FLIPPD

A BLENDED APPROACH TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Contents

I. Acknowledgements
II. Introduction
III. Environment: VOISE Academy High School
IV. The Problem
V. The Solution
VI. Theoretical Background
VII. Cycle 1
    a. Research Questions
    b. First Actions
    c. Artifacts
    d. Evaluation
    e. Initial Data
    f. Teacher Quotes
    g. Shifting Towards the Shared Mentoring Group
    h. Overcoming Roadblocks
    i. Reflection
VIII. Cycle 2
    a. Research Questions
    b. First Actions
    c. Artifacts
    d. Evaluation
    e. Product Demo - Chapter 1: Blended Learning Models
    f. Product Demo - FLIPPD Activity: Wait, Where Do I Stand?
    g. Data
    h. Reflection
IX. Cycle 3
    a. Research Questions
    b. First Actions
    c. Artifacts
    d. Evaluation
    e. Discussion Group Feedback
    f. Implementation Plan
    g. Constructing the School's Lifeforce
    h. Reflection
X. Final Reflection
XI. References

Acknowledgements

Those of us in the realm of K12 education found ourselves struggling to cope with the balance between the roles of an agent for positive change and a student looking to meet deadlines. These challenges, while present in my work, were no more than minor speed bumps along the journey. While I wish the credit for this rest upon my own shoulders the truth is I could not have accomplished such an engrossing project without the support of an amazing team. In all areas of my Action Research Project I was blessed to have just that.

The majority of my Action Research Project was accomplished offsite. Due to this distance it was paramount that there was someone in place to ensure progress at the school level. Jacqueline Kaminsky, only in her second year at the school, exceeded all expectations I had for the mentor teacher. Despite having her own full class schedule, and all necessary planning and grading that goes with it, Jackie took on the necessary logistical and leadership responsibilities. Without her support and innovative ideas the project would not have made it beyond the first cycle. It is my hope that Jackie was able to benefit in some way from the success she allowed myself, and those she helped along the way, to have.

Another leader at the school, and one who has always been my biggest advocate, is Bonita Walker-Jones. A founder of the school, Bonita has always been at the forefront of blended learning and a natural mentor for all her colleagues. Like Jackie, Bonita had a full teaching schedule but was also progressing through her own doctoral program. Despite all this she was able to lend support for the mentoring group and help me navigate through my own research. Bonita has always been one of the hardest working teachers in education. Her contributions only served to solidify this.

The focus of the Action Research Project was on assisting new teachers and those at the school were incredibly dedicated to the process. All three teachers: Budway Ferris, Brianna Harte, and Merrilynn Martin did an incredible job balancing yet another role for themselves within the school. Both Budway and Brianna were in their first year teaching. Merrilynn was a veteran teacher but it was her first time in a blended learning environment. Unfortunately the work we had done, while designed to assist their pedagogy, could not have been accomplished without additional burdens on their already heavy workload. The three were not simply passive recipients of new tools or strategy, but rather highly active agents within the process: constantly altering the path through their feedback and practices. This group of five teachers, all varying in experience, offered me more than just the chance to complete the project. They allowed me to grow as a professional and examine the problem from multiple perspectives. Again, my ultimate goal is that they were able to say the same.

Outside of the "Shared Mentoring Group" there are many others that allowed the project to be successful. The principal at the school is Todd Yarch – someone who has served as my own personal mentor over the years. Without his openness to new ideas (a quality many administrators lack) there would not have been the freedom present to complete the various cycles throughout the project.

Our Cadre within the Master of Arts in Learning Technologies at Pepperdine University had incredible professors. All of them contributed to our projects: from research to implementation. Valerie Schmitz, in her first year as a Pepperdine faculty member, was our primary advisor during the project. The Cadre could not have had a better teacher to lead us through our yearlong journey. Valerie was exactly what we needed: organized, available, and always willing to offer the intelligence and guidance when we were at a loss for ideas. Future Cadre members are in excellent hands.

Finally, the support we all received from our fellow Cadre mates was one of our greatest assets. We all found ourselves struggling with issues that were both reflective of our own and completely foreign, allowing us both an assured source of advice and a fresh approach to the issue. This was especially true within our learning circles. Throughout the process Kim, Mary, and Pam helped me stay focused, but most importantly: sane.

Introduction

When first tasked with selecting a topic for my Action Research Project a group of colleagues and I were in the process of writing a significant grant to open up a new school. During one of our many discussions the topic of teacher preparedness arose. One colleague and I debated the evolution of our professional development model. We agreed that it was a far cry from the democratic process that served as the foundation of the school in its first few years. With so may of us new to blended learning we relied on each other to make sense of our shared experiences. Consequently, many of us grew into school leaders as we tackled the technology and pedagogical practices that worked best for our students. As the school grew and evolved so to did our professional development sessions. Time that was once spent on understanding new technologies or best practices now shifted to matters deemed more important by the district (a trend that was backed up by initial data).

The shift in professional development had little effect on the more veteran teachers at the school. The people that struggled as a result of the change were the new teachers at the school. These new teachers – both in their first year of teaching or simply new to blended learning – had far too many tasks to juggle: honing their classroom management, creating their own curriculum, and understanding their role as a teacher. Now, with blended learning involved, they were also asked to learn and implement a number of highly detailed learning technologies while redefining their understanding of what it means to be a teacher.

Every teacher at the school had to learn the new technology and rethink their role as a teacher. What made the school, and its teachers, so successful early on was the fact that it was a shared experience. For these new teachers the problem was isolation. Professional development was focused on state assessments and school logistics. Little time was devoted towards established technology and best practices. As such, teachers struggled to adapt to the high expectations. With no supports in place, and arguably nobody to turn to, most would revert back to traditional practices.

My colleague and I discussed how we could prepare these new teachers without increasing the already enormous bourdons that the leadership team faced. We wanted to create an online course that would detail the technologies used and the practices that would ensure their success. New teachers would have access to tutorials in order to give them a better understanding of how to use the tools at their disposal. After that we would use professional development time more efficiently in order to build on their initial knowledge. With that a great, new idea was born. However, like many teachers with great ideas, reality intervened and it was put off.

My decision to select that topic as the focus of my Action Research Project was almost immediate. Professional development was always an area that I enjoyed leading and I knew that it had the potential to greatly impact the practices at the school. During the early stages of the project the work was entirely focused on creating an online curriculum that would serve as a guide for new teachers. What I found after hours of research, and, most importantly, after discussing the topic with my colleagues, was that the emphasis needed to be placed upon creating a shared experience. Admittedly the online curriculum severely lacked the capacity to bring the staff together. As the project evolved the curriculum became less of the focus and more of a highlight as it shifted towards the interactions between new teachers. The Shared Mentoring Group, as it came to be called, would be the most significant component of the project.

Environment

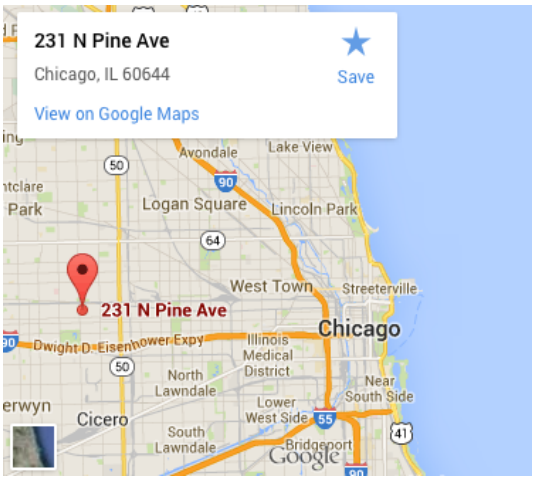
VOISE Academy High School was founded in 2008. A new school as part of the Renaissance 2010 initiative in Chicago, VOISE implemented a blended learning model for grades 9-12. Blended learning or a "hybrid" model is the combination of technology-driven, digital and online curriculum with a classroom teacher. Each student carries a laptop to and from their classes, which were heavily integrated with learning technology. Today, hundreds of schools operate within some type of blended learning environment. At the time, however, there were relatively few (6, as far as I can remember, that operated within a full-scale blended learning model). I was the head of the Social Studies department along side seven other teachers – all of which were the department chairs, as we were the only teachers. Being led by the administration, and with the help of the supportive staff, we ventured into uncharted territory in an area struggling to cope with the cycle of poverty and poor educational options.

VOISE at a Glance
Location: Austin community (west side of Chicago)
Principal: Todd Yarch
Staff: 35
Students: 400
Black: 98%
Hispanic: 2%
Low-income: 96.5%

Now in its sixth year of existence VOISE has achieved success in an area where it is not often found. All four grade levels are filled, which in many schools is an achievement of its own, and staffed by an energetic group of teachers. The administration, though small, is highly effective and hands on. With the help of the dean and the support staff the small school runs efficiently.

What allows VOISE to succeed where so many other schools failed is not simply a result of the new model or the technology used. The relationships the teachers have with their students are as good as I have seen at a school, which comes from the teacher assuming a different role. No longer lecturing or spending the entire class period instructing they are now free to work closely with students in small groups and individual settings. The technology allows

this to happen but it takes a special group of people to follow through with what comes next.



Something I have always been proud of at VOISE is our model for professional development. With the amount of technology we use in combination with a learning model that is unfamiliar to many incoming teachers, this is a critical aspect of the school. Failure to implement a successful model would result in an unsuccessful school. As a new teacher the technology and chance to lead excited me. I took on every opportunity to help in the areas that I felt comfortable; and each year the responsibilities grew along with the school. In large part due to the support of the administration I was able to go from leading school-wide meetings, to district, regional, and national sessions on various aspects of blended learning. These opportunities are what ultimately led me to Pepperdine to continue my studies and find new ways to implement new models to areas in need.

The Problem

Blended learning has shown continuous growth during the 21st century. According to the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL), 27 states have virtual schools and 31 states (and Washington D.C.) have full-time online statewide schools (iNACOL, 2013). In a similar study, the Innosight Institute (now known as the Clayton Christensen Institute for Disruptive Innovation) identified 45,000 K-12 students that participated in some form of online education in the year 2000. By 2009, that number had grown to over 3 million students (Innosight, 2011). The study also suggested that most of the growth was occurring in blended-learning environments, or, in a setting where students learn online in an adult-supervised environment (Innosight, 2011). Depending on the type of school model being implemented this could be on a part time basis or consist of the entire schedule in full-implementation models. While the numbers of students participating in blended learning in a K-12 setting continues to grow, this reflects only a small sample size in comparison to the projects for postsecondary exposure to virtual and blended course offerings. It is projected that by 2014, half of all postsecondary students will take at least one class online by 2014 (Christensen, 2008).

With such a dramatic increase in the number of students participating in online and blended learning educators must work to acclimate themselves to a changing educational environment. As students become more interconnected with technology and districts around the country mobilize to stay ahead of the curve, teachers must mirror these changes effectively in their classrooms. Unfortunately,

recent practices and the current implementation of teacher training have not reflected the move towards blended learning. While there have been some attempts to implement the effective use of technology, they remain isolated and complex, and as such, no consolidated picture on how to introduce technology through teacher training has been developed (Kay, 2006).

The aforementioned complexity is a result of a combination of factors. For seasoned teachers, their traditional practices have been previously constructed and reinforced, making it difficult to evolve. As argued by Carl Rogers, "Learning which involves a change in self organization – in the perception of oneself – is threatening and tends to be resisted (Rogers, 1969, pg159). For new teachers, the learning process is difficult enough even with the absence of technology. Within blended learning there exists an even greater complexity of issues. Not only would it require seasoned teachers to drastically alter their role within the classroom, but it would also pose problems for new teachers in that they must master a plethora of educational technologies in combination with the understanding of what it means to be a teacher. Between both parties of teachers there is a unifying issue in that their training has been fixated on the traditional model. On top of that, current professional development models within schools, even those that adopt blended learning strategies, refer back to traditional methods of rote memorization – often times placing emphasis on aspects not concerning instruction.

Another issue is an understanding of the balance between teacher and technology. Unfortunately, based on my own experiences and observing the practices of others, most new teachers come in with a traditional mindset. Especially in at-risk communities - where new models are needed most - most teachers are looking for any job and not necessarily one that deals with technology or blended learning. While a successful professional development model can alleviate the pressure of learning how to teach within a new model and operate various types of learning technologies, new (and old) teachers often times revert back to trusted practices when problematic situations occur. Because the school's Flex Model is based less on blueprint and more on teacher-by-teacher practices, there are few systems in place to ensure the approach undertaken is truly blended.

Most frequently, "standards" have taken center stage in the area of professional development. Previously concerned with statewide standards, the focus is shifting to the adoption of Common Core State Standards. Forty-three states, in addition to Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico have agreed to adopt these standards (Kendall, 2011). In his book, *Understanding the Common Core*, Kendall also addresses the "vacuum" in curriculum support. Due to the fact that the standards were developed before the curriculum, there will be an increased burden upon school districts – and teachers – to support their implementation.

