DEVELOPING A COLLABORATIVE MENTORSHIP MODEL TO EFFECTIVELY SUPPORT AND SUSTAIN FLEXIBLE LEARNING WITHIN SCHOOL DISTRICT 71

by

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by

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We accept the Process Paper as conforming to the required standard.

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Abstract

As alternative learning options become more and more available to students, educators are finding the need to incorporate blended or flexible learning practices into their teaching approaches. With the rapid advance of technology, educators who have been traditionally trained are facing the need to implement a variety of unfamiliar strategies to meet the needs of their learners. A deficiency in the areas of support and professional development has hindered the ability of some teachers to initiate an evolution in their practice. The intent of this project was to develop a collaborative mentorship model to help support teachers in implementing flexible learning practices. By creating an online collaborative community using Google+ and a resource website, I have collected feedback and reviews that indicate that there is a distinct need and desire for not only formal face to face mentorship, but just in time connectedness as well. The online community and resource website will continue to be maintained and will form the basis of a collaborative mentorship proposal to School District 71.

*Keywords*: Blended Learning, Flexible Learning, Mentorship, Online Learning, Online Community, Collaboration
Acknowledgements

“The road to success is not straight. There is a curve called Failure, a loop called Confusion, speed bumps called Friends and caution lights called Family. You will have flat tires called Jobs, but if you have a spare called Determination, an engine called Perseverance, a driver called Will Power, you will make it to a place called Success.” ~ Unknown

This is a journey I would not have been able to undertake on my own. A long time dream of mine, I am ever so grateful to those who have journeyed alongside me to make it come true.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Purpose of the Major Project

With the increase in alternative learning options available to students, it has become clear there is a distinct need for flexible learning options within the brick and mortar classroom. Students in British Columbia have the ability to take courses at a variety of online and independent schools throughout the province to meet needs not necessarily met in their neighbourhood schools. Parents and students are continually looking for alternative learning options that meet the needs of their learners. Over the past few years, flexible or blended learning has received an increasing amount of attention. It has been referred to as the future of education.

For the purpose of this project, the term blended learning has been defined using Michael Horn and Heather Staker’s definition. I have referred to this type of learning as flexible learning from this point forward. Horn and Staker (2012) define blended learning as “a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace and at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home” (p. 3). This increased attention to the combination of face to face and online environment, or flexible learning, at the K-12 level has led to an interest in improving the combination of online and flexible learning models and creating a variety of approaches to implement them in brick and mortar schools. Teachers who wish to incorporate flexible learning in their practice need to be supported and engaged in this process.

This project will aim to develop a mentorship model to support and sustain flexible learning in School District 71. Within this project I will look at the following:

- What is flexible learning?
What is mentorship?

What type of mentorship has been utilized by teachers in School District 71 in the past?

What type of mentorship can be implemented in School District 71 to support teachers in flexible learning practices?

There are many inspired teachers who want to implement flexible learning and are excited about the new technologies available. The most consistent barrier to implementation is being able to scaffold support while they are learning. Considering using these tools with their students when they don’t yet have the skill and/or confidence to use them themselves can be overwhelming for teachers. In my experience as a distributed learning teacher, there is an expectation to design and develop online courses. These courses are expected to be robust, interactive and cutting edge. There are a handful of teachers who have the skills and aptitude to successfully meet these criteria. There are many more that do not. How can we inspire those who instead of excitement and passion feel fear and resistance to change? The number of students taking courses online is also increasing significantly. In their book, Disrupting Class, Christensen and Horn predict that 50 percent of all high school courses will be delivered online by 2019 (2008). Many students in School District 71 are taking online courses in addition to their traditional face to face courses. Independent Learning Centers (ILC’s) in School District 71 high schools allow students to work on these courses within their school with teacher support. Again, how do we ensure that both teachers and students are not only prepared for, but supported in this type of flexible learning?

Definition of Terms

Blended Learning: Blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of
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student control over time, place, path, and/or pace and at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home. (Horn & Staker, 2012)

_Brick and Mortar School:_ a traditional school where students attend face to face in a building as contrasted with an online or virtual school.

_Distributed Learning:_ According to WhatIs.com (2010) “distributed learning is a general term used to describe a multi-media method of instructional delivery that includes a mix of Web-based instruction, streaming video conferencing, face to face classroom time, distance learning through television or video, or other combinations of electronic and traditional educational models. Although distributed learning can be executed in a variety of ways, it is consistent in that it always accommodates a separation of geographical locations for part (or all) of the instruction, and focuses on learner-to-learner as well as instructor-to-learner interaction”.

_Flexible Learning:_ Flexible learning (FL) provides opportunities to improve the student experience through flexibility in time, pace, place (physical, virtual, on-campus, off-campus), mode of study (print-based, face to face, blended, online), teaching approach (collaborative, independent), or forms of assessment and staffing. It may utilize a wide range of media, environments, learning spaces and technologies for learning and teaching. (Keppell, 2010)

_Formal Mentoring:_ A program and process for mentoring that is developed by an organization. This is usually a formal short-term relationship where the mentors are volunteers, the mentees are assigned and the two may or may not voluntarily choose each other. (Inzer, 2005)

_Independent Learning Center:_ Independent Learning Centres (ILCs) at all three Comox Valley high schools give local secondary students a unique opportunity to pursue individual distance courses within a teacher-supported classroom environment. An ILC is a classroom or
computer lab located within a bricks-and-mortar high school, where Comox Valley students can take courses through distributed (distance) learning. ILCs are staffed by teachers from the host school, and support teachers from the distributed learning school are often available for additional in-person support. (Navigate, 2014)

**Informal Mentoring:** Informal mentoring is the natural coming together of a mentor and protégé. This is done in friendship, through personal and professional respect and admiration from each to the other. It is usually a long-term relationship. (Inzer, 2005)

**Mentor:** According to Oxford Dictionary, a mentor is “An experienced and trusted advisor” (def 1) or “An experienced person in a company or educational institution who trains and counsels new employees or students.”(def 1.1)

**Mentee:** “A person who is advised, trained, or counseled by a mentor.” (Oxford Dictionary def 1)

**Mentoring:** Mentoring is an interaction between a more experienced person and a less experienced person; it provides guidance that motivates the mentored person to take action (George & Neale, 2006)

**Navigate (NIDES):** Navigate (powered by NIDES) is a fully funded and accredited BC school operating within the Comox Valley School District No. 71 that offers distributed learning opportunities throughout BC. (Navigate, 2014)

**Justification of the Major Project**

It is my belief, after reviewing the literature and working in a distributed learning environment, that a mentorship model will effectively support and sustain flexible learning within a brick and mortar school. Mentorship models are not new, and research indicates that
education has used the mentorship model for many years. Almost all of the research found
discussed using the mentorship model to train beginning teachers. The majority of models are
used while teachers are still completing their teacher training programs. There are some like
Kopcha (2010) and Glazer (2006) who propose an in situ mentorship model to implement new
programs within schools and see these models eventually sustaining themselves through
collaborative communities of practice. These are the models that I see working for our schools
in the near future. This is also the type of model I propose to develop and eventually implement
within School District 71.

