UTeach Professional Development

What do educators learn from our Foundations of Blended Learning course?

> **Educators enrolled in the UTeach <u>Foundations of Blended Learning</u> professional development course take four modules. We selected a few of their assignments to give you a sense of what they are learning. All educators gave us permission to share their work products. These reflection papers are from the 2019–2020 school year, with most teachers taking Foundations of Blended Learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Reflection papers from other school years are available at the link above.**

Module 4, Capstone Blended Learning Reflections

Assignment: Blended Learning Reflection Paper

The final activity in Foundations of Blended Learning requires participants to answer a driving question: *How do I best combine the technology-enhanced tools, differentiation strategies, and management tools to transform my classroom into a blended learning environment?*

Throughout the reflection paper, participants elaborate on the following topics:

1. Share what you are specifically trying to accomplish in your blended learning classroom.
2. Discuss changes you have made or plan to make to foster a blended learning environment.
3. Communicate how these changes will enhance student learning and describe what evidence you will use to determine improvement.

The following reflection papers were written by educators taking the Blended Learning course series:

Blended Learning Reflection Paper: Carmen Compean, Bilingual Kindergarten Teacher, Dr. Rodriguez Elementary School, Harlingen CISD, Texas

Carmen Compean, a bilingual kindergarten teacher, came into this course experience with a rich blended learning foundation and feels validated and even more excited to proceed as a result of the explorations and feedback provided in this course. She has pushed herself to grow and learn as an educator, benefiting from the successes, modeling, and visual examples of mentor teachers, and has implemented interactive centers and Seesaw with her young learners for the past five years. She proves that establishing strong norms and procedures will guide even pre-K students to be able to navigate technology and develop ownership for a lasting portfolio of work. Carmen's strong design and close facilitation has been rewarded with positive data and testing results to back up her efforts. She's excited to continue designing interactive learning and technology-rich activities for her kindergarten students.

"Change is good" is a quote I heard many times in my young adult life, but I'll be honest, I was scared for many years when I would hear it. Why? Because in my culture and family, if your professional and financial life is in great standing, then there's no need to move, change, much less seek growth in any aspect of life. With this said, in the start of my teaching career, just like all beginning teachers, I was afraid! Then I got my batch of first graders, and I was even more scared. So the year progresses and I'm teaching, but I can still remember how I felt. I felt something was missing. Especially when I would hear about other teachers and how great they were. I always wanted to know "what made them so good?" I was there three years and I never saw or heard exactly what they did to make them great teachers.

Then I moved to another district and there is where I worked with a teacher who was known as a "good teacher." Since I was in the same grade level as her, I saw why she was a "good teacher." When we would meet during our conference, to plan for the following week, she would just go crazy coming up with ideas for centers. I can still remember getting so excited and amazed at her creativity. I was sold! Our centers were good, but we were lacking the technology part. At this time, there was no technology in the classrooms. Things were fine, but I felt stagnant and I wasn't growing professionally. This is the first time I actually thought "I need a change and change is good." So I did just that.

I left the district and came back to where my teaching career started, Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District. I came back, because they were under new leadership and things were changing, for the best! Now this is where I was introduced to blended learning without knowing it was a style of teaching. This all happened because the district hired an Early Childhood director. This woman is the person I credit all my teacher success to. My first training included Early Childhood circle training, puppet making, sensory ideas, and iPad training. The presenters kept emphasizing "think out of the box." Since then, that has been my motto in every aspect of my life, especially in my classroom. I was so excited to implement all these ideas, especially technology.

This is where my love for technology began and how I could incorporate it into my classroom during center time. I hope I haven't bored you, but I want you to know how blended learning came into my classroom and the transformation of my teaching style. Now we're getting ready to discuss blended learning in my classroom.