The purpose of my Action Research Project was not to negatively evaluate the adoption of different professional development focus points. It is understood that each district, school, and teacher have identified areas of concern and support

that are personal to them. Instead, it was important to evaluate proper learning methodologies in an attempt to correctly apply them to address the issue of teacher unpreparedness in blended learning environments. In order to prepare teachers, both new and seasoned, a multi-faceted approach should be taken. And, in a reflection of that approach, the appropriate learning theories were addressed in a manner that supports the path to preparedness.

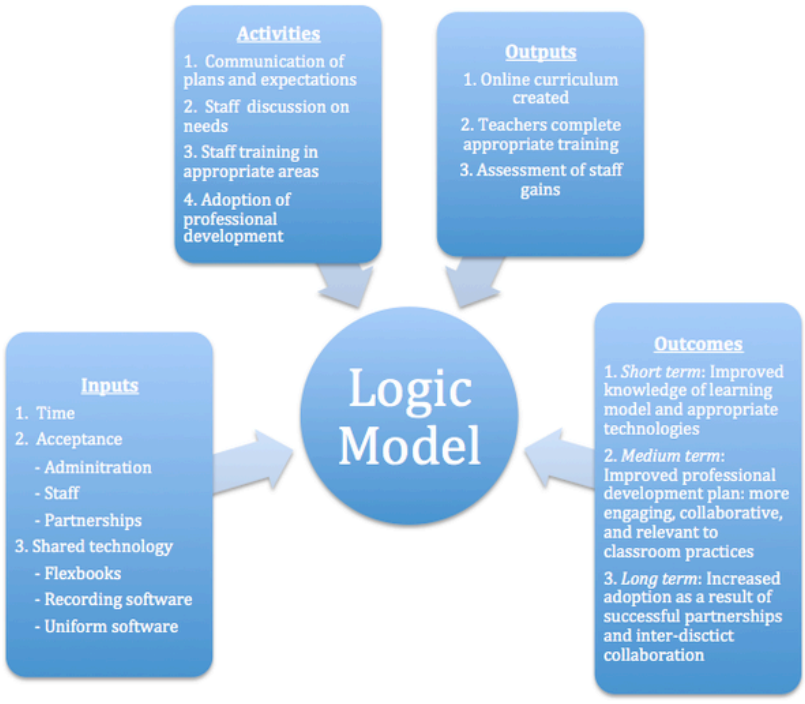
With both a personal understanding of the needs of the school and, due to extensive research, the changing climate of our educational system I identified four key "problems" that needed to be addressed:

- **Problem 1**: New teachers do not understand the learning technologies associated with a "blended" classroom
- **Problem 2**: New teachers do nut understand the various blended learning models
- **Problem 3**: New teachers are still struggling with traditional notions of classroom management and appropriate pedagogy
- **Problem 4**: Supports are not in place for teachers to experience shared learning and to serve as an outlet for discussions

The Solution

The first step towards solving these problems was proper planning. Two methods of preparation proved incredible successful when attempting to draft a solution to the problems: Logic Model and Force Field Analysis. Throughout the entire process, however, the role of research – both theoretical and practical – served to inspire new ideas and ensure any action taken was backed by appropriate learning theories.

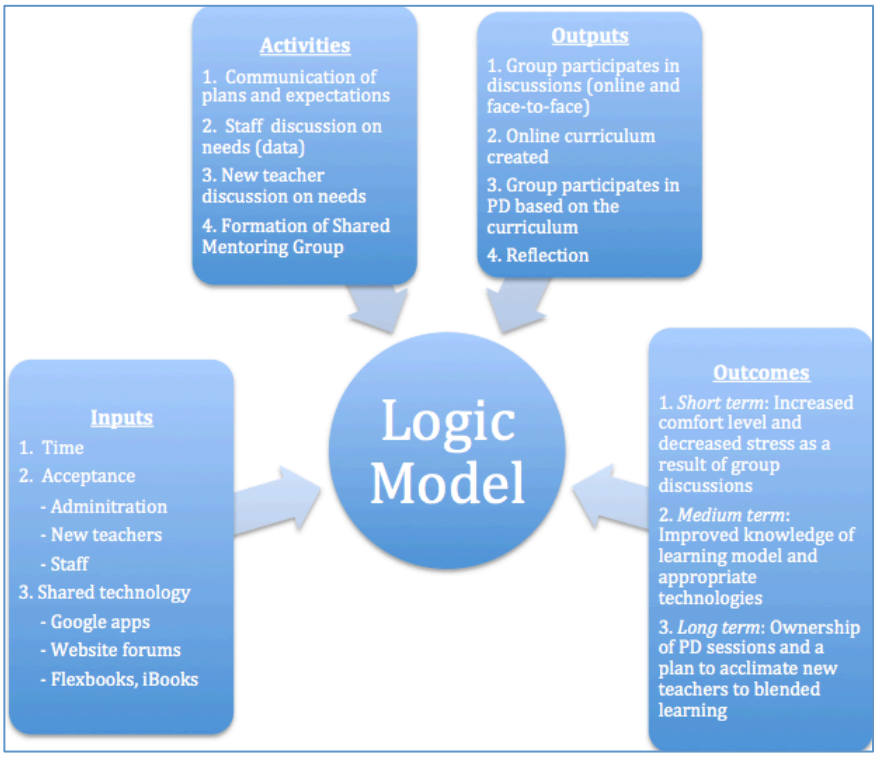
Logic Model



The figure above was the original logic model for my Action Research focus. The four key areas of Logic Models are: Inputs, Activities, Outputs, and Outcomes. Below is a brief description of each and how it applies to my project.

- **Inputs:** What needs to be invested for successful implementation (Key input: time)
- **Activities**: Tasks to be completed (Key activity: Early communication regarding key areas)
- **Outputs**: Result/production of activities (Key output: digital curriculum is stored and accessed)
- **Outcomes**: Gains as a result of successful implementation; has 3 stages: short, medium, and long (Key outcome: Short term success within work place)

One could clearly see through a brief analysis of the Logic Model that the early focus was entirely on creating an online curriculum to help foster more innovative professional development. The time being dedicated was focused on drafting early chapters for implementation. The acceptance of the administration and staff was based on a proposed commitment to more professional development. The partnerships I had hoped to forge were those that would allow the creation of expert-drafted chapters. Even the shared technology identified were all tools for creating online content. Activities, Outputs, and Outcomes further solidified that focus. It should be noted that both the Logic Model and Force Field Analysis (see below) were created before any action was taken or school data was collected. After the early data and careful reflection the Logic Model evolved to better reflect the needs of teachers:



Force Field Analysis

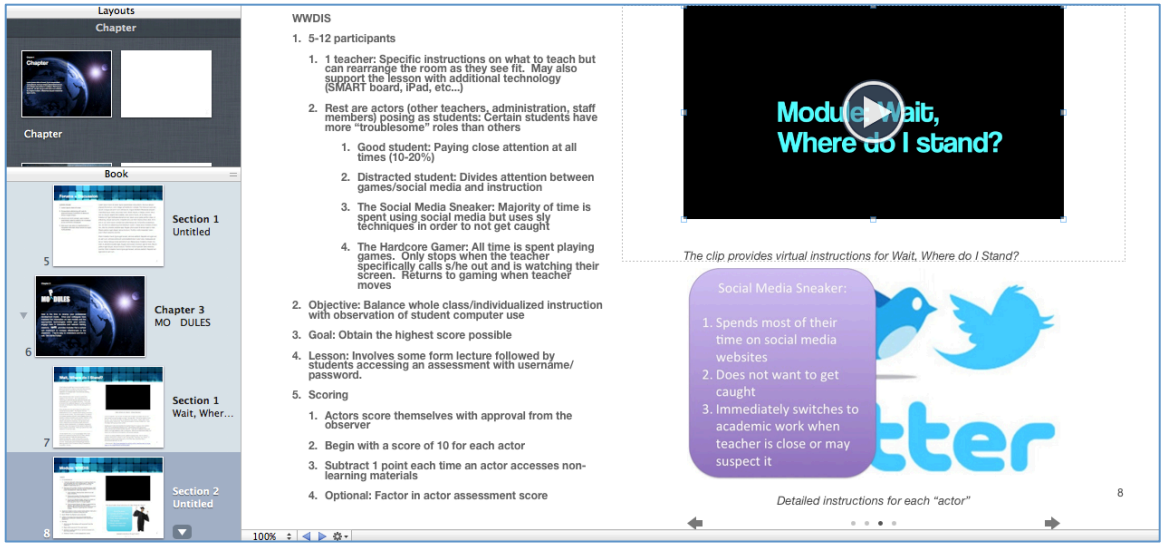
The model below is based on Kurt Lewin's Force Field Analysis as it applies to my Action Research Project. The primary arguments for implementation were the number of schools adopting new learning models (virtual and blended) as well as the number of teachers that will be required to staff these schools. On the opposite side of the argument is the typical resistance faced when attempting to implement a new policy or additional requirement for the workplace. Normally this would be of much greater importance, however, when dealing with the staff and administration at my school I felt confident that the established professional development model would lend itself favorably to the successful implementation of my Action Research focus. Personally, my biggest concern was creating an innovative approach to Professional Development, as it seems it is quite redundant in the area of Action Research. Also, though it is a similar viewpoint I had in regards to the professional development model in my workplace, there was the possibility of relying too heavily on others to fulfill the task required of them.

For	Score	Plan	Score	Against
Large number of new school models being implemented	5	Create online curriculum for teachers entering new school models: Types of models, technologies, methodology, etc...	3	Backlash against teachers not wanting to add to their workload/take a new approach
Few number of teachers entering workforce adequately prepared for new school models	5		2	Counting on colleagues and other contacts to assist in the work
Encourages more engaging professional development	3		2	Based on previous AR projects, PD seems to be a redundant area
Adaptability to various schools and possibilities for expansion	2		2	Balancing the scope of ambitions with realistic expectations for implementation
Possibility of creating platform for new teachers to be a guide to their practice	4		2	Concerns of measurable data based on student/staff improvement
Total	19		11	

Though the analysis proved heavily in favor of action, it should be noted that there is bias present when weighing the pros and cons of something one wishes to implement. Despite this, I feel the Force Field Analysis was done with fidelity and accurately represented the sides of both arguments.

FLIPPD: Online Curriculum and Blended Approach to Professional Development

Once the Logic Model and Force Field Analysis were completed the focus was placed on designing an online curriculum. "FLIPPD" was a term given to represent the "flipped" nature of the approach to professional development. Each section would cover an aspect of blended learning or specific learning technologies associated with the school. The sections began with a brief overview of blended learning and the different types of school models that fall into that category. With a basic understanding of the different models teachers would then move on to aspects of teaching within a blended classroom (e.g. *Wait, Where Do I Stand*, which covered teacher positioning in the classroom). These chapters were not written entirely by me but rather taken from collaborative partnerships with larger organizations. The International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) and The Clayton Christensen Institute for Disruptive Innovation (formerly Innosight) provided much of the reports used within the chapters. Another leader within blended learning, Tom Vander Ark, was also cited through his work on gettingSmart.com.



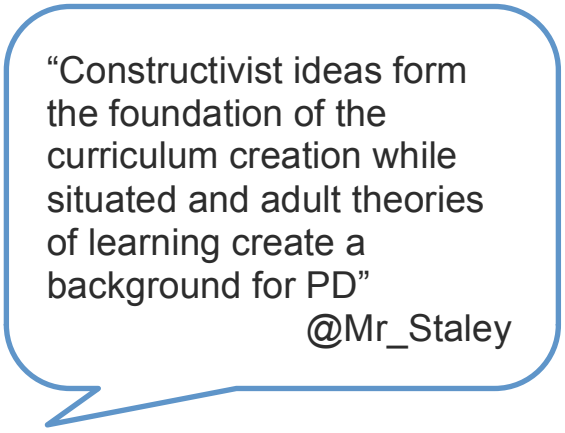
Sample Chapter: "Wait, Where Do I Stand?"

The chapters on best practices were primarily text-based with visual elements and videos included to further engagement. Each chapter was then connected with a "Module." These Modules included a number of content sources – text, video, virtual simulations, and activities – for teachers to access prior to a face-to-face professional development session. During these sections teachers would take on different roles in order to better understand the pedagogy or technology associated with the Module.