Many of our brick and mortar schools are still following an outdated method of
delivering education while the world around them, and the learners within this world, are
evolving at a rapid pace. Collaborative mentorship can support teachers in implementing
blended programs within their schools. It can also help them sustain these models by developing
their own communities of support. These communities may be formal or informal, online or
offline. For this project, we will be implementing a formal online community as a support base
from which to start gathering information. Mentorship can allow teachers to develop confidence
in their skills and will bring them out of isolation into a supportive community.

Critical Challenge to be Addressed

Developing a collaborative mentorship model to effectively support and sustain flexible
learning within School District 71. Within this challenge, I looked at the following:

- What is flexible learning?
- What is mentorship?
- What type of mentorship has been utilized by teachers in School District 71 in the past?
What type of mentorship can be implemented in School District 71 to support teachers in flexible learning practices?

**Overview of the Project**

My objectives were twofold. First, I intended to examine the current research relating to mentorship and flexible learning as well as current models of flexible learning to determine the pros and cons related to them in an organizational setting. Second was to develop a mentorship model to support teachers in School District 71 brick and mortar schools to implement flexible learning practices. In order to accomplish this, I worked with several people in School District 71; a VIU and teaching colleague; the District Principal of Technology; and the District Technology Support Teacher.

My colleague and I chose to align our Masters proposals as both of our questions looked at the development and sustainability of flexible learning practices within School District 71. Although our topics were related and we worked in conjunction with each other, we each focused on our individual topics for completing our Masters projects: *Exploring Online Communities to Help Foster the Development of Technology Supported Flexible Learning in School District 71*; and *Developing a Collaborative Mentorship Model to Effectively Support and Sustain Flexible Learning within School District 71*.

The purpose of these projects was to develop an online community and mentorship model that would support and sustain flexible learning practices in brick and mortar schools using current research around mentorship and flexible learning, an online community of practice as well as discussions with teachers and district staff. My focus with the district principal of technology and district technology support teacher was to look at the various technologies that
have already been implemented in our district, such as Smart Boards and iPads. I looked at the implementation methods that were used and the approaches that led to teachers feeling comfortable and confident in using them with students in their classrooms. There have been several teachers in our district who have been involved in mentoring processes in the past, and I had several conversations with these teachers to determine what methods and approaches they felt had the most impact on teacher learning.

I created a district mentorship site using Weebly as a platform. This site consists of a district mentorship proposal, mentoring resources, a link to the online community and two mentoring platforms; one formal, one informal. The Weebly site entitled “SD71 Collaborative Mentorship” is an evolving place for district mentorship resources and will eventually become a large part of my mentorship proposal to the district. As I gathered feedback from the online community, discussions with peers around the province and research, I was able to update and revise this site to suit our district needs. This site information was linked to a mentorship page that I created for the district’s Learn71 portal, a community resource portal for sharing and learning.

My colleague and I created an online community using Google+ for district staff relating to the topic of flexible learning. This community was a place for teachers to gather information and have discussions around flexible learning. Mentorship allowed teachers to take the available information and apply it in ways to build feelings of competence and success in their individual contexts.

To develop a model for implementing mentorship in brick and mortar schools in School District #71, I combined research, past practices, as well as discussions with district staff.
Through this research process I gathered common themes to inform my recommendations for a School District #71 mentorship model to support and sustain flexible learning.

**Project deliverables.**

1. Clearly defined goals of a mentoring program
2. Construction of a knowledge base (literature and experience)
3. Design of a mentorship platform for SD 71
4. Identify constraints
5. Develop program evaluation model based on knowledge base and outcomes
6. Implementation plan for a mentorship platform in SD71

**Project timeline.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Component</th>
<th>Anticipated Due Date</th>
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| Proposal sent to SD 71 (see Appendix A)  
Email sent to SD 71 staff (see Appendix B) | September 8 |
| Google + community start up  
Mentoring research initiated  
Meetings with district staff | September 15-19 |
| Interviewing past teacher mentors and mentees  
Google + community continues | September 22-November 15 |
| Evaluation of Mentoring and recommendations  
Evaluation of Google + community  
Evaluation of sustainability of mentoring program and online community | November 15-December 1 |
| Completion of individual process papers for submission to VIU | December 1 - 15 |
Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Background

Over the past few years, flexible learning has increasingly received attention and has been referred to by some as the future of education. This increased attention to the combination of a face to face and online environment, or flexible learning, at the K-12 level has led to an interest in improving the combination of online and flexible learning models and ways to implement them in brick and mortar schools. This literature review will focus on mentoring as a model for implementing flexible learning into K-12 classrooms.

Existing resources on the implementation of K-12 flexible learning programs are extremely limited as are resources related to using a mentorship model to support the implementation of flexible learning at the K-12 level. Much of the literature on flexible learning as well as mentoring is aimed at higher education and many of the resources available in K-12 are related to the mentorship of new and beginning teachers. The increased attention to flexible learning and increasing interest in brick and mortar schools adapting flexible models demonstrate the need for a way to support and engage teachers who wish to incorporate flexible learning approaches in their practice.

The success of the mentorship model in supporting and retaining beginning teachers indicates that it has a strong potential to effectively support the implementation of flexible learning within a school. My project therefore is “Developing a collaborative mentorship model to effectively support and sustain flexible learning within School District 71”. In order to develop this model effectively I will need to first define flexible learning and what the flexible learning model looks like in a brick and mortar school. I will then define mentorship and examine the research on mentorship models within schools.
Flexible Learning Overview

There are many definitions of flexible learning, with most taking into account the combination of a face to face and online learning environment. For the purpose of this paper, the definition of flexible learning by Michael Horn and Heather Staker will be used. Horn and Staker (2012) define flexible learning as “a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace and at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home” (p. 3). Horn and Staker make it clear that flexible learning is a combination of face to face and online as well as the fact that at least part of the program is delivered at a brick and mortar school. Figure 1 illustrates a clear visual of blended learning as defined by Horn and Staker. An important part of Horn and Staker’s flexible learning definition is the idea that there is “some element of student control of time, place, path, and/or pace” (p. 3). Digital Learning Now (2011), a national initiative of the Foundation for Excellence in Education, describes these elements of flexible learning as follows:

1. *Time*: Learning is no longer restricted to the school day or the school year.

2. *Place*: Learning is no longer restricted to the walls of the classroom.

3. *Path*: Learning is no longer restricted to the pedagogy used by the teacher. Interactive and adaptive software allows students to learn in their own style, making learning personal and engaging.