So now that I have been given the tools to be a not only "good" teacher but a "good with technology" teacher, the sky's the limit! So, now I am in my classroom and I want it to be fun for my bilingual Pre-K cherubs, because that's what I taught for four years before my current position. My centers were all hands on activities with technology. I first taught them how to use Seesaw and digital citizenship. They learned what every icon did and they became pros with Seesaw. They enjoyed seeing their work in their journal and showing their creations to their classmates. Seesaw was also used as an assignment. I would create activities in Seesaw, assign them, and they had to complete it at the designated center. At my table, I would also incorporate the usage of technology. I would use it as a writing tool when playing a game. For example, when I would flash a card with pictures (subitize), they had to write the number on the drawing tool in Seesaw. This was so much fun for them. So, as you can see, for me, blended learning started five years ago. Seeing the difference it made in my classroom, I wouldn't have it any other way. The students are excited to come to school, go to centers but most importantly, to learn! Data does not lie. I noticed that my students were doing great on the CLI assessment and parents were happy with their child's progress. After experiencing all this, I learned that this was the teaching style I had been searching for.

Like everything else, we have to keep growing professionally and I am a lifelong learner. I like to know what the latest research is saying and how it will impact my students. Also, what other teachers are practicing in their classroom that is working. There is always room for growth. Now that I am in Kinder, with the students being a year older, I have to know what is expected in their grade level and the behavior. With this said, about two or three years ago, I attended a workshop about centers. The presenter discussed how children think when working in a center. She mentioned that when they are at a center, they do not want to be disturbed, much less leave it. The thing she does is she goes to the student/s at the center they are and works with them there. This way, the child does not have to leave their center and worry if somebody will go over and destroy what they have been working on. This way the child gives the teacher all the attention and focuses on what the teacher is reinforcing. I implemented this change when I went back to my classroom and saw the difference. The students were attentive and I had their undivided attention. Since then, I do this and I have no attention issues and I can see them learning and understanding the concept.

Blended learning has enhanced my teaching, because it pushed me to seek technology ideas and training. Since then, I am constantly seeking ideas on how to incorporate technology for the classroom. My goal is to create engaging activities that students will find fun in their eyes, but in my eyes, they are learning. I really like how my class works with blended learning. Now, I know that all along my teaching style had a term. This has been an amazing class. Thank you for sharing your knowledge and amazing feedback. I enjoyed reading all your comments and suggestions.

Foundations of Blended Learning Reflections: Cassidy Beakley, 4th Grade Writing/Social Studies/STEM, Mesa Verde Elementary School, Amarillo ISD, Texas

In this reflection, Cassidy Beakley outlines her vision to use many different types of assessment strategies to encourage students to self-pace and set and target learning goals for the purpose of optimizing individual growth. Formative assessment will be a hallmark of her blended classroom this year and will offer timely feedback to identify student needs and to guide them in choosing engaging learning activities as they navigate more personalized learning pathways. Even in a socially-distanced setting, Cassidy looks forward to using her teacher-led small group to connect with students of all levels, in order to not only address misconceptions, but also to motivate all students to reach their true learning potential. Having pivoted and adjusted to meet the ever-changing situation in education the past six months, Cassidy sees blended learning as a long-term solution to promote student learning and engagement, in any learning setting.

The world that we live in is changing, and it is changing rapidly. Over the course of this year, we moved from in-person teaching to totally virtual teaching to a hybrid model of both in-person with restrictions and virtual teaching. In all the chaos that this year has provided, educators still hold true to one common goal: what is best for the students that we service. This school year will be a blended learning opportunity for all of us, and now, thanks to this course, we have the knowledge, tools, and resources to lead the way into the 21st century of education.

Last year, I attempted to implement a flipped classroom learning model for a variety of reasons. There were some aspects of that endeavor that were successful and some aspects that were not. Through the course of this training, I have learned strategies and accumulated tools to help better the blended learning effort into this year. The main goal that I have for this year is to increase student achievement and engagement through the use of high-quality and rigorous activities that allow the students to work on their level to show true growth in their learning. This will be achieved and evidenced, first and foremost, through the use of state-wide standardized tests. I hope that the data will show the growth that the students will have made throughout the year. This will be achieved, secondly, through formative assessments throughout the year. The assessments will allow the students to be a part of the planning process and will allow them to give feedback and self-reflect on their learning, which will in turn teach them how to be critical thinkers

and reflectors. Lastly, this will be achieved through the use of summative assessments throughout the year. The district common assessments and weekly short quizzes will allow me to see where the instruction needs to go and where the learning gaps lie.