Theoretical Background

With the influx of learning technologies in schools there must be background information, data, and best practices available at all times to the teacher. From there, schools can create an environment that fosters communities of practice and a professional development model more relevant and reflective of classroom practices. To support the development of an online curriculum, the theory of constructivism was identified and evaluated in the context of blended learning environments and instructional technology. Reinforcing the need of an alternative approach to teacher training, the theories of adult learning and situated learning demonstrate the importance of the correct approach to training teachers. Just as the online curriculum is reinforced by professional development the learning theories are mirrored to demonstrate how constructivism is interconnected - in this scenario - with adult and situated learning theories. Finally, to support the theories being applied to both a need for a combination of an online curriculum and professional development, the argument in favor of a move towards a "blended" approach to professional development will be upheld. In the area of professional development a blended approach can often be referred to as a "flipped" approach; the acquisition of basic data is done from a remote location allowing for more interactive on-site sessions.

Here is a brief collection of the resources and theories that helped me the most: Constructivist (Bruner), Constructivism and Instructional Design (Jonasen), Adult Learning (Knowles, Rogers, Cross), Situated Learning (Lave, Wenger), Communities of Practice (Wenger), Blended Learning and Professional Development (iNACOL, Clayton Christensen Institute, Bill and Melinda Gates, Department of Education), and my own personal data collection (VOISE).



The research could be divided into two separate sections: theoretical and practical. Constructivism, Adult Learning, Situated Learning, and Communities of Practice all fall into the realm of theoretical (though each clearly based on practical research with tangible results). Practical research, at least in how it applies to my own work, was focused on studies that I was familiar with or had actually contributed to during my time as a teacher. While the learning theories apply to the construction of knowledge, the later of the two sections applied to the growth or blended learning. Both played an equally important role in the formation of both the online curriculum and shared mentoring group.

Constructivism

Seymour Papert, basing theories off constructivist ideas, described the process of learning as a reconstruction rather than a transmission of knowledge. That learning is most powerful when a meaningful product can be created from learned experiences (Papert, 1986). Prior to Papert, Jerome Bruner reinforced the theoretical framework of learning being a construction of new ideas and concepts based on previous experiences and knowledge. In terms of Bruner's theory of instruction, there are four major aspects to consider: 1) specify experiences which implant a predisposition to learning, 2) knowledge should be structured so that it is readily grasped, 3) effective sequencing, and 4) the use of rewards and punishment throughout the continued learning process. As Bruner argues, the notion that learning is more of a broad idea than a skill is at the heart of the educational process (Bruner, 1961).

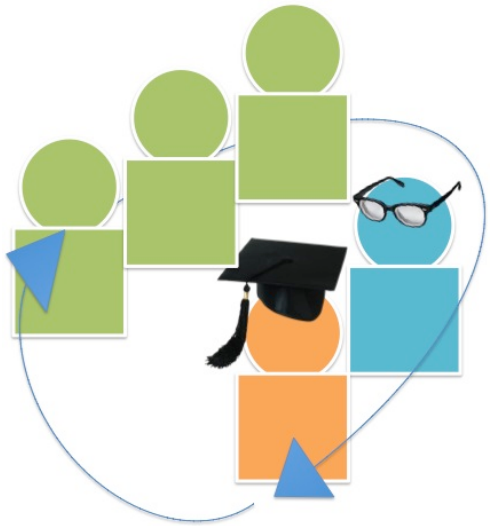
The theories of Bruner and Papert helped form the basis for the structure of the curriculum: teachers would access the online curriculum whenever they deemed it necessary and would later use the acquired knowledge and skills to apply them in educational settings. Initially in my Action Research Project this took the form of the connected Modules after each chapter. As state previously, these Modules were activities designed to facilitate interaction between teachers in various roles (e.g. a teacher, student, and/or collaborative partner). The Modules would also be connected with an idea of learning or a specific learning technology within the curriculum. The Constructivist Theory was the first step in helping me realize that basic knowledge and skills was merely the first step towards true learning. In order to achieve it, though, a more social approach was necessary.

Situated Learning and Communities of Practices

As my Action Research Project evolved it became heavily influenced by the work of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger; primarily their theory of situated learning, specifically in the areas of apprenticeships and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Interestingly, Lave and Wenger sought to observe practices outside of schools (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Not only does this approach provide a new approach to learning but it also provides more of a foundation for adult learning, as their observations focused on various professions and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The primary component to Lave and Wenger's studies was the idea of Legitimate Peripheral Participation. "By this we mean to draw attention to the point that learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community" (Wenger & Lave, 1991). Building upon the constructivist approach to curriculum in collaboration with adult learning, the idea that learning occurs in a social environment, or community of practice (Wenger & Lave, 1991) the argument for a need of a more relevant approach to professional development is strengthened.

Situated Learning had, initially, been less influential than Constructivism. As alluded to earlier, this was more of a case of shaping the theory to fit the problem and solution. As the Shared Mentoring Group took on a higher priority so too did the role of Situated Learning and Communities of Practice in my research. Once it became clear that new teachers needed social supports rather than a new tool to learn I began looking at colleagues who could ensure its success. My immediate reaction was to ask for the assistance of one of the founding teachers, Bonita Walker-Jones, for her expertise. Basing the structure more on Situated Learning and Communities of Practice it occurred to me that the new teachers could benefit from someone more like themselves. Jackie Kaminsky was in her second year at VOISE Academy and was a teacher I had worked with a lot in the previous year. Jackie had taken a strong interest in both blended learning and the different technologies, and was a natural leader.

Lave and Wenger observed that during apprenticeships adults learned more from their peers than the experts. The Shared Mentoring Group, in order to be successful, needed to be structured in a manner similar to that. With Jackie acting as a mentor for the new teachers, Bonita acted as a mentor for Jackie, and somewhat of a supervisor for the group. Within this structure the three new teachers drove much of the content and discussions; often times in the form of questions. Jackie could provide feedback from a perspective of someone who had recently been in that position. Bonita, the expert within the group, could provide insight ranging from best practices to the inner-workings of the school. As time went on the new teachers gained not only new knowledge and skills but also confidence in their own abilities and approach to discussions. Ideally – and I think the project results reflected this – the new teachers moved closer towards securing a role as a mentor teacher. Likewise, Jackie thrived in her role as a mentor. Her contribution towards the organization of the group and providing expertise allowed her to become more of an expert.



Shared Mentoring Group Structure

Adult Learning (Andragogy)

The notion of apprenticeship and situated learning, as it applies to instructional technology in professional development, should be viewed within the context of adult learning. Carl Rogers observed that all human beings have a natural propensity to learn (Rogers, 1969). While many theoretical perspectives place emphasis on the cognitive development within children and young adults, Rogers, and others like him, examine learning from an adult perspective. The role of the teacher in such a scenario, is to facilitate learning by setting a positive climate for

teaching, clarifying the purposes of the learner(s), organizing and making available learning resources, balancing intellectual and emotional components of learning, and sharing feelings and thoughts with learners without ironclad control over the process (Rogers, 1969). Perhaps the key element of this environment, as one can find in other arguments by similar theorists - namely Cross and Knowles - is that there is a direct connection between the knowledge learned and the practices, experiences, and social setting in which the learners operate (Rogers, Knowles, Cross).

Malcolm Knowles, in part influenced by Rogers, coined the term "andragogy" to describe his approach to adult learning. Similar to Rogers, he further emphasized the self-directed nature of adults. Other points of emphasis corresponding with Rogers and the proposed approach to professional development includes an explanation of why particular knowledge is being learned, learning built upon exponentially, problem-solving approach to social roles, and an immediate value of proposed topics (Knowles, 1973). Within his approach, not only should selected knowledge be applicable to experiences and social roles, but also that experience is the richest resource (Knowles, 1973). Knowles was, in fact, far ahead of his time in his approach to learning. In his book, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species,* Knowles states that "Adults have a deep need to be self-directing; the role of the teacher is to engage in a process of mutual inquiry with them rather than to transmit his or her knowledge to them and have them conform." Knowles then solidified the connection between constructivism, adult education, and today's approach to blended learning by clarifying that individual differences among learners increase with age. And, as a result of this, provisions must be made to account for differences in style, time, place, and pace of learning (Knowles, 1973). All of these descriptive features are strong components of blended learning strategies. For direct practices, instructors for adults need to focus less on what is being taught and more on role-playing and simulations as a facilitator rather than a lecturer or grader (Knowles, 1973).

"Individual differences among learners increase with age. And, as a result of this, provisions must be made to account for differences in style, time, place, and pace of learning."
Knowles, 1973

Knowles' vision, well before his time, provided the framework for blended professional development. The Shared Mentoring Group was almost entirely focused on discussion throughout the first Cycle. As we moved to Cycle 2 I wanted to place more emphasis on best practices. Back into the forefront came the online curriculum: FLIPPD. Instead of opening it up to the entire staff I wanted to tailor the experience for the first year teachers. Some of the sessions had been developed prior to any action, but as more data came in it became easier to craft chapters that would reflect the needs of the teachers. Basing the implementation off of the theories of Rogers and Knowles allowed the curriculum and sessions to be more

impactful. Teachers were presented with an activity that directly aligned to an area of need they identified instead of a random chapter they may or may not have had a connection with.

Reflection on Research

Immediately the research proved more in favor of creating a social environment for teachers. Constructivism proved to be a solid base for establishing an online curriculum. However, by using constructivism as a theoretical base it acknowledged the secondary role that the curriculum should play. My initial reaction to this was to create different chapters in the online curriculum: those that could be geared towards social and interactive professional development sessions. Admittedly this was stubborn on my part. It was a case of having your mind set on a solution and attempting to rework or mold one's findings to fit a certain way. It was not until I received the initial data from both the leadership team and new teachers that the focus began to evolve. From that point on both Situated Learning and Adult Learning had a much stronger emphasis on the actions taken.

Cycle 1

Research Questions

1. What information is deemed important by the leadership team and the new teachers targeted during research?
2. Subsequently, how can it be applied to an online curriculum?
3. What supports can be put in place to assist new teachers as they struggle with best practices (pedagogy, classroom management, and instruction)?

First Actions:

The first step of Cycle 1 was to establish a substantial amount of data on which further actions could be based. Two surveys were created: one for the leadership team (administration, Instructional Leadership Team, and department chairs) and the other for new teachers. The surveys were constructed with the following themes in mind: professional development model, relevant learning technologies, issues facing the school, issues facing new teachers, and the school's primary goals.

Once a baseline of data was collected it could then be applied to the online curriculum and the face-to-face professional development sessions. What I did not anticipate was the data having such an influence on the direction of the project. In truth my initial proposal was not too far off base from what was needed. The approach, however, needed adjustment in order to serve the needs of the teachers – primarily those in their first year – at the school.

Artifacts Collected

- Data from leadership team
- Data from new teachers (initial survey and skills assessment)
- Digital curriculum chapters
- Instructional videos

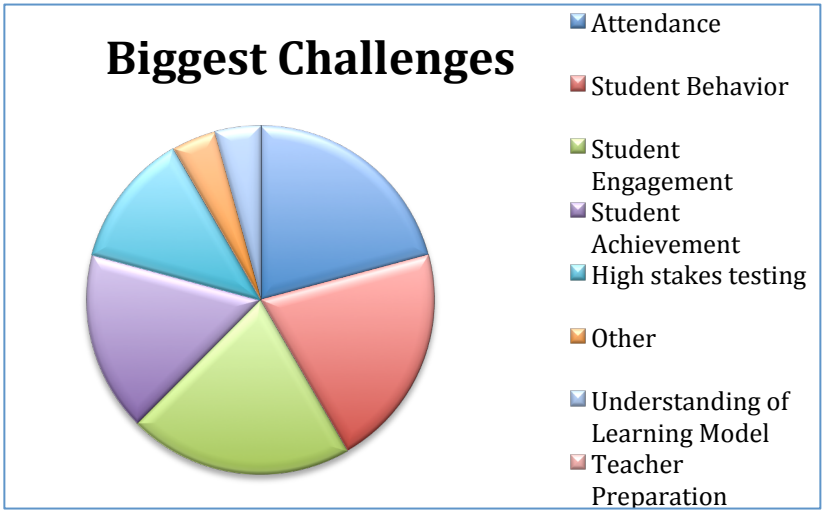
Evaluation

During Action Cycle 1 success was dependent upon the information received by teachers. Ideally the data should have matched with the technologies and practices identified early in the creation of the curriculum. Interviews with select members of the leadership team, especially those who could have contributed to the curriculum itself, determined how much of the burden of creation will be placed upon me as opposed to those I viewed as "experts" with their fields of study.

Cycle 1 will also be evaluated upon the success of forming a "Shared Mentoring" group. This group will consist of three first year teachers, one second year mentoring teacher, and a more senior, expert teacher. This group will meet synchronously and asynchronously (via online forums) in order to created a shared learning experience. This group will also evaluate and test units within the online curriculum.

