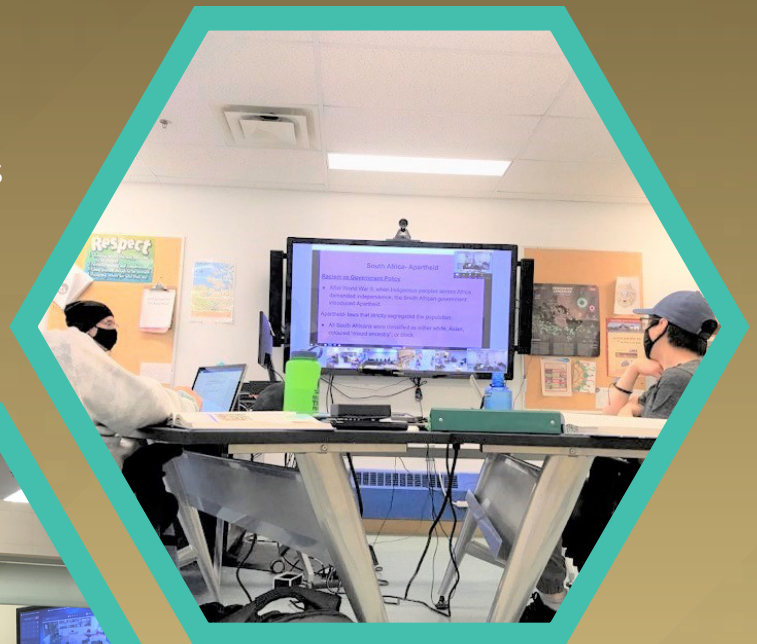# Northern Distance Learning (NDL)

A Guide for Teachers

OUR VISION

Students in small communities have access to equitable academic programming enabling them to:

▶ STAY IN THEIR HOME COMMUNITY

▶ MEET THE GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS OF HIGH SCHOOL; AND

▶ PREPARE TO ENTER POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS DIRECTLY FROM HIGH SCHOOL

NDL: RELATIONAL SKILLS

Online learning, blended learning, synchronous, asynchronous... What do you need to know about teaching in this environment and how is it different from your regular classroom?

Relationships and teacher 'presence'. You are a teacher, teaching a live class, but the students are not in the room with you physically. They are in another room that you can see on a screen. This affects your 'presence' with your students in new ways. Connecting with students on the screen can be more difficult. In regular classes you often already have a relationship with the students from being in the school with them. The concept of building relationships in a video conference space will eventually feel familiar, especially when you have students progress through grades 10-12 in your NDL class. Among many distance learning aspects, NDL continues to develop the concept of 'presence' and support—and your ideas are needed.

Programming for online students can feel different compared to preparing lessons for students in the regular classroom who are right in front of you. You cannot deviate from a plan or use new materials unless all communities have access to them. You need to structure and plan for collaboration, it doesn't occur organically. You need to engage and include all students (even the quiet ones). You need to plan in advance and have alternate lessons ready in case the technology doesn't work. It can be challenging to get students to do homework or ask for extra help because you are not in their community and aren't part of their community outside of class.

Some aspects of programming will feel quite similar, as students still have to demonstrate the outcomes, and you still have students with different abilities in the class. Some aspects are the same because you have to accommodate based on individual student's needs. You still have to provide feedback so the students have an opportunity to meet the outcomes required to pass the course.

What are the protocols for communication about student progress and/or issues?

Remote students. NDL students are students who are enroled in a different school, and often a different education body than where you are. As such, students are ultimately the responsibility of their local school principal. However, you are their teacher, so if you feel the need to contact their parents, or let their principal know about an issue, you need to know how to do so.

First. Your first point of contact about concerns regarding a student would be the student themselves and the local In-class Support Person (ISP) who is physically in the classroom with the student. The ISP is the go-between who acts as your bridge to the student's local school and community.

Next. If for some reason you don't feel that the student is responding, or that the ISP isn't communicating the message effectively, you can speak to your principal or the NDL coordinator for advice on how to proceed.

Student support. Students who miss more than 3 classes unexcused, or whose grade falls below 65%, should be flagged for a support meeting. The ISP can support the teacher's efforts to follow-up on attendance and achievement concerns early in the semester.

What is the nature of the ISP-teacher relationship?