I plan to implement many of the strategies, tips, and tricks that I learned throughout this course. COVID-19 restrictions will have to be upheld, but I want to incorporate a sense of collaboration as much as possible. I also want to be flexible enough in a station rotation model to allow the students to choose where they work and what they work on so that they have the freedom of choice. The teacher station will be intentionally set up to work with those who are struggling with the content, and it will also be a time of conferring with the students that are doing well to encourage them to keep growing and striving. Many of the lessons and resources will be available to my students on the platform Canvas, which encompasses a multitude of learning apps and websites. This will allow my students to work at their own pace and stop and start the learning as needed.

This has been a career-altering experience for me. To know that there is a community of learners and educators that are successfully implementing this type of teaching model is so encouraging to know. Many educators are not willing to put in the time to learn about a new approach to teaching, but the instructors and educators that were part of this course truly want what is best for the students of today. The research that was done this summer opened my eyes to see all of the opportunities that we have to change the face of education for future generations to come.

Blended Learning Reflection Paper: Jacqueline Escobedo, 5th Grade, English Language Arts & Reading, Stuart Place Elementary School, Harlingen CISD, Texas

As she reflects on her specific role as a classroom teacher in her district's transition to blended learning, Jacqueline Escobedo recognizes that she is well-prepared to make this shift, repurposing many of her successful and established learning activities into a differentiated station rotation format and moving away from lecture to a more student-centered and explorative learning environment. In her new and improved classroom, Jacqueline looks to offer students more control of their learning path and pace and offer them targeted options with feedback to guide their individual choices and decisions. Formative assessment will be continual in Jacqueline's blended learning classroom, and her students will benefit from the many types of feedback that they receive in this more personalized setting.

My school district has decided to adopt blended learning in all classrooms throughout the district. This of course made me nervous because I did not know what this entailed or how it would change the dynamics of my teaching style and classroom environment. After reading several articles and watching multiple videos throughout the modules of UTeach Foundations of Blended Learning,

I have developed a sense of what my classroom should strive to be. Blended Learning is an innovative classroom model that has the potential to revamp our learning environment impacting our students' engagement and academic growth.

Our students are what motivates us to do our best when analyzing, designing, and implementing curriculum, and it will not be any different with blended learning. In my blended learning classroom, I would like to take the curriculum, tools, and classroom design I currently have and find ways that I can enhance them to allow student choice and engagement. I want to create a learning environment that students enjoy, learn from, and grow in through interaction and collaboration. The most important thing I would like to accomplish in my classroom is the ability to relinquish control and enable my students to take the reins of their own learning and make the choice of how, when, and where they will learn. Students are more engaged and show academic progress when they develop a sense of autonomy in the classroom. As a teacher, I will be able to accomplish this for my students by creating a learning experiences at the students' level and interest with the ability to grow at their own pace. Student academic growth will be an integral part of blended learning, and it will be important to monitor and have mini-conferences with students to set goals and discuss progress.

One of the biggest changes I will be implementing this coming fall is going from a traditional teaching style to a more student centered approach. Up until now, I have relied on teacher lectures that are followed by a student activity. This of course, I now realize, has not been effective with all my students, since I have students at different levels who learn at a different pace.

Therefore, I will be looking at the curriculum and materials I currently use to determine how I can incorporate them in a station rotation model. Even though I have had learning centers in my classroom before, I feel that the station rotations model is different because you will not have similar centers for students to participate in. Station in my classroom will have to be well thought out to offer differentiation and variety of tools for students to choose from. Student participation and progress in each station will be important in determining the path students take to master their areas in need of improvement.