4. *Pace*: Learning is no longer restricted to the pace of an entire classroom of students.
Flexible learning is a model that has recently gained considerable attention in education. It is not necessarily a new model and there are schools that have been using a type of flexible model in some way for many years. The definition of flexible learning has evolved to incorporate some form of online learning, learning in part in a brick and mortar school as well as some student control over their learning. Schools, however, have not necessarily evolved along with this definition. Similarly, schools that may consider themselves as offering flexible programs are actually incorporating technology into their teaching rather than truly “blending” the learning. Changes in the way students learn and the increasing advances in technology have brought flexible learning to the forefront as a way to address current learning needs.
Mentorship Overview

The term mentor stems from Homer’s Odyssey. Odysseus entrusts his son, Telemachus, to the care of Mentor. Mentor was a teacher, guide and overseer to Telemachus. Over time, the word mentor has evolved to mean trusted advisor, friend and teacher (Nick, J. M., Delahoyde, T. M., & Del Prato, D. 2012).

Mentoring is often thought of as a relationship that is beneficial to both parties involved, and according to Haggard, Dougherty, Turban and Wilbanks (2011) requires a “reciprocal relationship, involving mutuality of social exchange as opposed to a one-way relationship” (p. 292). It is important to note that both of the parties play a part in contributing to the relationship.

Desirable characteristics of both mentors and mentees include expertise, professional integrity, honesty, accessibility, approachability, motivation, respect from peers, and supportive and encouraging attitudes according to Berk, Berg, Mortimer, Walton-Moss and Yeo (2005).

Mentorship has a long history in the educational field. Most mentoring programs focus on the development of beginning teachers in traditional school settings. There is a distinct lack of research available on the mentorship of established teachers who are traditionally trained and may be struggling with incorporating new teaching methods brought about by the rapid advancement of technology.

Review of Literature on Mentorship Models

Glazer and Hannafin (2006) discuss the lack of professional growth that occurs when teachers attend workshops. They believe that learning experiences of this type are isolating and lack ongoing support or feedback. They propose a model that features “reciprocal interactions”
where both parties to the learning experience interact and influence each other. They suggest a collaborative apprenticeship model that encourages “peer-teachers to serve as modelers and coaches of strategies and ideas aimed at improving instruction” (p. 179) Glazer and Hannafin’s model moves through four phases of development and allows for teachers to obtain mastery and in turn become mentors themselves. Figure 2 shows the four phases of the collaborative apprenticeship model where teachers would move from introduction through to mastery with direct coaching diminishing as they become more proficient.

Glazer and Hannafin’s (2006) paper brings up some implications that require further investigation. Some of these implications are the need for defining the qualities required of mentor teachers as well as looking at how schools are organized and how to implement a program that would allow for a “sustainable, supportive community of professional teachers” to evolve (p.191). It is my goal to build on Glazer and Hannafin’s collaborative apprenticeship model to support effective implementation of flexible learning in brick and mortar schools.

Glazer and Hannafin’s emphasis on community and implementing a program that meets the needs of both the teachers and the organization is very relevant. Teachers may be in a variety of locations with diverse schedules. Due to these conditions, implementation of a mentorship program may require support in flexible formats.
Glazer, Hannafin and Song (2005) discuss the lack of success teachers have in integrating technology into their classrooms. They attribute this lack of success to several factors including lack of support, ineffective and inauthentic training and lack of time. According to the writers, support and training needs to be ongoing and applicable. They propose using a collaborative apprenticeship model in situ to allow teachers to “obtain on-site, continual, and just in time support from peers as professional learning is integrated into the community’s repertoire” (p.58). Implementing flexible learning into a brick and mortar setting will demand that teachers are comfortable and confident in applying online teacher skill sets. If support and training are ineffective and/or lacking then the model will fail. A mentorship model would allow for hands on, sustained support and training until the teacher has demonstrated competency and confidence. This model then allows for sustainability by having the mentee become the mentor over time.
Kopcha (2010) proposes a systems-based mentorship model for implementing technology in K-12 schools. By taking this approach and looking at all of the parts of the system, Kopcha allows for the implementation to take place in a step by step way with lots of room for evaluations and revisions or adjustments. This allows for a flexible system that can be applied in multiple situations. Kopcha’s model is in line with Glazer’s (2005) thinking that by using a systems-based collaborative method, teachers will learn more, be more engaged and motivated and gain transferable knowledge. According to Kopcha’s (2010) research, “educators who are trying to integrate technology into their teaching, either in K-12 or higher education settings, universally desire the just in time support and individual attention provided by this model” (p.187).

**Components of an Effective Mentorship Model**

The International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) looks at the mentoring relationship by studying several online schools that have implemented mentorship programs to aid teachers who are new to teaching in an online environment (2008). The schools observed all found that a successful mentorship program was beneficial to everyone involved; “an effective mentoring program will benefit the mentee through development of knowledge and skills, the mentor through development of leadership and communication capabilities, and the school through the sharing of ideas and expertise” (p.2). Each of the schools observed used a model based on their own needs and models varied from formal to informal, online and face to face as well as just in time to on-going. Most of the schools used online networking communities as ways to offer on-going informal support. The idea of placing mentors within a
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school but having an online informal support system in place that is district wide is intriguing and would, I believe, be a positive asset to an implementation model.

Chuang, Thompson and Schmidt (2003) reviewed literature published in the area of implementation of technology mentoring models in K-12 schools and teacher education programs. They discuss several elements that effective models have in common; “providing visions for technology use, individualizing technology support, breaking down hierarchical structure, establishing learning communities, and providing mutual benefits for mentors and mentees” (p. 104).

Schmidt (2006) describes a study of a music teacher and his experiences in being mentored as well as mentoring others. This study looked at the benefits and reciprocity of mentoring relationships. One of Schmidt’s discussion points is the quality of both the informal and formal mentoring that was received and how this can affect individual failure and/or success. The time a mentor spent with the mentee initially to find out their individual needs, strengths and weaknesses was integral to success.

Hobson, Ashby, Maldarez and Tomlinson (2008) provide a review of literature on the mentoring of beginning teachers. They discuss the benefits of mentoring for mentors, mentees and the schools that implement mentoring programs. Hobson et al point out that mentoring can have a significant effect on the self esteem and professional development of mentees, specifically beginning teachers based on this review. As others have, Hobson et al learned that mentoring provides a reciprocal relationship and the mentors in turn learn from their mentees and enhance their own teaching. Within schools, mentoring programs have led to less isolation and often lead to other experienced teachers either seeking help or offering it which promotes a communal support system within the school.
Nick, Delahoyde, and Del Prato (2012) look at best mentoring practices that exist in order to establish a program for excellence in mentoring for nurse educators. The authors found six categories to describe best mentoring practices through their research. These six categories are: achieve properly matched dyads, establish clear mentorship purpose and goals, solidify the dyad relationship, advocate for and guide the protégé, integrate the protégé into the academic culture, and mobilize institutional resources for mentoring support (p.1). It is clear from the research that the relationship between the mentor and mentee, along with clear goals for both are integral to mentoring programs. Nick et al (2012) also touch on the idea of reciprocity, another theme that has recurred throughout the literature, where “each party has the experience of being the giver and the receiver” (p.4). It has become clear to me that reciprocity strengthens the mentoring relationship as both parties receive some benefit and have a feeling of ownership over the process that has occurred.

