UiT The Arctic University of Norway

JOHNSON
SHOYAMA
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY
UREGINA ⟍ USASK

Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities and Education

Organizing Distance Learning in the North;

Analysing Canadian K-12 Policies for Distance Learning

Raymond Lillevik

Organizing Distance Learning in the North;

Analysing Canadian K-12 Policies for Distance Learning

Raymond Lillevik

Master in Governance and Entrepreneurship in Northern and Indigenous Areas

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education
UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy
University of Saskatchewan

Spring 2023

Supervised by

Lisbet Rønningsbakk, professor

Department of Education, UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Co-supervised by

Hans-Kristian Hernes, professor

Department of Social Sciences, UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Acknowledgements

Abstract

To explore what role distance learning may play in strengthening human capital in the Circumpolar North, this case study describes the development of distance learning policies on organization and facilitation in K-12 education in Canada and suggests explanations for this development. Because the decentralized structure of Canadian governance and the autonomy of the provinces and territories impact policy development in the education sector, distance learning policies can develop differently across the country. In the provinces where the student population is large enough to support distance education, several providers of distance education operate in the same market, but in some jurisdictions with smaller student populations, there are only one or two programs. Despite differences, there are also some significant similarities in how distance learning is facilitated as a learning environment in different jurisdictions. Although policy changes in the Canadian education sector often take place incrementally, there are examples of radical shifts as well, which tend to generate political debate. Investigating both governance aspects of distance learning and the facilitation of educational technology for instructional design, the thesis suggests some elements of the Canadian experience that are valuable for other areas in the rural North.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 Education and human capital in the rural North

Despite the vast natural resources in the global North, the education sector in these regions often experience challenges, particularly in rural areas. Strained finances and low student numbers are frequent reasons for rural schools to close or amalgamate. Businesses and community organizations may find qualified employees being reluctant to work in a community where their children cannot receive a globally competitive education. At the same time, young people move away from communities that cannot provide gainful employment. This "brain drain" and "brain turnover" have a gender dimension because more young women than men leave rural communities to move to cities in the South (Hirshberg & Petrov, 2014, pp. 354-356, 390).

Although basic education in the different Northern regions and areas is determined by the nation, state, or provincial frameworks they belong to, the long distances and the rural character create problems for providing high quality education. Because of these shared problems, best practices in one area may be of interest to other places in the Circumpolar world. In the wake of digitalization, distance learning has become increasingly regarded as a remedy for many challenges facing rural schools. Hence, OECD experts believe that new technology can strengthen their attraction. New opportunities for distance education may enhance rural students' abilities to compete with urban students by connecting learners with learning communities and experts directly, in a way that reduces the geographical and demographic challenges (Echazarra & Radinger, 2019, p. 4). In the national education systems of Northern countries, responses to distance learning have been varied. For example,

Norway has been quite restrictive with distance learning in primary and secondary education but, in 2023, it seems poised to expand opportunities for this mode of learning (The Ministry of Education, 2023, p. 113). Canada, on the other hand, has had years of experience with providing distance learning for primary and secondary students (K-12). For education researchers and policy designers, and for myself as a high school teacher in rural Northern Norway, Canada, therefore, stands out as a case of particular interest.

The Canadian experiences demonstrate that it is possible for the education sector to overcome distances, increase the ability to recruit competent school staff, and strengthen graduation rates in the North, which often are lower than most national average levels (Hirshberg & Petrov, 2014, pp. 354-356). To some extent, the Canadian education sector can bypass the requirement to hire experienced and qualified staff members to teach subjects like foreign languages, mathematics, and science, being able to provide a broad spectrum of courses for their students (Mulcahy et al., 2016, p. 27). However, as I demonstrate below, this development in Canada is not without tensions and frustrations.

My goal with this thesis is to provide an understanding of distance learning's potential to build human capital in the North. Human capital theory holds that the most significant resource for successful business development is the workforce. Investing in education and strengthening cognitive skills increase people's income and the well-being of individuals and communities (Deming, 2022, p. 78). In northern and other rural areas, education has often been perceived as an exit from the home community (Corbett, 2007, p. 91). This is not always the case, however: Education may contribute to identity development and a sense of belonging to a place, particularly among young people (Storvoll, 2019, pp. 49-50). As a result, education is

2

at the core of how to develop sustainable communities in rural areas outside cities and in the North.

1.2 Research topic: Organization and facilitation of distance education

In this thesis, I explore pedagogic practices and policies of educational technology and design relevant to governance in Northern regions by addressing the research question, What are the policies of organizing distance learning in Canadian K-12 education? The research is designed as a case study on the organization of digitalized distance education in elementary and secondary schools in Canada (K-12). Although most countries in the North are familiar with distance learning within higher education, Canada's use of this school practice in the lower part of the education sector is particularly relevant for other parts of the Circumpolar world. Therefore, the purpose of the thesis is to establish a set of knowledge and insights that may be useful both from the perspectives of policy analysis and pedagogy. Addressing questions about the organization and facilitation of distance learning are critical, but the topic is broad. I have therefore narrowed the research topic to an investigation of policies of distance learning facilitation, addressing the following research questions:

 1. What has been the development of distance learning policies on organization and facilitation in K-12 education in Canada?

 2. What has been the rationale for this development?

These questions address the "how" and "why" perspectives of distance learning. The description of the policy development ("how") establishes the foundations for the discussion of the potential reasoning behind the choices ("why"), and both questions are cornerstones for

the research design of the thesis. In the concluding chapter, I argue how and why the research may be relevant for other countries in the North, like Norway.

1.3 Terminology and concepts

The documents behind the expected new *Norwegian Education Act* to be passed in summer 2023 use the Norwegian term "fjernundervisning" ("instruction across distance"), but the term I usually apply in my discussions is "distance learning" (The Ministry of Education, 2023, pp. 113-127). However, as the research literature, Canadian and other, uses different terms synonymously—like distributed learning, online learning, or e-learning—I also use this terminology in the thesis (Barbour, 2018; Funding, p. 2). Within the field of digital education, it is important to distinguish between remote/distance and online learning. While the latter implies the use of more non-traditional didactic methods (favoring self-directed learning), distance learning is provided both in the form of online learning, as well as in traditional teacher-led classes transmitted via Zoom, Teams, and other technologies.

The concept of digitalized education in general includes a wide array of practices and a myriad of materials, resources, perspectives, and learning approaches. Digitalization can refer to online courseware for asynchronous learning, video conferences for synchronous ("live") activities, internet articles, YouTube videos, learning communities on social media, and virtual experiences in online video games or VR technologies. The combination of online/distance learning and face-to-face learning is usually called blended learning. Several examples of different instructional designs are mentioned in the thesis, like the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique (CSF) in 4.2.4., page 44.

2   Method and Theory

2.1 Previous research

In the mid-1990s, the development of Internet made it easy to expand the number of distance education programs (previously based on correspondence, radio, and television) dramatically, At the same time, educators began to realize that such programs should not be replicas of classroom teaching but demanded learning facilitation adapted to the new context (Reiser, 2001, Part II, p. 64). While available data on the national level about online and distance learning is rare internationally, Canada, together with the US, is one of only a few countries with formal government research on this topic. In Canada, there is a comprehensive project called *State of the Nation: K-12 e-Learning in Canada*, providing annual reports since 2008 on national policy trends and practices within each province. This research resembles the US research project *Snapshot*. Several Canadian universities also provide courses on the topic.

In distance learning, the question is how to construct pedagogically well-functioning instructional and learning designs because self-directed learning in the wake of digital learning turns upside down some traditional roles and expectations of teachers and students alike, and the new opportunities also risk making school more difficult for vulnerable groups (Lillevik, 2023). Figure 1 illustrates this change. In addition to changes in roles, expectations, and study habits, local student support is a pre-condition for a successful outcome. This support is more likely to occur if local facilitators are offered professional development

(Barbour et al., 2021, p.1; Borup, 2018, p. 433).
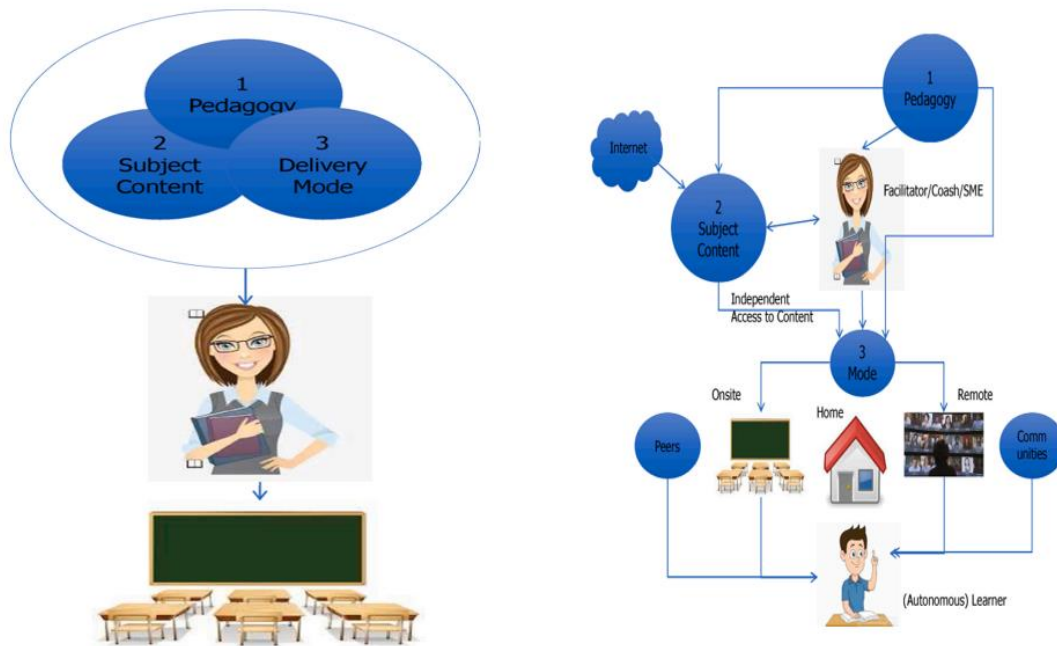
Figure 1. The transformation from the conventional role of the teacher compared with the new role of the teacher in a more student-centered approach (Srinivasan, 2022, pp. 4-5).

Instructional design is concerned with the student learning environment and skills in self-regulated learning, but in Norway, there is little experience on how to facilitate this environment and develop these skills for virtual learning communities. Another topic in which Norwegian education stakeholders need more knowledge is how to strengthen student support and build students' sense of inclusion (Munthe et al., 2022, pp. 14, 86). Support and inclusivity are both regarded as crucial for keeping learners on track and reducing dropout rates. Student support can be considered on three levels: macro, meso, and micro (Willems, 2013, pp. 18, 20, Lillevik, 2023). This thesis focuses on the latter two levels.

On the meso level, the focus is on organizing technical support for the learner, including broadband access (Willems, 2013, pp. 25-26).[1] Designers of education may easily overlook technical difficulties for the distance learner, but it is essential that these be addressed if learning is to take place. While distance education may lead to valuable cost reductions for institutions, there is a risk that this may increase the workload for the staff (Willems, 2013, p. 26). Teachers of distance learning are particularly susceptible to high workloads, which may threaten the quality of education.

On the micro level, the focus is on curriculum design, interaction and communication in learning communities, and learner characteristics. In other words, this level is concerned with how the learning takes place. This research highlights how, when it comes to communication in distance education, both cultural and social inclusiveness needs to be considered; inclusiveness can be easily compromised, by, for example, slow and unreliable internet services or physical disabilities (Willems, 2013, p. 29).

