

## **How to adopt blended Learning in your Classroom**

**Problem/Guiding Question:** How do I adopt a blended approach in my own learning environment with limited supports or infrastructure?

### **What is your original/starting learning environment?**

Our school is a K-7, we have 10 classrooms with challenges. There are 13 educational assistants, 3 learning assistants, and 1 resource teacher. My current teaching assignment is a regular 3 / 4 split of 23 students. The current delivery of instruction is typical of a grade 3 / 4 classroom. Lessons are generally large group with assignments that follow. I have a smartboard to aid in teaching. Expectation and completion of tasks vary to aid in differentiating the learning. I teach all subjects except for music. The classroom is average size and space. There are no extra classrooms or spaces within the school. The hallways are narrow, so there is no room outside the classroom for small groups to gather. The academic levels are generally low and vary greatly. One third of the class is at least a year behind in math, reading, and writing. The behaviour of the students is generally good. Students work and play well together. Although listening to instructions can be difficult, I believe that the students can rise to any challenge. There is a teaching assistant assigned to my classroom to support a medical condition with one of my students. The assistant is available to help all students, but might need to support the medical condition without notice. I have easy access to technology. We have a computer lab, a set of 30 iPad minis, and a set of 15 iPad minis. We also have a smartboard at the front of the class. Unfortunately, we do not have any money to purchase programs for student use.

### **What problems you are trying to address by making this change?**

The problems I am trying to address are academic and on-task behaviour. "According to George T. Duran, Leaders can take their ideas a step further by defining them as SMART (specific, measurable, assignable, realistic, and time-related) objectives" (Blended: Using Disruptive Innovation to Improve Schools pg. 101). The two "SMART" goals are not only will allow me to be successful, but will allow me to measure the success. My first goal is to have students showing an increase in on-task behaviour. By collecting data before the new lessons

are introduced will enable me to know whether my goals have been met. Generally speaking I have about 25% of my class is off-task at any one time. They might be seating there quietly, but they are not always actively academically involved. Any decrease to off-task behaviour would be good, 20% would be very good and 15% would be excellent.

The second goal is academic. Students reading levels are very low. One third of my grade three four class is reading at least one year below grade level. Students have not increased their reading levels one grade per year. Over a six month period I hope to show an increase of six months equivalent in reading levels. Simply put, we cannot fall further behind. If 100% of my targeted lower third of my class show normal progress that would be excellent results, if 75% very good and 50% would be consider good.

The two problems go hand in hand. To increase academic levels, students need to stay on-task. If they stay on-task, then their academics will increase. To continue to teach in a regular fashion is not an option. Students are not being successful in their current educational system. A change is needed. It is time for a disruption! Blended learning will slowly be introduced using a station rotation model.

### **What would you like students to control (Time, place, path, pace)?**

I believe that students do better if they have some control over their education. Being only 8 or 9 years old, students will need to be guided and choices will need to be limited. Students will be encouraged to engage in the programs outside of school time. I am not encouraging students to get more screen time, but rather replace some of their game time with educational learning. Students will have some control over the path they take. Students will have the ability to choose what they would like to work on and the software will increase the challenges when the students are ready. For example, the student may choose to read nonfiction and the software will increase the reading level as the student show mastery. Clearly, the pace of instruction will be mirrored to the student's ability.

At the more basic level, student can work at their own pace either by going ahead, keeping pace, or by slowing down if they need to review something. If students are actively using

technology, then the teacher is free to support learners in many other ways. (Blended: Using Disruptive Innovation to Improve Schools pg. xxv1).

### **What is the role of the teacher?**

To use the station rotation method, the teacher must be both manager and teacher. First the manager must organize the materials used, the flow of the students, and make sure the learning environment is conducive to learning. The materials could include the hardware and software used, pencil and paper exercises, and tools for small group instruction. The hardware might need some trouble shooting to solve technological problems. The flow of the students involves both the movement of students in a logical way, but also the timing of the tasks involved. Because there could be three different activities going on in the classroom, students could easily be distracted and lead off task. The teacher, therefore, will also be required to supervise all activities too.

The teacher is also responsible for teaching. The main teaching job is to work with small groups at their own level of ability and interest. Not only will small groups give students more opportunity to be involved in learning, but the teacher will be able to determine what the individual needs of each learner are. The teacher is also a facilitator too. Because the other two groups of students are working on their own, the teacher will need to train the students to solve problems on their own. This may involve peer helping, asking the learning assistant teacher, or to simply work on another problem until the teacher is available.

