

Major Inquiry Project: Creating a Blended Learning Program



OLTD 511 Blended Learning

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Proposal: To put forward a plan to create a 'flex' blended learning program at Ucluelet Secondary School (USS), to address the current issue of nonconsumption, and to allow students, in this outlying area of School District #70, to have more success, more control, and more choice over their educational journeys.

The Definition - What is a flex blended learning program? In education, 'brick and mortar' refers to a school setting where students are supported by a teacher, in a classroom, within a building ("Brick", n.d.). 'Online' includes learning that is delivered via a personal electronic device and the Internet ("Online", n.d.). When online and traditional brick and mortar combine, the result is a product known as 'blended learning', where students receive their education at least in part online, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace, and at least in part, at a supervised brick and mortar location" (Horn and Straker, 2014, p. 51).

'Flex' is the descriptive given to a blended learning model where individuals primarily learn online, but there is a teacher on-site to provide face-to-face support, and students are mostly housed in a brick and mortar setting ("Blended Learning", n.d.).

Click on the following link to hear a short description of blended learning from one of the foremost experts in the field, Michael Horn.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_oMIHA2Hsg

The Background - School District #70 not only provides service to learners in the Alberni Valley, but the district is also responsible for students in the outlying areas of Ucluelet, Tofino, and Bamfield. Port Alberni closed 2 schools in the summer of 2015, and now has a total of 6 Elementary, 1 Alternate and DL, and 1 Secondary school. This is down considerably from the all-time-high of 14 Elementary, 3 Junior High, and 1 Secondary school, in the prosperous age of the 1970s decade.

While Port Alberni still has a large enough population base to adequately provide its students with a fairly comprehensive list of required and elective secondary courses, the same cannot be said about the schools in the district's outer ranges. The combination of declining enrolment and funding cuts has caused, what could arguably be called a crisis, in these areas. Moving to a flex blended learning model is a practical and logical solution to the situation.

The Problem: "How to more successfully support the educational needs of School District #70 students attending Ucluelet Secondary School (USS)" is the problem that has been identified.



This photo of USS was taken from Google Maps <http://bit.ly/1YRsrh0> and was retrieved on Dec. 5, 2015.

USS caters to students in Ucluelet and Tofino, in grades 8 through 12. Presently, the school is faced with several challenges including lack of student success, declining

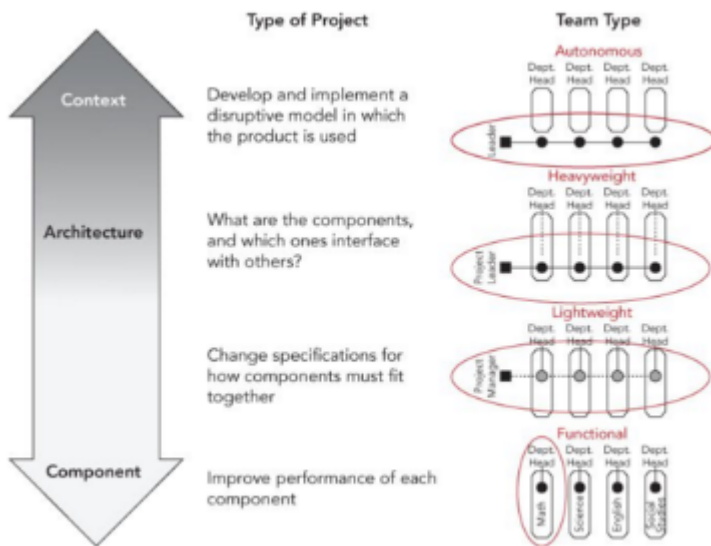
enrolment, and limited access to courses. This is a problem that is, in part, due to 'nonconsumption', which means that the school cannot provide enough of a diverse learning experience to fully support its students, so the students have no easy option than to venture outside the school or 'go without' (Horn and Straker, 2014, chap. 3).

This is a situation that is not unique to USS. Because of limited resources, including numbers of teachers and students, many smaller schools struggle to offer breadth in the curriculum. It is difficult, if not impossible, to have qualified teachers in every subject. As a result, there are many courses that are just not available (Christensen & Horn, 2008).

A flex blended learning environment will increase student success by providing students with a much large number of courses, by giving them much more control and choice over their educational plans, and by supporting them with face-to-face teachers.

