



**Newsletter 1- December 2007**

## ALL ABOUT GO

"Getting Online: Distance Education Promising Practices for Canadian Literacy Practitioners" (or the GO Project for short) is an innovative national project designed to research trends, technologies and promising practices in online and distance learning in Canada.

The GO research team reflects the pan-Canadian project approach, and is made up of researchers from British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and Newfoundland. The team is researching both existing and emerging trends in online and distance learning and the use of online learning within the Canadian literacy community.

As well, the GO team is researching online learning outside of literacy and its application within government-sponsored programs, not-for profit-organizations and educational institutions.

The GO team will share these findings with Canadian literacy practitioners through interactive, online training courses, and via a website including independent learning modules. The GO team will also write and distribute a research report and a Promising Practices manual. Information will be shared at conference presentations, in newsletters, and via the GO website at:

[www.nald.ca/gettingonline](http://www.nald.ca/gettingonline).

The GO Project is hosted by Athabasca University, Canada's Open University. It brings together various project partners including Writing Out Loud (Alberta), Capilano College (British Columbia), and Community Literacy of Ontario. GO is funded by the National Office of Literacy and Learning (Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program of the Government of Canada), and runs from June 2007 to May 2009.

### *IN THIS ISSUE:*

<i>All About GO</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Research Updates:</i>	
<i>Literacy Community</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>External Organizations</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Online Learning Technology</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>GO Project: Next Steps</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Research Team</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Team Quotes</i>	<i>5</i>



## RESEARCH UPDATE – LITERACY COMMUNITY

- **SURVEYS:** A survey about online and distance learning practices, issues, and future trends was developed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of Athabasca University. Responses were accepted from July to November 2007. In total, 102 surveys were received from members of the Canadian literacy community. Surveys came in from all geographic regions of Canada. Different types of programming were represented in the surveys (adult literacy, family literacy, volunteer-based training and instructor-lead training). As well, responses were received from practitioners in both urban and rural areas. Some respondents had substantial experience in online and distance learning while others were beginners.
- **KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS:** From July to November 2007, 24 key informant interviews with people from the Canadian literacy community were conducted by GO researchers. Researchers asked further questions about successes and challenges associated with online learning. People from coast-to-coast-to-coast and every region of Canada were interviewed.
- **FOCUS GROUPS:** In November 2007, two focus groups were held with literacy practitioners about online learning. One was held at the November conference hosted by Literacy Newfoundland and Labrador. Another was held online with Ontario literacy practitioners. In both focus groups, the benefits and challenges of online learning were discussed by practitioners and documented by GO researchers.
- **LITERATURE REVIEW:** From July to September 2007 a literature review was conducted, including published and fugitive sources. This review covered topics such as: historical overview of distance education; the benefits and challenges of distance/online learning; literacy and online learning; and the learning needs of literacy practitioners. This literature review will be included in the GO research report.

*"Distance learning provides an opportunity to participate that might not otherwise exist. It could help extend awareness of what is happening in other jurisdictions, what is happening in the research field, and what is happening in practical ways in literacy."*

-Quote from a participant in the GO research



## RESEARCH UPDATE – EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

- **WEB-BASED RESEARCH:** The GO team researched external organizations all across Canada which are currently involved in online and distance learning. Researchers explored 100 relevant organizations. These organizations represented all provinces and territories, as well as national organizations. Researchers also sought out different types of learning (academic, professional development opportunities, informal learning, emerging technologies, etc) and different types of organizations (universities, colleges, government, and community-based).
- **SURVEYS:** A survey about online learning practices, issues, and future trends in external organizations was developed and sent to 100 external organizations with responses accepted from July to November 2007. In total, 40 organizations, representing a broad geographic and organizational diversity, responded to the external GO surveys.
- **KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS:** From July to November 2007, GO researchers held 17 key informant interviews with external organizations. Organizations from all regions of Canada were interviewed using a structured interview process approved by the Research Ethics Board of Athabasca University.

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## RESEARCH UPDATE – ONLINE LEARNING TECHNOLOGY

- **TECHNOLOGY – LITERACY COMMUNITY:** GO researchers contacted Canadian literacy organizations that are leaders in the use of online learning. This research probed more deeply into the technology being used in the literacy community and the related benefits and drawbacks. Nine Canadian literacy organizations participated in this technology research.
- **TECHNOLOGY:** Data on online learning technologies in use from the internal and external research is being compiled. A wide variety of approaches is evident: accredited, formal online and distance learning; self-directed online learning; and online learning using emerging technologies are just some of the approaches in use.



## GETTING ONLINE PROJECT – NEXT STEPS

- Currently, the research team is coding and analyzing the internal and external research data using ATLAS.ti (a powerful software tool for qualitative data analysis). During the winter and spring of 2008, we will write and edit the Getting Online research report.
- The GO team is also analyzing promising practices in online and distance learning from the external and internal research. Starting in late winter 2008, the research team will begin to write the Promising Practices manual based on our GO research and also including knowledge and experience from other sources.
- Further, in late winter 2008 we will pilot our first online course designed to provide literacy practitioners with an introductory online experience while exploring the opportunities and benefits distance learning has to offer. This course will be more widely offered in late spring 2008.
- In addition, GO researchers are writing an overview of the most commonly used online learning technologies from our research and summarizing the basic features of each technology.

*"I see a bright and growing future for online learning, in particular in the remote and rural areas of our province where this method of learning is the "only game in town."*

-Quote from a participant in the GO research

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**Stayed tuned to the GO website at [www.nald.ca/gettingonline](http://www.nald.ca/gettingonline) for more information or contact one of our researchers!**





## RESEARCH TEAM

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The GO team is very grateful to have Dr. Pat Fahy serving as Principal Investigator to our project. Dr. Fahy is a professor at Athabasca University in Alberta.



## TEAM QUOTES

- "I love the cross Canada team of literacy based researchers/writers/facilitators we have put together for the GO Project. Our different backgrounds and experience give the Project a richness and validity that I find quite irresistible. Collaborating with this dynamic team is really productive, stimulating - and fun!" (*Deborah Morgan*)
- "The GO project has been an exciting opportunity to explore distance education with the literacy community. It's been really interesting to note the keen interest that people have in learning more about using online and distance learning technology for professional development." (*Lynn Best*)
- "The GO project has provided me with an opportunity to explore the many exciting and innovative ways that organizations, large and small, are involved in e-learning in every province and territory in Canada, as well as internationally." (*Vicki Trottier*)
- "I'm thrilled to be researching all of the many ways online learning is allowing people to more easily access training. It feels like a 'brave new world' where people can more easily learn and share across vast distances". (*Joanne Kaattari*)
- "I like the national perspective. Often, literacy is more regional and this is a great chance to learn about the bigger national picture. I am most looking forward to the research results and learning how people are using online learning and what they perceive the barriers to be". (*Dr. Pat Fahy*)
- I have enjoyed having conversations with literacy workers in Canada and learning about the amazing things that are happening in literacy across this country. For me this research is a chance to learn, reflect and share what is happening in online learning in the literacy field with people who are hungry for that information. It is an exciting project and I am learning way more than I ever thought I would. That's what makes research fun! (*Diana Twiss*)