



COUNTRY PRESENTATION: THE BAHAMAS

By: Michelle Sears

Overview

A glance at a map of The Bahamas immediately brings focus to the challenge this country faces in bringing quality education to its people. With a population of a mere 350,000 unevenly dispersed over twenty-two islands and cays, The Bahamas has had to seek creative means to deliver equitable levels of education particularly to people in the more distant islands.

Historically, the practice of correspondence study, a precursor of distance learning, has been most popular especially with the adult learner since the 1950's. Over the years, distance learning has become more deliberate and focused beginning in the 1970's with the gradual influx of offshore universities - Benedictine University, the University of Miami, Nova Southeastern, St. Thomas, Kent State and UWI – they offer a range of Bachelor and Masters degree programmes in Education, Business, Law and Hospitality Management.

With the advent of modern technologies, The Bahamas has sought to keep pace recognising that quality education demands quality teaching.

- In 1985, The Bahamas Ministry of Education and the College of The Bahamas, in collaboration with the Organisation of American States, piloted by distance, a teacher upgrading programme for teachers on our family islands
- In 1992, The Bahamas hosted a Commonwealth of Learning conference using distance learning methods and offered an opportunity for retraining for technical and vocational teachers
- In 2001- 2005 Commonwealth of Learning and the University of Technology, Jamaica, co-sponsored a programme to provide training for 27 technical vocational teachers using face to face sessions supported by telephone, email, and virtual classroom setting.

In more recent years the Ministry of Education has placed great emphasis on the provision of opportunities for distance learning using mixed media programmes including print, radio, television, video and audio cassettes and computer-based instruction. Distance learning in The Bahamas most often provides support to the classroom teacher.

The following attempts to highlight some recent developments and enhancements in the delivery of distance learning.

Television Broadcasts

With technical support from the Commonwealth of Learning, The Bahamas Learning Channel (BLC) was launched 30 March, 2007. The BLC currently airs nine programmes on Cable TV 12 and beginning this week similar programming will air on ZNS Television 13.

Programming includes three areas of interest

- School based programmes targeting preschoolers through secondary school students
- Allied ministries and agencies targeting college students, parents, the general community
- News and special features, particularly news emanating from the ministry of education youth sports and culture.

Dubbing Center

Our Distance Learning Unit collaborates with Cable Bahamas to provide teachers with copies of non-copyrighted materials that have aired on Cable TV, for example programmes from the Public Broadcasting Service. In addition, video and audio tapes of local events and educational presentations are similarly made available to teachers for use in preparation of their lessons.

Radio Broadcasts

Radio programmes have been at the foundation of distance learning in The Bahamas.

- A time for Education - has been modified over the years to accommodate primary students in the morning at 10:00 and secondary students / adults at 3:30 in the afternoon
- Audio study guides that parallel the national exam syllabi in core curriculum areas.

Print Media

Print media is indispensable in the delivery of distance learning and we continue with the creation of newspaper supplements and learning packages.

The Junk & Noo Vocabulary Development series deserves particular mention as it continues to extend its offerings, and recently developed a television series for lower primary. Piloted in the 1990's this series produces indigenous integrated and interactive resource materials for students, teachers and parents to enhance the learning experience. Lessons that parallel the teachers' manual are now available on CD-Roms; in addition, independent learning and active engagement is provided on the Junk & Noo website. Presently the Junk & Noo series is being mass produced to facilitate its distribution to the most remote classrooms in our archipelago.

The Junk & Noo programme received international recognition in 2005 when it reached the semi-finals in the Commonwealth Best Practice Awards.

School Computerisation Project

The computerisation project with our international partners – OAS and IDB - continues to provide training in basic computer literacy for teachers and will facilitate use of full range of multi-media resources and integration of technology into instructional programme. Our goal is to have trained 2700 teachers by the end of 2008 and to provide technology –aided instruction in grades 4 through 6.

The installation of active boards continues and to date we have 30 schools including three in the Family Islands, and teachers have been trained and are actively using the boards.

Destination Reading and Math interactive programmes are used in an increasing number of primary schools.

Resource Centers

We continue to maintain four resource centers on major islands that provide additional resources to students and teachers.

Our top priorities

- Redefine our distance learning programme and harmonize our goals and activities with the current and ever changing technologies
- Procure funding for training in distance learning, for writing teams and for printing of learning packages.
- Expand Bahamas Learning Channel hours and produce more creative instructional programming by increasing technical staff
- Establish an interactive website that mirrors the BLC to provide additional learning opportunities with a student, classroom, parental or community focus
- Expand ministry's website to include streamable audio and visual programmes
- Increase level of Family Island contribution to programming at BLC.

COL can support The Bahamas with the following

- Internships, or tours of exemplary distance learning models in island state settings such as ours
- Ongoing training for BLC personnel in latest technology (final cut –pro system); programme development and delivery, in particular script writing, equipment repair and website production and maintenance
- Technical support for improving Ministry of Education website to optimize the delivery of distance learning
- Developing distant learning modules, units, lesson plans for radio broadcast from preschool to high school.

DISTANCE EDUCATION IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS



THE CHALLENGE

- Approximately 350,000 people on 22 islands
- About 48,000 students in 160 public schools;
- 111 primary and All-age schools;
- 54 secondary schools and
- 10 special needs schools
- School populations range from 5 to 1000 plus
- Bringing quality education to all

AN OVERVIEW OF DISTANCE LEARNING IN THE BAHAMAS

- An historical perspective
- Offshore support
- A multi-media approach

OUR SUCCESSES

- Launched Bahamas Learning Channel in April 2007
- Indigenous television series for Lower primary based on the Junka & Noo Vocabulary Development Program; on CD Rom; an interactive website
- Radio programs and audio study guides that parallel national exam syllabus in core curriculum areas
- Training in Distance Learning techniques for officers and writing teams.



OUR SUCCESSES

- Learning packages and Newspaper supplements
- On-going computerization Project with international partners – OAS, IDB, - to provide training for teachers in computer applications to facilitate use of full range of multi-media resources and integration of Technology into instructional program
- College of the Bahamas programs in Grand Bahama, Abaco, Eleuthera, Exuma and Andros



OUR PRIORITIES

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OUR PRIORITIES

- Establish an interactive website that mirrors the Bahamas Learning Channel and other learning opportunities with a student, classroom, parental or community focus
- Expand Ministry's website to include streamable audio and visual programs
- Increase level of Family Island contribution to programming at BLC



SUPPORT NEEDED

- Internships, visits or tours of exemplary models
- Ongoing training for BLC personnel in latest technology, program development and delivery, equipment repair and website production and maintenance
- Technical support for improving Ministry's website to enable delivery of Distance Learning



THE BAHAMAS...

Thanks to all!

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