Changes such as digesting curriculum, designing engaging activities, enabling student choice, and adopting the station rotation model will facilitate a personalized learning opportunity for my students to learn and monitor their progress through formal and informal assessments. I will be able to ensure my students success in my classroom by personalizing instruction and focusing on individual student needs. I will be using a variety of data collection tools to monitor student progress and understanding of content such as exit-tickets, student participation in stations, weekly and monthly progress monitoring assessments. Of course, all of this will not be easy, but it is a

challenge I am willing to take because I know it will benefit my students. I will be embarking in this journey with my colleagues who I hope to collaborate and learn from this coming fall.

Together, we will be able to develop a plan to help each other and our campus excel in this innovative teaching and learning model.

Blended Learning Reflections: Jessica James, 5th Grade Math Teacher, Odyssey Academy Galveston, Texas

In this reflection, Jessica James shares her excitement and specific plans to integrate technology in her 5th-grade classroom as a way to personalize learning for her young math students. She will make effective use of her Learning Management System to organize personalized pathways, with embedded formative assessments and targeted technology resources, to optimize individual outcomes. Jessica will embrace her roles as designer, analyst, and facilitor of this dynamic setting and looks forward to using data to drive instructional planning and encourage intentional interactions in her teacher-led small group.

I first signed up for this course because we were in the middle of a pandemic where teachers were thrust into online teaching with only days to prepare. I felt so lost in the online world and wanted any help I could get with educational technology. I thought MAYBE I would learn a thing or two I could take back to the classroom with me next school year. However, from this course I have learned SO much more!

At the beginning of this course, I was not completely sure what the term "blended learning" meant. I knew it had to do with technology in the classroom, but I did not know what that technology was or how it would look being used in a real classroom. I quickly learned that blended learning is so much more than just using technology in class. It is using technology as a tool to enhance lessons and activities. It is also a tool for allowing personalized learning to happen. Blended learning is an entirely new way of thinking about the everyday life of a student and teacher. And I now WANT that life!

Blended learning has so many benefits to education and life in the classroom. For teachers, it allows quicker feedback through online formative assessments, which in turn help to guide and plan future lessons. It also gives teachers access to so many different models of presenting information. It can allow teachers flexibility in the classroom and give them the opportunity to differentiate learning and focus on small group intervention. For students, blended learning gives them freedom. It allows for personalized learning at their own pace. It also teaches students life skills such as accountability and proactivity. It peaks students' interest and keeps them engaged longer. It also promotes student ownership and autonomy. Lastly, blended learning gives students valuable skills

in technology and computer literacy, which are imperative to working and surviving in the 21$_{st}$ century.

My main goal is to create a blended learning environment in my classroom that fosters student learning using personalized learning and technology integration. My plan for creating a blended learning environment consists of reorganizing the physical setup of my classroom, integrating online tools into my course on our Learning Management System, and using online formative assessments to drive my instructional planning. The physical environment of my classroom will include spaces in the room for technology, teacher-led small group learning, whole group teaching, small group collaboration, and independent student work. There will also be strong rules and expectations set in the classroom to ensure blended learning will flow smoothly.

The other two steps to my plan include the integration of technology. I will start by using our Learning Management System to present students with learning paths, which will allow for differentiation in student learning. Learning paths will also serve as a checklist for students to keep up with their work. Within the learning paths, I will include a variety of online tools and apps which will keep students engaged and learning. These could include videos to watch, online math practice activities, or online math games. Lastly, I will use online formative assessment, tools such as Quizlet as "exit tickets" each day. This quick data will help me in planning for the next day's lessons and small group teaching. I also want to use this data to reteach during teacher-led small groups the content which students did not grasp.

I am beyond excited to have the chance to implement blended learning in my classroom next year. I know it is going to make a huge difference in the education of my students by allowing them freedom and personalized learning. It is also going to make things easier for me as a teacher and provide me with more time and resources. Blended learning is going to make a world of difference!