**Criticisms of mentorship models**

Kopcha (2010) and Chuang, et al (2003) touch on common criticisms of mentorship models including the time, money and support required to implement them. Kopcha argues that the systems based model that he proposes actually reduces some of these demands due to the fact that his model results in the “development of a community of practice” which allows for long-term sustainability. I agree that although the initial output of time, money and resources may be large, this will diminish as the model succeeds, mentees become mentors and a collaborative community develops.

Schmidt (2008) addresses the need to recognize when a mentoring relationship is not working and is in fact contributing to the failure of the mentee. Here is where Kopcha’s (2003)
systems-based model can be effective as it allows time for evaluation and revision, especially important if things are not working as planned. Schmidt’s (2008) discussion around “mutual mentoring” is akin to communities of practice mentioned in other resources. As the mentorship model begins to sustain itself, mentees work together to learn from each other and in turn mentor others. I appreciated Schmidt’s point around the idea of a mentor not always needing to be an “expert” and individuals discovering their own strengths and in turn sharing these with others.

In their review of literature on mentoring beginning teachers, Hobson et al (2009) indicate that there may be some disadvantages for those involved in a mentoring program. One of the disadvantages discussed is that the mentoring role can result in feelings of increased workload and stress. They also indicate, as Schmidt (2008) does, that the mentor/mentee relationship is not always positive or successful and that several conditions need to be met in order for mentoring to be effective: “(i) contextual support for mentoring; (ii) mentor selection and pairing; (iii) mentoring strategies; and (iv) mentor preparation” (p.211). Hobson et al are also the only ones who raised an extremely important factor in the success of any implementation model: the ‘willingness’ to be mentored on the part of the mentee (p.211).

Hansford, Ehrich and Tennent (2004) reviewed a variety of research-based literature on mentoring in the context of education, business and medicine in order to determine the outcomes of mentoring programs. Hansford et al (2004) found that overall, mentoring programs provide positive benefits to all parties involved. They found that the majority of the literature spoke of the fact that mentors and mentees were more likely to be happier and more effective at work as well as more likely to help others in similar positions.

“The Dark side of Mentoring” (Long, 1997), discusses the weaknesses of mentoring, describing circumstances under which mentoring can be negative to both the mentor and
mentee. Long mentions factors similar to Kopcha (2010) and Chuang (2003) such as cost, support, time, planning, and the mismatching of partnerships.

Hansford et al (2004) raise some interesting points when they review “Issues and Challenges for Educational Administrators”. They state that a school or district should take the time to research and plan before implementing any kind of mentoring model. They are suggesting that mentoring should be a proactive approach, not a reactive one. In other words, we should not implement a mentoring program for its own sake, it should be well thought out and planned. The major challenges that Hansford et al (2004) cite administrators face are: awareness of the research on mentoring that exists, support for the program, training of the mentors, participant selection and program evaluation. All of these challenges can be mitigated by careful and thorough planning and the building of a sound implementation model.

Conclusion

How can a mentorship model effectively support and sustain flexible learning within a brick and mortar school? Mentorship models are not new, and research indicates that education has used the mentorship model for many years. The majority of the research I found discussed using the mentorship model to train beginning teachers and most of the models are used while teachers are still completing their teacher training programs. There are some like Kopcha (2010) and Glazer (2006) who propose an in situ mentorship model to implement new programs within schools and see these models eventually sustaining themselves through collaborative communities of practice. These are the models that I see working for our schools in the near future. As stated by Glazer and Hannafin (2005), workshops and seminars are ineffective means of implementing new programs. By offering follow up face to face mentoring as well as a place
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or community to have peer to peer discussions, we can ensure that the information from the workshops is transformed into the practice of our educators.

Many brick and mortar schools continue to follow an outdated method of delivering education while the world around them and the learners within this world are changing and evolving at a rapid pace. Through collaborative mentorship we can support teachers in implementing flexible programs within their schools and help them to sustain these models by developing their own communities of support. Mentorship will allow teachers to develop confidence in their skills and will bring them out of isolation and into a supportive community.

Famous filmmaker George Lucas (2001) said; "Mentors help novices learn by doing - applying theory in practice - and also inspire them, keeping them motivated to persevere." This quote sums up the mentor-mentee relationship, it also points out the key factor to the success of a mentorship model to implement flexible learning in a school. “Learn by doing” and “applying theory in practice” are what will make such a model successful. Kopcha (2010), Hobson et al (2009), Chuang et al, (2003) and Glazer et al (2006) have all indicated in some way that in situ or just in time mentoring are what is needed in order for teachers to gain confidence and skill as well as to sustain a model over time.
Chapter 3 – Procedures and Methods

Major Project Design

I currently work as a vice principal at Navigate, a distributed learning school in British Columbia. Through my work as an online teacher and now vice principal of distributed learning, I have watched the shift from practice being completely at a distance to the need for a combination of online and face to face teaching and interaction.

The number of students attending brick and mortar schools who are cross enrolling by taking one or more courses at our distributed learning school has increased significantly. This increase of cross enrolled students at the secondary school level led to the creation of independent learning centers (ILCs) in our school district. These ILCs allow students to work on their online courses within their school with the support of a teacher. ILCs are an example of the self-blend or a la carte model of blended learning as described by Horn and Staker (2012).

Figure 3 shows a clear visual of the a la carte model in action.

Figure 3. The a la carte or self blend model (Horn and Staker, 2012)
The ILC teaching position is a difficult one as many teachers have not experienced a flexible model and do not know how to adequately support students within the model. Having these flexible programs in place, we need to make sure that they are supported and sustained to ensure student success. Similarly, students lack experience in being flexible learners. Many students do not have the chance to be successful in an ILC because they have not learned how to be independent learners. Exposing them to flexible learning early on in their career as a student would teach the critical skills needed.

With this in mind, I concluded the intent of my project was to develop a mentorship model for School District 71 in order to support teachers with implementing flexible learning practices in their classrooms. This in turn would support students in becoming flexible learners. Scaffolding skills for flexible learning starting in elementary school could help all to be successful.

As I looked at mentorship and flexible learning, my colleague indicated he intended to look at online communities as a way to support flexible learning within our school district. With the support of our supervisors, my colleague and I decided to align our projects and work together on creating an online community of practice where my colleague could study the effects of the online community in action and I could gather information on and begin to implement mentoring. The online community would serve a dual purpose: in addition to gathering information and feedback, I wanted to see its benefits as a collaborative community of practice where just in time mentorship could happen and connections could either be created or carried forward after formal mentorship had taken place.
The first step was to define what flexible learning was; what did it mean in the context of School District 71 and our schools? Horn and Staker’s (2012) definition of blended learning where “blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace and at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home.”, is the one that made the most sense and fit the model I was hoping to create. The student control over time, place, path and pace were integral to choosing this definition as it is what makes the learning flexible.