2.2 Distance learning in Canada: A case study

The main body of this thesis investigates the research questions about policy development and rationale: What has been the development of distance learning policies on organization and

---

[1] Meso level issues may be categorized by 1. quality assurance, 2. professional development and faculty support (most of the research so far focuses on higher education), 3. learner support services, 4. innovation and change, 5. costs and benefits, 6. management and organization, 7. educational technology, and 8. open educational resources.

facilitation in K-12 education in Canada, and what has been the rationale for this development?

Canadian education is a provincial and territorial responsibility, and approaches to education policies across the country vary widely. Policies and practices need to be understood and explained in their different contexts, making case studies an appropriate research design for my thesis. An examination of one or several specified cases or examples from the real world, case study research design is used in different fields from medicine to history to education to social studies (Gomm et al., 2000, p. 2). Researchers often uses this method when they want to explain how and why contemporary situations or social phenomena occur within a certain context and, from their observations, make attempts to transfer the findings to other situations, in other words, to generalize them (Yin, 2018, p. 4).

In contrast to social surveys, which may use many cases to gather relatively small amounts of data from each example (e.g., individual respondents), case studies focus on an in-depth investigation of a few cases (or only one) in context, examining many features or qualities of each case. Case studies are also different from experimental research, as a case study investigates a phenomenon occurring in a natural social situation, not in a lab. The design is open for many different qualitative and quantitative methods, and the case itself may be an individual (like in a work of history), an event, or an institution. Not least, the approach is relevant in research on phenomena at the community or national level, for example, how different modes of learning operate in the education sector (Gomm et al., 2000, pp. 2-4; Rønningsbakk, 2019, p. 44; Yin, 2018, p. 12).

Multiple case designs are usually favored over single case studies because information may be more valid because of comparative or contrasting dimensions (Yin, p. 61). Even research on two cases is substantially better than a single case, as the advantages of the multiple case study approach appear parallel to the counterfactual approach for how public policy analysis investigates best practices (Bardach & Patashnik, 2020, pp. 133-144). In this research, I therefore explore policy development and its rationale in the two provinces of Ontario and British Columbia.

Research on individual policies or programs will emphasize different phenomena, and both take place in unique cultural, political, and social contexts. One potential downside with case study research is that it may be subject to selection bias. The cases in my thesis are characterized by demographic asymmetry between the provinces, with British Columbia having a population of more than 5 million and Ontario more than 15 million. The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, whose distance learning practices I refer to in the discussions in Chapter 4, has a population of only 500 000. The limited material is not necessarily a problem, as data quantity is not always the same as data quality (Bardach & Patashnik, 2020, p. 178).

2.3 Document analysis

Based upon the assumption that we understand the world by using language, reading texts are adequate for grasping policy development and their rationale (Bratberg, 2021, p. 44-45). The case study is therefore designed as a document analysis on political ideas, understood as political solutions or policy streams (Bratberg, 2021, pp. 93-94).

The scope of the thesis and the material investigated have been narrowed into two documents selected for their relevance and reliability on the education sector in Ontario and British Columbia: The *Class Size Consultation Guide* (the *Guide*) published by the Government of Ontario, the Ministry of Education, and *Bill 8*, *the Education Statues Amendment Act* from 2020 by the Government of British Columbia (Bill 8). By analysing a range of literary devices used in the documents, I describe and discuss policies on how and why distance learning is organized. The discussions also include documents from several Canadian jurisdictions, like agreements, union policy statements, news clippings, and research reports. The strengths of these sources of evidence for case studies are that they can cover a wide range of settings and events and are usually not produced with the case study in mind. However, although documents are stable, in that they can be reviewed repeatedly, they may be subject to selection bias and reporting. As well, they can be difficult to obtain (Yin, pp. 113-115). The thesis's conclusion connects the results from the analysis and discussions with the knowledge gaps highlighted in the introduction. Here I suggest some topics on how Canadian policies and practices may be relevant for other Circumpolar and rural contexts.

There are several reasons for using material published by the governments in Ontario and British Columbia. While Ontario, the most populated province, has the education sector with the highest number of distance learning students, British Columbia is the province with the highest percentage of students enrolled in distance education in Canada. Because of the student population size, Ontario can produce more learning resources than most other provinces. Consequently, school boards and districts in other jurisdictions tend to adapt learning material from Ontario for their contexts (M. Barbour, personal communication, February 20, 2023). For identifying ideas such as political solutions, or "policy streams," policy and law documents are useful not only for mapping and describing policy change and

development but also for examining the purposes and reasoning behind the decisions (Bratberg, 2021, pp. 88, 93). To choose documents that have originated near the centre of political power means that they contain pertinent information and need to be read as artifacts that influenced how policy developed in a particular context. This means that my analysis of the ideas in documents do not focus solely on the isolated texts but combine other approaches related to the contextual discourse or social implications. To understand the texts, I therefore take into consideration the context where the text originated (Thagaard, 2018, p. 119). The text selections are read critically and placed into context (Jacobsen, 2022, p. 17). Consequently, I combine the approach of analysing political ideas with elements of discourse analysis and rhetorical political analysis (Bratberg, 2021, pp. 75, 212-213, 217, 223). While, compared to other policies, legislative amendments are best understood together with their implementation, the *Guide* must be read with its communicative and rhetoric contexts in mind.

As a document analysis, the research is carried out as a hermeneutic interpretation with an inductive approach. Based upon my assumptions of how political ideas and solutions may be found in texts, and a close reading of grammar and semantics, I make specific observations to recognize potential strategic use of language. Since policy documents often signal political goals and are results of political deliberation between conflicting interests, my interpretive approach considers underlying ideas found in the documents when relevant. In addition, I explain how the document and text play out in the related discourse politically (Grape and Tønnesson, November 21, 2022). This means I discuss if and how certain words, verbs, or expressions may be biased in their political use, for example, the use of the word "barrier" in Chapter 4.1.3. Literary devices like metaphors, composition, narrative structures, and styles can shape or maintain certain worldviews or perspectives. Additionally, the use of language,

composition, and structure may reveal policy alternatives (Asdal & Reinertsen, 2020, p. 85; Bratberg, 2021, pp. 64-65, 67). When use of strategic language is limited, like with the formalized speech act of Bill 8, a close reading of key decisions is essential, for example, how the prescribed agreements in the amendment establish certain privileges. Illuminating policy implementation and alternatives are also important for the analysis and discussion of the decisions expressed in the text (Bratberg, 2021, p. 79; Matczak, 2017, p. 1). From these observations, I suggest and discuss potential patterns and trends in policies and their explanations (Bratberg, 2021, p. 107).

Although the selected documents provide reliable, relevant, and valuable information that can go some distance in answering the research questions, no research results or their interpretation are flawless. Epistemologically, then, my arguments are open for evaluation and modification. Although my research questions are confronted with the empirical reality represented by law texts, expressed policies, and descriptions of practices, the knowledge is situated and contextual. The validity of the results depends on the transparency of my argumentation (Thagaard, 2018, p. 188).

2.4 Outline

Mapping the ideas in the documents is not about describing or paraphrasing the texts per se but about identifying and scrutinizing ideas from the context. (Bratberg, 2021, p. 113; Jacobsen, 2022, p. 38). As the documents need to be seen in light of relevant context and research literature, Chapter 3 presents the Canadian situation in K-12 distance learning. The two subsequent chapters, analyzing the *Class Size Consultation Guide* and *Bill 8*, discuss different aspects of policies in Ontario and British Columbia. The discussions include a comparative approach, seeing rationale in light of contrasting or parallel developments in

other Canadian jurisdictions. The concluding chapter summarizes the highlights and recommends further research on topics related to the knowledge gaps referred to in the introduction.

3 Organizing and Facilitating Distance Learning in Canada

3.1 Variation among distance learning policies

Canadian education administration and governance is a complicated picture, making any mapping of policy development and discussion of their rationale complex (Koole & Squires; 2021, p. 8-10). This situation impacts the organization of distance learning, as some provinces operate with single provincial programs, others with programs based on what the school districts provide, and still others with a combination of both (see Figure 2). These different policies are reflected and exemplified in the discussions in Chapter 4. Distance and online learning regulation in Canadian provinces and territories mainly consists of legislation, policy handbooks, agreements, and/or memorandums of understanding. However, the legislation on the topic is usually limited, only defining distance education or providing the actual Minister of Education the ability to regulate or create distance and online learning programs. While some provinces do not have any formal regulations at all, like Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador, about one-third of the jurisdictions use policy handbooks. Until now, the three territories have been using programs from the neighbouring provinces, although Yukon and The Northwest Territories are developing their own online programs (Barbour & LaBonte, 2022, State of the Nation, p. 8).

Despite the widespread implementation of distance learning in Canada, it is used not because of a preference for this mode of education, nor because distance learning is without barriers. Examples of such challenges are financial problems, resistance in the school organization, and

lack of strategies and vision in the school administrations. Many students also believe that distance learning takes more time than traditional instruction. Other factors are reportedly difficulties with social interaction, lack of necessary academic and technical skills, motivation issues, and problems with administration, technology and internet access (Mulcahy et al., 2016, p. 29). Online learning also appears to carry a stigma of being lower quality than face-to-face learning: During the Covid-19 pandemic, for example, a court case in Quebec supported the provincial government in its contention that face-to-face learning was preferable to a full education in the form of distance learning (Di Cristofano & Thangarajah, 2022).

Nor is there a national political strategy that has established the current use of distance learning. Unlike many countries where the national government oversees education, the federal government in Ottawa has no responsibility for education. An important exception is the regulation and funding of education for Indigenous students. Hence, despite some similarities in funding and the structure of the school year, legislation and policy differ across the country, and each of the 10 provinces and three territories maintains and develops the K-12 education curriculum, policies, and standards within their respective jurisdictions (Barbour & LaBonte, 2018, p. 601).
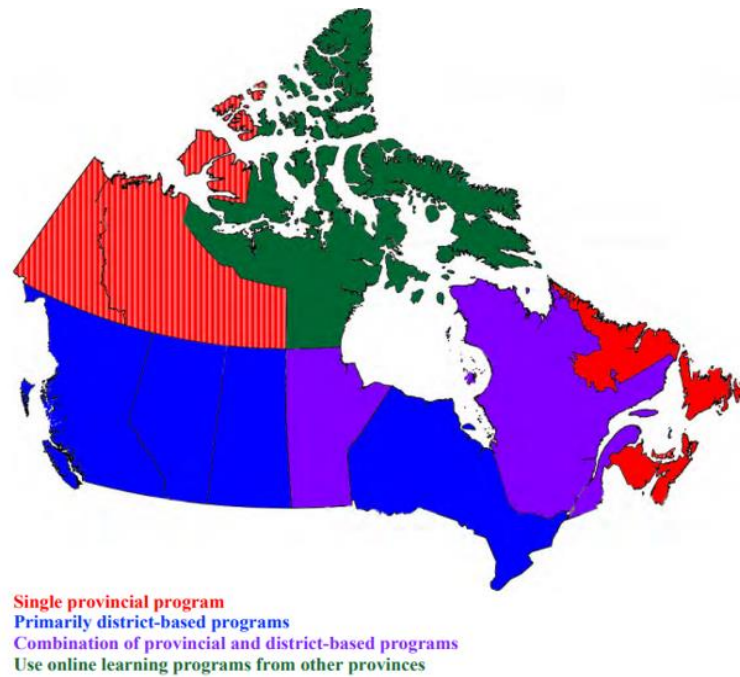
Single provincial program
Primarily district-based programs
Combination of provincial and district-based programs
Use online learning programs from other provinces

Figure 2. Types of organization of distance learning programs in Canada (Barbour &
LaBonte, 2022, *State of the Nation*, p. 8).