Remote assistance. As per the request of NDL teachers, they take attendance at the beginning of class and the ISP takes attendance for late students. ISPs help extend the teacher's presence and communicates with students, parents, and the local principal about student issues.

Working relationship. The ISP is there to support NDL student education. You can ask them to prepare and deliver unique work for students, such as labs, but they are not experts. You are still the teacher and will need to guide them by preparing programming. If you have preferences for how the ISP and students work together during class time, you should discuss these with the ISP. For example, asking them to ensure side discussions with a student don't occur while the teacher is teaching is a practical matter that needs discussing. You should have regular, ongoing contact via email or other preferred methods with the ISP.

NDL: PEDAGOGICAL – INSTRUCTIONAL SKILLS

Managing learning & instructional design decisions.
Time is provided to use the Moodle Learning Management System (LMS) to organize materials, create and house assignments, communicate, etc. It will be useful to complete the orientation in August on how to use Moodle effectively, but it is also worthwhile to spend some time thinking about how you might design your course in Moodle to best make use of the resources available to you:

- Is there a particular type of assignment that would be best delivered online?
- Is there a particular activity that requires everyone to be live, listening and talking together?
- Is there an assignment that must be completed on site, supported by the ISP?

Consider how blending online and face-to-face learning can allow you to enhance the range of learning materials and activities used in the course. Blended learning can also enhance education for students by paying attention to Universal Design for Learning principles. Some questions to direct your planning could include:

- What are the learning goals?
- What platforms are available?
- What equipment do the teacher and students have access to?
- What content is available to enhance your lesson?

What about technology-related issues? Do NDL teachers need special technology skills?

Learning with technology. COVID-19 has forced remote teaching upon all brick and mortar teachers - with or without training. Many high school teachers are aware of the benefits of technology-supported learning but have not been required to use only online synchronous teaching. The role of the NDL teacher is to go beyond lecturing and 'delivering' content, toward developing presence, relationships and collaborations. In addition, the advantages of building courses in the LMS that students can access any time and anywhere should also be realized. NDL is headed in the direction of relational, live facilitation of LMS-based courses. Ongoing support in this field can be found online with Tony Bates.

You are first and foremost a teacher. You may not be a technical expert, and there are supports in place to help navigate technology issues. Your first point of contact is the Beaufort-Delta Divisional Education Council NDL coordinator, who will help resolve an issue or seek further support for you.

Technical routines. It is helpful to have some technical skills. Especially knowing how to use a Mondopad (communication and collaboration devices), understanding the common technical issues that come up, knowing how to use the Surface Pros and their applications, etc. This way, you can quickly help students on the fly with minor issues, and do not have to disrupt your teaching to seek outside support. As you establish your technical routines, your confidence and troubleshooting abilities will grow.

Responding to changes. Flexibility is essential. It is good to have a backup plan in place in case technology fails. You don't have to have a complete alternate plan in place, but it is helpful to have a PDF version of an online assignment handy that you could quickly email to a student or ISP if they're having network issues. Some of these things are useful to know so you can minimize disruptions outside of your control. Housing task instructions, videos, and readings in Moodle will also help at those times.

NDL: COURSE SUPPLIES

Managing types and costs of course supplies.
Some NDL schools will not be familiar with the types and costs of materials required for your courses. It is important for you to remember that some of the course supplies used in a larger school may be expensive or even considered dangerous goods for transportation into smaller schools. For a science or an art teacher, it can be a challenge, as you may need to consider alternative supplies.

The NDL course supplies process is as follows:
1. Seek alternatives to dangerous, expensive and/or heavy goods
2. Provide course supply lists to the NDL coordinator, who will secure a northern supplier that can negotiate bulk prices and understands NWT hazardous goods requirements.
3. The NDL coordinator makes these lists available to the NDL principals who can chose to have NDL order them, or order them from their own suppliers.
4. The principal keeps and secures the supplies from one year to the next.

PROFESSIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

What are the benefits of being an NDL teacher?

Diverse students. You get to teach great students from across the NWT; few teachers have this opportunity without extensive travel.