Blended Learning Reflection Paper: Amy Holton, 6th Grade Technology Applications, NYOS Charter School, Austin, Texas

Amy Holton came into this course experience equating blended learning directly with flipped instruction, and as a result, had reservations about adopting this approach with her students, many of whom struggle with poverty. As Amy became immersed in the course explorations and, at the same time, had to adjust to an abrupt shift to remote instruction due to Covid-19, her definition of blended learning broadened as she began to realize that she could use many student-centered and technology-rich strategies to meet students in any setting and from any background. Amy is now excited about using intentional technology and blended frameworks like stations, instructional videos in the classroom, small group and individual conferences with students, and formative assessments to encourage higher engagement and achieve her goal of 80% mastery for all of her students, especially those from challenging circumstances. She is renewed, reinvigorated, and excited to continue making

positive change for the good of her students as she carries out this transition and her forward-thinking vision this year.

The absolute goal for me when I am learning to be a better teacher is to feel reinvigorated in my profession and excited about bringing change to my students. To get to that place after the exhausting work of retooling all of my lessons to an online version, and struggling with my young students through that transition, is no small feat, but this course did it.

I began learning in early spring about blended learning with some misconceptions under my belt. Most significantly, in my brain, blended learning had become synonymous with flipped learning, and I had reservations about using the flipped learning model for younger students. Many of my students live in circumstances where learning online at home is a significant challenge, and many lack access to technology, so I didn't really think of it as a viable option.

I learned, however, that there are several different models, many of which utilize centers that allow students to learn independently with digitized instruction within the classroom. This, I could get behind, and I began thinking of how I could start experimenting during the fourth quarter with the blended learning rotation model. Then, ironically, my colleagues and students were forced by a worldwide pandemic to take learning online, and the issues related to taking digital instruction into our homes were there at the forefront of my daily teaching experience.

For next year, I am looking at a design for instruction that literally requires the adoption of the blended learning model, and I could not feel more grateful that I had the training I have received to help me prepare for the coming year. The model takes different elements that I have been incorporating into my teaching — gathering and using data to drive instruction, personalizing learning, mixing face-to-face instruction with digital instruction, etc. — and puts them all together. I have conferenced, had students work on digital lessons, and held small groups alongside whole group instruction, but I never utilized the station model to make my practice more intentional and more consistent, and that is the element that was missing.

My action plan clearly defines 10 steps that will help me revise my units and lessons, develop norms and procedures, build my understanding of the technology tools I plan to use, redesign my classroom to optimize instruction, and build the backbone course materials: instructional videos, assessments, rubrics, learning paths, and choice boards that will make next year a success.

Last year I designed classroom displays that brought the ISTE standards to the forefront. This year, I want to break down the TEKS and ISTE standards into a proficiency checklist that each student will monitor in the process of taking ownership of their own learning.

Online learning and teaching this spring exposed the problems that our students in poverty face most egregiously. I strive to make my instructional design universal, but I want to make them the touchstone for my lessons next year. I will revisit *Teaching with Poverty in Mind* by Ruby Paine and try to weave her recommendations into the blended learning model so I can take personalized learning to the next level. I want to streamline access to the learning experiences I design so that the process is easier to interpret. I want to make my lessons more clear, more accessible, and more meaningful to all students. When I collect data, I will specifically be working to ensure the success of my students experiencing poverty, and as a corollary, my students of color. I intend to work toward the goal of at least 80% of my students in poverty showing mastery of at least 80% of my standards.

Every few years something happens to me that inspires a major overhaul of my teaching. This time, it was a pandemic and blended learning. I am looking forward to putting the blended learning model into practice, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to take this course in order to make that possible and to continue to learn with leaders like Catlin Tucker and Heather Staker and join the online professional community of "blenders."

Reflections on Blended Learning: Anika Jones, Teen Leadership Instructor, Charles A. Baxter Junior High School, Everman ISD, Texas

In this reflection paper, Anika Jones outlines the specific ways that she will involve her students in their own learning journey, encouraging reflection and individual progress monitoring as fundamental elements of every class meeting. Anika is currently navigating the short-term challenges of remote learning and looks forward to a day that she may guide in-person small group interactions, using both traditional and technology-rich tools and strategies. Anika recognizes the fluid nature of a blended classroom and will embrace her role as designer to offer a balanced mix of activities and interactions to guide students to build lasting learning together, and in a more autonomous setting.