My project’s main focus was twofold. First was the creation of an online Google + community where teachers could access and interact with current mentorship resources as well as flexible learning resources. The goal of the online community was to allow teachers to experience flexible learning and have a space to communicate their experiences and thoughts around how mentorship may aid them in implementing these practices in their own classrooms. Initial conversations indicated that there was an interest in flexible learning practices, yet a hesitancy around implementation due to lack of knowledge and support. The online community was developed to create a knowledge base, offer support through discussions and use the information gathered to create a mentorship model that would allow teachers hands on experience in areas that interested them. Second, was a place in School District 71’s Learn71 portal that would house district mentorship resources. Here teachers would be able to find out what mentorship is and why it is important, who our school district mentors are, access application forms to be a mentor or mentee and much more. Both of these objectives would help me in my final goal to develop a collaborative mentorship program that I would propose to our district for implementation.
Major Project Development

The initial basis for this project was the proposed plan for Kindergarten to grade nine cross enrollment in B.C. schools. Cross enrollment at the elementary grade levels will mean that we need teachers and students who are versed in flexible learning practices. I have experienced the confusion that has come with the implementation of cross enrollment at the grade eight and nine level and there is a lot of fear around what cross enrollment will look like when it moves to Kindergarten through grade seven. How can we support teachers when flexible learning becomes a necessity because a percentage of their students will be taking online courses? What will this look like in the elementary brick and mortar classroom?

Once I started examining the reasons behind the lack of technology and flexible learning implementation in many schools, I discovered there is also a gap in professional development opportunities available for teachers to implement flexible learning into their practice. This conclusion formed the secondary basis for my project as the lack of availability of professional development for technology or flexible learning implementation is a serious roadblock to teachers initiating a change in their practice. In other words, there is technology available; teachers just don’t know how to use it in a way that is pedagogically sound. Flexible learning is not the same as a technology rich classroom and, as Knuth and Rodriguez (2000, para. 1) state; "Educational technology is not, and never will be, transformative on its own. It requires the assistance of educators who integrate technology into curriculum, align it with student learning goals, and use it for engaged learning projects."

When my colleague and I began to share ideas for our projects, it became evident we would be able to align our projects to reach a common goal of bringing flexible learning to our school district by providing not only resources around flexible learning and a place to discuss
them through the Google+ community, but also providing a way for teachers to connect with those who were already using flexible learning practices and collaborating with them in a hands on way. In short, we could provide opportunities for mentorship through collaboration and communication.

One of the most difficult steps of this process was agreeing on a definition of what flexible learning is? My colleague and I initially had differing views of what flexible learning in our school district would look like and which components needed to be present. Once we found Horn and Staker’s (2012) blended learning definition which includes the elements of time, space, path and pace, we knew that this would fit both of our project’s needs and would fit in well with what we were attempting to accomplish.

The second difficulty came in choosing which type of online community to use for our project. This would be an important decision as we needed something that was robust, but not overwhelming to use. Having experience with Facebook, Twitter and Google+, we narrowed it down to these three. The community needed to be a place where members felt secure, could easily engage and it had to be easy to use. From my perspective, I needed the community to be able to have longevity and to allow for mentorship to happen. Google+ offered all of these things. I had success with Google+ communities in the past and knew that it was relatively easy to use and access and it had the capability for creating subsections based on mentoring topics.

In July and August of 2014, we worked on a joint proposal to our school district. This joint proposal would eventually be rewritten as two individual project proposals to be submitted to our Vancouver Island University supervisors. During this time I was also gathering information around mentorship models that had been used by other school districts. In addition to seeking out relevant research, I turned to Twitter for help and sent out repeated queries asking
for models that others had implemented or had experience with. Both the research and queries
demonstrated there is a lack of available information regarding mentorship and flexible
learning. Replies to my tweets or emails were often filled with more questions than answers as
well as appeals to share my findings. It seemed that many others recognized the need for
mentorship, and shared the desire for a process to implement it.

After receiving feedback that our proposals were approved, I felt we were ready to
launch our online community using Google+. Part of our initial project proposal included a letter
to our district senior administration (Appendix A) as well as a letter to district teachers
(Appendix B) introducing the online community and asking for them to join and
participate. What we hadn’t anticipated in our early planning stages was that the British
Columbia teacher labour dispute would delay the start of the school year by three weeks. The
ongoing labour dispute meant that we needed to delay the launch of our project. Instead of
starting at the end of August, we were not able to send off our initial requests to join the Google+
community until October 17, 2014. This also meant that I was unable to gain access to the
Learn71 portal to start developing a section on mentorship until October.

I decided to create a Mentorship site using Weebly with the hope that I could move it
into the Learn 71 portal once I was able to gain access. The site contained the overview of a
district mentorship proposal, a link to the online community, mentorship resources and two
different ways of mentoring. The first was an informal just in time method, I called “Ask a
Mentor” (Appendix C). I created and embedded a Google Form that potential mentors could fill
out with their name, area of strength and contact information. The form would automatically
populate a spreadsheet that potential mentees could look through to find a suitable match. The
intention of this was to have a searchable database of skills for those who needed to ask just in
time questions without having to go through a formal mentorship process. The second was a more formal method of mentoring I called “Learning Partnerships” (Appendix D). Again, there was an embedded form to complete which asked for the name(s) of the learning partners, their goal and the proposed time/funds they needed. Applicants had the option of requesting a specific learning partner or being matched up with someone suitable.

In mid October, with the Google+ community up and running and access to the Learn71 portal, I was able to start distributing information on mentorship and look for feedback on a proposed mentorship model for School District 71. The late start was discouraging and caused some anxiety around whether or not I would be able to complete my project on time. I debated whether I should change my initial proposal and instead create a larger mentorship resource that could be housed on our school district website, building upon the Weebly site that I had already created. In the end, I decided that this project was about collaboration and helping teachers to work together to implement technology supported flexible learning. Part of any process would naturally consist of unforeseen events that would cause problems in a classroom and this project was about how we could recover from them through collaboration and support. Research such as that of Glazer and Hannafin (2006) indicates that just providing a resource or a workshop is ineffective in promoting success; it is meaningful interactions and collaborations that allow teachers to demonstrate and feel success and confidence. I decided to move forward with the project as proposed and hoped to be able to gather enough information to create an effective model for mentorship.

**Major Project Delivery/Implementation**

After sending off the email to the district teachers and opening up the community, we were eager to share our ideas and engage in meaningful discussions. At the same time as using
Google+ to initiate mentorship discussions and gather information around pros and cons of people’s experience, I continued to use Twitter to gather this information on a larger scale. I also created an overview of a two year, three phase proposal for implementing mentorship in School District 71 (Appendix E). This proposal was posted on the Weebly mentorship site as well as put out to others for peer review and feedback. The Google+ community was one of the major vehicles for delivering and implementing my project. This is where I would put my questions, ideas and proposals out to the field and gather valuable feedback and discussion.