Canadian distance learning practices are a matter of need more than a national strategy. Due

to the country's immense size and rural character, distance education has been part of the

education sector since 1919 in British Columbia. A pattern Canada shares with most countries

is that distance learning, or digitalized education in general, has been developed from the

bottom up. The fact that this process has taken place as a sort of grassroots movement

accounts for the differences from place to place in policies and funding (Pratt, 2018, p. 226).

The grassroots character of Canadian distance learning has so far made most of the

policymaking and coordination a matter of initiatives, networking, and partnerships. National

platforms for this dialogue may be organizations like the Council for Ministers of Education

in Canada or the Provincial-Territorial Education Association, or more practitioner-focused

organizations like CANeLearn, which publishes the *State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in*

Canada (Barbour & LaBonte, 2018, p. 612).

3.2 Pedagogy, funding, and teacher workload

Distance learning takes place in different forms, from fully online courses to a more blended model, combining online synchronous and asynchronous instruction with face-to-face learning models. Generally, however, most distance learning in Canada is provided as supplementary courses for students registered in local schools, with teachers creating learning content in the schools'/districts' Learning Management Systems (LMS). In most cases, distance learning in K-12 education is managed by provincial and territorial governments, where private contractors provide technology and educational content on their behalf. This differs from distance learning in the US, where the most significant drivers of K-12 distance education are independent corporations that provide distance learning and other education services (Barbour & LaBonte, 2018, p. 602).

Funding is the backbone for all education development. Generally, there are three Canadian models for funding online and distance learning. One model is that the provincial government funds programs directly through full-time equivalents (FTEs) or credit enrolment units (CEUs); another is that the government provides resources to online or distance learning opportunities directly. There is a tendency that provinces using the FTE and CEU system spend less on distance learning enrolments than on traditional classroom learning. The third model is, used by many programs, is fee-for-service: Students pay a fee for each course they are enrolled in. In the US, for comparison, models one and three are used the most, largely because distance and online learning are often carried out by private enterprises in the American context. In Canada, as well, a combination of student fees and funding by the ministries is common (Barbour, 2018; Funding, pp. i, 9).

For distance learning development in general, recruiting competent educators tends to be a challenge. These teachers need to be able to create relevant content and apply online pedagogies. However, resources available to them vary according to policy and funding frameworks (Barbour & LaBonte, 2018, p. 611). Although the number of students in virtual learning environments has doubled in the last 10 years and the number in blended learning environments has doubled in three years, this development has not influenced general teacher education. Only about 30% of teacher education programs offer online or blended learning field experiences for the pre-service or in-service teachers enrolled (Archibald et al., 2020, p. 13).

Since the beginning of the first online distance learning programs around 2000, Canadian teachers and unions have voiced concerns about a sustainable balance of student support vs. teachers' working conditions and workload. Gradually, policies on these issues about the organization and facilitation of distance learning have emerged in different jurisdictions, including class size and teacher-student ratios.

Teacher unions and parents have been particularly concerned about student support and teachers' working conditions, and in 2019 the State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada project documented how these issues overlap when it comes to class size. Barbour argues that in distance and online learning instructional design, the different functions for one face-to-face instructor in a classroom (planning and creating the learning material, support, organization, implementation, and evaluation) are divided among several individuals. Although how these functions are combined may differ, three types of teacher models are common: The Virtual School Designer, the Virtual School Teacher, and the Virtual School Site Facilitator. Figure 3 shows the use of the latter two in combination (Barbour, 2017,

Working Conditions, pp. 2, 6). Different variations of supplementary programs apply to Canadian contexts. These programs contrast with models for full-time distance learning (for example, in homeschooling contexts), which is not very common in Canada.
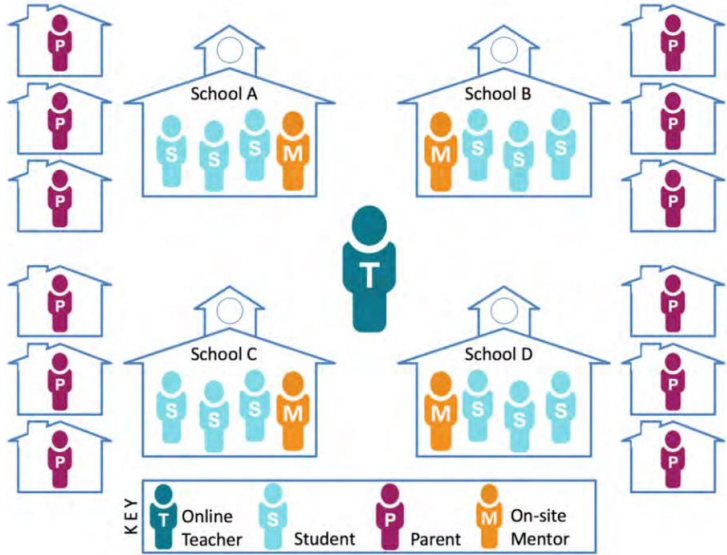
Figure 3: The instructional context of a supplemental distance learning environment (Barbour, 2019, E-Learning Class Size, p. 5).

3.3 The increased use of distance learning

Although the uses of online learning are less developed in Canada than in the more populated US, distance education and online learning have continued to grow in both countries since the internet appeared in the 1990s. As Table 1 illustrates, the use of distance learning in Canadian provinces has been increasing for several years.

	% students engaged in distance and/or online learning			
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
NL	1.8%	1.7%	1.6%	1.5%
NS	2.0%	1.8%	2.7%	2.1%
PE	0.5%	0.7%	0.8%	1.3%
NB	3.3%	3.5%	4.8%	5.2%
QC	4.0%	3.5%	3.9%	5.5%
ON	4.4%	4.8%	5.9%	6.8%
MB	5.7%	6.6%	4.4%	3.9%
SK	4.5%	6.7%	12.2%	10.3%
AB	10.6%	11.2%	13.3%	12.5%
BC	10.2%	10.8%	12.6%	11.1%
YT	3.1%	4.2%	7.1%	4.6%
NT	1.4%	1.5%	1.1%	1.4%
NU	0.6%	0.2%	0.1%	-
Federal	1.9%	2.0%	2.8%	3.2%
Total	*5.9%*	*6.0%*	*7.3%*	*7.6%*

Table 1. Summary of K-12 distance and/or online learning activity in Canada over the past four years (Barbour & LaBonte, 2022, State of the Nation, p. 13).

However, there appears to be no connection between the different models of organization and the level of enrolment in the programs in the provinces. While some provinces have significant legislation on distance learning, like British Columbia and Nova Scotia, as seen in Table 1, the level of enrolment is not the same in these two provinces (Barbour & LaBonte, 2022, State of the Nation, pp. 10, 13).

From 2008 to 2019, the number of students in Canada enrolled in distance or online programs increased from under 140 000 to about 300 000 (Archibald et al., 2020, p. 1). With an enrolment of about 7.6% of students in online, distance, or blended programs on the national level (2021), Canada has the highest per capita student enrolment in this sort of education in the world (Barbour & LaBonte, 2022, State of the Nation, p. 9).[2] The most extensive use of this type of education is in British Columbia and Alberta (Winkelmans et al., 2010, pp. 6-28, Bennet, 2016, p. 299). In British Columbia, K-12 participation in online learning had reached more than 12% before the pandemic, not including those participating in blended models (Barbour & LaBonte, 2018, p. 603). Since the student population is highest in Ontario, however, the number of distance and online students is also highest here, see Table 2.

---

[2] The pandemic probably has had a share in the development of distance learning since 2020, but to what degree is unclear.

	# of K-12 students	# enrolled in distance/online learning	Percent involvement
NL	63,536	936	1.5%
NS	129,121	2,761	2.1%
PE	20,131	~260	1.3%
NB	98,906	5,134	5.2%
QC	1,003,322	~55,000	5.5%
ON	2,056,055	~139,000	6.8%
MB	204,149	~8,000	3.9%
SK	186,084	19,142	10.3%
AB	733,599	~92,000	12.5%
BC	~667,000	73,744	11.1%
YT	5,456	~250	4.6%
NT	8,700	120	1.4%
NU	10,902	-	-
Federal	109,001	~3,500	3.2%
Total	*5,295,962*	*399,847*	*7.6%*

Note: ~ symbol means that approximations were provided by one or more sources

Table 2. Summary of K-12 distance and/or online learning activity by jurisdiction for 2020-21 (Barbour & LaBonte, 2022, State of the Nation, p. 9).

In the wake of the increase of online learners, several concerns have been raised about equity, particularly in technological infrastructure, and the "digital divide" between learners with access to technology and those without (Walker, 2000, pp. 1-6, Lillevik, 2023). Even in jurisdictions where distance learning has become quite common, like British Columbia, the access to quality educational programs is still challenging for some rural schools (Larsson, 2017, pp. 7-11).

Some researchers suggest that blended learning in the form of instructional designs that combine elements of online learning and face-to-face approaches will become the leading teaching model in Canada in the future (Meats et al., 2010, evaluation; Barbour, 2011, Online and Blended Learning, p. 13; Barbour & LaBonte, 2018, p. 603). The use of blended learning is probably under-reported, as it tends to be an augmented learning process not registered anywhere (Barbour & LaBonte, 2019, *State of the Nation*, p. 13).

To understand the development and reasoning for the growth of distance learning—as well as the concerns enumerated above—the next chapter analyses two documents from different provincial governments.

4 Document Analysis

In Chapter 2, I argued why I have designed the thesis as a case study based on document analysis to explore the research questions. By analyzing two documents, Chapter 4 aims to answer the research topic "What are the policies for organizing distance learning in Canadian K-12 education?" The overall goal of the analysis is to answer the research questions about the Canadian situation:

1. What has been the development of distance learning policies on organization and facilitation in Canada?

2. What has been the rationale for this development?

The following analyses and discussions identify, in light of Chapter 3 and other relevant literature, the development and the reasoning behind the development and narrow down the findings that I highlight in Chapter 5. Here I suggest how the results may have value for other parts of the Circumpolar North.

4.1 Class Size Consultation Guide: Ontario

4.1.1   *Validity and reliability, rationale for choice of text*

The text analyzed below is selected from a short document about maximum class size policy changes in the province of Ontario in 2019. The document also includes significant developments in the organization of distance learning in the province. This document, *the Class Size Consultation Guide*, has become available to most stakeholders in Ontario's

education sector since its publication in 2019. The document is accessible to the readers it targets, and its author has had full access to any knowledge about the education sector available. As a governmental publication, the *Guide* not only contains information from the provincial Ministry of Education but also advocates the government's goals.

Although the *Guide*'s content appears straightforward—describing the proposed development of distant learning policy—the interpretation of the reasoning behind the policy changes is a matter of argumentation and analysis. As mentioned in Chapter 2, political texts are often the results of compromises between different perspectives. Additionally, they aim at achieving certain results and are thus also tools for political power. Policies and learning practices may be perceived as political ideas and their implementation in a community, and the theoretical framework for my approach to this text lies within the concept of interpreting such political ideas (Bratberg, 2021, p. 79).

4.1.2 *Author, description of the document, and purpose*

The *Class Size Consultation Guide* is a 9-page booklet published in 2019 by the Ministry of Education, the Government of Ontario. Its immediate background was that the new government in the province had launched a modernization program for education, "Education That Works for You." Before the implementation of the program, the Ministry conducted a substantial consultation process among stakeholders in the education sector, including approximately 72 000 individuals or organizations. In relation to this reform, the *Guide* was designed to support local discussions and feedback to the Ministry. Before the publication, the Ministry had already carried out two other consultation processes. The *Guide* appears to have been shaped by the comments and feedback in the two previous rounds of consultations. In other words, the document is an attempt to comment upon issues raised in the consultations

related to changes in both class size and distance learning as part of the reorganization of K-12 education.