Firstly, please allow me thank the designers of the course; as your collaboration, insight, and educational impact has truly been meaningful. At the beginning of the course, I was not sure what to expect, in terms of specific criteria, things to avoid, necessary protocol, technological requirements, etc. However, it soon became clear that there was no uniform approach to Blended Learning. Although I expected a very defined, parochial outline, refreshingly, the resources of the course were anything but. My initial interest surrounding Blended Learning had to do with wanting to establish a means by which I could consistently engage with my students in a small group or individualized manner. Early on in the course, I appreciated the continuity of the presentation of resources via various formats; as I began to wrap my mind around this layered yet fluid concept that is Blended Learning.

In a nutshell, as aforementioned, I am looking to implement a Blended Learning format that allows for consistent, customized learning in the Teen Leadership classroom. At this point in time, the plan is that the majority of the time, our Blended Learning style will be a hybrid of the Station Rotation and Fliperentiated models. Due to the nature of these COVID times and the likening of my instructional day to the work day of a vlogger or stockbroker, I am having difficulty elaborating much past what has already been provided. Despite this challenge, I will continue from an idealistic perspective, in that students will interact with various tiers of content via multiple exposures within a lesson cycle experience using both traditional and technologically-enhanced pedagogy. My goal is not to start from scratch nor change components of plans that have worked well; but instead, to truly evaluate them for areas of refinement. The aspects that I am evaluating are: student learning, engagement, collaborative means, efficiency, and autonomy.

With each lesson, as I determine which aspects of the lesson to "blend," I am mindful of student learning being the utmost priority. Flexibility and adaptability will be necessary as the different phases of Blended Learning are encompassed in the Teen Leadership classroom; especially as I continue to grant more ownership to my students. At different portions of the lesson cycle, I plan to have students reflect on where they are on the roadmap and draw conclusions about what their next tasks should be. It will be required that the conclusions be justified and coupled with thoughtful inferences with the aim of modeling and discussing the rationale for the when/why of the checklist. Another paradigm shift for this school year is the monitoring of student progress. To be clear, not that assessment and student awareness of their areas of refinement and reinforcement are new, but the tracking system and the extent of the data will be amended. Previously, more of the soft skills were tracked in a detailed manner; as we started our "Developing Adults" initiative in the spring semester. However, having students participate in and eventually facilitate their own data management will help them transfer decision making skills, organization strategies, self-agency fundamentals, and a sense of resiliency.

Within the Blended Learning course, the overall the exposure to a wealth of resources, opportunities to practice, and environment promoting collaboration is undoubtedly life-changing. There is tremendous potential to foster the idea of digging deep and propelling forward like never before. Additionally, I can only begin to imagine the confidence and authentic learning that will take place, as much will be on their terms in manners comfortable and preferred to them. I anticipate that my students will be able to transfer and apply the nuances throughout their lives and across curricula.

Blended Learning Reflection Paper: Zach Wilson, High School English and Social Studies Teacher, Advanced Learning Academy, San Antonio ISD (CAST Network), Texas

Zach Wilson's reflection shares his blended learning journey, starting with an inspiring in-person observation of a blended learning classroom over a year ago, to his pandemic-induced quick transition, to designer and facilitator of synchronous and asynchronous lessons for his 7th-graders in the spring of last year, and now his new role teaching AP English and Government to high school seniors in a new school. Zach's reflections truly reads like a "how-to do blended learning" manual as he outlines the differentiated playlists that he has implemented this year, designed for students navigating different pathways with varying goals. Zach has shared examples of his playlists. Please enjoy!

In March of 2019, I had the opportunity to visit an elementary school that utilized Blended Learning strategies in a suburb of Houston called Clear Lake. The observation was incredible. Students ranging from first grade to fifth were working independently and collaboratively on a number of different learning targets in the same classroom environment. On T-TESS rubrics, the vision articulated is that "all" learners should be engaged deeply in learning, and in this elementary school, that goal was met in every single classroom I visited. Students used data trackers and binders to measure their own progress and make thoughtful instructional decisions for themselves. The teacher in each room truly was a facilitator, often working with small groups while other students worked diligently on the floor, in comfortable seating, or in traditional desks. It was genuinely a revelation — hadn't I been taught that adolescents had weak executive functioning and that they struggle to make and execute plans independently? — but I wasn't sure that what I was witnessing would be something I could ever achieve for myself.

