

## **LETTER OF INTENT – Education and Technology\***

(\* ways in which the program will help achieve my goals – included; SET OF QUESTIONS included at end)

---

Fostering an active learner atmosphere results in positive outcomes for students; interaction between instructors, students and with the curriculum is one important way to achieve these positive outcomes. This notion of active vs. passive learning and its affect upon final outcomes is at the core of my understanding of the uses of technology in the learning process. During my personal studies, as well as through my professional experience in the delivery of web-based curriculum, I have come to value the need for the promotion of interaction between a learner and the material they are attempting to grasp.

Drawing upon my own personal educational experience, I can recall many lectures where the instructor stood at the podium, and simply relayed the facts of the topic in an organized, point by point analysis. This passive learning experience, where as the learner I was taken for “an empty vessel waiting to be filled with knowledge” was at times enlightening, but more often than not resulted in outcomes that were generally negative. In this kind of experience, where I encountered little or no opportunity for interaction (either instructor to learner, or vice-versa), my overriding sense was one of detachment from the information being taught. However, as I progressed through my education, I found myself taking part in more seminar-style lectures where the instructor’s interaction with the students, and vice versa, determined the final outcomes [of the lecture]. This active dialogue between the instructor’s “so, what do you think about this” and the students “ok, but what if this, and my opinion is” created an atmosphere where I felt more ownership over the information being discussed.

During the latter half of my undergraduate degree in English Literature, I took advantage of an opportunity to take a position with the Division of Educational Support and Development in the UBC Faculty of Medicine. This position as a Web and Multimedia Projects Assistant gave me a chance to work in the design and delivery of web-based material to transmit existing curriculum in the Undergraduate Medical program. Attempting to strike a balance between the expectations of the instructors/curriculum designers and the student learners quickly emerged as a very complex challenge. Some instructors viewed the web-based information as a very simple passive reproduction of lecture materials, while others saw it as an active teaching and learning tool through which student learners could interact with modules and discussion boards to augment their knowledge base. On more than one occasion, I found myself guilty of adopting the passive interpretation of the web-site’s purpose; however, when I was able to employ the active interpretation (with the aid of the instructor), learner feedback was generally positive. From my own personal perspective, this dichotomy just highlighted the fact that even with the inclusion of technology as a teaching tool/aid, the same struggle between active and passive learning still exists.

Since July 2003, I have been in a position with the Department of Family Practice at UBC where I am responsible for the logistical implementation of an ever evolving curriculum. Part of this position requires the direct assistance to instructors in the delivery of their lectures and online materials (where the instructors employ a range of

passive and active teaching techniques/interactions). However, with the set expansion of the UBC Medical School in September 2004, I have found myself questioning parts of the distributed teaching/learning model that is to be employed (teaching sites will include UBC, UVIC and UNBC, with the bulk of lectures being transmitted through Video Conferencing from one 'local' site to the other two 'distant' sites). Student learners will either have a local instructor present in the lecture theatre with them, or will be interacting with a projection of the instructor in one of the two distant sites. How will instructors and student learners overcome the passive nature of this technology (for most the act of watching a projection/tv is the most passive of all experiences)? When determining the effectiveness of a distributed teaching/learning model such as this, what will be the final outcomes for local and distant student learners? Does promoting interaction increase the chance of positive outcomes? And if yes, what types of interaction seem to have the greatest impact?

It is my hope that through a SFU Master's in Education and Technology, I will be able to tackle these general questions in more depth (statement of questions/ideas is at the end of this letter), and formulate a thorough response to the use of this new teaching model. I realize that my first goal when undertaking this program will be to explore the existing theories of active vs. passive learner experiences and outcomes, paying special emphasis to technology aided teaching and learning. Building upon this, I believe my next goal would be to explore the different types of interaction that take place to foster active learning experiences within existing technology aided learning models, eventually focusing this exploration on the current research into Video Conferencing teaching models. As I understand the current CORE requirements of the MA stream of this program, the exploration of these theoretical bases of teaching/learning with technology I wish to undertake would take place within the existing courses or would closely compliment these courses. The area that I realize would provide the greatest challenge would be my exploration of Video Conferencing teaching models, for I understand that existing research is ongoing, and in places incomplete. However, I am confident that given an opportunity to explore the existing research and theories that apply to the use of technology in learning, and with the guidance of a Faculty Advisor, the scope of any research I undertake could be refined to best utilize the department's resources.

I have come to believe that SFU Graduate Programs in Curriculum and Instruction, Education and Technology being a part, have found for themselves a very unique and relevant niche in the current scholarship into educational research. Currently, the state of post-secondary education in this province, if not all of Canada, stands at a new crossroads. With demand for higher education greater than ever before, and with a provincial government that seems committed to increasing enrolment by 25 000 new seats by 2010, the needs and uses of technology in education, especially in distance/distributed-model teaching, will only expand. It is my hope, that by drawing upon my existing experience with design and curriculum implementation processes, and by gaining the opportunity to explore the existing scholarship in the area through the Master's in Education and Technology, I will be able to produce a substantive contribution to the educational research being done in our province.

---

## **Statement of questions/ideas to be explored**

### *Course:*

To explore the existing theories of active vs. passive learner experiences and outcomes, paying special emphasis to technology aided teaching and learning models.

### *Course:*

To explore the different types of interaction that take place to foster active learning experiences within existing technology aided learning models, eventually focusing this exploration on the current research into Video Conferencing teaching models.

### *Thesis:*

Learner interaction and learner outcomes: a comparison of local and distant site lecture presentations and their corresponding outcomes.

- What are the quantitative results, as measured through final examination questions that are related to learning objectives, for the local and distant students?
- Is there a correlation between active learning experiences and final outcomes?
  - If yes, is it possible to identify the most positive of the types of interaction and its level of effectiveness over final outcomes?