The booklet contains a brief introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, and an appendix. The first two chapters include a short list of questions, each supporting dialogue among the readers (Government of Ontario, 2019, *Class Size* p. 2). The three chapters consist of overviews of the proposed class size changes in Grades 1-8 and Grades 9-12, in addition to an explanation of the financial consequences of the reform. The class size overview for Grades 9-12 is particularly explicit on distance learning issues, which is why I have selected this for text analysis.

4.1.3   Text analysis

The following text analysis focuses on the section in the Guide on Grades 9-12, which describes the proposed changes in face-to-face classes and distance learning. In addition to conveying the content (the "how") of the reform, by analyzing literary devices like strategic language and composition, I explore how the *Guide* also mirrors political deliberations, different interests, and directions. In Chapter 4.2.4, I discuss how these findings may explain (the "why") the proposal (Bratberg, 2021, p. 79-80).

The chapters "Grades 1-8" and "Grades 9-12" partly share the same structure of presenting short tables, which illustrate the current status on maximum class size compared with the proposed changes, see Table 3. The chapters conclude with a selective summary of the feedback from previous consultations, highlighting elements in the changes that have won support so far.

GRADES	CURRENT STATUS	PROPOSED CHANGES
Grades 9-12	• School board class size averages must not exceed 22 in grades 9 to 12 • The funded average class size is 22.0	• School board class size averages must not exceed 28 in grades 9 to 12 • The funded average class size is 28.0

(Table 3, Grades 9-12. Government of Ontario, 2019, *Class Size*, p. 5).

Like the structure of tables in the chapter on Grades 1-8, Table 3 addresses the changes in maximum class size and stresses that the funding has increased proportionally. However, there are striking differences in the regulation changes: While there are no changes for Grades 1-3 and mixed grades, the maximum board-wide average class size for Grades 4-8 has slightly increased from 23.85 to 24.5. For Grades 9-12, however, the increase is significantly higher, from 22 to 28 students.

Using the table in this manner indicates that the Guide is structured as a "Tell Your Story"-approach by a policy issue brief. These are usually short, crisp and visual, often with tables describing one or two points. Technical information is often provided in an appendix, which also is the case with the Guide (Bardach & Patashnik, 2020, pp. 84-86, 90).

Unlike the previous chapter, the proposal for the 9-12 Grades 9-12 also contains three changes in distance learning. These changes are described in one paragraph:

"The government remains committed to modernizing education while continuing to support students and families. In addition to the planned changes in the table above, starting in 2020-21, the government plans to centralize the delivery of all e-learning courses to secondary students in Ontario to allow students greater access to

programming and educational opportunities. Secondary students will take a minimum

of four e-learning credits out of the 30 credits to fulfill the requirements for achieving

an Ontario Secondary School Diploma. That is equivalent to one credit per year, with

exemptions for some students on an individualized basis. This will include increased

class size for online courses to 35 students" (ibid, p. 5).

This paragraph presents three different proposals for change for secondary students: 1. to centralize the distance learning courses, 2. to require every secondary student who graduates to take four of 30 credits as distance learning courses, and 3. to limit the maximum class size in face-to-face classes to 28 students and distance learning classes to 35. The consequence of these new policies is that most secondary students in Ontario will not only have to take at least four credits online, but these courses will have higher class size numbers. Assuming that stakeholders in the education sector are familiar with the importance of student support and union concerns I have described in Chapter 2 and 3, their concerns probably explains the strategic use of words and expressions in the paragraph. While "modernizing" relates to the government's attempt to change policy, "continuing to support students" connects to the crucial role of student support. The paragraph also combines the concept of centralization policies with "access" and "opportunities." Within rhetorical terminology, this use of language combines the information (logos) with the mobilization of positive emotions (pathos), possibly in an effort to create and maintain support for the reform among readers (Bratberg, 2021, pp. 178-179).

Both chapters "Grades 1-8" and "Grades 9-12" follow up the proposed changes with a section titled "What We Heard in Support of the Plan." In "Grades 9-12", the reported feedback is presented in the form of two bullet points, each followed by the Ministry's response:

"• Schools and school boards require the flexibility to organize courses and pathways

to meet the needs of secondary students and the school community which cannot be

achieved through hard caps.

   o The ministry heard of the importance and requirement for flexibility and will

   continue to provide the flexibility that is important in meeting the needs of

   students and school communities.

• Feedback received from sector partners stated that the ideal class size for grades 9-

12 ranged between a low of 20 students to a maximum of 30 students.

   o The ministry's plan will align our secondary class sizes to better reflect other

   jurisdictions in Canada and follows a fiscally responsible approach. Please

   see appendix A for information on class sizes in other jurisdictions in Canada

   and a comparison of class sizes between Ontario and Quebec" (Government of

   Ontario, 2019, *Class Size*, p. 5).

While the first point dwells on the need for organizational flexibility, advocated by school

managers, the second reports feedback on optimal class sizes for secondary students. That the

term "flexibility" is repeated in the Ministry's response emphasizes its value for the

government. "Flexibility" is explicitly contrasted to "hard caps" on class size, giving the term

a flair of progress. As such, this is another example of a combination of logos and pathos in

the *Guide*, shaping a favorable look for the new policy (Bratberg, 2021, pp. 178-179).

The identity of the groups highlighting class size is less clear, as the text refers only to "sector

partners." Here the Ministry also refers to maximum class size practices in other parts of

Canada, particularly Quebec. Including the comparative aspect in a reference like this is a

literary device, strengthening the document's authority by giving it an aura of substance and

transparency at the same time (Asdal & Reinertsen, 2020, p.94). The Ministry also refers to the funding issues described in the final chapter of the *Guide*. The reference to the appendix is the only example of comments being supported by such information in the chapter, probably highlighting how important this issue may be for the readers in their evaluation of the changes. This suggests that some stakeholders suspect that cost reductions are the main motivation for the change, as "flexibility" may also include economically sustainable use of limited resources (see Chapter 3.2) (M. Barbour, personal communication, February 20, 2023).

Instead of providing explanations or literature reviews for its audience, the *Guide* contains two lists titled "Consultation Questions" that conclude both the chapters "Grades 1-8" and "Grades 9-12." The list of questions for the latter chapter highlights four perspectives:

"Consultation Questions:

1. What are the opportunities of the planned changes in relation to the four key goals?

2. The new vision for e-learning is intended to provide more programming options for students. What comments and advice do you have?

3. Class size caps exist in many local collective agreements. Do these caps pose a barrier to implementing the new class size requirements?

4. Are there other comments on the planned changes, keeping in mind the four key goals, you would like to provide?" (Government of Ontario, 2019, *Class Size*, p. 6).

This list of questions gives impression of the civil society being involved in political participation and a bottom-up approach in the policymaking (Bevir, 2012, pp. 108, 117). The formal authority of the *Guide*, deriving from the document's representation of the

government, and goal to give the audience a sense of participation in the policymaking may increase the legitimacy of the proposal among the stakeholders ((Bardach & Patashnik, 2020, p. 85; Bevir, 2012, p. 6-7). Nevertheless, the use of language in these questions indicates a rhetorical awareness of the *Guide*'s purpose. While question 1 refers to the term "opportunities," question 2 connects distance learning to "more programming options," and question 3 focuses on class size caps in collective (union) agreements. However, the mention of local collective agreements as a potential "barrier" for policy implementation is significant. Local agreements referred to in the *Guide* are not very common at the provincial level, and Nova Scotia is one of few provinces where teacher-student ratios are regulated (The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2017). As a rhetorical metaphor, the term barrier allows the reader to visualize how unions may prevent options and opportunities for students, creating a narrative structure where such agreements appear less sympathetic among the readers. The list of questions therefore not only stages a dialogue in the direction in which the document is aiming but also illustrates how policy documents play out on the political arena (Asdal & Reinertsen, 2020, p. 88; Bratberg, 2021, pp. 79-80, 217).

These observations suggest that antagonism against restrictive class size limits in distance learning influences how the *Guide* is used as a strategic device to raise support for the reform. They also reveal how increasing distance learning class sizes while making such education mandatory likely raised concerns among stakeholders worrying about student support and teacher workload. The Ministry therefore had to reassure stakeholders that the new policy was not about reducing costs but is in line with other Canadian school practices.

4.1.4 *Discussion*

The reorganization of distance learning

As described above, the centralization of distance learning is presented in a style of language that seeks to raise support for the reform. Nevertheless, the *Guide*'s reference to centralization appears to have played a lesser role than the questions of class size and mandatory distance learning credits. In Ontario, like in most other Canadian jurisdictions, local distance learning providers have over time established substantive networks, so-called consortiums (Pratt, 2018, p. 226). This decentralized origin has been the object of changing policies on centralization or decentralization based on the political views of changing governments. The reforms described in the document "Education that Works for You" can thus be described as a step in a different direction from the ideas presented in the previous "Master User Agreement" delivered by the former government in the fall of 2013 (e-Learning Ontario, 2013, Master). In the government's public rhetoric, however, the impression of radical changes is somewhat downplayed, as in media releases, the reform is presented as a plan to "protect a sustainable world-class education system" by providing a modernized curriculum and classrooms (Government of Ontario, 2019, News release).

As of spring 2023, distance learning in Ontario is still delivered by several different groups including anglophone, francophone, and Catholic providers.[3] Today, the agency that develops the online learning material and maintains the course catalog is the Ontario Educational Communications Authority (TVO/TFO) (People for Education, February 22, 2019). Notably, the number of distance learning programs in Ontario has more than tripled from about 70 to 248, see table 4. This increase likely occurred because of the implementation of mandatory

---

[3] English-speaking students in Quebec have the right to pursue their education in English, and likewise French-speaking individuals can do the same in the English-speaking jurisdictions.

distance learning courses. The prospect of an increase in demand for distance education became a forceful incentive for private operators.

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
NL	1	1	1	2	2
NS	2	2	2	2	2
PE	0	0	0	1	1
NB	2	2	2	2	2
QC	4	5+	6+	7+	44+
ON	~81	~81	~70	~70	248
MB	~38	~38	~38	~38	~38
SK	15	14	16	27	36
AB	32	33	34	36	46
BC	74	74	69	68	71
YT	2	2	2	2	2
NT	1	1	1	1	1
02	0	0	0	0	0
Federal	5	5	5	4	4

Table 4. Number of K-12 distance learning programs per jurisdiction over the past five years. (Barbour & LaBonte, 2022, State of the Nation, p. 14).

Policymaking has a strong incremental character in this centralization process. In practical terms, distance learning in Ontario was already centralized before 2019, as most schools used curriculum and resources developed under the Ministry. The responsibility of the local schools was to organize the activity at the schools (M. Barbour, personal communication, February 20, 2023). Such moderate policy changes appear to be a characteristic for some of the developments in distance learning in Canada. They are deliberated more closely in Section 4.2 of Chapter 4.

The class size changes

The rationale for the reorganization of distance learning and the different student numbers in the traditional and virtual learning modes are neither explained in the *Guide* nor in the background document (Government of Ontario, March 15, 2019, *Class Size. Backgrounder*). Nor is there any explanation of the status quo and modest changes discussed in the previous chapter. The closest we get is the reference to the appendix describing maximum class sizes in

other jurisdictions. The mention of Quebec is probably no accident. Together with Ontario, Quebec has for years had the highest number of K-12 students enrolled in distance learning programs in Canada, although last year's increase in enrolments in British Columbia seems to challenge that picture somewhat (Barbour and LaBonte, 2022, p. 12). This design and information gap is probably due to the *Guide*'s goal aimed to be a resource for dialogue and feedback to the Ministry.

Some of the reasoning behind the different class size changes may be found in the extra-textual scholarly research literature on distance learning. In 2019, the same year as the release of the *Guide*, the Fraser Institute published a report on the significance of class size in face-to-face learning. (Allison, 2019, p. 13-14). Despite the consensus on the impact of student support on both the students' learning outcome and the teachers' working load, there is very little research on the relationship between learning outcomes and class size. Generally, education research does not recommend any universal class size for distance learning (Zhang, Liu, & Lin, 2018, p. 280; Munthe et al., 2022, pp. 14, 86).