Professional development. You have the opportunity to develop your teaching practice in a new, digital environment. All NDL teachers are given additional preparation time to work on their course's development in Moodle, with the support of the Beaufort-Delta Divisional Education Council (BDEC) NDL coordinator, and have time to learn and develop high-quality blended learning opportunities for their students. Each fall, NDL teachers are expected to review the Content Development Standards Rubric (CDSR), self-reflect and set goals for their NDL teaching practice.

Team identity. You are part of a dedicated team of educators working to bring equitable educational opportunities to students, regardless of what community they live in.

What are some other aspects of NDL that would be useful to know before starting as a new NDL teacher?

Your supervisor. Your local principal is your supervisor. The BDEC NDL coordinator is not your supervisor; he/she is there to support all aspects of the NDL program in order to keep it running smoothly.

Feeling of disconnection. Be very prepared and organized; in the beginning there will likely be a lot of silence on the students' end. Check for understanding often by having students paraphrase what is happening in class. Do not assume silence means students know what is happening. Often there are technical issues and the teacher is unaware. Encourage interaction between students in different communities.

Communications/administration. Note all due dates in writing; don't rely on lectures or oral instructions. Be prepared for more time spent on administration. There will be a number of emails to send to In-class Support Persons, parents, and principals.

Be flexible and experimental. Be prepared to try different activities; often activities that work well in a regular classroom do not work well in an NDL class, and vice versa.

Future trends in NDL. To accommodate the diverse needs of students, NDL will continue to pursue additional on-demand course features in the learning management system. More resources will be sought to support teachers in the design of NDL courses in the LMS.

"I participated in NDL classes because it offered the courses that were required to get into a university program I was considering. I also believed that taking NDL courses would best prepare me for post-secondary education."
- NDL student

IS NDL HARD?

For NDL students, classes will be different from what they are used to. Initially, students might find it harder. At first, some parents might notice student's marks are lower than what they are used to seeing. Explain there is a reason for lower grades, but they will improve. Explain how students at post-secondary institutions often work outside of regular class periods to complete assignments and projects; NDL students should also do that. Explain to parents/guardians how to help their child transition to this environment by encouraging them to do their homework with the ISP after school, and by making a time and place for them at home to study and prepare for the next day.

NDL TEACHER SUPPORTS

NDL teachers help to bring equitable access to courses not regularly offered, or perhaps ever offered, in the NWT's small communities. NDL teachers bring a 'disruptive change' for the better to the lives of students who have often experienced learning with the same cohort of students since their first years in school. In many cases, NDL teachers are tasked with introducing different levels of rigour and engagement in high school courses.

NDL teachers have their feet in both educational worlds: brick and mortar classes and online and blended learning classes. Their work with students in-person and from a distance enables them to identify the benefits and strengths of each learning context and use that insight to design an effective, engaging, and enlightening learning experience for NDL students.

Various supports are made available to NDL teachers in an effort to mitigate the limitations and challenges inherent in an online learning context. Perhaps the largest two challenges are relationship building with students, parents, ISPs, and principals from a distance, and having access to the same knowledge about student learning needs typically available to in-person teachers. To support NDL teachers in these areas, the following supports are offered:

CDSR. NDL uses a self-reflection tool called the Content Development Standards Rubric (CDSR) that helps guide NDL teachers as they self-reflect on their online teaching and blended learning practices.

In-services. Through in-services, NDL follows up on the host-school principal's feedback from the CDSR-based, teacher-principal conversations in areas of identified need and strength (i.e., student learning needs, distance relationships, technology, pedagogy, resources, etc.). Teacher feedback influences NDL policies and supports student success.

Site-visits. NDL working group members make efforts to visit NDL teachers at their school annually to listen to their concerns and imagine new program possibilities.

Pedagogical on-demand support. NDL teachers should reach out for pedagogical support to Ed Hartley at ehartley@bdec.nt.ca and technical support to the NDL Technology Coordinator at jobby_jose@gov.nt.ca.

Contact ndl@gov.nt.ca with your questions, concerns and suggestions.

COURSES

NDL offers 19 courses

ELA (10-1, 20-1, 30-1)
MATH (10C, 20-1, 30-1) • SCIENCE 10
SOCIAL STUDIES (10-1, 20-1, 30-1)
BIO (20, 30) • PHYSICS (20, 30)
CHEMISTRY (20, 30) • ART (10, 20, 30)

NOTE: NDL offers all 19 courses each year, eliminating the practice of only offering some courses every two or three years.