Click on the following link to access a video that will give you more information on Flex Blended Learning environments. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1GsBu2ll9A>

The Team - It is vitally important to organize the right team to lead this blended learning project. Blended learning teams can be functional, lightweight, heavy weight, or autonomous. (Horn and Staker, 2014, chap. 4).



o = people; ___ = direct reporting relationship; --- = indirect reporting relationship; oval = team

Image Source: Horn, M. B., & Staker, H. (2014). *Blended: Using disruptive innovation to improve schools* (p.114). John Wiley & Sons. Kindle Edition <http://www.amazon.ca/>

This plan goes beyond teachers within the same department (functional), and implicates more than one set of teachers (lightweight), and is also about more than

implementing sustaining innovations (heavyweight). It is necessary, therefore, to put together an autonomous team because what we are proposing is a disruptive model, and we are pursuing a nonconsumption opportunity. (Horn and Staker, 2014, chap. 4).

What is being proposed is a disruptive model because we are departing from what we think of as a traditional classroom. "The way to implement an innovation so that it will transform an organization is to implement it disruptively—not by using it to compete against the existing paradigm and serve existing customers, but to let it compete against “non-consumption,” where the alternative is nothing at all" (Christensen & Horn, 2008, para. 4).

Therefore, we need an autonomous team because we are proposing some technology initiatives intended to disrupt the classroom and replace it with an entirely new education model and subsequently, we need to have the freedom to rebuild the budget, the staffing plan, and the facility (classroom) design from the ground up (Staker, 2013). There needs to be team leader, which would most logically be a member of administration because “a senior administrator’s key role is to defending the autonomous team’s right to break the grip of established processes” (Staker, 2013 para. 8). However, all USS teachers and staff would need to be part of the team and part of the process. The team, therefore, would consist of all members of the Ucluelet Secondary School population, including administration, teachers, and support staff. Secretarial staff, custodians, parents, and students will also play a role so that all members of the USS community are involved and informed. In addition, School Board members would also need to be part of the team, as the plan has implications for additional funding to support the proposal.

Finally, Choices DL teachers will need to be part of the planning and part of the team process since they will be providing and supporting the online courses, and they will be responsible for marking and reporting on student progress.

The Student Experience - A blended learning program needs to include some element of student control over time, place, path, or pace (Horn and Staker, 2014). The student experience includes all of these elements, as outlined below.

- **Time:** Since the students' courses will be available online, when the students choose to work on their courses is flexible because they can work on them at school, but they will also have full access to the courses at home, using personal electronic devices.
- **Place:** The majority of students' work and study will probably be completed at USS, but just like it is expected that homework be completed outside school hours and outside the school building, students will have to complete some online course work, at home.
- **Path:** A blended learning environment requires that a student's learning path be connected to provide a cohesive educational experience. This means, that it doesn't matter what modality is on the student's course of study, be it online, face-to-face, or collaborative, all components will work together to deliver an integrated course and learning experience. For example, students will not be repeating what they learned online, in a classroom, and vice versa. What they will be receiving will be a 'blend' of the formats that are on their learning path. (Horn and Staker, 2014, p. 36). All marks will continue to be transferred and reported to the ministry of education and all courses, that will be used, follow BC Ministry of Education outcomes and have equivalent value to courses offered in BC classrooms.
- **Pace:** Students will be able to work on courses using a continuous entry model, meaning that they can register at any time throughout the school year. Students will be strongly encouraged to complete a course within one school calendar year, but students can actually take more or less time as needed. This means that students can progress through the courses at their own pace(s), keeping in mind that they should aim to complete a course within a school calendar year, or shortly thereafter.

The Teacher Role - For this program to work, teachers need to embrace this opportunity to create a great program. They should be given the opportunity to learn about the technology they will be using, and provide their own input as to the furniture and physical layout of the classroom. They need the opportunity to take this program and make it their own. According to Horn and Straker (2014), teachers are more motivated when

given the “opportunity for achievement, recognition and intrinsically rewarding work (p.181).

The primary role of the teacher based would be more of a tutor, or guide. According to Horn and Straker (2014) use of the Flex Model, relies “on guides instead of teachers, during core skills time. The role of the guides is to help students (1) set weekly goals, (2) graph their own progress, and (3) maintain portfolios, and to ask helpful questions when students get “stuck” (p.231). These teachers would offer supplementary information or enrichment, and assist with any problems or difficulties students may encounter with their online courses.

These teachers would all need to be ‘on board’ with the plan. The most important aspect of any program, new or otherwise, is having the right person in the position. If you don’t have a teacher excited and motivated, you aren’t going to be able to get students excited and motivated. This position will be very different from the ‘normal’ teaching position, and may be confusing for some teachers who are more familiar with controlling all aspects of the students’ learning. In this case, another teacher chooses lesson design, activities and grading. It’s not an easy transition, and incoming teachers need to be fully aware of what is ahead.

The Hardware, Software, and Physical Space - To provide adequate space for movement, a large classroom is required. If one is not available, merging two classrooms may be necessary to create a large learning space. In this way there could be computer stations along the walls, while also providing an area for small group discussion/instruction and learning teams, while also providing spaces for individual students to work independently. Tables and chairs should have wheels for quick, quiet and easy reconfiguration.