The research synthesis on class size in Canadian schools by the Fraser Institute, while not specific to distance learning suggests that although small classes may increase students' performance for younger children, upsizing class sizes do not appear to damage school results for secondary students. The opposite may be the case instead (Allison, 2019, p. 13-14). Such findings may indicate that competent teachers and good learning designs, e.g., integrating student collaboration in the virtual learning community, are just as influential as a student-teacher ratio for the learning outcome.

Notwithstanding that methodology and results from school research tend to show much variation in general, in this case, it is worth noting that the proposed changes in the *Guide* appear to mirror the Fraser Institute report. While the increase in student numbers is none or very moderate for grades 1-8, the rise for the secondary students is significantly higher. The following political debate led the government to reduce the average class size number (CBS News, August 22, 2019).

The reasoning for the criticism and the changed proposal seems to be related to the low graduation rates within much distance learning. During the debate, W.R. Hick from the Ontario Public School Boards' Association expressed his doubts about parts of the proposals:

> "Making four e-learning courses mandatory and having classes of 35 could exacerbate the issue of attrition. Students must be supported in their first experiences of E-learning to ensure they are properly prepared and able to cope with the self-directed demands of an E-learning curriculum delivery model" (Hick, May 31, 2019).

As digitalization transforms learning processes, this has consequences for student support. As discussed in Chapter 3, students cannot often self-regulate their learning process, and if personal contact with a teacher is insufficient, the learning outcome becomes even weaker. While there exists little research that documents successful transformations within education caused by digitalization, there is much documentation of the impact of the teacher's role in the learning processes, particularly about the teacher's qualifications. The teachers' role is not only important to be able to implement education technology but also to secure the necessary student support (Munthe et al., 2022, pp. 14, 86).

According to *State of the Nation*, the research indicates that when distance learning class sizes increase, student performance sinks. A challenging factor following the implementation of distance learning is the temptation to increase class size in distance learning programs. According to Barbour, local support is a precondition for avoiding a reduced learning outcome (Barbour, 2019, *E-Learning Class Size*, p. 17). Despite this, the class size in distance learning may still be higher than in traditional learning environments. The precondition is that the schools provide the necessary and relevant local support, reflected in the increasing practice of implementing on-site facilitators (see Chapter 3). In such contexts, the students have two educators available, seeming to strengthen the learning process (Barbour, 2019, E-Learning Class Size, p. 15-16). This arrangement appears to have won support among some Canadian providers. After hiring and training staff to supervise students in their local schools who take online courses, the Sun West Distance Learning Centre in Saskatchewan claims the learning outcomes have increased (Barbour & LaBonte, 2022, Sun West Distance Learning Centre).

There also appears to be some correlation between teachers' workload and student support. Since the early 2000s, surveys have documented that teachers in British Columbia have been operating with distance learning class sizes with much higher student numbers than in traditional classroom-based courses (Barbour, 2019, E-Learning Class Size, p. 13). However, classes for primary students were smaller than for secondary students. Often teachers do not work full-time with distance learning but in combination with face-to-face instruction or blended learning communities (Barbour, 2019, E-Learning Class Size, p. 13-14). In Saskatchewan as well, the workload has been an issue. Although Saskatchewan does not provide fixed standards for class size numbers, the Teachers' Federation in Saskatchewan

points out the need to balance teachers' workload with distance learners' particular needs for support (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2018, p. 92).

Additionally, in places where on-site mentors are in use already, an increase in distance learning may put pressure on the local staff (Barbour, 2019, E-Learning Class Size, p. 14-15). This has been the experience in Newfoundland and Labrador, where a characteristic of the school practices is practice of on-site mentoring and synchronous models; the other Canadian provinces tend to deliver more asynchronous models (Barbour & LaBonte, 2018, p. 604). In the beginning, these courses were aimed at students who were able to regulate themselves work independently with the online courses. After a while, the group of distance students became more varied, so more students lacked the skills to complete distance learning. Since some students also experienced that their grades dropped after enrolling in distance learning courses, they avoided them as much as possible. While some students did not feel close enough to the online teacher, some also felt too shy to ask for help. Some research findings show that most students prefer regular classroom learning with its social interaction and believe that courses delivered as distance learning are more difficult and time-consuming. Another frustration raised by some stakeholders has been technological, organizational, and logistic challenges, particularly related to lab work, where the expected adult supervision was not provided. In general, previous experiences or fear of lack of local and online support when attending distance courses tend to make students and families avoid those courses (Mulcahy et al., 2016, pp. 34-35).

As the experience from Newfoundland illustrates, local student support can come under pressure over time, indicating a need for some modification of the on-site model. Researchers have suggested that local schools should reduce teachers' other duties to provide sufficient

support to distance learners. As it is expected that an increasing number of students at small rural schools with a limited menu of courses will rely on distance learning to graduate from high school, strengthening local support is even more important (Mulcahy et al., 2016, p. 37).

Mandatory distance learning credits

The Ontario government's proposal of four mandatory distance learning course credits is something quite new in Canada, and, like the other proposals in the *Guide,* their implementation and rationale and not explained any further (People for Education, July 9, 2019). Other jurisdictions have tried other incentives to increase distance learning enrollment. In British Columbia, making distance learning mandatory for all school districts with flexible access to courses has encouraged students and families to choose such opportunities, leading to a significant increase in enrolments. This increase was also due to a funding method that encouraged school administrations to develop such courses (Barbour & LaBonte, 2018, p. 612). Education policies that mandate online credits are not unheard of, though. In the US, this sort of requirement for high school graduation has been practiced in some states, like Florida, for several years. In these states, however, only one credit is required (Digital Learning Collaborative, February 3, 2023, Florida).

The motive for mandatory online credits was not elaborated on by the Ontario government. However, when commenting upon the governmental proposals, ContactNorth's Maxim Jean Louis suggested such mandatory distance learning course credits may have at least four explanations: 1. to save money, 2. to compromise with the teacher unions in the province, 3. to facilitate universal access to courses for all students everywhere, and 4. to train students for later education (Jean-Louis, 2019, Making Ontario).

Indirectly, the *Guide* connects to several of these suggested reasons. The reference to flexibility probably includes universal access, and the fact that the *Guide*'s last chapter describes the proposal's consequences for the findings indicates that the consultation process made it necessary for the Ministry to say something about finances (Government of Ontario, 2019, *Class Size*, p. 7). Several stakeholders, as well as the government itself, indicated that this increase in distance learning courses would reduce the need for teachers in the province. Additionally, others argued that this reform would require teachers to increase their competence in distance learning pedagogies (People for Education, July 9, 2019). Under the heading "Financial Impact," the *Guide* summarizes the estimated financial impact of the proposed changes, represented in the form of a table reflecting the fiscal year figures from the government (Government of Ontario, 2019, *Class Size*, p. 7). In other provinces as well, we see how class size is an important factor for the financial side of distance learning. For example, in 2019 it was clear that the government of British Columbia decided to reduce costs by, to some extent, withdrawing its formal regulation of local support aimed at students involved in online and distance learning. This is noteworthy, as British Columbia for years has been the only jurisdictions in Canada with such formalized policies (Barbour, 2019, E-Learning Class Size, p. 16).

Considering the agreements between teacher unions and the education authorities, it is interesting that one of the dialogue questions focus on how such agreements may become a barrier to the changes: "Class size caps exist in many local collective agreements. Do these caps pose a barrier to implementing the new class size requirements?" (Government of Ontario, 2019, *Class Size*, p. 6) The existence and content of such agreements and union policies vary between the jurisdictions. In Nova Scotia, the government made an agreement for the whole province that also included class size within distance learning (The Department

of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2017, *Agreement*). While there has been no such agreement in Saskatchewan, the teachers' federation in the province nevertheless has in its policy documents emphasized that the special conditions for distance learning must be considered (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. (2018). *Governance,* p. 92).

Regarding the above, I observe how the policies of teachers' unions are presented as a potential "barrier" to the reform's "opportunities" and "vision" mentioned in the two earlier questions (Class Size, 2019, pp. 8-9). Such value-loaded terminology indicates how this guide is not only a neutral document presenting facts and summarizing feedback but is also part of the government's attempts to legitimate the reform politically and ideologically in the public. This observation on how the questions and the rhetoric in the *Guide* may influence the further consultation process important not only because of what they highlight but also because of the issues that may not be mentioned there, intended or not.

4.1.5 Summary

While the literature on document analysis makes a distinction between discourse analysis and the analysis of ideas, the selected texts in the *Class Size Consultation Guide* case illustrate how these distinctions are blurred. According to Bratberg, this is often case with political ideas like policy development (Bratberg, 2021, pp. 81-82, 112). The *Guide* not only contains ideas in the form of policies and regulations but also represents the Ontario government's attempts to set the conditions for the political discourse. This is seen in the use of terminology, the choice of questions for the consultation dialogue, and in the way the *Guide* refers to topics like funding and class size practices in other Canadian provinces, this information is not only a response to previous consultations but is also probably a way to steer the dialogue in a desired direction.

The appear to be several motives for the proposed changes. The increased class size, as well as the implementation of mandatory distance learning courses, may reflect ways to reduce costs as well as to build more incitements to practice self-paced learning. Both the proposals on class size and distance learning credits may potentially conflict with student support and teachers' workload, which may be the reason for the rhetoric in the text. The proposed centralization, however, seems to have been much less radical. The incremental character of such policy change will be discussed more closely in the analysis of *Bill 8* below.

4.2   Bill 8: British Columbia

4.2.1   *Validity and reliability, rationale for choice of text*

As described in Chapter 3, Canadian education policy is a matter of territorial and provincial jurisdiction, while federal responsibility covers Indigenous communities. Consequently, there are several ways of organizing education, also when it comes to distance learning. By pursuing the research questions; "What has been the development of distant learning policies on organization and facilitation in Canada?," and "What has been the rationale for this development?," my analysis of the *Guide* has demonstrated how organization issues on the provincial level impact several stakeholders in the education sector in different ways.

The following document analysis explores other sides of both the development and the reasoning behind it. The document is a text of provincial law, mirroring the most recent policy changes in British Columbia, the so-called *Bill 8*, or *The Education Statues Amendments Act from 2020*. As a piece of statutory law, it carries high validity and reliability and is a useful example to illustrate both policy changes and their rationale, but not in the

same way as the Guide combined information and political advocacy. As the amendment forms the basis for the present implementation of the new organization of distance learning in British Columbia, to be thoroughly understood, the texts need to be read and discussed in light of the Ministry of Education's concrete implementation of the amendment and with comparisons with other jurisdictions (Bratberg, 2021, p. 113).

4.2.2   Author, description of the document, and purpose

On March 4, 2020, the Government of British Columbia had the new Education Act passed in Parliament. The law process began in 2018, with the purpose to implement a new organization for distance education in the province (Hembling, February 13, 2023, Online Learning). The ten pages long law amendment came into force July 1, 2021, and changed the two laws the *School Act* and the *Independent School Act* (both from 1996), as well as the terminology of distance learning (in British Columbia from now on called "online learning"). The amendment takes the form of several statements of what sections in the previous Education Statutes Amendment Act from 2015 that are either repealed or amended.

In terms of Austin and Searle, the amendment is a speech act, as its main purpose is to bring into being a new reality or situation (Thiselton, 1992, 18). Following the formula-like style of the law text genre, particularly those with a primarily prescriptive purpose, the selected texts are structured in short and dense sentences, with formulations presenting little variation with formalized sentence patterns. Since the matter of subjects is limited, the exact wording in statutory texts like the one used here often needs to be considered thoughtfully (Berukstiene, 2016, p. 96-97, 111-112). In addition, to give a full understanding of the text, the amendment

also needs to be placed in context, particularly the background, its implementation, and the new situation compared to other relevant practices.