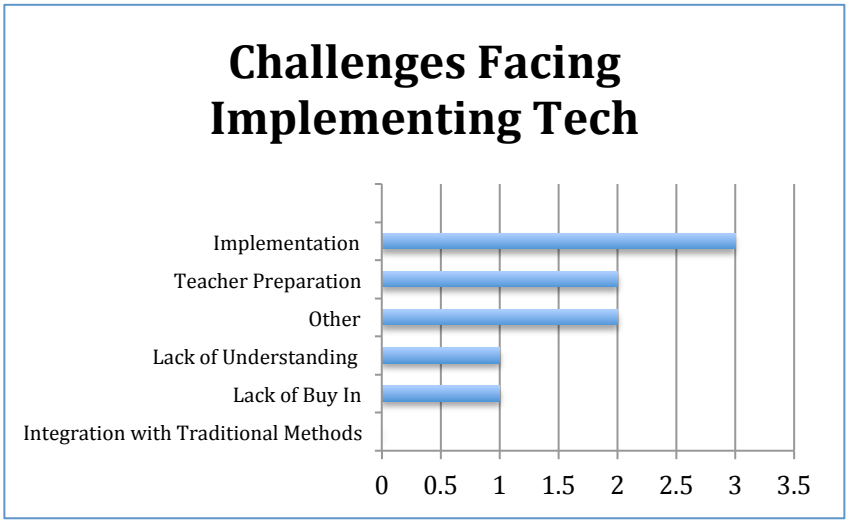
Initial Data

The data in Cycle 1 was based on the input of the leadership team and new teachers. Once that data was collected it was reviewed, compared to the existing curriculum samples, and ultimately influenced the direction of the online curriculum. More importantly, though, was that the data created a shift in the focus of the Action Research Project. Also, during this phase I held personal discussions with the leadership team, new teachers, and select members to gauge a personal understanding of what is needed and who can best assist in collaboration moving forward. It should be noted that not all data was included; only that deemed most relevant.

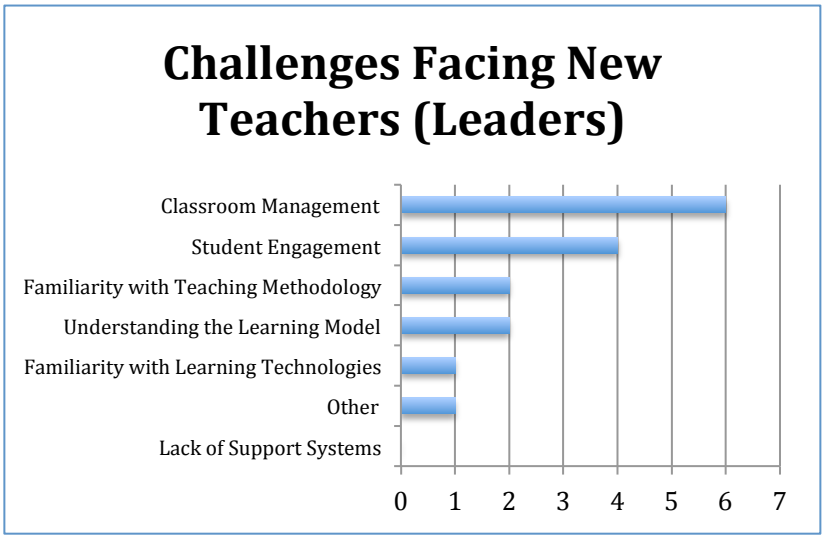


Determining the "Biggest Challenges" facing the school was instrumental in

solidifying the argument for particular chapters within the online curriculum. In line with theories of Adult Learning, without a connection to what teachers deemed relevant the professional development sessions would not be as successful. This data was unsurprising yet encouraging. From personal experiences attendance high stakes testing and other logistical issues were beginning to monopolize more of the developmental time within the school. The fact that teacher preparation and understanding of learning model were not identified as key issued appeared, at first, to be a roadblock. However, it is clear that instructional issues remain as both student engagement and achievement were frequently identified as issues. Theoretically better teacher preparation and an understanding of the learning model would lead to improvements in both categories.

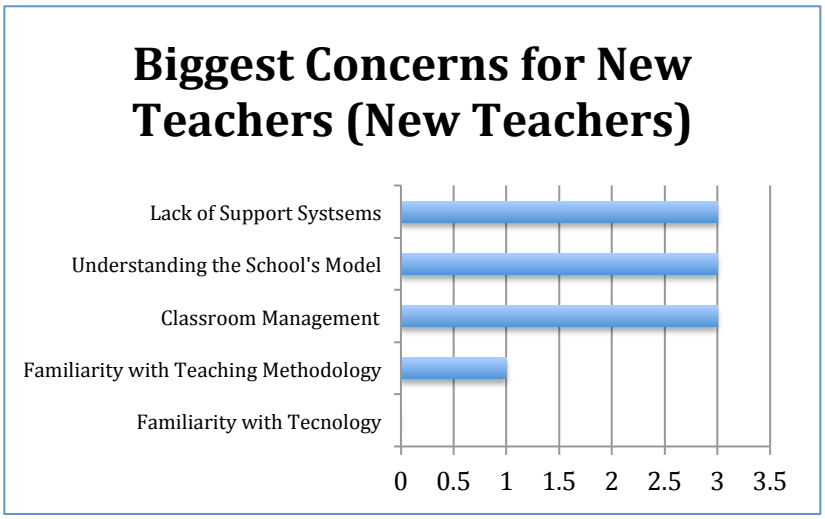


The most telling piece of this data set is that the biggest barrier towards proper implementation of relevant technologies is the implementation process itself. There appears to be a disconnect between the challenges at the school and the current professional development focus. It could also hold true that no disconnect exists, and that there is disagreement on how teacher instructional time should be spent. Either way it represents a problem with the way technology is acquired and administered within the school. Surprisingly, teacher preparation was the second most frequent item, despite it not registering a single selection in the previous set detailing challenges. The two could very well be connected: implementation suffers due to teachers not being prepared to use the tools available to them. Again, this raises the question of whether time or the process is at fault (or both).



The next two sets of data – coupled with individual and small group discussions –

caused the primary focus of the Action Research Project to shift. The first set of data was taken from the responses given by the leadership team. The leaders were accurate in their assessment of two of the primary challenges new teachers faced; classroom management and engagement were two areas new teachers reported struggling with. Familiarity with teaching methodology and the learning model were secondary factors. Interestingly enough both leaders and new teachers rated their familiarity with technology relatively low. This posed a potential problem as my project was currently set up to assist with the familiarity and implementation of technology. The most telling piece of data, however, is what the leadership team failed to identify. It was the aspect selected most frequently by the new teachers.



"Lack of support systems" was selected by each of the new teachers who completed the survey. Not a single administrator, nor those leading the department they were a member of, recognized this as a factor. It is common knowledge that new teachers will struggle with classroom management. This aspect is magnified in a blended learning environment where the requirements are even more demanding. How can this disconnect be explained? If both parties recognized the need for supports to assist new teachers with classroom management in a blended environment why did one side feel they were not receiving them? The majority of the leaders had been at the school since its first or second year in existence. During this time they were able to customize the professional development model to fit their needs. Instruction was given ample time in the beginning until more logistical mattes needed attention as the school expanded. Meanwhile the leadership team, seasoned and comfortable with their pedagogy within the model, did not account for new teachers having the same needs as they had when first arriving. The written responses from the new teachers provide greater clarity for the issues they faced.

Key Quotes from Teachers

"In terms of understanding blended learning, there are no tools in place to alleviate these concerns."
"Lack of PD-not all teachers know best practices for blended learning and what the true meaning of the model is."
"There are teachers to help, but it is hard to seek them out and have a solution."
"There is an "open door policy" for help and guidance, but teachers are usually left to

their own devices to solve these challenges. Teachers depend on one another for resources and instructional help."
"More observing best practices and offering/modeling their own best practices."
"[What is needed is] whole school PD regarding the learning model, departmentalized meetings focused on how to implement blended learning, and coaches that help figure out how to make activities/lessons/etc blended or technologically focused"

It is clear from the teacher responses that there was a disconnect between the leadership team and teachers entering the school. What was once an open, democratic culture that helped shape the professional development model had become much more of an oligarchical approach. With so many of the founding teachers and current leaders having created their own shared experiences they now assumed all new colleagues would follow in a similar manner. Unfortunately this was not the case.

Shifting Towards the Shared Mentoring Group

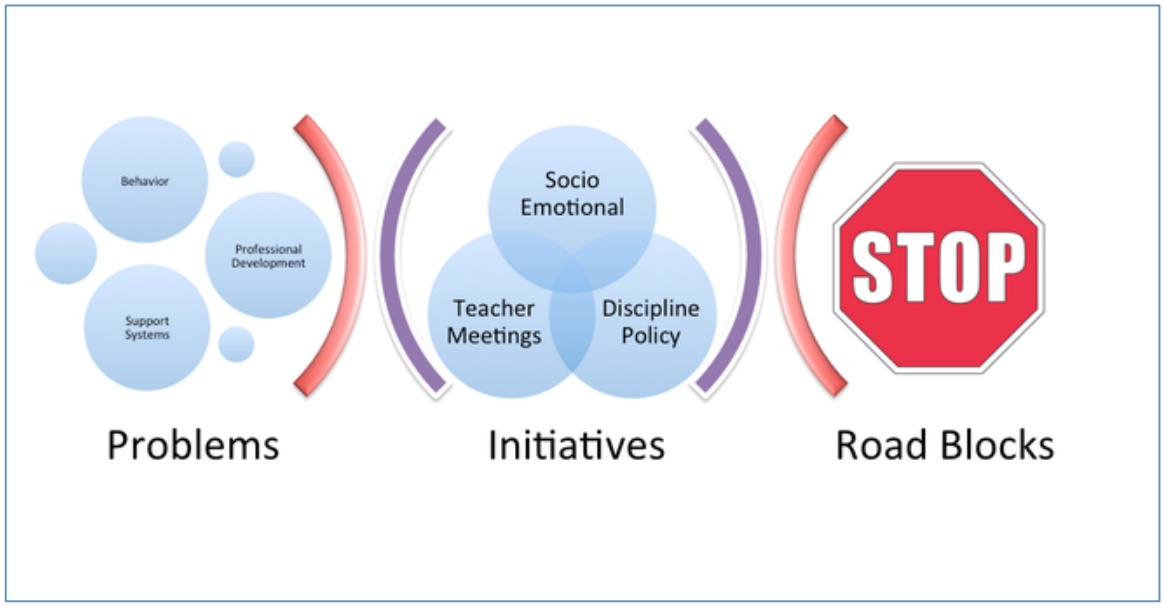
During Cycle 1 a team of teachers was assembled. With the focus on improving the practices of first year teachers, a second year mentoring teacher and a more senior expert teacher were grouped together with the three new teachers. Together they formed the "Shared Mentoring Group" that met to share ideas and discuss concerns. Through these shared discussions and experiences they would create an understanding of the appropriate technology and teaching methodology that could then be applied within their classrooms.

Cycle 1 helped move the focus away from technology and more towards giving teachers an outlet to express themselves and share best practices. Based on the data I received - both from the leadership and new teachers - it was clear that a support system was needed outside of the sphere of technology. Unsurprisingly, teachers rated themselves highly on technology, but low in terms of an understanding of relevant learning models. In response to this I decided that a mentor group would allow them to create a more social environment for new teachers. Rather than have a typical mentor-mentee relationship I opted for a strategy that reflected Wenger's ideas on Communities of Practice. With this in mind I wanted the new teachers to have a mentor who could relate.

The perfect candidate presented herself in the form of a terrific second year teacher who went through the same experience the previous year. To assist in my support for the mentor teacher and new teachers I brought in one of the most experienced blended learning teachers in the country - a veteran teacher and founding member of the school. Together these teachers assisted each other in their own practices by offering advice, or as one member said, "Just hearing that there are other people out there dealing with the same issues." Aside from their own discussions this group of teachers would also serve as a panel to test out the online curriculum. Though it had taken a back seat the online curriculum would still play a big role in later cycles, and especially with new teachers in coming years. Cycle one

helped move the focus away from technology and more towards giving teachers an outlet to express themselves and share best practices.

