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Learning from virtual teachers



Aspiring musicians can now turn to the web to learn how to play.

TRI-CITY NEWS FILE PHOTO

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Published: **January 28, 2010 4:00 PM**

Updated: **January 28, 2010 4:15 PM**

The ubiquitous internet is making it easier for students to get some of their schooling online and some are even opting to take guitar and piano through distributed learning programs.

Chris Madsen, of the Vernon-based Music Educators Institute, said 1,000 B.C. students are taking free music courses leading to graduation. And he thinks numbers will grow.

“We’re filling that niche now making sure that students all over the province know that even if they [music courses] are not being offered in their local school they can still get music courses.”

Students can take whatever course matches their proficiency level but they have to take tests and submit their performances via MP3s, YouTube or other web-streaming programs so they can be graded. The courses are for students in Grade 8 to 12.

Although there is no face-to-face component, students can still email questions and there is follow up by administrators if they slack off and don't fulfill all the program requirements, Madsen said.

"We've made the monthly check-ins and if they don't do it, we phone them up." If students still fail to practise or get the assignment done, he phones their mom.

"They seem to have more power than educators," Madsen said.

He thinks the online option is appealing to more students who are looking for flexibility and options in their schooling. Adults can also take the courses for free, too, even if they don't need the credits. The closest school for enrolling is Surrey.

More information about the provincially-accredited program is available at www.meicanada.com/schools. Details for adults are available at www.meicanada.com/musicforeverybcreresident.

Gleneagle principal Dave Matheson, a proponent of technology in education, said online music courses may appeal to self-directed students looking for flexibility in their program schedule. But many still enjoy taking guitar with their teachers at school. Face-to-face courses offer a kind of esprit de corps among students not available online. At Gleneagle, long-time music teacher Eddy Travato teaches guitar.

Matheson said these days students are figuring out what they want to learn and the best ways to do it — a trend he thinks is promising.

"Often it's the kids finding out about the courses, kids finding these learning experience and asking, 'Can I do this?'"

In School District 43, distributed learning courses are becoming more popular. According to SD43 information, 120 students were enrolled in online courses in 2006/2007 and 295 last year.

For more information on SD43 online courses, visit www.sd43.bc.ca.

An information video about the music program for schools is available at www.youtube.com by searching MEI online music course.

Enrolment doubles for online courses

Like everything else online, School District 43 students have taken to internet-based education and are signing up to take everything from fine arts to career courses.

Each year enrolment has doubled in Grade 11 and 12 distributed learning programs through Coquitlam Open Learning, says principal Sarah Husband.

In fact, numbers have doubled in each of the last three years and as of last September, SD43 had enrolled 400 full-time equivalent (FTE) students, up from 195 in 2008/2009. With most students taking only one or two of their courses online, those 400 FTEs add up to a lot of teens doing school work on laptops.

Husband says students like the flexibility of distributed learning courses and she's always looking to add new ones to meet their needs.

This year fine arts, drafting, and a popular computer networking certification program developed by Cisco Systems were added.

Husband said the economic decline has prompted more students — including older adult students — to look for opportunities to enhance employment skills.