The background for the document is that since about 2000, the use of online and distance learning programs provided by public school districts and independent schools has grown considerably in British Columbia. (Barbour & LaBonte, 2022, British Columbia). Such learning programs have since 2006 been regulated by the School Act and the Independent School Act. Today most school boards in the province provide full distance/online learning programs as classroom alternatives after Grade 7, and in 2021 about 85 000 elementary or secondary students were enrolled in an online or distance program provided by 52 district-level online learning schools, and 16 independent schools. These online programs may be taken entirely from home (not necessarily to be confused with homeschooling) or in combination with in-person lessons at school (The Government of British Columbia. (2021, December 19, Barbour & LaBonte, 2022, British Columbia). The selected texts state the main changes in the legislation, namely about who will have the right to deliver distance learning to students outside their district or institution.

4.2.3 *Text analysis*

The following analysis focuses on the *Independent School Act*, section 8.1, and Section 75 (4.1) in the *School Act*. As my purpose is to answer the research questions, the goal with the following text analysis is not to make a full *legal* analysis of the law text, but to identify observations that are relevant for policy development and its rationale. As the law text is form of speech act, the practical analysis deals differently with this text than with the Guide. The genre of statutory law and its formalized structure limits language bias and

political usage strictly, leaving out aspects of e.g., persuasion, making interpretation of the text from external context even more significant compared to an isolated analysis of grammar and semantics in the law text itself (Asdal and Reinertsen, 2020, p. 96, Bratberg, 2021, p. 113). This does not mean I reduce the text to it its context, as the understanding of a given law requires an interpretation that extracts the rule in question (Bergstrøm and Dale, 2007, p. 33). However, the discussion needs to consider how the text has been interpretated by the government, and how it has intervened in the education sector (Asdal and Reinertsen, 2020, p. 241-242).

In both text examples the text states who has the right to deliver educational programs as distance/online learning. In addition there is a change in terminology: Since the early 2000s distance learning in the province has been called "distributed learning," but is in the amendment now changed to "online learning:"

«4 Section 8.1 is repealed and the following substituted:

Provision of online learning

8.1 (1) Subject to subsection (2) and the regulations, an authority may deliver all or part of an educational program through online learning.

(2) An authority of an independent school may deliver an educational program, or part of an educational program, through online learning to the following persons only if the authority has approval to provide the educational program under an agreement with the minister:

(a) a student who is enrolled in an educational program provided by another independent school;

(b) a student or francophone student, as defined in the School Act;

(c) a child who is registered under section 13 of the School Act with a school or a

francophone school, as defined in that Act, or another independent school.

(3) Subsection (2) does not apply in respect of an educational program that is

(a) offered through an independent school for which an authority holds a certificate

of group 3 classification, or

(b) not intended to meet educational standards established by the minister.»

In accordance with mainstream literature on legal texts, by a locutionary act (intentional speech act) section 8.1. (1) states that authorities at independent schools carry the role as rightsholders regarding delivering distance/online education programs (Matczak, 2017, p. 2-4). However, to provide distance education for groups outside their own institutions, section 8.1. (2) limits this right to schools having an agreement with the Ministry. Such rightsholders are entitled to deliver distance learning courses for students registered at (a) other independent schools, (b) francophone students, and (c) children registered under the school Act's section 13. The latter group refers to children scheduled for home education (School Act, 1996, §13).

A close reading of the grammar and wording of the text reveals that by defining the prescribed right (to "deliver an educational program, or part of an educational program, through online learnin "online learning") and the right-holder ("an authority of an independent school"), the amendment is codifying conditions for distance learning when it comes to independent schools (Bratberg, 2021, p. 64-65, 67). The Act enables schools that have reached an agreement with the Ministry to provide distance education to students being enrolled at other schools in addition to their own students.

In addition to establishing a system where some schools have the privilege to reach out to other students than their own regarding distance learning, the regulations also include

limitations regarding certain certifications and standards. The wording in 8. 1. (1) states that distance education does not need to be delivered in fully online courses, which allows the use of learning that combines online/distance learning with face-to-face instruction, possibly referring to blended learning.

In essence, the following amendment to the School Act states the same regulations to public school boards:

> "11 Section 75 (4.1) is repealed and the following substituted:
>
> (4.01) Subject to subsection (4.1) and the orders of the minister, a board may deliver all or part of an educational program through online learning.
>
> (4.1) A board may deliver an educational program, or part of an educational program, through online learning to the following persons only if the board has approval to provide the educational program under an agreement with the minister:
>
> (a) a student, as defined in the Independent School Act;
>
> (b) a student who is enrolled in an educational program provided by another board, or a francophone student;
>
> (c) a student who is not resident in the board's school district;
>
> (d) a child who is registered under section 13 with a school operated by another board, a francophone school or an independent school" (Bill 8, 2020, § 4.1. a-d).

Compared to the previous text, the right-holder "an authority of an independent school" is here changed to "a board," while the prescribed right in question, to "deliver an educational program, or part of an educational program, through online learning" remains.

Compared to the Independent School Act, subsection 4. 1. (c) in the School Act adds to the groups that can be provided distance education students registered at other school districts, if

the school district board reaches an agreement with the Ministry. This statement is important from a policy perspective, as it gives some school boards a privilege in the student population compared to other school boards.

Indirectly, Bill 8's weight on the required agreement with the Ministry also indicates the existence of alternatives of how such delivery can be arranged: Either a system where no agreement is necessary to deliver education as distance learning, or a system with only one provider (Bratberg, 2021, p. 64-65).

As the observations regarding what rights endowed to what rightsholders indicate, the law amendment states that some school boards and an independent schools may be granted the privilege to deliver distance education programs, or part of such, to students outside the school district or its own institution. The precondition for such delivery is that the board has got an approval for this in an agreement with the Ministry. The amendment allows advantaged school districts to operate in a larger market than school boards that only can register "in-district" students.

However, in the following discussion I argue that this decision, despite initiating two different levels of operators, it turns out that this does not establish a new practice as such. Instead, the implementation opens for some standardization that may strengthen student support. To explain this, it is necessary to compare Bill 8's context with alternative policies and reasonings, as well as how its implementation differ from some other jurisdictions (Bratberg, 2021, p. 64-65).

4.2.4 *Discussion*

DOLS and POLS

The implications of the new legislation are described in detail by documents published later by the Ministry, aimed at school administrators in the province (Palahicky, October 20, 2022). From these documents, it becomes clear that the main point of the amendment is to structure the difference between the schools that have an agreement with the Ministry and those that do not. The new distance learning policy will be implemented in the summer of 2023, creating two different school organizations designed for the purpose: the Provincial Online Learning Schools (POLS) and the District Online Learning Schools (DOLS). Schools within the POLS category is supposed to make new agreements with the BC education authorities to be allowed to enroll students from other districts. On the other hand, a school within the DOLS system is only allowed to accept students from its school district. The two different systems will follow different sets of regulations regarding assurance of accountability and quality, as well as different requirements regarding the use of Learning Management Systems (Barbour & LaBonte, 2022, State of the Nation, p. 21-22).

An example of how a POLS program may work is Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique (CSF). The district uses a blended learning model offering a complete K-12 program in French to 200 students in the province. Still located at their home school, the students are assisted by a local teacher. Besides having increased the number of French courses, this system also makes it possible for many students to work at their own pace. (Barbour & Labonte, 2022, *Conseil scolaire francophone*).

The creation of DOLS and POLS is another example of the incremental character of policymaking regarding distance learning. The amendment is mostly a formalization of

existing practices that began when some school districts began providing programs for students outside their school districts. Consequently, the DOLS will not be very much impacted by the new policy, as they can go on with their programs as they like, while every POLS category school now will need an agreement with the Ministry.

What is new, however, is that the POLS need to replace their LMS-platforms in exchange for one standard platform for all (Brightspace). In contrast, DOLS using for example Moodle may continue doing that if they like. The POLS providers will also face a distinct system for accountability and quality assurance (M. Barbour, personal communication, February 20, 2023; Palahicky, October 20, 2022). Despite the regulation of the LMS, the implementation of Bill 8 raises two questions: Why is distance learning in the province set up with such a decentralized structure? And why are the policy changes in the wake of the law amendment so light?

Single or multiple operators and standardized systems

The system changes in Bill 8 with the different categories of providers reflect a decentralized education sector characterized by the dynamics of demand and supply. However, not all provinces share this structure for distance education; the Atlantic provinces have set up one organization for distance learning delivery each (or two for the sake of different French- and English-speaking populations). For example, in Newfoundland and Labrador students located at their community schools attend courses provided by the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District's Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation (DCLI) (Bennet, 2016, p. 6, Saqlain, p. 68-86).

Comparing the different structures of arranging distance learning illustrates how the new policies in British Columbia reflect the demographic context of the province. Such single

46

provincial programs in the Atlantic provinces is due to the small populations in these jurisdictions, with no sustainable market for any provider of such education. In contrast, jurisdictions like British Columbia and Ontario are so big that several virtual schools may operate in the same market (M. Barbour, personal communication, February 20, 2023).

About 60% of its population of about 500 000 lives around St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador's province capital (Mulcahy et al., 2016, p.31). Although the share of students in distance learning programs is lower here than in the Western provinces (see Table 1, p. 19), distance learning has become a lifeline for students in the rural areas. The rural population is spread across a territory about the size of Norway (Comparea, February, 25). Particularly the smaller schools have become increasingly dependent on distance learning programs to provide the necessary programs to students that want to go on to academic education (Mulcahy et al., 2016, p. 34-35, LaBonte & Barbour, 2020, Newfoundland and Labrador). Being a division of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD), the Centre is funded by the Ministry of Education, on equal terms with traditional classroom students (Barbour, 2018, Funding, p. 10-11). While the DCLI in 2021 offered 45 courses for 912 students at senior high schools, a parallel program (ConnectED) also provided 42 different courses for 24 younger students (Barbour et al., 2021, p.19, Barbour & LaBonte, 2022, p. 22). In addition, all the teachers in the province have access to the CDLI portal and can use the recordings or other the other material as much as they like in their face-to-face classrooms. (Barbour & LaBonte, 2018, p. 604). Because of this open access policy, the use of the distance learning material is probably bigger than the relatively low number of registered students at the DCLI and the ConnectED indicates.

With such single programs the use of different LMSs is no problem. Therefore, the implementation of a shared learning management system among POLS schools in British Columbia has an element of significant standardization as well. Over the years, the increase in distance learning enrolments has led to much overlap in the projects undertaken by the schools, illustrating the need for support for development, organization, and evaluation (Barbour & LaBonte. 2018, p.612). For the students, the present situation for the delivery of distance learning in the province is very complex regarding the use of LMS. A student enrolled in one course at one online school, and another course at another may well have to operate on three different platforms, including the student's local school. The new provincial platform is probably an attempt to reduce such frustrations and thereby increase learning outcomes (M. Barbour, personal communication, February 20, 2023). Consequently, the implementation of Bill 8 combines the standardized solutions from the less populated jurisdictions with the much richer supply of providers of education in British Columbia.

The advantage of incremental changes

Many policy changes take place incrementally, partly because this makes implementation technically easier, but sometimes it is a way to avoid much political unrest (Bratberg, 2021, p. 96). The incremental changes in British Columbia contrast with the parallel policy changes in Saskatchewan, where the government is trying to centralize distance learning management. Since 2022 the Ministry of Education has been organizing a crown corporation (a governance-owned corporation) to provide online learning for the school year of 2023 – 2024. In 2022 more than 19.000 of the 186.000 K-12 students were involved in some sort of distance or online learning provided by 36 programs in the province (Barbour & LaBonte, 2022, Saskatchewan). Until now, however, there has been no distinct policy on distance learning by the provincial government (Barbour & LaBonte, 2022, Saskatchewan).