As mentorship is about support and collaboration, the online community was a significant part of my field testing. As our students and teachers face flexible learning in the classroom, educators also face this on a collegial level. Can mentoring be flexible as well? In other words, can mentorship happen informally in an online community as well as formally in a classroom? If students have control over the time, place, path and pace of their learning, can we not give teachers this same control over their professional development through flexible mentoring practices? My vision was to use the online community to test out some informal mentorship practices and gather feedback from members through discussion and through feedback on the Weebly site. At the same time, the community would be used to showcase parts of a mentorship proposal that would eventually be put forward to the district in the hopes of gathering feedback from those who would eventually be involved. The online community formally launched on October 17, 2014.
Beta Testing Methods and Process

The Google+ online community went live in mid October 2014, three weeks later than we had planned due to the BC labour dispute. Prior to the community start up I had been working on a Mentorship site using Weebly. I shared the site with several teachers and administrators in our school district. This site contained the overview of a district mentorship proposal, a link to the online community, mentorship resources and two different methods of mentoring, one formal and one informal. All those who viewed the site commented very positively on the way the informal mentoring was set up and the automatic population of the spreadsheet with mentor information. They all expressed a desire and need for a database of mentors searchable by skills who were open to informal, just in time mentoring. I also shared the site with several people on Twitter, who had expressed interest in my work, to gather a broader base of feedback. I wanted to know if this was something that was desired in other districts as well.

Beta testing the Weebly site was a process of sharing the information and gathering feedback which would allow me to add and change things based on the needs of our community. The most valuable feedback was received during a district meeting on November 17, 2014 led by the District Principal of technology where my colleague and I were able to showcase our work to date. We were able to sit down with a district team to evaluate the Google+ community as well as my Weebly site and determine our success to date as well as what the future of the project would look like.

Beta testing the Google+ community was a more difficult task as this really was an ongoing project. A website is a project that can be created, shared, evaluated and eventually
revised. An online community, however, is ever evolving. It is created and maintained by all who are involved and is dependent on collaboration and interaction by members who all have different goals. In order to share the Google+ community beyond the initial email invite, a regular bi-weekly email was sent to district staff introducing a new topic and inviting them to join the community. After each email several new people would join the community and join in on the discussions. After several weeks, the community was expanded outside of SD 71 staff to include others. In hindsight, I am not sure if this was a wise move as I believe it eliminated the “district” feel to the community that we initially promoted.

In Chapter One the intended outcomes of my major project were to deliver the following:

1. Clearly defined goals of a mentoring program
2. Construction of a knowledge base (literature and experience)
3. Design of a mentorship platform for SD 71
4. Identify constraints
5. Develop program evaluation model based on knowledge base and outcomes
6. Implementation plan for a mentorship platform in SD71

Through this process I have effectively defined and researched both flexible learning and mentorship. The research and literature review have established a knowledge base with which to move forward with design, implementation and beta testing. The feedback from the online community as well as the Weebly site have allowed me to identify constraints and further developments of a proposal for a mentorship program.

The beta testing process was invaluable in gathering feedback and information around mentorship and collaboration. The online community allowed for the beta testing to take place in a way that mirrored my project. By engaging in collaboration and mentorship to gather
feedback, it allowed me to identify needs and constraints of what will hopefully become a successful model for collaborative mentorship in our school district.

**Findings of Beta Testing**

The Google+ online community went live on October 17, 2014 and I was happy that we had several people requesting to join each day. During the first week we were engaged in several discussions and posting on a regular basis. After this, things seemed to slow down and colleagues seemed hesitant to post their thoughts. We also noticed that the number of members requesting to join had slowed down significantly. There were several challenges to our online community right from the start. Some of these challenges were expected, others were ones I had not counted on.

One of the reasons we chose the Google+ community was its user friendliness. A mistake that was made was the assumption that people would have experience with some type of online community already. I found that there was a lot of hesitancy in joining Google+ from people who had no idea what it was and who were fearful of social networking in general. This alone eliminated a large group of people right from the beginning. Ironically, the people who were my main target in mentoring, those who are fearful, resistant and hesitant about technology and flexible learning, were the ones who were being excluded by the choice of an online community. I made a point of posting some links about how to use Google+ in the community itself as well as conducting some face to face conversations with some more hesitant colleagues in order to educate them around this community. This was an important reminder about the awareness of our audience as we were definitely reaching colleagues who were already interested in and moving towards a practice of flexible learning but were leaving out those who truly were our intended target.
I quickly realized that many of the discussions initiated were related to topics unfamiliar to the majority of the group. I observed a need to scale back and bring things to a more informal level. There were a handful of people who were posting and responding, but the majority of the group was quiet. When I approached several people informally, they responded that they found the discussions interesting, but were intimidated by the level of the conversations. I posted a general open ended question around experience with mentorship which garnered a host of responses from which I was able to create a district needs assessment form. This form was used to gather information relating to mentorship practices that had been effective or ineffective as well as what type of mentorship would be utilized. All of this feedback helped me to design and develop the Weebly mentorship site.

The community was up and running and we had members who were posting to discussions, but how would we determine what was successful in this venue? Initially we were excited to have 10 people join but after a week, it seemed too small. We ended up with 46 people in the community which, when considering the number of teachers in the Comox Valley, does not seem like a large number. However, for a venture like this that is only a month off the ground, it is a great start. When we think about this as something that is evolving and growing, it definitely shows the potential to be a beneficial community for our district. With time and mentorship we can hope that more people will join the community to collaborate with each other.

In our meeting with district staff on November 17, 2014, we gathered valuable feedback. There was a general consensus that 45 members in less than a month was a positive start and a larger group than some had anticipated. The fact that we were still adding members on a somewhat regular basis was also an indication that the community was continuing to
grow. We discussed the use of Google+ as a community and again the consensus was that this was the preferred format. It was decided that as School District 71 moves forward with their Learn 71 portal, this online community will become an integral part of building district collaboration and mentorship. There is now a permanent link in the portal as well as on my Weebly site to this district discussion Hub.

In Chapter Two, I discussed iNACOL’s (2008) review of several online schools that have implemented mentorship programs. Each of the schools observed used a model based on their own needs and models varied from formal to informal, online and face to face as well as just in time to on-going. Most of the school used online networking communities as ways to offer on-going informal support. The Google+ community offered a district wide online informal support system and proved to be a positive asset to implementing mentorship. It allowed for connections to be made between potential mentor partners who may not have know about each other otherwise and will serve to maintain connections after formal mentoring relationships end.

Whereas the feedback from the online community was gathered in a discussion or a two way conversation format, the feedback from the Weebly site was more in the format of evaluative comments. Kopcha (2010), Hobson et al (2009), Chuang et al, (2003) and Glazer et al (2006) have all indicated in some way that in situ or just in time mentoring are what is needed in order for teachers to gain confidence and skill as well as to sustain a model over time. The feedback that I received indicated a real need and desire for just in time mentoring. The spreadsheet on the Weebly site would be able to provide exactly that. As mentors complete the embedded Google Form on the site, the spreadsheet automatically populates with their information. This then provides an up to date database of mentors who are available for just in time mentorship. The spreadsheet indicates the mentor’s area of strength as well as the best way
to contact them. Those who provided feedback indicated that this type of platform would be invaluable and very relevant to all teachers.

