

Videoconferencing
Chaired by Karin Davidson-Taylor, Royal Botanical Gardens;
Reporter, Amanda Tamul

Section 1	
Summary	Royal Botanical Gardens has been offering education programs via video conference since 2007, building on 60 years of providing onsite public and school groups programs. These interactive programs are plant-based and linked to the curriculum. After requesting a program, teachers receive packages with a presentation outline, and pre- and post-conference activities. http://www.rbq.ca/Page.aspx?pid=341#onsite
Background	The educational mission of the Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG) in Burlington, Ontario is to encourage environmental stewardship by providing meaningful and diverse learning experiences that connect people with the plant world and help them to understand the crucial role that plants play in sustaining and enhancing our lives and the environment.
Challenges	The RBG found that most school visitors were from local schools. As an organization with a provincial mandate, they wanted to reach schools and school children who were unable to visit in person.
Approach	Real-time interactive communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes collaborations between/with students and experts • Uses teaching strategies to support diverse learning styles • Increases motivation, participation and retention • Equal opportunity for students in remote communities • Enhance and support units • Linked to provincial curriculum • Environmental, financial and time saving benefits • Opportunities for questions during and after the presentation • Complete teacher's package provided to prepare for the videoconference http://www.rbq.ca/Document.Doc?id=64
Intended outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide teachers with support for curriculum units related to educational mission of the RBG; promote the importance of plants in the environment and our daily lives. • Help make RBG relevant to those in other parts of the country/world e.g. children in Texas see different plants than do those in Ontario • Promote cultural exchange e.g. students from Nunavut demonstrated throat singing
Intended outputs	Frequent videoconferences with Ontario schools beyond easy reach of the RBG.

Section 2	
Obstacles and issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding – a Trillium Grant helped RBG to purchase \$25,000 worth of equipment • Equipment & support (integration & standards must be met) • Quality of signal to support sound & visuals is important • Training – Karin learned by trial and error • Logistics – time zones, location, cannot do wireless • Participation – very few participants from Ontario (probably because of the cost \$125); the technology not directly supported by Ministry of Education and Training yet within the schools
Actual outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RBG is presenting to over 200 schools every year and growing; presenting to libraries, seniors' homes, at conferences... • Not only are we putting content out but also we are bringing it in from other sites for RBG visitors to see/share. • We are collaborating with multiple schools at a time, so they can hear from one another as well as from us. • We are incorporating SMARTBoard and other technologies thereby expanding the scope of the videoconference
Actual outputs	<p>Since May 2007, Karin has made over 800 presentations connecting with 18,509 people. The majority of her presentations are to schools in the United States, with Alberta schools a close second last year. Recently, more schools in Ontario and Quebec are using the technology.</p>
Section 3	
Lessons learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The uses of the technology are limitless • Many using videoconferencing are self-taught. It's a vertical learning curve! • The key is to have champions either at the schools or in the school boards.
Next steps	<p>We want to take the equipment outside into the gardens and the natural lands beyond the RBG walls. This will be dependent on finding a secure connection and being able to accommodate the weather.</p>

Unfortunately, there was no time for questions for the first presentation, but for the second one questions were asked during the presentation rather than afterwards.

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Karin Davidson-Taylor

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 Karin joined RBG in 2006, coming with 17 years experience with the Upper Grand DSB. She has been responsible for establishing RBG as a Canadian leader in the world of

videoconference-based virtual field trips. She develops and delivers RBG's distance education programming to schools around the world, working in coordination with other staff and partners.