Overcoming Roadblocks

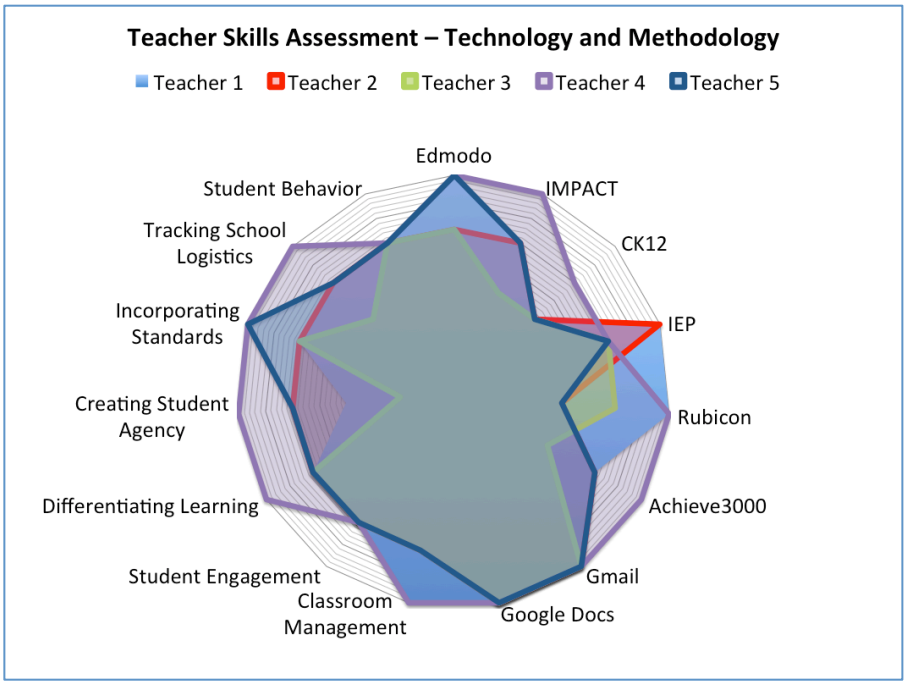


The first Action Research meeting with the Shared Mentoring Group was incredibly informative. In attendance were two new teachers (one was absent on vacation), the second-year mentor teacher, our expert teacher, and myself. After discussing the online-curriculum and taking care of a few logistical issues, I posed a simple question: What's a big challenge you face? My concern over a hesitancy to engage in dialogue quickly evaporated. Each teacher was eager to share some of the difficulties they were facing. The openness with which they shared was incredible. It was clear that these teachers had found little time to engage with their colleague's prior in the year. My second year teacher, who had been terrific in helping organize the group, had already met with teachers before in order to give them a platform for discussion. For the other teachers, though, it was (quite possibly) the first chance they had at opening up with some of their problems, concerns, and ideas.

One statement was made early on that stuck with me: "We're facing a lot." I knew this would be the case for first year teachers, but it seemed evident within the entire group. While each teacher discussed a different problem they were facing (student behavior, expectations, and evaluations) they were all in agreement that these were shared problems. Another trend I noticed was that each teacher, and possibly other teachers within the school, felt a lack of empowerment to implement changes. This was surprising, as an open and collaborative staff was one thing the school had always cultivated. Now, though, each initiative they proposed to solve a problem was met with resistance.

My main talking point during the discussion focused on finding solutions. It's always easy to focus on the problem. Sometimes it's of great benefit to put our problems and concerns out there, but more is needed for real growth to occur. For teachers, roadblocks will always be present: student issues, lack of parental support, and administrative requirements. The challenge is in using the resources we have to empower ourselves. With so much going on in the middle of the school year it can be difficult to find solutions. I hope that through discussing concerns and finding shared solutions; these social experiences will provide the platform for empowerment. Once teachers have the foundation and support they need, we can switch the discussion from concerns to that of improving practices. Our main goal is to empower our students; to do that we must first empower ourselves.

In order to give new teachers ideas on how they can best approach their problems I wanted to tailor the activity sessions to problem areas they had identified. The final piece of data collected during Cycle 1 was a skills assessment that the entire Shared Mentoring Group participated in (both new teachers and mentor and expert teachers).



Cycle 1 Reflection

Cycle 1 was incredibly successful. Not because I had successfully identified the solution to the issue, but because it helped to define the solution moving forward. It could be deemed successful because everything that was addressed in the research questions was identified and all artifacts were collected. This is primarily due to working with an incredible staff. There were moments of frustration when trying to take initial actions: (1) Administration was dealing with a number of issues and delayed in approving the Action Research Project and data collection, (2) Winter Break was underway, and (3) the second semester was beginning causing teachers to have an increased workload. Despite all this the data was collected and it was truly impactful. The need for an online curriculum like FLIPPD was still present but it was clear that it should not be the primary focus; data and personal research confirmed this.

The transition to the Shared Mentoring Group was also successful, and rather painless, due to the need of the teachers involved. With so much happening during their first year at the school they needed a forum for discussion. While I had hoped that both forms of discussion – synchronous and asynchronous – would be utilized it was clear that teachers preferred the face-to-face sessions. Having sat with teachers during a few of these sessions I could see a trend that developed. Teachers always need a forum for discussion but it's important to have a formal plan in place to ensure these discussions are productive. Those who have spent time in education will no doubt be familiar with the propensity of teachers to get together to discuss how they are tasked with solving the ills of the world. Not wanting the Shared Mentoring Group to turn into this I discussed with the mentor and expert teachers the need to come away from each meeting with a solution or next step to the problems that were addressed. Having identified this early on I feel that it set a positive example for the remainder of the year. No matter how difficult the job is one always needs to come up with a shared approach to make a positive impact.

(Continue to Cycle 2)

Cycle 2

Research Questions:

1. How can "shared mentoring" experiences empower teachers within the school?
2. How can the online curriculum be used as a resource to create more engaging and interactive professional development sessions?
3. How will early sample lessons impact the Shared Mentoring Group's understanding of Blended Learning models?
4. If new teachers take a more active role in leadership will that make them more engaged in their own practices?

First Actions:

The discussions and meetings held during Cycle 1 continued throughout the Action Research process. Hopefully, with this group firmly established, it can be a template to apply for new teachers in coming years, and at other schools.

The first step of Action Cycle 2 was to improve on the online curriculum and professional development focus based on the feedback from the Shared Mentoring group. Once the new teachers had completed the trial period of the online curriculum they were to use that – in collaboration with a tech-focused piece of professional development at the school called "Tech Talk" – to take on a more active role in the application of learning technologies.

Artifacts Collected:

- Examine growth of forums and online discussions
- Staff feedback
- Shared Mentoring group feedback (post PD)
- Updated versions of the online curriculum (Flexbook form)

Evaluation:

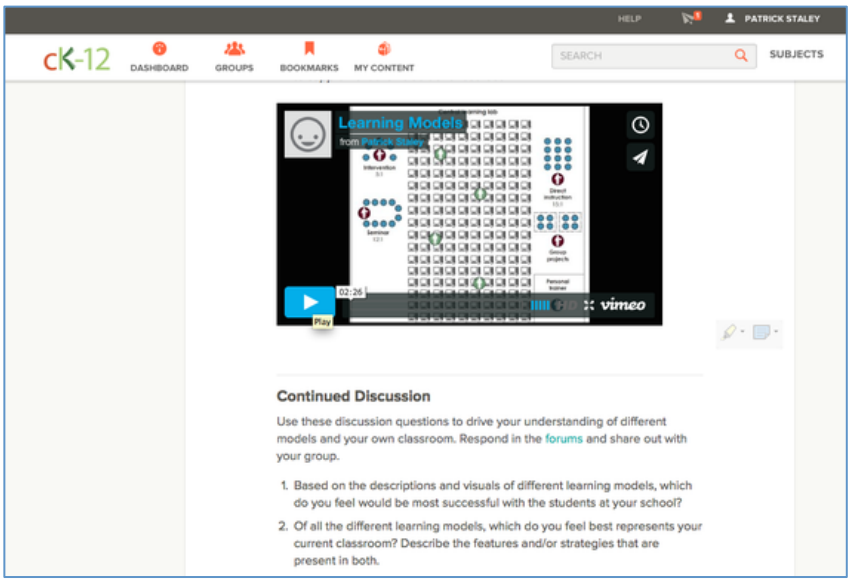
Action Cycle 2 will be evaluated based upon the growth of the discussions. The Shared Mentoring group should be utilizing face-to-face time while also contributing to the online forums. Cycle 2 will also be evaluated based on the feedback received from the staff and Shared Mentoring group after they complete a school-wide professional development session with a technology focus.

Product Demo - Chapter 1: Blended Learning Models

The final piece of data in Cycle 1 influenced the direction of Cycle 2. As stated previously, the FLIPPD online curriculum served as a support to the Shared Mentoring Group and not the primary focus of the project. With the skills assessment data the focus of the sessions and discussions could be identified. The group identified the following issues: Understanding the learning model, creating student agency, engaging students, and knowledge of the content provider, CK12 Flexbooks.

Synchronous and Asynchronous Discussions

The initial lesson was designed to give teachers a basic understanding of Blended Learning models. The chapters were organized in this manner for two reasons: (1) it tied in perfectly with the constructivist notion of how information and content should be presented - as it can be easily built upon and establish a baseline knowledge - and (2) it reflected the data from Cycle 1 where teachers addressed a lack of understanding in regards to blended learning models (even their own). The section combined a number of different content sources and also tied in a discussion piece to drive continued reflection.



Session: Blended Learning Models

New Teacher
"I think our students would be most successful with the Flex Model or with the Rotation Model. Both of these allow for teacher interactions and do not require too much work to be done at home since a lot of our students don't have internet access at home.

I think we are best represented by the Flex Model. Both have teachers as an important aspect and also internet."

New Teacher
"I believe that the flex model is the ideal model for the blended model at our school. However, I don't feel that this model is ideal given the circumstances of our school as they are. I believe that the flex model has the greatest potential to deliver the highest quality instruction to our students, but our building and culture do not permit this model to reach it's potential.

In my classroom, the flex model is the most prevalent. I have the students watch tutorial videos as their primary instruction and then I patrol and facilitate the room as necessary. The work is mostly done on the computers and delivered/submitted via the internet."

Master Teacher
"The model I think is most successful would be the flex model where students can work at their on pace to meet the individual needs of the learner.

Currently, I do the flex model in my classroom; however, I cannot do small groups as much as I use to because the classrooms are so crowded with 30+ students."

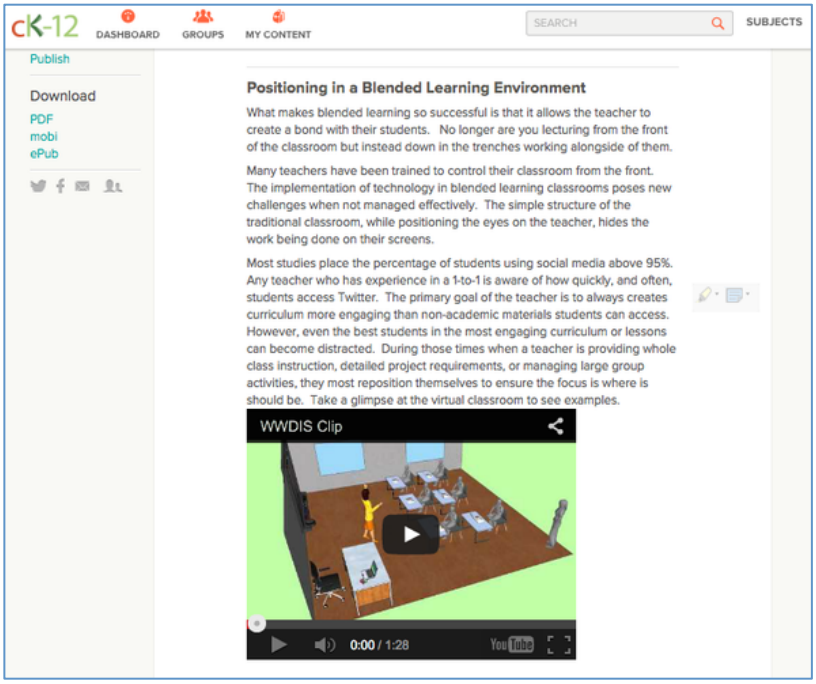
Mentor Teacher
"I think the model that would work best for our school is the flex model. What I believe effects successfulness at VOISE is the space. The school still looks and feels like a traditional school. Because of this, I don't believe the flex model is able to be implemented as it should be per the definition. What I like about flex is the "flexibility" (ha,ha!). I think it's important to have the teacher in the classroom in order to facilitate conversations with the students if necessary.

The model that best represents my classroom is the flex model. I use this term loosely because there aren't stations in my class room and the majority of instruction is whole group or individual."

Discussion Reflection

What was most encouraging regarding the teacher discussion was their ability to identify the appropriate learning models. Some teachers also took it a step further in detailing what prevented them from fully implementing that model within their own classroom. Some teachers mentioned that the building and equipment hindered the implementation while others spoke of class sizes as an issue. Unfortunately, unlike instructional strategies, these are not issues that can be solved by a group of teachers; these were district demands. It does, however, present an opportunity to discuss ways, as one teacher put it, to be more "flexible" in order to achieve success.