Recently, the provincial government has selected Saskatchewan's biggest online school as the main partner to standardize distance learning in the province, the Sun West School Division's Distance Learning Centre with about 2000 students (Barbour & LaBonte , 2022, Sun West Distance Learning Centre). The change has caused much debate, with for example the teachers' federation in Saskatchewan criticizing the process for lack of transparency (STF, November 22, 2022, Warick, December 9, 2022, Barbour, Oct. 14, 2022).

Compared to the situation described above, the reform initiated by *Bill 8* does not seem to have sparked similar questions in British Columbia as the more radical changes in Saskatchewan. However, it is nevertheless possible the standardization of the provincial LMS may cause some frustrations during the implementation.

4.2.5 Summary

The enacting of *Bill 8* is mainly an incremental formalization of existing practices in the education sector, but for the schools providing distance learning outside their districts (POLS), they will have to adapt to some standardizations. Particularly important is the implementation of an LMS shared by all POLS category schools. From the analysis and discussion above, it appears that the rationale for these changes as well as how they are conducted are twofold. As the character of distance learning may be felt as a barrier for different sorts of students, reducing the complexity of technological challenges is important.

The amendment mirrors how the province's education sector to some extent operates as a market of demand and supply. As the comparison with CDLI shows, other ways of organizing distance learning are the use of single provincial programs arranged by the governments. The foundational reason for this difference is demographic, as tiny populated provinces lack the market dynamics in bigger regions. To facilitate distance learning sustainably, governments

here need to take a more active part in the delivery of distance learning programs. Not least, the implementation of *Bill 8* illustrates the significance of incremental changes in distance learning policymaking. Besides reducing potential political unrest, it makes it possible for education managers to "pick the battles" and improve things that matter to the students.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on inductive observations from analyzing *Class Size Consultation Guide* and *Bill 8 – the Education Statues Amendment Act*, I have answered the research questions by identifying and explaining patterns and trends within Canadian distance learning K-12 policies and school practices. This does not mean that I assume that all policy development is led by rational choices, for example based on economic motives (Bratberg, 2021, p. 83). Indeed, the complexity of the Canadian distance learning policy development has sobered any expectations I could have previously on finding a master plan behind it all. For anybody looking for best practices in the Canadian education sector, this should be kept in mind.

While most of the provinces have several providers that compete in the same market of students, the less populated jurisdictions have only one or two programs for distance learning. Most of this education takes place asynchronously as supplementary courses in combination with traditional classroom education, often at the local school. There are also providers that facilitate the education with more weight on synchronous approaches, and there are students taking a full education by distance. Learning and instructional material developed in populous provinces dominates education sector nation-wide. Student support, online and locally, is fundamental for student success. Many schools therefore integrate the use of on-site mentors as part of the virtual learning community, but the increase in distance learning enrolments places a strain on the staff at some schools.

There appears to be a strong policy trend towards centralization or standardization in provinces, often implemented incrementally. It is less clear if there is a trend toward making distance learning mandatory, since Ontario is the only jurisdiction which has done this. However, given Ontario's significant share of the Canadian student population, this policy may have great impact on the education sector. Increasing class size and mandatory distance learning credits may conflict with student support and teachers' workload. However, the proposed centralization seems to have been a formalization of already existing practices. The processes in British Columbia and Ontario reflect how these provinces operate with many providers of distance learning education, compared to less populated provinces that do not have the same marked dynamics. To facilitate distance learning sustainably, in some jurisdictions, governments need to take a more active part in the delivery of distance learning programs than in populated areas like Ontario and British Columbia.

The rationale for this development appears fragmented. There has been no national strategy or plan on distance learning, and the current landscape is a result of a grassroot movement. Providers and the education sector in the jurisdictions try to meet several student demands, notably the need to bypass geographical barriers, and increase flexibility and access to courses. In addition, some stakeholders see distance learning as a way to reduce costs by increasing class sizes.

When making use of what looks like good practices from somewhere else, it should be left to local policymakers and education authorities to figure out what are the generic values to be harvested from the Canadian experience (Bardach & Patashnik, 2020, p. 139-140). For stakeholders in the education sector looking for best distance learning practices relevant for regions like Northern Norway, I believe two factors are worth considering: The crucial role of

student support, and an incremental implementation of a District Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation, inspired by DCLI in Newfoundland and Labrador. Pedagogically, virtual learning communities may facilitate student support in different ways, but the trend in Canada seems to move towards the use of on-site mentors and blended learning approaches. For policymakers, a joint virtual school and research center for supporting the region's distance learners appears relevant to mitigate the lack of a student population big enough for multiple providers. In addition to developing and delivering relevant courses and programs it could support counties and municipalities with policy development and management, provide professional development for teachers, support pedagogic research in distance learning, and coordinate contact with independent and public providers.

For other rural areas in the Circumpolar North, the Canadian experience illustrates that reducing barriers to education by distance learning is welcomed by the student population, given adequate and contextualized organization. Generally, the elements of student support, a structure for delivery that mitigates the lack of large student populations, and incremental policy changes appear relevant for other rural areas in the North. While strong student support seems necessary, to ensure professional development of teachers and staff to provide satisfactory virtual learning environments, rural school owners need help with this task. For the support of students and schools alike, school authorities should develop the resources, experiences, and regional technological and instructional competence that already exists into networks and institutions that can help young people and communities in the North to benefit from the educational technology in the best way possible.

Figures and Tables

Figure 1. The transformation from the conventional role of the teacher compared with the new roles of both teacher and student. Srinivasan, V. (2022). AI & learning: A preferred future. In *Computers and Education: Artificial Intelligence, 3*. P. 1-17; p. 4-5. [AI & learning_ A preferred future-1.pdf](). Under a Creative Commons license.

Figure 2. Types of organization of distance learning programs in Canada. Barbour, M. & LaBonte, R. (2022). S*tate of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada.* Canadian E-Learning Network. P. 8. [state-of-the-nation-2022.pdf (k12sotn.ca).]() Used with permission.

Figure 3: The instructional context of a supplemental distance learning environment. Barbour, M. (2019). *E-Learning Class Size*. A special report of the State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada project. Canadian eLearning Network. Page 5. [e-learning-class-size.pdf (k12sotn.ca).]() Used with permission.

Table 1. Summary of K-12 distance and/or online learning activity over the past four years. Barbour, M. & LaBonte, R. (2022). S*tate of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada.* Canadian E-Learning Network. P. 13. [state-of-the-nation-2022.pdf (k12sotn.ca).]() Used with permission.

Table 2. Summary of K-12 distance and/or online learning activity by jurisdiction for 2020-21. Barbour, M. & LaBonte, R. (2022). S*tate of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada.* Canadian E-Learning Network. P. 9. [state-of-the-nation-2022.pdf (k12sotn.ca).]() Used with permission.

Table 3. Grades 9-12. Government of Ontario. (2019), *Class Size Consultation Guide*. P. 5. The Government of Ontario. The Ministry of Education [Class Size Consultation Guide (gov.on.ca)]()

Table 4. Number of K-12 distance learning programs per jurisdiction over the past five years. Barbour, M. & LaBonte, R. (2022). S*tate of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada.* Canadian E-Learning Network. P. 14. [state-of-the-nation-2022.pdf (k12sotn.ca).]() Used with permission.

Works cited

Allison, D. (2019). *Secondary school class sizes and student performance in Canada.* Fraser Institute. Secondary school class sizes and student performance in Canada (fraserinstitute.org)

Archibald, D., Barbour, M., Leary, H., Ostashewski, N., Wilson, E. V. (2020). *Teacher Education and K-12 Online Learning. A special report of the State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada project*. Canadian eLearning Network. Microsoft Word - covers.docx (k12sotn.ca)

Asdal, K. and Reinertsen, H. (2020). *Hvordan gjøre dokumentanalyse. En praksisorientert metode*. Cappelen Damm Akademisk.

Barbour, M., Brown, R., Hasler Waters, L., Hoey, R., Hunt, J.L., Kennedy, K., Ounsworth, C., Powell, A., Trimm, T. (2011). *Online and Blended Learning: A Survey of Policy and Practice of K-12 Schools Around the World.* International Association for K-12 Online Learning. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED537334.pdf

Barbour, M. K. (2017). *Working Conditions for K-12 Distance & Online Learning Teachers in Canada. A special report of the State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada project.* DL-Contract-Language.pdf (k12sotn.ca)

Barbour, M. (2019). *E-Learning Class Size*. A special report of the State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada project. Canadian eLearning Network. e-learning-class-size.pdf (k12sotn.ca)

Barbour, M. & LaBonte, R. (2019). State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada. 2019 Edition. Canadian E-Learning Network. State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada - 2019 Edition (k12sotn.ca)

Barbour, M. & LaBonte, R. (2020). *Newfoundland and Labrador. State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada. 2019 Edition.* Canadian E-Learning Network. Newfoundland and Labrador – State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada (k12sotn.ca)

Barbour, M. & LaBonte, R. (2022). S*tate of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada.* Canadian E-Learning Network. StateNation22.pdf (k12sotn.ca)

Barbour, M. K., LaBonte, R. (2020). British Columbia. S*tate of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada.* Canadian E-Learning Network. British Columbia – State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada (k12sotn.ca)

Barbour, M. & LaBonte, R. (2022). British Columbia. S*tate of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada.* Canadian E-Learning Network. British Columbia – State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada (k12sotn.ca)

Barbour, M., & LaBonte, R. (2018). An Overview of eLearning Organizations and Practices in Canada. In (Eds. Ferdig, R. E. & Kennedy, K). *Handbook of Research on K-12 Online and Blending Learning* (Second Edition). Carnegie Mellon University: ETC Press. Pages 601-616. HandbookofResearchonK12OnlineandBlendedLearningSecond (1).pdf

Barbour, M. & Labonte, R. (2022). Saskatchewan. S*tate of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada.* Canadian E-Learning Network. Saskatchewan – State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada (k12sotn.ca)

Barbour, M. & Labonte, R. (2022). Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique's new À la carte blended model. S*tate of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada.* Canadian E-Learning Network. Conseil scolaire francophone de la

Colombie-Britannique's new À la carte blended model – State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada (k12sotn.ca)

LaBonte, R., & Barbour , M. (2022). Sun West Distance Learning Centre. S*tate of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada.* Canadian E-Learning Network. Sun West Distance Learning Centre – State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada (k12sotn.ca)

Barbour, M. (2018). Funding and Resourcing of Distributed Learning in Canada. A special report of the State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada project. DL-Funding-Report.pdf (k12sotn.ca)

Barbour, M. (Oct. 14, 2022). *The Questions Begin in Saskatchewan*. State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada. Canadian E-Learning Network. The Questions Begin in Saskatchewan – State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada (k12sotn.ca).

Bardach, E., Patashnik, E. M. (2020). *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving* (6th ed.). Sage.

Bennet, P.W. (2016). Digital Learning in Canadian K-12 Schools: A Review of Critical Issues, Policy and Practice. In Marcus-Quinn, A., and Hourigan, T., (Ed.) *Handbook on Digital Learning for K-12 Schools*. Springer. 293-315. DOI:10.1007/978-3-319-33808-8_17. (PDF) Digital Learning in Canadian K-12 Schools: A Review of Critical Issues, Policy, and Practice (researchgate.net)

Bergstrøm, H. and Dale, J.T. (2007). *Rettslære 1. Samfunnsfag og økonomi Vg2*. Dalefag.

