

Artificial intelligence improves support for MyEducation BC users

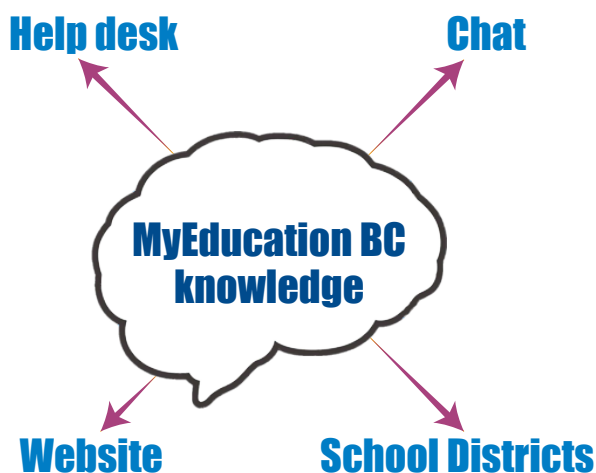
How do you solve more problems without additional resources? How do you get a machine to understand the true meaning of someone's question?

Those are the questions Andrew Smit, project manager for independent schools, has asked for several years. It was only recently, however, that technology was able to provide answers in the form of artificial intelligence (AI).

In the summer of 2017, Andrew and his team built 'Robbie,' an AI that supports independent school users of MyEducation BC by answering questions sent to the independent schools' help desk.

"We wanted to make our help desk quicker and smarter," said Andrew. "It was just a matter of waiting for tools to come available that were cheap enough and didn't require a PhD."

Built using Google's Dialogflow, Andrew likens Robbie to a brain. It's trained through manual entry of questions and answers, and it uses that knowledge to answer users' questions immediately. Because the AI can understand users' unique questions and provide specific answers, it has many advantages over user guides or keyword-driven queries, which force users to spend time searching for the answer they need.



Andrew likens the artificial intelligence to a brain, which uses its training and natural language processing ability to answer MyEducation BC user questions, and can be accessed through various channels.

"Schools love that they get instant specific answers to their questions right away."

"Schools love that they get instant specific answers to their questions right away. More importantly, Robbie is available 24/7, which means on weekends and evenings there is a high chance they can get an answer when our office is closed," said Andrew.

Andrew used questions previously submitted to the help desk to train Robbie in preparation for launching the tool in September 2017. "From a programming point of view, it's not super hard. The harder part was training," said Andrew. "I easily spent ten times more time training as developing."

Training is an ongoing process: feedback from users and new questions are used to increase Robbie's knowledge and ability to provide support. All that adds up to hundreds of hours of training time.

"If I had to look at the cost savings right now, it hasn't really saved that much because any time I've saved from answering questions, I've spent training it. But once we get farther, the efficiency will really kick in," said Andrew, who estimates Robbie successfully answered 10-15 per cent of tickets in September.

He expects that with more training that number could grow to 40 per cent, meaning his team can focus on complex problems and those requiring tasks at the district level.

Andrew has also begun collaborating with other districts to create a new AI brain that will support teachers using MyEducation BC, and is considering creating a third AI brain to support Student Services in the future. "What I want is for districts to simply leverage the work and time that we have already put into this and be able to get something awesome for everyone," said Andrew, who will continue to do the training of the AI, but have districts' contribute to its training by using the tool and providing feedback.

Though Robbie is currently integrated into the independent schools' help desk system, Dialogflow is capable of connecting to users through other channels, such as chat,

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text message, or other web interfaces. It's flexible in other ways too: the individual brains could be merged into a 'mega brain,' or the system can be programmed to ask questions, such as the user's role or district, in order to provide more specific answers.

"There is lots of potential here."

"There is lots of potential here," said Andrew. "I see this AI becoming the primary method of providing support."

Andrew and his team continue to train their AIs' brains and research additional functionality to further improve its capabilities. He is currently looking to partner with more districts who wish to access the teacher support tool. For more information, visit myedbc-ai.com. •

MyEducation BC featured in Follett Aspen video

A [new video](#) from Follett puts the focus on how MyEducation BC is supporting student learning across the province of British Columbia. Filmed in May 2017, the video features representatives from Chilliwack, Richmond, Peace River North, and Surrey school districts, as well as the Ministry of Education, and footage from the Lower Mainland area and Richmond school district. Watch the video [here](#). •



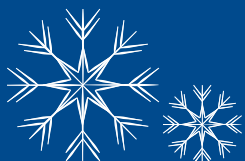
MyEducation BC Academy returns to Richmond, BC May 7-8, 2018

Mark your calendars! MyEducation BC Academy returns May 7-8, 2018 to the Sheraton Vancouver Airport Hotel in Richmond, BC. This annual learning event features sessions and workshops with experts from school districts across the province, the Ministry of Education, and Fujitsu

and Follett, as well as abundant opportunities to connect, collaborate, and network with colleagues and peers.

The Ministry is currently accepting session proposals for this district-led conference sponsored by the Ministry of Education and Common SIS Consortium. Log on to the MyEducation BC Academy Page in MyEducation BC (Pages>Academic>MyEd Academy) for more information on how to submit, or email myedbc@gov.bc.ca for information.