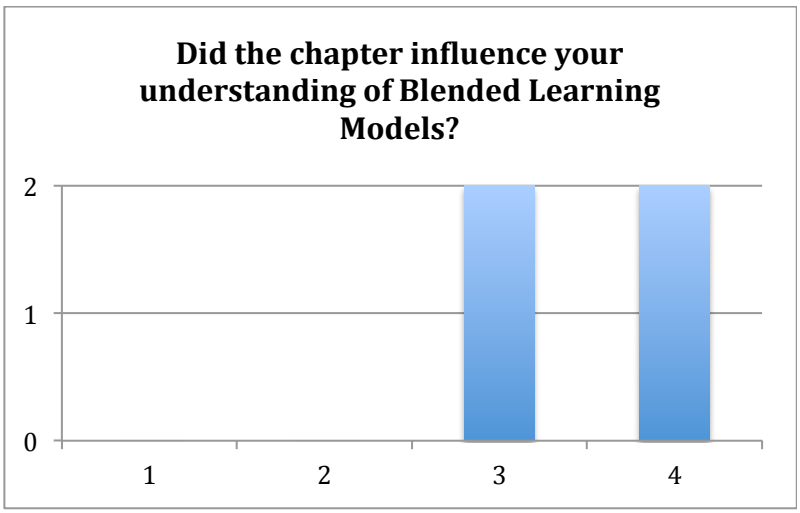
Product Demo - FLIPPD Activity: Wait, Where Do I Stand?



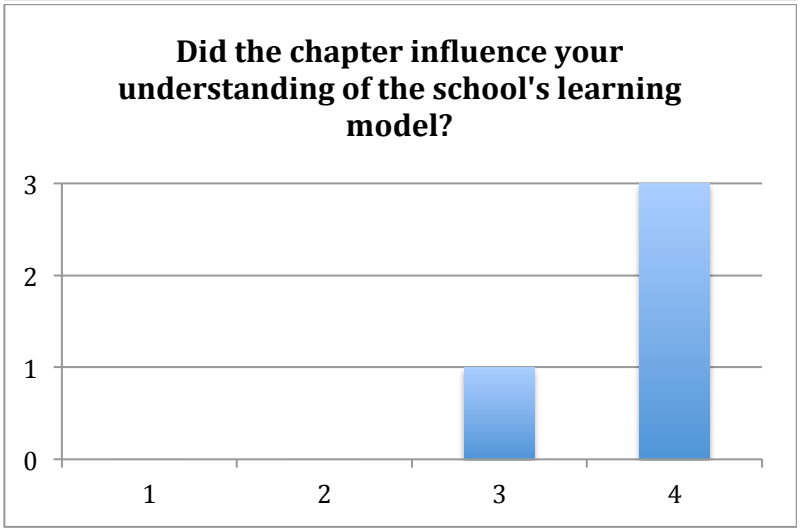
The follow up to the first section was designed to be more interactive. Keeping with the theoretical research on Constructivism, the "Module" was to follow the chapter on blended learning models. With teachers having a base understanding of blended learning and how it can be applied in different forms the goal was to have them apply that knowledge to a more specific teaching strategy. An activity was designed that had teachers take an active role in acquiring practical knowledge - some acting as students behaving in a certain way while others played the role of the teacher attempting to carry out a lesson. The goal was to be able to find the balance between instructional goals and classroom management (keeping students from accessing non-course related materials). The module provided articles as sources of specific content, video demonstrations, and video and text-based instructions.

Chapter Feedback

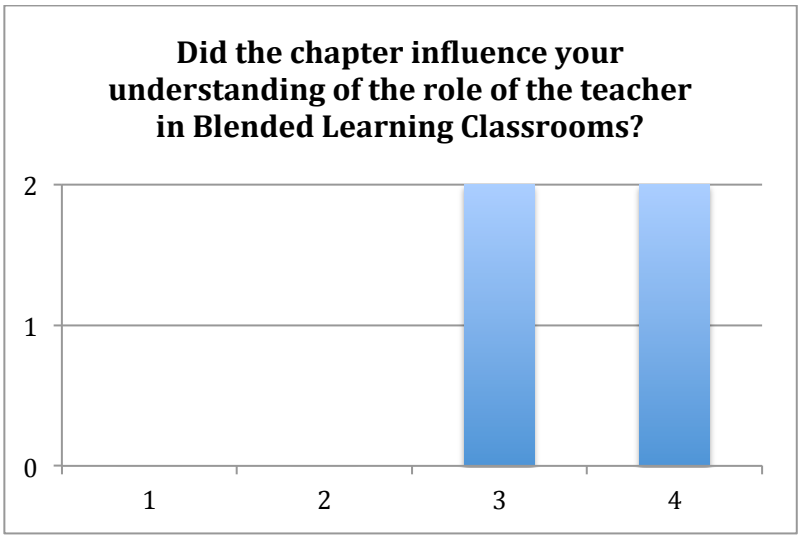
Once the teachers had completed the pre-work and activity they were prompted with a survey to assess the impact of the online curriculum chapter, as well as the functionality and design. Teachers were prompted with questions designed to avoid response bias. Responders were instructed to select a number from 1-4 (1 being no impact and 4 representing perfect clarity). A four-point scale was used to ensure data could be classified as either favorable or undesirable.

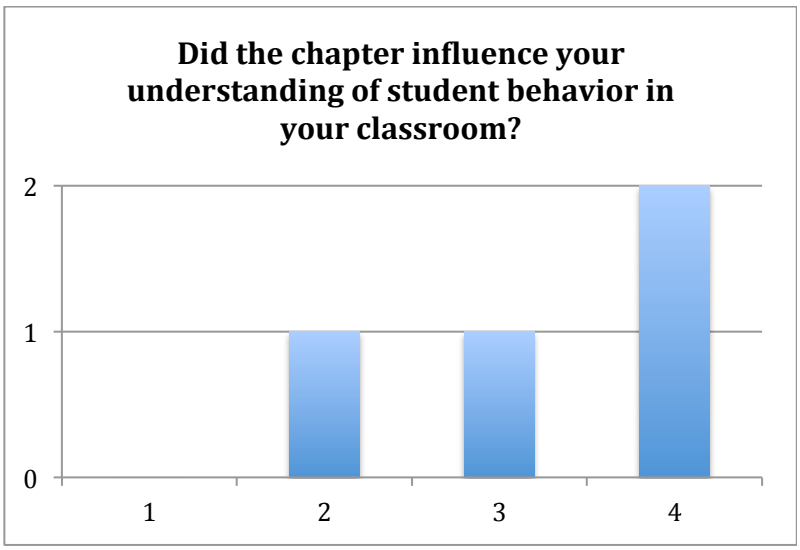


The initial report of 100% positive influence on the specific topic was a key element. Not just in the data, but the acquired understanding resonated within the teacher discussions as well.

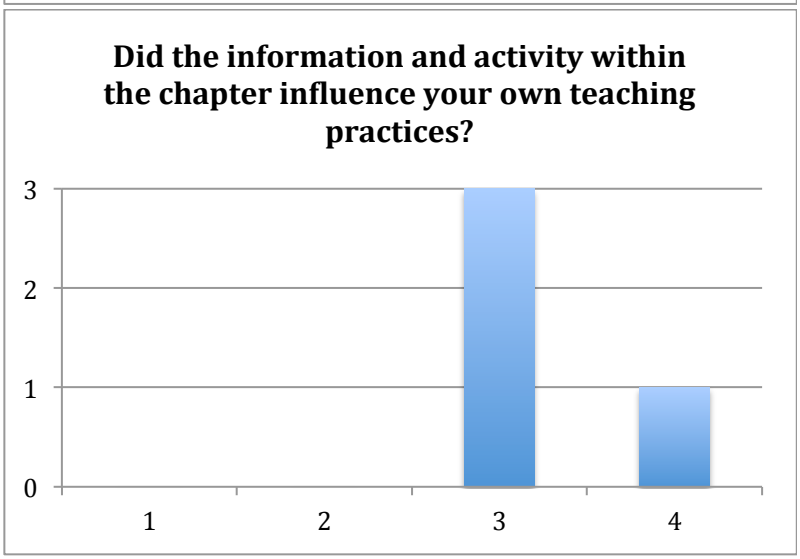


Another positive shift: clarity was provided on a greater scale in terms of the specific learning model within the school. I believe this could have also been impacted by the post-activity discussion - during which teachers discussed their own classrooms within a Blended Learning environment.



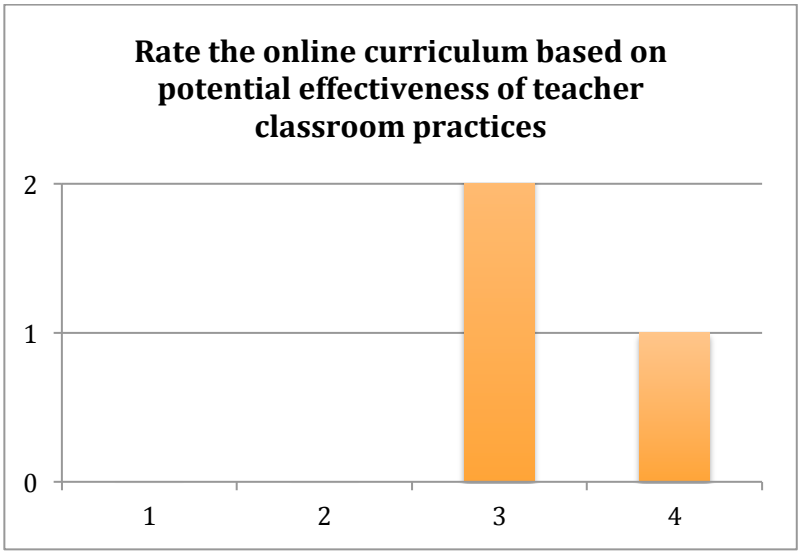


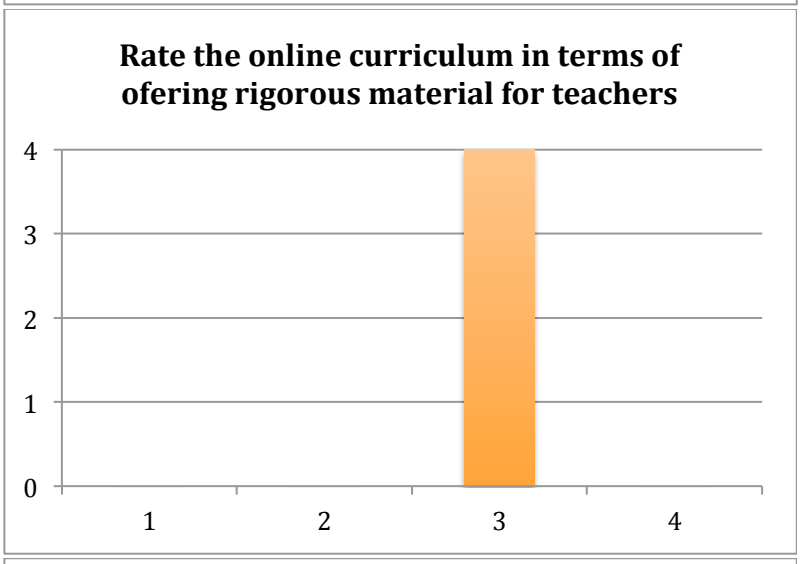
The only negative data strand in this specific section: either the teacher was already informed or they felt key information was missing. Based on the post-discussions I believe teachers felt that not all students were represented in the activity.



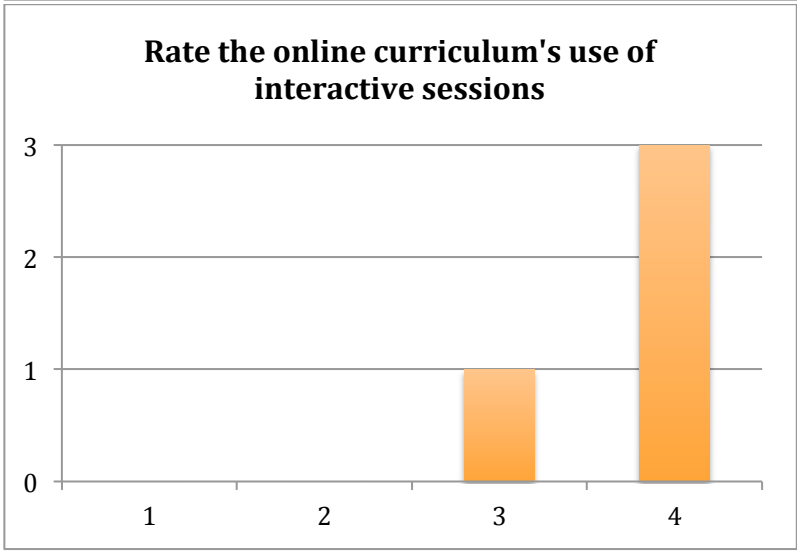
Again, all teachers reported positive influences. What I appreciated most about the connection between the data and the discussions is that teachers felt comfortable challenging their own practices and being open about making changes.