Ideally, the classroom would have 6 permanent desktop computer stations along the walls, with 20 Google Chromebooks available so that all students have access to computers every



class.

This photo of a chromebook was retrieved on Dec. 5, 2015, from <http://bit.ly/1k3NaP>

Modular tables and chairs can be organized in a way to create an open and flexible



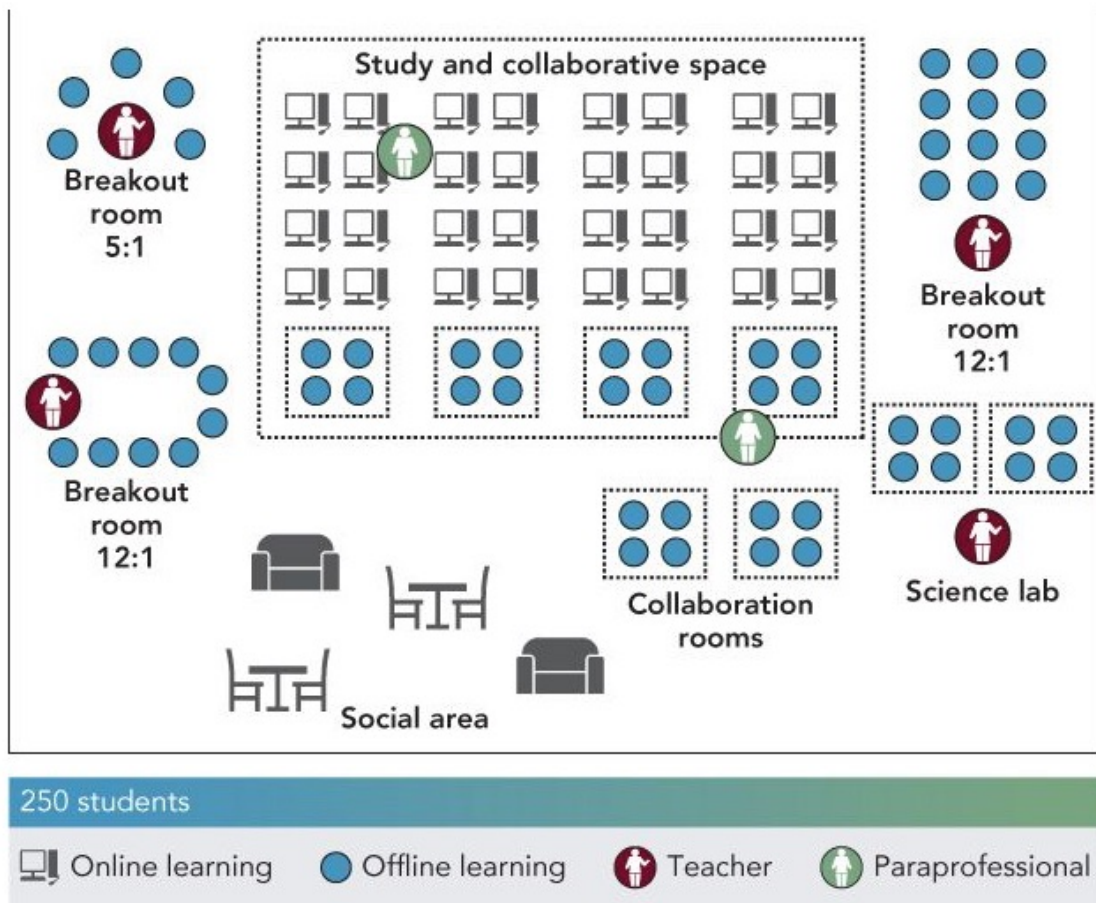
working environment.

From <https://raystuckey.wordpress.com/tag/youtube/>

This floorplan is created by a teacher in Michigan, Ray Stuckey, who is currently working on a Masters in Education Technology. He also provides a [youtube video of his ideal classroom](#). This classroom is designed for 40 students, however, for this program, it is unlikely there will be 40 students using this classroom at one time, so less tables and chairs may be adequate.

This program will use Choices online courses on a Moodle LMS already available within the school district.

More About the the Model - A Flex model of blended learning is being proposed because we are focusing on a non-consumption problem and using an autonomous team to solve this problem.



From <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMRYMRzowCI>

For this program, the classroom will be based on the Flex model of Blended Learning School. On a much smaller scale, the classroom for this program will be set up with breakout areas and collaboration areas as shown in the floor plan above.