In Chapter One my critical challenge was to develop a collaborative mentorship program to support and sustain flexible learning in School District 71. The findings of the beta testing have addressed this challenge by indicating first of all that there is a need for mentorship within not only this school district, but others around the province. The discussions that were held in Google+, on Twitter and face to face all revolved around a lack of support and professional development opportunities to help teachers implement flexible learning practices as well as a lack of available mentorship to those who needed guidance.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

Teacher support and mentorship is a topic that came up repeatedly during my post-graduate work in the first cohort of the Online Teaching and Learning (OLTD) program at Vancouver Island University. This became very apparent to me during a course with Alec Couros when we looked at open educational resources. I kept coming back to the concept of sharing and collaborating and wondering how we could bring this down to a smaller scale so that our own district could move forward in a positive manner. In my blog during that course, I wrote the following:

When I first started hearing about MOOC's, I was intrigued and excited by the amount of people who were so passionate about their areas of expertise or interest that they were sharing this with the world. They were putting their knowledge and experience out there for others to benefit from. Up until a few years ago, I have always found teaching rather isolating. I have worked in schools where little or no collaboration took place or where materials were hoarded and hidden so others couldn't use them. The idea that people are creating amazing courses and resources and freely sharing them with others, gives me goosebumps. To me, this is what teaching is about. This is why I wanted to be a teacher, to share my knowledge and strengths with others and in turn to learn from them. This year, I have worked in a blended classroom that I share with a teaching partner. We have 23 grade 6-8 students in a program focused around robotics, engineering and new technology. My teaching partner is the robotics and engineering expert and I have the DL experience to help integrate curriculum into the f2f and at home environments. This year, we decided not to send out the usual "boxes" of resources that are pre-packaged and
ready to go for all of our students. Our program is unique in that students attend f2f three days per week and learn at home the remaining two days. In order for us to integrate curriculum into an engineering theme, we had to look to other sources. We made many mistakes, had a few "a-ha" moments and also a few moments we are extremely proud of. Without the knowledge, passion and willingness to share of community members, experts we contacted online and other teachers around our district, our classroom would have looked very different (Holtkamp, 2013).

Another challenge that became apparent to me during the program is that we often introduce new tools, strategies and concepts and rarely move to proper implementation. Too often we fail to continue the learning process, we need to go beyond merely introducing the tool and mentor each other in becoming effective facilitators of the tool. Just as we recognize that learners learn more effectively in groups and from each other, teachers need to do the same.

These experiences throughout my two year course work planted the seed for this project on collaborative mentorship within School District 71. The online community and mentorship website are the beginning phases of what I hope will be a lasting project that will support teachers as they move towards flexible learning practices within their classrooms. My goal is to use my research and the information gathered through this project to create a proposal to School District 71 to support the mentorship model that I have created. With the support of money and time, this is a program that could greatly influence the success and sustainability of flexible learning within our district.
Literature

Flexible learning practices are becoming more evident in the literature and in schools across our country. I have attended numerous conferences in the past year where the majority of workshops are aimed at blended or flexible learning practices. I have spoken to many colleagues about these workshops and what I hear most often is that the concepts are great, but there is no follow through on the implementation. Glazer and Hannafin (2005), state that “Teachers often learn technology skills and integration strategies in intensive seminars, ineffective means for professional learning because experiences are seldom transferred to instructional practices”. If we, as teachers, are learning about these practices in workshops and at conferences outside of our classroom environments, how are we supposed to successfully integrate them once we return? Having a collaborative mentorship model in place, gives teachers not only the space to communicate their needs and concerns, but a process for following through with what they have started. Glazer and Hannafin (2005), sum this up very well when they say “Learning in a teaching community is a social process that involves ongoing, on-site, and just in time support. Teachers need avenues to continually interact to provide such support across all members of the community”. It is exactly this type of support that a collaborative mentorship model can provide. The online Google+ community in combination with the website provides that avenue for teachers to have ongoing, supportive, collaborative access to each other.

Kopcha (2010) also refers to this just in time support that is required by teachers who are attempting to integrate new practices. Kopcha also touches on the implementation of a community of practice providing sustainability. If I had just developed a website as a mentorship resource for district teachers, it would not provide any of the collaboration or community that is required for ongoing support. The online Google+ community is what will
provide the sustainability of the mentorship program as teachers become more comfortable, knowledgeable and collaborative. As the model grows, mentees will become mentors and a collaborative community will develop, allowing for continuity of relationships.

It is the reciprocal relationship between the participants in a mentorship program that is integral to its success. As Hobson et al. (2008) demonstrate, mentoring provides a reciprocal relationship and the mentors in turn learn from their mentees and enhance their own teaching. This mutually beneficial relationship brings forth more community and collaboration as it grows and develops.

**Perceived Successes**

Although we met with some significant hurdles when undertaking this project, the late start being one of them, we met with significant success as well. The Google+ and face to face discussions alone were invaluable. Opening up a community and giving teachers an online space to connect was a big step forward in developing a collaborative model within our district. The fact that the community continues to grow and people continue to express interest is a testament to its success.

The Weebly site has demonstrated success in that the reviews and feedback were very positive. Having the site more accessible to teachers will allow for continued success and use of the site.

**Perceived Limits**

While the online community is now established and has a respectable number of members, we still need to address those colleagues who are resistant to using online methods to garner mentorship. The Google+ community and the website address the needs of those teachers who are already comfortable with working in an online environment. I propose providing a
platform of alternative offline pathways to mentorship where more people can access the scaffolding they need to move their practice forward and build capacity toward contribution within the online community. This community can then become more of a just in time platform assuming it is moderated efficiently.

Another limitation to this project is the continued maintenance of the online Google+ community. This is a very time consuming endeavor and one that needs to be timely and relevant. We discovered that timely responses to people’s posts were important to the quality of the discussions. It is important to ensure that someone is always monitoring the community so that questions are answered or redirected without a long delay. There will need to be a discussion around efficient and effective moderation of the community in order to maintain its success and relevance.

Recommendations

If School District 71 recognizes and supports the need for collaborative mentorship and were to support this project, it would allow for teachers within our school district to develop skills in flexible learning practices in a supportive and timely manner. It would start to break down some of the traditional brick and mortar walls and bring flexible learning into the mainstream schools. As this is an ongoing project with no end date determined, I have several recommendations that I would suggest to ensure that collaborative mentorship becomes part of our school district platform.