Product Feedback

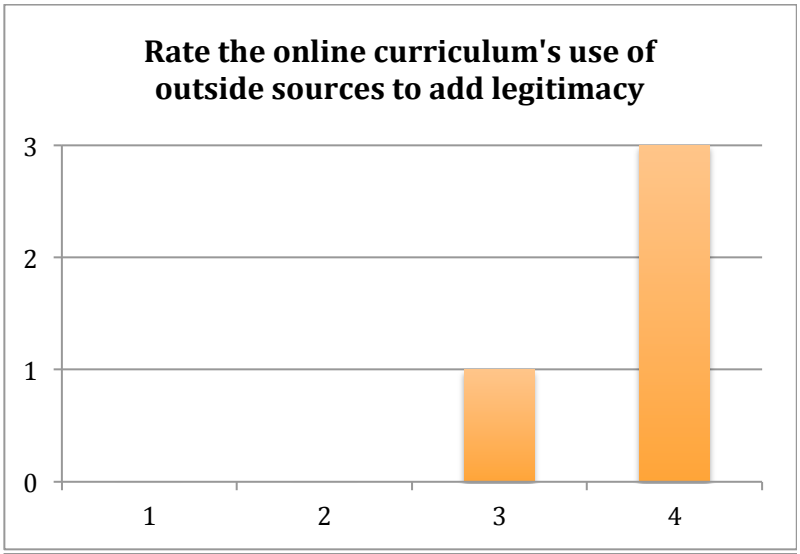




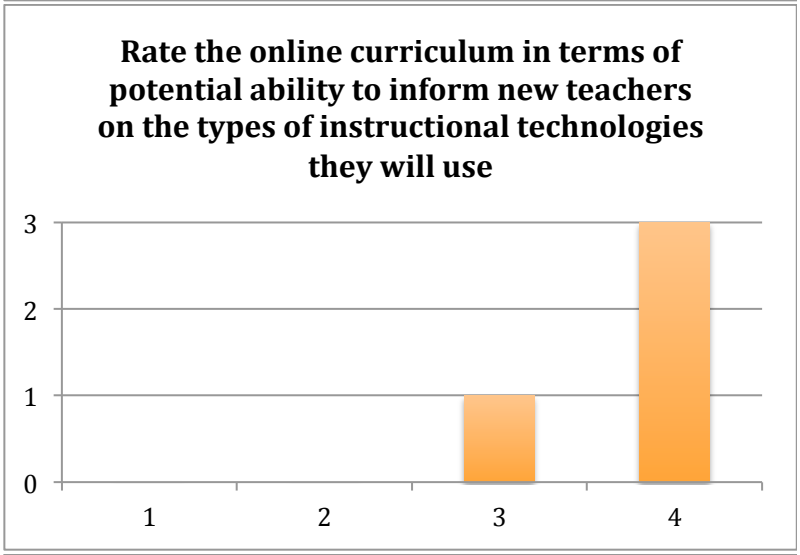
All teachers rated rigor at a 3. It was the only strand of data within the collection that did not contain a 4. While the chapters were sample features (designed to be at a basic level) many teachers reported changes in the way they viewed their own practices.



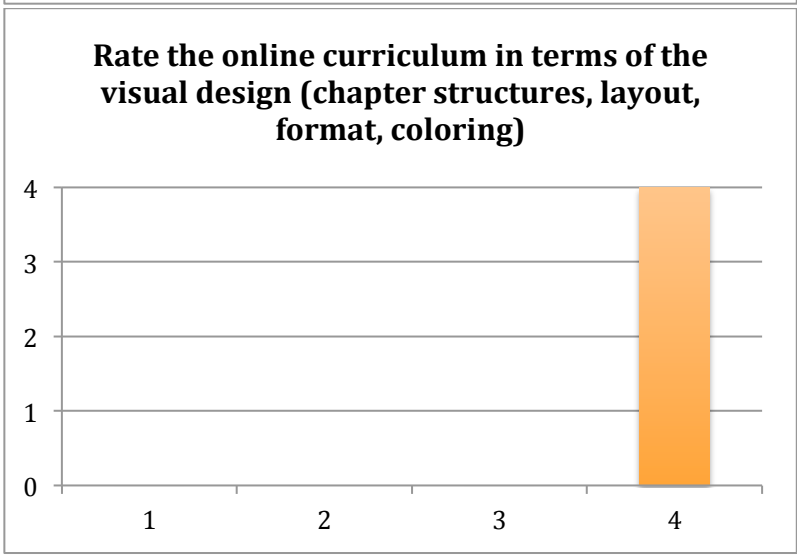
There was an upward shift between effectiveness of practices and the use of interactive sessions. Perhaps this serves to support the theories on Adult Learning and Constructivism in that hands-on learning is more impactful than typical curricula.



Interesting that nobody questioned the source of the material (Always a positive when dealing with professional development and teachers). I believe this is in part due to a shared approach, rather than instructor delivered, which can often times put teacher/student at odds with each other.



This was perhaps the most important piece of data. I would have preferred to see the "Potential Ability to Inform" at all 4's, as this was the biggest opinion piece they could offer in terms of evaluation. It also presents strong data for future expansion and implementation.



It appears response bias could not be entirely avoided. The final piece of data - while encouraging – seemed to be the group responding far too favorably (especially considering the product used was the simple Flexbook layout as opposed to an iBook).

Cycle 2 Reflection

Like Cycle 1, Cycle 2 had impactful data that accompanied the actions. This data also helped shaped further actions as well. Discussions continued within the Shared Mentoring Group and were even more impactful when they followed a professional development session. Despite a hesitancy to step out of comfort areas teachers did an incredible job of taking on roles that were new to them. Not only did this show an increased understanding of their role as a teacher in a blended learning model – an aspect reflected in the data – but it allowed them to take a hands on approach to their own development. With both face-to-face and online discussions present they could share their thoughts and concerns through a number of different mediums. It was encouraging to see teachers reflect in an online format because you could really see their growth as a teacher and someone who is coming to terms with blended learning.

Due to rich discussions following the activity sessions it could be concluded that the FLIPPD online curriculum was successful. Though the sample size was small, all teachers reported it as having a positive influence on their practice. I do wish the curriculum could have been expanded to include more sessions in areas of student agency and engagement, but the mentor teacher explained that with so much going on at the time it would be difficult to accommodate it. With that being said, the data was encouraging in that all teachers reported favorably in regards to expanding the curriculum and professional development sessions to include more teachers and have it begin earlier in the school year. As the school will see a new crop of teachers in the coming years, and with the possibility of charter expansion and new schools, creating a formal plan would be of the utmost importance.

(Continue to Cycle 3)

Cycle 3

Research Questions:

How has the Shared Mentoring group evolved throughout the process? How have their discussions and work with the online curriculum shaped their practices within the classroom? If new teachers take a more active role in leadership will that make them more engaged in their own practices? Has a system been established with enough documentation to create a formal plan for new teachers in the coming years?

First Actions:

Reviewing the data from the chapter and product feedback was important in establishing evidence in support of a formal plan. As the Shared Mentoring Group became the primary focus of the project, feedback was needed to demonstrate a positive impact for new teachers. Once this data was collected and reviewed the structure of the Shared Mentoring Group and FLIPPD curriculum could be created.

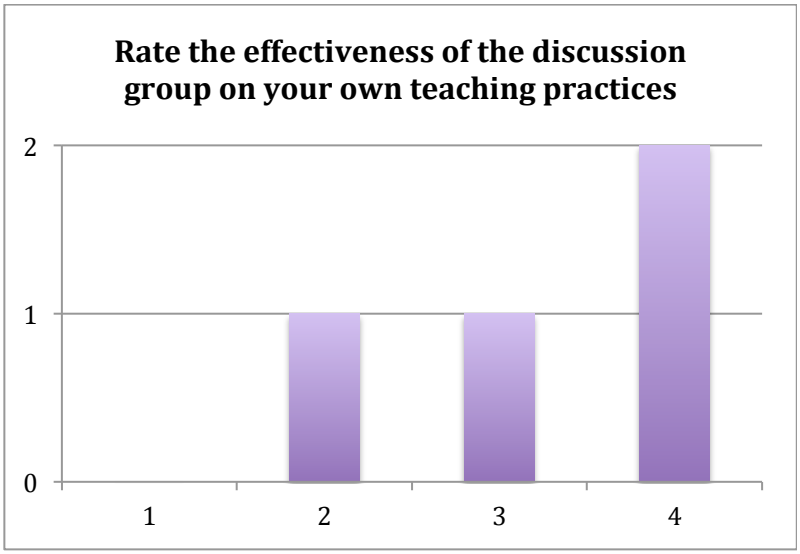
Artifacts Collected:

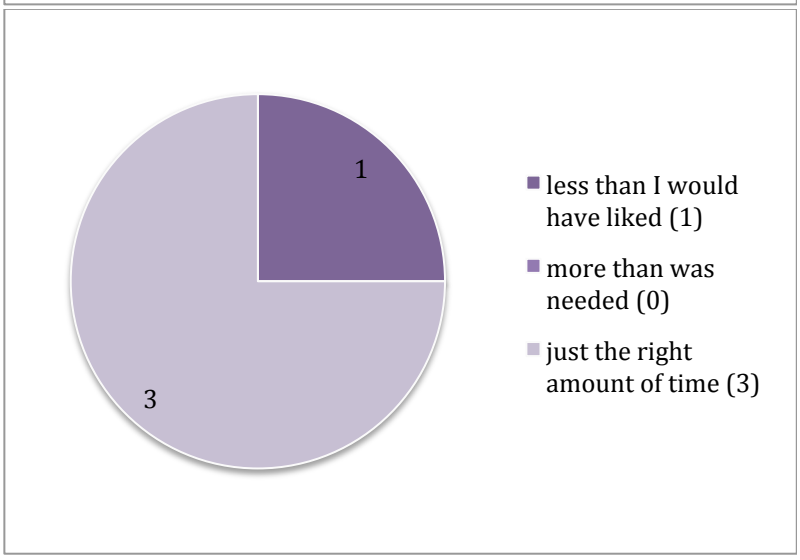
- Examine growth of forums and online discussions
- Interviews with the Shared Mentoring group
- Skills assessment
- Interviews with the Shared Mentoring Group (individual and full) to create a plan for future use
- Formal PDF/file that documents how to establish the Shared Mentoring group within schools
- Finalized versions of the online curriculum (eBook and Flexbook) that represent the needs of professional development areas (both technology and methodology)

Evaluation:

Action Cycle 3 will be evaluated based upon the growth of online and face-to-face discussions. The FLIPPD curriculum will be highly influenced by a product review carried out by the Shared Mentoring Group. The growth of teacher pedagogical skills will be measured by individual interviews and discussions. If skills in areas of technology and methodology have improved, and teachers report a positive experience during the process, the first three cycles of Action Research should be considered successful. If so, a formal plan will be documented to instruct schools on how to establish the process with their new teachers.

Discussion Group Feedback





What's most interesting about the first piece of data is that it contained the only negative strand in the entire collection. I say surprising because the Shared Mentoring Group was designed specifically in response to the data collected in Cycle 1 and through 1-on-1 discussions held with teachers. The entire focus shifted away from digital content and towards providing supports for new teachers. However, the most engaging pieces of data and discussion topics came directly after **FLIPPD** curriculum samples and activities. With the group members in mind,

Along with scale based responses teachers were also given a questionnaire within the survey. Similar to Cycle 1, the written responses provided clarity in regards to the climate of the school (especially as it relates to new teachers).

How did having a discussion group help you with your problems?

"It was a good place to realize that I'm not the only teacher with my problems and it opened my eyes to some options I have that I wasn't aware of before as to how I can solve these problems."

"The discussion face-to-face discussions were great to see how the new teachers felt about their practices. However, if a new teacher could not attend the blog allowed an alternative resource the new teacher could use to post questions and receive feedback

from the entire group."

"Just a good place to vent in a safe spot."

If started at the beginning of the year, how could the shared mentoring group and discussion sessions be used to influence new teacher practices?

"If this was used over the summer or during the opening PD sessions in August, the curriculum would have more impact on new teachers. Knowing what to expect when walking into a blended learning environment is important to lesson the stress of teaching and provide better classroom management."

"We can grow and develop our skills as a team, which I feel would be much easier and less intimidating than needing to learn so many online modules and interfaces on your own at the beginning of the year."

"I think if it were a year round thing starting at the beginning of the year it would help give new teachers the feeling that other teachers are there to support and help. It would be easier to address problems as they arise."

"This has the potential to really help new teachers. In addition to sharing techniques on where to stand, etc, it could be helpful in teaching teachers how to use some of the online programs. That was difficult for me as a new teacher last year. I learned most of the programs by myself."