Students will be working on their own individual, self-paced courses, so will be controlling their pace in a classroom where teacher will be providing face-to-face guidance and tutoring for their courses. Students will also have the opportunity to participate in teacher led group discussions as necessary depending on the course and the topic/skill being learned. For example if several students are completing English 12, they can meet each day for discussions of the novel they are studying.

The school runs on a 2 day rotation on a semestered system. In each class, there will be 2 teachers, one math & sciences, and the other humanities. A typical week will provide

students with a teacher who is knowledgeable about their learning and online courses. Students will only attend this class to access courses not already available at their school.

Schedule	Day 1	Day 2
8:40-10:05	A	B
10:10-11:35	B	A
11:35-12:20	Lunch	Lunch
12:25-1:50	C	D
1:55-3:15	D	C

Teachers will work closely with students, monitoring their progress. Teachers will keep current up-to-date checklists for each student’s courses. Students will be working on only one course per semester, with the rare exception of a second course, depending on individual need and ability.

For each class, students will be broken up into students who are currently working on their individual courses, and do not require immediate assistance from the teacher, small face-to-face teams that will hold discussions about a topic in a course, and small collaborating groups who are working on the same course. Two teachers will be available through the class to guide and facilitate discussions and activities.

Since the school runs on a two day, four class schedule this should provide the classroom teachers with an easily manageable course load. This format will cause the least disruption to both students and teachers regular school class rotation routine.

Creating a Positive Culture - Creating a positive culture is key to developing a successful program (Horn and Straker, 2014). Both teachers and students need to be active participants in creating a positive culture for this blended learning program. To shape and maintain a positive culture in this program, the following initiatives should be considered.

Teacher initiatives:

- Opportunity for both teachers to meet regularly so as to know individual needs of the students. Ten minute meeting twice/week should be enough to touch base and share information
- Provide teachers opportunities to acknowledge or award students of success on assignments/tests etc.
- Classroom teachers in coordination with online teachers maintain an online document of student enrollment, completion and withdrawal of courses.
- Professional development activities between classroom teachers and online teachers.
- Online teachers and classroom teachers maintain open communication with USS administrator.

Student Initiatives:

- Students meet with teacher regularly to discuss course progress, time management and set weekly SMART goals.
- Students are provided opportunities to organize and facilitate course discussions, and connect with students for cooperative learning opportunities.
- Self-direction encouraged for students.
- Provide students opportunity to create an online communication/forum for classroom management/activities
- Encourage students to brainstorm and develop new ideas for classroom atmosphere/culture.
- Ensure that students feel their contributions to classroom culture are important.

The Budget Strategy - The cost to implement this blended learning model is not prohibitive.

- The Classroom: As previously stated, the classroom should require very few, if any, renovation. Internet at the school is already in place, but the classroom may need a computer station set up, and or wireless and wired connection modifications. With

the recent closure of 3 schools in Port Alberni, there should be lots of available tables and chairs to furnish the room appropriately.

- Staffing: Staffing costs are usually a large percentage of a budget. However, no additional staffing should be required. What needs to happen is that staffing assignments should be adjusted and organized to best support the program and the needs of the students. Also, Choices DL teachers can be seen as additional staff members, that will be available at no extra cost to USS, or the district.
- Technology: In the short term, the purchase of 20 Acer Google Chromebooks will be the largest expense. Each chromebook costs approximately \$250.00, for a total cost of \$5000.00. Chromebooks have been chosen for a number of reasons including the following. They are relatively inexpensive, they don't slow down over time, and they have built in virus protection that automatically updates (Donovan, 2015). The majority of the cost, for this program, will be incurred in the initial setup of the classroom, and future expenses will primarily be the purchase of new electronic devices as needed. However, the purchasing of chromebooks will save money, in the end, since they are far cheaper than desktop computers or traditional laptops, and they last much longer.

Click on this link to access a video that explains how chromebooks work.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-JYp0lu4pw>

As an additional note, USS already has existing desktop computers that could be utilized, which would cut down the number of chromebooks that would need to be purchased. Either way, the blended learning room should have enough electronic devices to allow approximately 20 to 25 students access to the Internet, at any one time.

To Sum it Up - Twenty-first century learners have high expectations, and it is important that the education system respond to their needs. School District #70 has a responsibility to provide service and support for its students, to the best of its ability. The changing challenges of public opinion, student enrolment and government funding, make this responsibility complex and demanding. In addition, Ucluelet Secondary School finds itself in a position of do or die. The school staff realizes that they can no longer provide

their students with the diverse learning experiences that they are entitled to receive. A blended learning environment can offer a solution that promises to not only help students be successful by giving them access to additional courses, but also promises to support them with both face-to-face and online teachers. The end result will be students who embrace new control over their learning path, and the options that are now available to them.

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