Fast forward a year and a half, and enter into a pandemic. Suddenly, I'm using EdTech tools that had intimidated me before on a regular basis, not just proficiently, but fluently. It sounds like an exaggeration, but in just 9 weeks, I learned how to make hyperdocs that followed the 5Es template to create instructional videos using Screencastify, to use tools such as NearPod and EdPuzzle for content exposition, Zoom instruction for small group tutoring and one-on-one conferencing, and Google Forms for formative and summative assessments. I didn't know it, but during that time I developed many of the skillsets I would need to create engaging, content-rich, and personalized instruction — instruction that aligned specifically with my own vision of inquiry based and project-based learning.

This year, I've transitioned from teaching 7th grade history to working with high school juniors and seniors at the Advanced Learning Academy in San Antonio ISD. My job is to teach AP government and dual enrollment English IV. In part because of poring through the amazing English language arts Blended Lesson plans of Caitlin Tucker as part of this summer course, I met with my

instructional coach and told her that my goal for this upcoming year would be to focus specifically on trying to integrate personalized learning into my English IV class.

I had two specific goals for myself, and after the action plan that I turned in recently for this course, I now have a third. The first goal is to create a weekly action plan for students that explicitly carves out differentiated paths towards mastery that students should follow throughout the week, basing their academic decisions both on academic readiness levels and their own passions and interests. So far, I've made two weekly playlists, and both have been hits. I gave students a survey on the very first day and asked them what their goals were for the course: were they trying to gain high school credit, UT college credit that would transfer to Texas public schools and community colleges, or Advanced Placement English Language Arts credit? Based on their answers, I created playlists that highlighted Must Do and Can Do options. The Must Do options align with the requirements for the dual enrollment course that I'm teaching and has students completing 90 minutes of homework each week (45 minutes every other day except Friday); the Can Do option includes an extra hour of college-level reading and concept acquisition for different rhetorical terms commonly tested on the exam as well as timed writing practice, and I'm tiering things down and shortening assignments for below grade-level students who indicated they are just focusing on passing high school. I know that description was more in-depth than called for, but I'm extremely excited about how this is playing out, and that I'm able to challenge students in a way that feels equitable and fair. I'm not tracking students based on ability levels, but using strategic grouping and differentiation to support students along their readiness levels. It feels fantastic!

Second, I'm using all the technological skills I gained during the start of the pandemic in March of 2020 to make Zoom instruction as collaborative and focused on problem-solving and inquiry as possible. Because of flipping my classroom, my students who don't do homework have been working on the Nearpod during class time to get the basics, my students who struggled on the homework are working on extra practice with me to clarify their understanding, and my high-flyers are working on extension assignments in class that are often a little too challenging for some of them to achieve on their own. It has been powerful so far, and I couldn't have done it without this summer training.

My last goal is to begin using a data tracker to measure students' progress, and I'm going to think more about this as the semester progresses. Right now, I have my hands full with the first two goals, and anyway, I'm far above word count! I did want to include a picture of my personalized learning plan for the first week, however. I'm hoping that y'all like it.

Week One English IV Playlist

Day One

Must Do (for high school credit)	Can Do (for OnRamps and AP Credit)
Together, in class • Character Strengths Inventory (10m) • Course Difficulty Survey (5m) • Letter to Mr. Zach (30)	On your own, as homework: • Independent Learning Pre-Test (Are We a Nation of Immigrants?) (45 minutes)
On your own, as homework (for OnRamps credit) • OnRamps Orientation (45m)	