Berukstiene, D. (2016). Legal Discourse Reconsidered: Genres of Legal Texts. In *Comparative Legilinguistics*. Pages 90-117. Vytautas Magnus University.

Bevir, M. (2012). *Governance. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Bill 8 – 2020. (2020). *Education Statues Amendment Act, 2020*. Government of British Columbia. Bill 8 – 2020: Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2020 (gov.bc.ca)

Borup, J., Chambers, C. B. & Stimson, R. (2018). *Helping online students be successful: Student perceptions of online teacher and on-site mentor facilitation support*. Lansing, MI: Michigan Virtual University. Retrieved from https://mvlri.org/research/publications/helping-online-students-be-successful-studentperceptions-of-support/

Borup, J. (2018). On-site and Online Facilitators: Current Practice and Future Directions for Research. In (Eds. Ferdig, R. E. & Kennedy, K). *Handbook of Research on K-12 Online and Blending Learning* (Second Edition). Carnegie Mellon University: ETC Press. Pages 423-441.

Bratberg, Ø. (2021). *Tekstanalyse for samfunnsvitere*. 3rd ed. Cappelen Damm Akademisk.

CBS News. (August 22, 2019). High school class sizes in Ontario to remain 'effectively the same' this year, Lecce says. *CBS/ Radio Canada*. High school class sizes in Ontario to remain 'effectively the same' this year, Lecce says | CBC News

Comparea. (February, 25*). Newfoundland and Labrador (Canada) is 11 % larger than Norway (Overseas Territories).* Norway (Overseas Territories) vs. Newfoundland and Labrador (Canada): Comparea Area Comparison

Corbett, M. (2007). *Learning to Leave: The Irony of Schooling in a Coastal Community*. Fernwood Publishing.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. (2017). *Agreement between the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development of the Province of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union*. The Government of Nova Scotia, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Page 56-58. Teachers' Provincial Agreement 2015-2019 (windows.net)

Di Cristofano, S. & Thangarajah, R. (2022) Distance Learning and the Quebec Karounis Decision. In Barbour, M. & Labonte, R. S*tate of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada.* Canadian E-Learning Network. [Distance Learning and the Quebec Karounis Decision – State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada (k12sotn.ca)](#)

Digital Learning Collaborative. (February 3, 2023). *Florida Digital Learning Landscape*. The Evergreen Education Group. [Florida Digital Learning Landscape — Digital Learning Collaborative](#)

The Government of British Columbia. (2021, December 19). *Classroom Alternatives*. [Classroom alternatives - Province of British Columbia (gov.bc.ca)](#)

Deming, D. J. (2022). Four Facts about Human Capital. *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 36 (3). Pages 75–102.

Echazarra, A., Radinger, T. (2019). *Learning in Rural Schools; Insights from PISA, TALIS, and the Literature.* OECD Education Working Paper 196. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. [Learning in rural schools : Insights from PISA, TALIS and the literature | OECD Education Working Papers | OECD iLibrary (oecd-ilibrary.org)](#)

e-Learning Ontario. (2013). Master user agreement. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario. http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/elearning/MasterUserAgreement.pdf

Gomm, R., Hammersley, M., Foster, P. (2000). Introduction. In Gomm, R., Hammersley, M., Foster, P. (Eds.), *Case Study Method* (p. 1-16).

Government of Ontario. (2019), *Class Size Consultation Guide*. The Government of Ontario. The Ministry of Education. ([Class Size Consultation Guide (gov.on.ca)](#)

Government of Ontario. (2019). *Class Size. Backgrounder: Education that Works for You - Modernizing Classrooms. Province Modernizing Classrooms*. Newsroom. Government of Ontario. [Ontario Newsroom](#)

Government of Ontario. (2019a). News release – 'Back-to-basics' math curriculum, renewed focus on skilled trades and cellphone ban in the classroom coming soon to Ontario: Minister of Education Lisa Thompson unveils Government's vision for 'education that works for you.' Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario. ['Back-to-Basics' Math Curriculum, Renewed Focus on Skilled Trades and Cellphone Ban in the Classroom Coming Soon to Ontario | Ontario Newsroom](#)

Grape, S. and Tønnesson, J, (November 21, 2022). *Episode 8. SAKLIG! Om tekstanalyse – med statsviter Øivind Bratberg og retoriker Charlotte Hidle*. Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies, The University of Oslo. [8. Om tekstanalyse - Institutt for lingvistiske og nordiske studier (uio.no)](#)

Hembling, P. (February 13, 2023). Online Learning Changes in British Columbia. . Canadian E-Learning Network. [Online Learning Changes in British Columbia – State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada (k12sotn.ca)](#)

Hick, W.R. (May 31, 2019). Next Phase of Consultation on Hiring Practices and Class Size. Ontario Public School Boards' Association. [Next-Phase-of-Consultation-on-Hiring-Practices-and-Class-Size-Consultation-May-31-2019.pdf (opsba.org)](#)

Hirshberg, D. Petrov, A.N. (2014). Education and Human Capital. in Larsen, J.N. and Fondahl, G. (Eds.), *Arctic Human Development Report*. Pages 349-400.

Jacobsen, D. I. (2022). *Hvordan gjennomføre undersøkelser? Innføring i samfunnsvitenskapelig metode*. 4rd edition. Cappelen Damm Akademisk.

Jean-Louis, M. (2019). Making Ontario Canada's Leader In Online Learning In Secondary Schools. *State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada*. [Making Ontario Canada's](#)

Leader In Online Learning In Secondary Schools – State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada (k12sotn.ca)

Koole, M. and Squires, V. (2021). The Education System of Canada: ICT and STEM Balancing Economics with Social Justice. In S. Jornitz, M. Parreira do Amaral (eds.), *The Education Systems of the Americas, Global Education Systems*. P. 1-20. Koole-Squires2021_ReferenceWorkEntry_TheEducationSystemOfCanadaICTA.pdf

Lillevik, R. (2023). *The Equalizer? Distance education for rural and remote K-12 students from the point of view of social equity and equality*. Unpublished paper at ETAD 802 Historical and Theoretical Foundations of Educational Technology at USask's College of Education.

Larsen, J. N, Fondahl, G. (2015). Major Findings and Emerging Trends in Arctic Human Development. In Larsen, J. N. and Fondahl, G. (Eds.). *Arctic Human Development Report*. Nordic Council of Ministers. 479-502.

Larsson, L. 2017. *Rural Education Report*. The Parliamentary Secretary of Rural Education in British Columbia. Rural Education Report (gov.bc.ca)

Matczak, M. (2017). Three kinds of intention in lawmaking. In Law and Philosophy. University of Warsaw, Krakowskie Przedmies´cie. Open access. DOI 10.1007/s10982-017-9302-8. MATTTO-9 (philarchive.org)

Means, B., Toyama, Y., Murphy, R., Bakia, M., & Jones, K. (2010). *Evaluation of evidence-based practices in online learning: A meta-analysis and review of online learning studies*. Washington, DC: Department of Education. https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/tech/evidence-based-practices/finalreport.pdf

The Ministry of Education. (2023). *Lov om grunnskoleopplæringa og den vidaregåande opplæringa (opplæringslova)*. (Prop. 57 L 2022 –2023). Prop. 57 L (2022–2023) (regjeringen.no)

Mulcahy, D., Barbour, K.M., & Lahiri, M. (2016) The straight truth about online learning in the Straits: An investigation into the nature of education in a rural and remote region of Newfoundland and Labrador. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, Vol. 26 (1), pp. 27–41.

Munthe, E., Erstad, O., Bergsten Njå, M., Forsström, S., Gilje, Ø., Amdam, S., Moltudal, S., Bergill Hagen, S. (2022). *Digitalisering i grunnopplæring; kunnskap, trender og framtidig kunnskapsbehov*. Kunnskapssenter for utdanning. Universitetet i Stavanger. Rapport GrunDig (uis.no)

Palahicky, S. (October 20, 2022). *K-12 Online Learning: Ministry Update*. Ministry of Education and Childcare, the Government of British Columbia. (Conference presentation abstract). DL Symposium -October 20 Ministry Update Presentation DRAFT 2022 10 12 (sched.com)

People for Education. (July 9, 2019). *Ontario e-learning plan unique in North America. People for Education*. People for Education. Ontario e-learning plan unique in North America - People for Education

People for Education. (February 14, 2022). *Major changes coming to online learning in Ontario*. People for Education. Major changes coming to online learning in Ontario - People for Education

Pratt, K. (2018). K-12 Online and Blended Learning in Aoetearoa New Zealand. In (Eds. Ferdig, R. E. & Kennedy, K). *Handbook of Research on K-12 Online and Blending Learning* (Second Edition). Carnegie Mellon University: ETC Press. Pages 617-630. HandbookofResearchonK12OnlineandBlendedLearningSecond (1).pdf

Reiser, R.A. A history of instructional design and technology: Part II: A history of instructional design. In *Educational Technology, Research and Development* 49 (2), 57–67 (2001).

Rønningsbakk, L. (2019). *Når didaktikken møter de digitalt innfødte: Teknologistøttet læringsarbeid i skolen i lys av tradisjonell og nyskapende undervisning*. (Doctoral dissertation). UiT The Arctic University of Norway. thesis.pdf (uit.no)

Saqlain, N. (2016). The Development of Virtual Schooling in Newfoundland and Labrador. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education* 17, 68-86. Microsoft Word - 7.docx (dergipark.org.tr)

Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. (2018). *Governance Handbook: Constitution. Policies*. Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. Governance Handbook (stf.sk.ca)

The School Act (1996). *School Act (RSBC 1996) Chapter 412*. BC Laws. School Act (gov.bc.ca)

Srinivasan, V. (2022). AI & learning: A preferred future. In *Computers and Education: Artificial Intelligence, 3*. P. 1-17. AI & learning_ A preferred future-1.pdf

STF. (November 2022, 2022). *STF Urges Consultation, Transparency on Provincial Distance Learning Crown*. Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. STF Urges Consultation, Transparency on Provincial Distance Learning Crown | Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation

Storvoll, R.A. (2020). *Ung drivkraft i nord: Unges legitime medvirkning i stedsutvikling*. PhD-avhandling UiT-Norges arktiske universitet. Ung drivkraft - runde 3 v2 (uit.no)

Thagaard, T. (2018). *Systematikk og innlevelse: en innføring i kvalitative metoder*. 5th edition. Fagbokforlaget.

Thiselton, A. C. (1992). *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*. London: Harper Collins Publishers.

Walker, B.A (2000). *Using information technology to promote community for the North Island Distance Education School*. (Master's thesis). Royal Roads University. https://www.learntechlib.org/p/117320/

Warick, J. (December 9, 2022). Sask. government picks school division with 26% online graduation rate to lead standardization. *CBC/Radio-Canada*. Sask. government picks school division with 26% online graduation rate to lead standardization | CBC News

Willems, J.A. (2013). Equity in Distance Education. In *Global Challenges and Perspectives in Blended and Distance Learning* (Eds. J Willems, B Tynan, R James). IGI Global, p. 17-35. Willems2013Equity-in-Distance-Education (3).pdf. DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-3978-2.ch002

Winkelmans, T., Anderson, B., & Barbour, M. K. (2010). Distributed Learning in British Columbia: A Journey from Correspondence to Online Delivery. *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning*, 14(1), 6–28.

Zhang, Y., Liu, H., & Lin, C-H. (2018). Research on Class Size in K-12 Online Learning. In (Eds. Ferdig, R. E. & Kennedy, K). *Handbook of Research on K-12 Online and Blending Learning* (Second Edition). Carnegie Mellon University: ETC Press. Pages 273-283. HandbookofResearchonK12OnlineandBlendedLearningSecond (1).pdf

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications*. SAGE. (6th ed.).