I will require a "functional blended learning team" (Blended: Using Disruptive Innovation to Improve Schools pg. 120) to help make the classroom level project happen. Since this is a classroom level project, much of the work will be done by the teacher.

### **What changes to the physical environment will you make?**

Since we do not have any money in the budget to make and physical changes, I will have to make do with what is available within the classroom and around the school. Our chairs and desks are not attached to each other, so that gives me the opportunity to make a variety of

group configurations. I will use different configurations as needed. To run a station rotation model in my classroom requires desks for students to work on pencil and paper activities. Students can also use a carpet area at the back of the room if more space is needed. Students will also use their desks when they are using the iPad minis. Sitting well using the iPads is also safer as they are less likely to be dropped. The third need is for small group instruction. The front of the room already has a smartboard, so small group instruction will be normally done there. A couple of tables will be needed for the small groups. Using the current physical environment keeps the changes to a minimum and, hopefully, less distracting to students.

### **What software or hardware might you use?**

Our school is fortunate to have a couple of sets of iPad minis and a computer lab. We only have 10 classrooms to share these with. I normally will not require the whole set of iPads, so sharing with another classroom is possible too. The computer lab has 32 older mac computers. Most classes only use the lab once per week, so the lab is often available. The computer lab is connected to the library, so it is possible to rotate groups between the computer lab and library and still supervise both groups.

Software is a problem. Our district wants to use our devices as a tool. Our technology department does not support software that they would see as “drill and kill” or games. Many programs that I would use to support learning would fall into one of those categories. Any software that I use must be free, work in the computer lab, or on the iPad minis. The two main programs that I will be using are [studyladder.ca](http://studyladder.ca) and [prodigygame.com](http://prodigygame.com). [Spellingcity](http://Spellingcity.com) is another free program that will be used, but to a lesser degree. I have also secured using DreamBox for two months on a trial bases starting in January.

[Studyladder.ca](http://Studyladder.ca) has many lessons for teaching and learning vocabulary, spelling lessons, and reading for comprehension. The program keeps track of student’s progress and where they need the most help. The teacher can assign work individually, in groups, or to the whole class. The program also supports all other subjects too. Because the programs are fun, the students will also want to work at home.

Spellingcity supports the current spelling program in the classroom. The same words are programmed into lessons online. Students can use this program to reinforce their lessons. It is not a teaching tool. Students are able to login at home and practice there too.

The prodigygame is an adventure game where students can move their avatar through the make believe lands. They are trying to become a wizard and encounter problems along the way. The teacher can assign what problems the students work on. The program evaluates how well the students have done on each assignment. Students are able to use this program away for school too. Prodigygame will provide help to solve problems, and show solutions if need be. Although the Prodigygame is math based, it is still used to aid students in improving their on-task goals.

Dreambox is a commercial product to act as the student's math program. When it is available to me I will replace the prodigygame with it. If the program proves very useful, then I will go to the parent group to see if they will fund it. I will be very curious as to how well the program does comparison to standard teaching. Other factors will be how much the students enjoy it, or whether the stand alone package can free the teacher to support learners individually. The cost to run Dreambox is \$25.00 per student. Not that much, but when your budget is \$0.00 it is comparably expensive.

### **How will you mix/balance online and F2F modalities?**

Teaching is always a balancing act. Using the station rotation model provides for a supervised mix of F2F and online learning. Having students rotate around through stations gives the students an opportunity to work at their own pace, choose their own path, along with getting small group instruction and individual help. It is the best of both worlds. Grade three and four students need to have their education closely monitored. Being able to support their online learning within the classroom teaches them how to best learn when they are online outside the classroom. My station to station model will mainly involve a working station, an online component, and small group instruction. The station rotation model supports learning in many ways. I do not want to students to be looking at screens for more than 25 minutes so moving stations supports this philosophy. Young students cannot sit in one spot too long anyways.

Changing activities keeps the student's interest up and stops them from becoming bored. Keeping their focus keeps them on-task. The balancing act is well monitored and can change to support the learner very quickly.

**How will the different modalities provide an integrated learning experience?**

Each component of the station rotation model supports each other. For example, students might receive small group instruction from the teacher on consonant blends. Next they move to the seat work station where the students work blends doing paper and pencil activities. When they move online a consonant blend activity will be available there too. The learning experience can be from a broader prospective. Students could simply be working on improving vocabulary and, thus, giving students more choice in what they can do. Having a variety of learning experience allows for students to choose how they best learn too. Using different modalities widens the student's learning experiences. Having different modalities may help students to discover how and when they learn best.