Day Two

Must Do (for high school credit)	Can Do (for OnRamps and AP credit)
Together, in class • Orientation and Syllabus Quiz (5m) • Independent Learning Pre-Test (Are We a Nation of Immigrants?) (45m) KWLs about disability in small groups (10m)	Together, in class: • The Dignity of Disabled Lives: identifying types of controversy, stakeholders, arguments (1 hour)
On your own, as homework (for OnRamps credit) • The Dignity of Disabled Lives: identifying types of controversy, stakeholders, arguments (1 hour)	On your own, as homework: • The Medical Model of Disability: viewpoint, fair summary, argument breakdown (60-90m)

Day Three (Friday the 21st or the 28th)

Must Do (for high school credit)
Together, in class • In-Class Research Summary (60m) (this serves as a writing pre-test)
On your own, as homework: • Finishing the research summary and submitting it on Canvas (less than 30m)

This Is Blended Learning: Anna Rendon, Academic Coach (All Subject Areas), Lytle High School, Lytle ISD, Texas

In this reflection paper, Anna Rendon shares her plan to take the lead in guiding teachers in making the transition to blended learning across her campus. Anna recognizes that student agency is a primary benefit of this approach and that technology integration heightens the ability for teachers to create student-centered learning environments. Because she works in a well-resourced district, Anna feels that she and her teachers are well-positioned to make this transition. She plans to work with her Curriculum and Technolgy Integration Director, as well as a committee of campus leadership and stakeholders, to use technology in an intentional way in professional development interactions with teachers. She also will create course content leaders among the teachers in her school to provide all teachers on her campus with a viable model and visual examples to help them make this leap, while developing a positive campus culture of student-centered and collaborative learning.

Blended learning (BL) is a hot topic when looking for ways to improve education. Before this course, I was under the impression that it was a complicated way that required full-day use of technology. However, I have learned that even though technology heightens blended learning it does not drive it. Leaning more heavily on in-person, brick and mortar experiences to provide responsive teaching for students while working also online is the best combination for student growth. It's not about the technology and software, but more about giving students agency over their own learning path. Encouraging students to reflect on their own learning through metacognitive skills as they take control of where, how, and when they learn improves engagement and persistence in learning.

After taking this course, I am convinced that Blended Learning must become part of every secondary educational program or school. One of my goals for blended learning is to create a classroom environment of collaboration and metacognitive skills are the norm through the use of playlists and station rotations. Students would be attentive and committed to the task at hand and fully engaged in learning. We currently have resources that would make this transition fluid and possible. All the students in our high school have 1:1 Chromebook devices assigned to them. We also have a Curriculum and Technology Integration Director that could help me as the Academic Coach make this happen. It may not be an overnight change; however, if some teachers begin to delve into areas of blended learning, it is a start to transformational learning. Most teachers on my campus are familiar with digital tools such as EdPuzzle or Flipgrid, but do not use it systematically in their classes. The point is to begin offering professional development that indicates how any technological tool must be used with a purpose and intention. We must ask how will using technology help measure student knowledge and skills as a form of formative assessment in the classroom.

Conversations among the leadership team have begun to take place and that is a great place to start. Next, we will complete a needs assessment among our faculty to gauge the level of knowledge about technology tools and blended learning. A stake-holders committee will be created which will allow teachers a voice in the plan being created. The CTI Director and I will join forces and plan BL professional development trainings for teachers. This is where this course becomes beneficial because I will be able to share the knowledge gained by completing the assigned modules. We would also meet with teacher volunteers to design a plan that would include curriculum and technology integration. I would like to have one teacher volunteer from each content area course so that once the initiative begins, other teachers will have a model plan in each of their departments. These teachers would lead the change on our Lytle High School campus.

Creating the right culture is not only essential but critical for blended learning to work on any campus. If we consistently work together and share priorities, we can make this work! Innovation often is equated with the unknown or uncertain experimentation; however, if a detailed plan is created by a group of teachers and administration with a common goal in mind then parents and students are more likely to buy in to this new method of learning. We can anticipate to see growth through qualitative and quantitative data to support a blended learning environment. Once all stakeholders realize that students will gain so much more through blended learning, then we know that the plan was well-executed.

For more information and to discuss your professional development needs, please contact:

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