What was the more impactful feature of the discussion group?

"Using the different blended learning models. Understanding the different models and choosing which works best for your students was an important issue to discuss."

"I think talking about what model classroom we actually have as opposed to what we thought we had was a really great feature of the discussion group."

"Reading and hearing what other teachers had to say and being able to let them know we are all here for each other."

"Having a group to share experiences with. I like that the group was smaller, which created a sense of trust and community. I think if the group is too big, people might not feel a sense of connection or responsibility."

In what ways could the discussion group experience be improved?

"Regular meeting times and possibly a year long goal."

"Sometimes meeting off campus over coffee or lunch, provides a calmer atmosphere in which to reflect one's daily work."

"More teachers. Maybe involve more 2nd year teachers because they probably still need support and help and can help the 1st year teachers."

"We can meet at a regular interval with more specific ideas to think about from one meeting to the next, kind of like a book club."

Discussion Group Feedback Reflection

What was encouraging about the discussion group feedback was the approval to extend the reach. Teachers identified having an early start and yearlong goals as ways to further the impact of the Shared Mentoring Group. It was also encouraging to see multiple members of the group comment on the shared nature of their experiences and how teachers can benefit from it. Words like team, group, and community were used to describe the experiences. The challenge moving forward will be to expand on the Shared Mentoring Group while keeping the safe, community feel that teachers enjoyed.

Implementation Plan

Like the FLIPPD online curriculum when I first imagined an implementation plan for the future I began planning it myself. Luckily my work done throughout the project taught me a lesson in terms of ownership. For an implementation plan to be truly successful those that will benefit from it must be the ones that design it. The Shared Mentoring Group excelled when taking on activities that were designed with their needs in mind. A shared experience, like the one the founding teachers and most of the leadership team created, was essential in coming to terms with all the requirements of teaching in a blended model. This must be an essential component of any formalized plan put in place as the school moves into its seventh year. Also, the prospect of work within a charter organization further increases the need for a plan. With an increase in the size and diversity of the staff, coupled with a higher number of learning technologies that will be implemented, flexibility must be present as well.

Currently the implementation plan is still in the design phase. The structure was created based on the discussions held with new teachers, the mentor teacher, and the expert teacher. The structure also draws heavily upon the research done during this Action Research Project. With so few established teachers understanding the new teachers' need for supports it is my hope that the research will encourage further communication between those two groups. With a truly shared approach to the professional development model hopefully some of the challenges of being a new teacher in a blended learning model can be overcome.

During the summer administration will work to identify the expansion and the direction of the school. While a top down implementation structure is not ideal it is a necessity given the size of the Chicago Public Schools district and the

requirements that come from the area. Logistical needs and funding are still dictated by the administration and the leadership team. Despite advocating for the ownership of instruction to be in the hands of the teachers it would obviously not be favorable to put discretionary spending in the hands of new teachers. The current system in place for identifying new technology has been relatively successful. With that being said, it does mean that any plan put in place must account for the policies put in place by the district, area, and administration. Once these are identified, though, new teachers and the leadership team can work together to create the content within the plan.

Implementation Plan Structure

1. Introduction: Evolution of FLIPPD and the Shared Mentoring Group
2. Problem Statement
3. Solution
4. Theoretical and Practical Background
5. Shared Mentoring Group
    a. Formation
    b. Supports
    c. Meetings and Dialogue
        i. Face-to-Face
        ii. Asynchronous
    d. Goals
6. Constructing the School's Lifeforce
    a. Mission and Vision
    b. Goals
    c. Strategies
    d. Tools
7. Encouraging Leadership
    a. Creating in-house leaders
    b. Teacher driven PD
8. FLIPPD
    a. Linking Your Lifeforce to PD
    b. Using, Editing, Creating Curriculum and Chapters
    c. Using and Creating Activities for PD

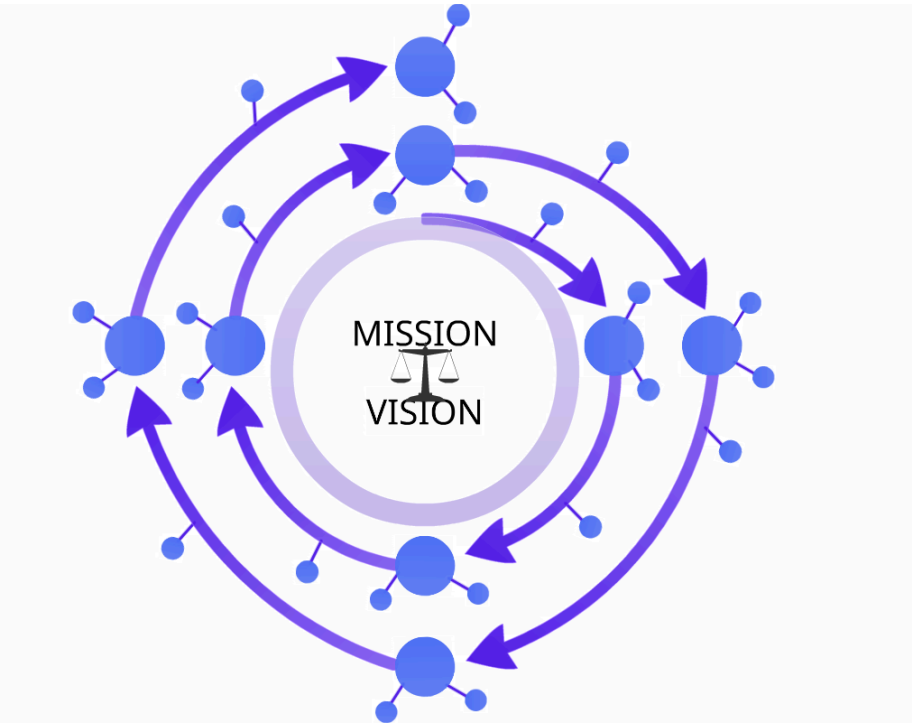
Overview of Structure

The introduction, problem, solution, and theory will reflect the culmination of my Action Research Project. These sections will serve as the foundation on which the plan will be established. The Shared Mentoring Group section will be based on the experiences of the three new teachers, mentor teacher, and expert teacher throughout the project. Content within the formation, supports, and dialogue descriptions will be generated by this group. They will also determine the primary goals for new teachers throughout the year.

Constructing the School's Lifeforce

One new element of the plan is the design of what was termed the "Lifeforce" of the school. With so many goals, strategies, and tools in place that teachers need to understand a location was needed for them to have access. It should be noted that the school's Lifeforce will be designed by the administration and leadership team. However, each department and the Shared Mentoring Group will also have a model that they will fill in to better reflect their specific needs.

At the center of the model is the Mission and Vision. These are the primary driving forces within the school and everything that follows should adequately reflect both. From there it branches out with three different types of components: connecting arrows represent strategies, large circles represent goals, and smaller circles represent tools to achieve the goals and strategies. All elements come with their own descriptions.



1. **Mission Statement** - Defines the entity in its current state: WHAT, WHO, HOW.
2. **Vision Statement** - Projects the future state: what end product will the entity produce
3. **Goal** – A primary element of the school. Goals can be logistical (e.g. attendance, scheduling), instructional (e.g. best practices, classroom management), and/or achievement based (e.g. graduation rates, GPA, standardized testing). Goals that are listed on the Lifeforce should be done so in order of importance.
4. **Strategy** – The plan put in place to achieve a goal. There should be a strategy in place connecting each of the goals listed in the Lifeforce.
5. **Tools** – Any piece of technology or professional development session that will allow the staff to achieve the goals and strategies. Specific tools should be connected to the relevant Goal or Strategy they were identified to facilitate with.

The primary Lifeforce model will be the one created by the administration and leadership team. This will serve as an example of what teachers coming into the school should understand. It will also be a way of ensuring that the professional development model adequately reflects the primary goals of the school. The school's Lifeforce will highlight the primary mission and vision as well as the goals shared by all teachers. These could include high attendance and graduation rates, success on standardized testing, and ensuring the blended learning model is followed. Strategies will take the form of professional development and will be attended by all staff members. Tools that accompany the goals and strategies will likely be those accessed by all teachers: Learning Management Systems, Grade Management Systems, Behavior Management Systems, and content creation platforms.

For content departments or grade level teams the goals, strategies, and tools will be more specific to their curriculum. These can take the form of percentage of students passing their classes, identifying specific strands and areas of need on standardized assessment, and tools that are specific to their classroom (e.g. content-based websites). The Shared Mentoring Group will also have their own Lifeforce that outlines the goals, strategies, and tools that are of primary importance for new teachers. Their discussions and activities will be centered on what they identify, and it can also serve as a calendar outline for their meetings throughout the year.

Connecting the Lifeforce to the FLIPPD Curriculum

Instead of one or a small group of teachers designing the curriculum to be used in a blended approach to professional development the growth of leadership will hopefully encourage all teachers to be active participants. With a shared approach to the creation of the model it will be more impactful as teachers have dictated where the importance lies. What remains at the heart of the professional development model is the need for more hands-on and interactive learning. With the structure of a curriculum in place there is a concern that the activities will be recaps of what the model is or overviews of the online curriculum. Teachers should instead work to ensure that the curriculum serves only as a reference point; both to prepare them for development sessions and acting guide available to them at all times. The leadership team and mentors at the school must foster innovation and creativity within their departments.

Cycle 3 Reflection

It is difficult to reflect on Cycle 3 as so much is still unknown. It truly is the aspect of the project designed to ensure it becomes a lifelong part of my practice. It was highly encouraging to review the data that the Shared Mentoring Group provided. All teachers reported a positive impact on their practices and identified the need for a more structured system to be created for new teachers. The formal plan has been designed well based on their input and the data received over the course of the project. Moving forward I hope that the members of the Shared Mentoring Group will be encouraged by their experiences and take a more active

role in leadership. It has been a difficult year for them and this summer will only challenge them more as they prepare for the coming year. In order for Cycle 3 to truly be successful the new teachers must be active participants in the development of new teachers next year.

Final Reflection

The Action Research Project was a lesson in humility. What began as somewhat of a vanity project evolved into a system to give new teachers a voice. Throughout this process I was encouraged by the progress the group made. New teachers became advocates for themselves and their fellow group members. It was not a new tool that they needed exposure to but rather a chance to collaborate with others. As the school has grown this aspect has been desperately missing. The data I received during the cycles was encouraging. What I hope, though, is that teachers felt empowered beyond a simple number on a scale. Everyone that participated in the project hopefully expanded their practices and experienced professional growth.

For new teachers my hope was simple: ensure that they were comfortable in a new environment. Throughout the project this meant that they needed a place to share problems they were having. New teachers also needed a group they were comfortable with in terms of opening up. It is never easy asking questions you feel are trivial. It was encouraging to know that teachers felt comfortable within the group to ask these questions and give each other feedback. With a better working knowledge of everything they needed to master the next step would be to take on more leadership roles themselves. In the coming year I hope that the encouragement and comfort that they felt carries over. With a new group of teachers coming in every year it is important that they have mentors that have recently experienced the transition to a blended learning environment. In terms of Communities of Practice, the new teachers are now on the path leading them further into the community and becoming experts.

For the mentor and expert teachers I hope that both were encouraged by the leadership qualities they exemplified. For Jackie, in her role as a mentor, it was amazing to see her transformation into someone who could successfully guide teachers who were in her exact same position no more than a year before. Aside from her work within the Shared Mentoring Group she also explored ways in which to further her own understanding of blended learning and the impact it can have. Jackie regularly attended functions throughout Chicago and took part in online courses focused on new school models and innovative instruction. Perhaps the greatest success of the project was allowing someone like her to thrive. Despite having a number of tough responsibilities already Jackie was able to ensure that the project was successful.

The work done by both the mentor teacher and the expert taught me about my own leadership qualities. At times throughout this project my typical mindset

took over: take charge and be innovative so that others will follow. While that has held true during my time at the school it is far from the approach needed to ensure the success of all teachers. The Action Research Project encouraged me to take a step back and really observe the needs of others. Instead of diving into what I think is the adequate solution there should be more time spent on research and theory. I had always advocated for the practical over the theoretical, but I discovered that there is a reason why so much emphasis is placed on the latter: it works. Theories of Constructivism, Adult Learning, Situated Learning, and Communities of Practice all pointed me in the direction of creating shared experiences for teachers to thrive in. While there was some resistance at first eventually logic took hold and the project took the direction it needed in order to be successful.

Moving forward with this project and any other endeavor I take on I hope to take this approach from the onset. Instead of paving the way for others to follow my hope is that I can instead provide the right environment and tools for them to feel confident in navigating the path on their own. Throughout it all, though, I discovered that the most essential tool a teacher can have is a positive relationship with those working right next to them.

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