Registration, hotel booking, and agenda information will be released in the new year. •



Happy Holidays!

The MyEducation BC team would like to wish everyone a joyful holiday season. We'll see you in 2018!



Meet your SMC: New Executive Members

In September 2017, the Service Management Council (SMC) Executive committee welcomed five new members, introduced below.



Gabe Linder

Gabe Linder is the Independent Schools representative on the SMC executive committee, and the principal of Traditional Learning Academy Online (TLA), a K-12 Distributed Learning school based in Surrey, BC. He has a background in teaching History and English, and

loves building community through field trips and events at TLA. Gabe was recently elected to the Federation of Independent School Associations of BC (FISABC) Board of Directors, and works on FISABC's iGroup, which manages and supports MyEducation BC usage in BC Independent schools. He is the father of four school-aged children, and one of his favourite activities is supporting youth sports by coaching baseball and basketball.



Dave Sands

Dave Sands is the Principal of Technology Implementation for School District 43 with 26 years teaching and administrative experience. He has a Master's degree in technology and curriculum from Simon Fraser University, is a member of several district and

provincial committees focused on technology, and has led various technology-based initiatives at the district level. Dave is an educator first, focusing his instructional practice and leadership on empowering students, teachers, and administrators with the use of technology-based tools to enhance and deepen the learning process. Further, Dave is a strong proponent of the development of digital citizenship among youth, and regularly presents to parents throughout the province, encouraging them to guide their children's healthy use of technology.

Regrets: Sean Cameron, SD06 Rocky Mountain



Josh Porter

Josh Porter is the Director of Information Technology for School District 71, Comox Valley. Like many small and medium school districts, Josh has many roles including purchasing hardware and software, providing training around the use of technology, writing policy, and implementing and overseeing MyEducation BC in the school district. Josh has worked in IT for 17 years, 12 of them being in education technology. When not working, he can be found out enjoying the many activities the Comox Valley has to offer, from golfing, kayaking, and skiing, to camping with his family.



David Vandergugten

David Vandergugten, MEd, a Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence 1997 recipient and an Apple Distinguished Educator, is an assistant superintendent in Maple Ridge. David has taught at all levels of the public school system and has been a provincial technology facilitator and speaker throughout Canada.

Who is the SMC Executive?

The Service Management Council (SMC) Executive Committee membership consists of up to ten representatives and the chair from the SMC. Its current members are:

- Quirina Gamblen, SMC chair, SD36 Surrey
- Surinder Brar, SLC chair, SD73 Kamloops-Thompson
- Phil Luporini, OSC chair, SD46 Sunshine Coast
- Dave Sands, SLC co-chair, SD71 Comox Valley
- David Vandergugten, SLC co-chair, SD42 Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows
- Sean Cameron, SD06 Rocky Mountain
- John Dawson, SD39 Vancouver
- Gabe Linder, Independent Schools
- Sam Muraca, SD35 Langley
- Josh Porter, SD71 Comox Valley ●

SMC Committee Corner

The Service Management Council (SMC) is comprised of representatives from each school district appointed by each superintendent. The SMC has four standing committees: Operations and Standards Committee, Student Learning Committee, Software Enhancement Committee, and Data Integration Committee. These committees provide

guidance and input on the evolution of MyEducation BC. Brief updates from the SMC's committees are below. For more information, contact your district's SMC representative, which is listed under "MyED BC Contact" on the [School Districts - Basic Information page](#).

Group	What We're Up To	Contact(s)
Operations & Standards Committee (OSC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance enhancements to make class office input more usable and efficient were implemented September 2017 Continuing Courses and DL Active Date to enable courses to be carried over multiple years were implemented July 2017 Standards Manual was updated November 15 New standard was developed for naming plans in the upcoming data entry process for Student Services 	Phil Luporini
Software Enhancement Committee (SEC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Last three 2016/17 enhancements delivered with the release 5.8, December 17, 2017 Seven 2017/18 enhancements are well underway and two others are on schedule for possible delivery by March 31, 2018 Four 2017/18 items being discussed for possible solutions, initial planning, and development this year with a completion target in 2018/19 Two 2017/18 items being reviewed as core code changes with estimates to come; two have been completed as part of the Attendance Project; and one has been funded by the Ministry The enhancement submission window for 2018/19 timeline ended November 30, 2017. The SEC will start to review these items over the next few weeks 	Surinder Brar
Student Learning Committee (SLC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SLC received and analyzed responses to district survey on implementation of MyEdBC student learning tools, and thanks participating districts because survey data has already proven invaluable to establish priorities and direct resources Thanks to Judy Smith, 12 instructional videos posted on mytrainingbc.ca/learningsupport to support users with standards-based gradebook SLC will continue to develop and share resources regarding district implementation of Family Portal, pages, standards-based gradebook, and single-term reports Simplified IEP process ready for acceptance testing in SDTest beginning December 6 	Dave Sands and David Vandergugten



Contact

Have a great story related to MyEducation BC? Have a comment about something you've read? Email myedbc@gov.bc.ca with your ideas and feedback.