** in your classes?

1. Communicate course topics, goals, timelines, and expectations regarding assignments?
2. Provide instruction to students about participation in activities, productive dialogue, and task expectations, as well as providing instruction to help students master content and achieve learning outcomes?
3. Guide students to help identify areas of agreement/disagreement on course topics, help clarify student's thinking about course topics, focus discussion on relevant issues, and help students explore new concepts in the course?
4. Foster the development of a sense of community among course participants, and provide relevant and timely feedback to students?
5. Select appropriate resources and/or develop learning materials and content for your students that meet the highest standards for quality and student usability

As a distributed learning teacher, what do you do to create a **social presence** in your classes?

6. Create a sense of belonging and community for students?
7. Support student expression in online discussion, building a sense of collaboration?
8. Foster the use of a variety of communication strategies, including online strategies, for social interaction among students and teacher?

As a distributed learning teacher, what do you do to create a **cognitive presence** in your classes?

9. Foster student interest in course issues and content, while supporting the development of new perspectives through student reflection?
10. Encourage students to use a variety of information sources, techniques, and approaches to solutions when exploring problems posed in the course?
11. Support the testing and application of new knowledge for students?

Leadership Practices – Questions for reflection

As a distributed learning leader, what do you do to plan, support, and communicate?

1. Create a shared vision for DL?
2. Foster the creation and implementation of group goals; set direction, monitor, and plan school growth and activity?
3. Set high performance expectations for staff and students?
4. Ensure all teachers are qualified and trained, and provide instructional support for staff?
5. Assist staff in the creation of processes and content that fosters student engagement?
6. Create structures in a DL environment that foster collaboration?
7. Build productive relations with parents and the community?
8. Recognize and celebrate teacher and student accomplishments?

DRAFT

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