I would like to see the online Google+ community continue to be supported by the district by having it remain in a prominent place on the district Learn71 portal. My colleague and I hope to continue to maintain the community along with support from the district technology support teacher. Based on my earlier observations, my recommendation is to change
the title of the group to “Learn71 Discussion” rather than “Flexible Learning in SD 71”. Broadening the focus of the group will encourage more people to join as the flexible learning topic may not have appealed to some. As this is a district collaborative venture, it would be great to have all voices heard.

The Weebly site is currently linked within the Learn71 portal; I would like to see it more accessible to teachers in the future. As this is a place where teachers can search for mentors, they need quick access for it to be useful and relevant. The embedded spreadsheet needs to be in a prominent, easy to access space to maximize its power and success.

The opportunity to promote the mentorship site and online community through face to face presentations would help to raise awareness of the resources available to educators in our district. Teachers already active online, will be able to join the community and visit the site through online promotion. Teachers hesitant about joining social networking groups or working online would be the target audience of these outreach face to face opportunities. By providing workshops in a face to face format, we can provide hands on mentorship to those who need the support and confidence to initially join the community.

I would like to continue to work with our district team and others to expand the mentorship network. Being able to communicate with other colleagues around the province through such means as Twitter will enable us to see how others are promoting mentorship in their district and to allow us to connect and collaborate around these platforms and strategies.

**Conclusion**

At the onset of this project, I had a completely different outcome in mind. I envisioned setting up a mentorship program and going out into the schools to start mentoring people. Once I started doing the research, it became clear that there was a lot of background work needed before
a mentorship program could be planned and implemented. In order to establish an effective mentorship program, careful planning needs to be put in place so that one can achieve positive and desired results. Components such as procedures, relationships, sustainability and support are crucial to success.

With parents and students continually looking for alternative learning options that meet the needs of their learners and many teachers looking for support in providing these alternate options, a system of support and collaboration needs to be implemented so that all needs can be met.

Yet, as the elements of flexible learning indicate, a completely structured system may not be the best approach. Flexible learning includes elements of control over time, place, path and pace. Our students are looking for this control in their learning platform and we need to ensure that we offer teachers the same as they adapt their traditional methods to that of flexible learning. Creating a model that offers teachers flexibility in their mentorship through providing offline and online, informal and formal, face to face and virtual mentoring will provide support at all levels and create sustainability through collaborative methods.

Going forward, my vision is to submit my proposal for a collaborative mentorship program to School District 71 to offer an avenue to support and sustain a flexible learning model within our schools.
References


Appendix A: Letter to School District 71 Management

August 19, 2014
Sherry Elwood, Superintendent
School District 71 - Comox Valley
607 Cumberland Rd.
Courtenay, B.C., V9N 7G5

Dear Ms. Elwood,

We, Marieke Holtkamp and Andrew Ferneyhough, are currently enrolled in the Vancouver Island University Masters of Education (Leadership) Program after finishing two years of coursework to obtain our Graduate Diploma in Online Teaching and Learning. We have each been assigned the task of completing a Major Project that is comprised of approximately 300 hours and 12,000 words. We have each been assigned a mentor (Alissa Pratt and Randy LaBonte) and would like to develop and implement a district program as the focus of our studies.

Our project is based on two main guiding questions: “Can the creation of an online community help foster the development of technology supported flexible learning in School District 71?” (Andrew’s focus); and “Developing a mentorship model effectively support and sustain flexible learning practices for teachers in School District 71” (Marieke’s focus). Though we each have an individual primary focus, we will be working together as a team.

It is important to note that ‘Blended’ learning is often associated with an ‘at home’ component and has had a variety of definitions attached to it. As we wish to have it encompass more than that, we will be using the term ‘flexible’ learning throughout this paper so as to include a variety of in-school techniques and programs that release the teacher of some of their traditional roles and place the responsibilities, place, and time requirements into a more flexible realm.

Our overall goal is to foster technology supported ‘flexible’ learning through the use of an online community and the development of a mentorship model. We believe that a well designed, robust, district-backed online community that is focused on Flexible Learning will help assist teachers in ‘breaking down the walls’ in the traditional face to face classroom. By sharing our resources and by developing mentorship opportunities, we believe we can help teachers to realize some of the benefits that technology can provide in meeting the very specific demands of today’s learners.

This document serves as an outline to what we propose to create, what we are asking for from the district, as well as a brief summary of the literature reviews contained in our Master’s papers.

Sincerely,

Andrew Ferneyhough and Marieke Holtkamp
Appendix B: Letter to School District 71 Teachers

Dear Colleagues,

We, Marieke Holtkamp and Andrew Ferneyhough are currently involved in our Masters of Education (Leadership) at Vancouver Island University. Our final project will involve creating an online community focused on flexible (blended) learning and then developing a mentorship model for the district. We will be working with Rob Moore and Kara Dawson throughout the process as we hope to have our efforts carried on when our course is complete.

As the traditional definition of blended learning often involves a home component and we would like to focus on blended learning within ‘brick and mortar’ schools, we would like to use the term ‘flexible learning’ in its place. The best definition we could find for this type of learning in a single sentence is as follows:

“A program in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace and at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home.” (Horn and Staker, 2011)

‘Student control over time, place, path and/or pace’ This is a concept that many of you employ on a daily basis and it is our hope to clarify, discuss, debate and ultimately share our resources as a learning community. Concepts and methodologies such as BYOD, Gamification, and flipping the classroom are all concepts that we have been studying during our course work at VIU and are excited to share and discuss with our peers.

We have created a Google+ community which is divided into a variety of sections. Within each section we will begin with resources defining the topic and will continue to provide additional resources on that particular topic. Our hope is that if you are interested in a particular area, or if you have some prior experience, be it good or bad, that you will share that knowledge with us. If you are interested in being a part of our adventure please contact us through email or join our Google+ community directly at

https://plus.google.com/u/0.communities/111179173037808325680.

Sincerely,

Marieke Holtkamp and Andrew Ferneyhough
Appendix C: Ask a Mentor Form

Ask a Mentor
* Required

**Area of Strength**
Please note the area(s) you are willing to mentor in

*This is a required question*

**First Name**

**Last Name**

**Email Address**

**Other contact**
If you have another way you would like to be contacted (text, skype etc.) please note it here.

**Additional Comments**

Submit

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.
Appendix D: Learning Partnerships Form

Learning Partnerships Application Form

1. Date

2. Learning Partner 1:

3. School:

4. Grade/Subjects:

5. Email Address

3. Please check which applies to you
   - I have already selected a learning partner (go to question 6)
   - Please match me up with a learning partner based on my goals below (go to question 5)
4. Learning Partner Two:

5. Comments/Goals/Needs/Plans etc. Describe Briefly

6. Proposed TOC time request

7. Alternate Funding Request

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Appendix E: Mentoring Needs Assessment Form

Mentoring Needs Assessment

We appreciate you taking the time to complete this form. Blended/Flexible learning is an education program in which a student learns at least in part through delivery of content and instruction via digital and online media with some element of student control over time, place, path or pace. (Horn and Staker 2011)

Are sufficient supports available to teachers at the school and district level for implementing technology supported blended/flexible learning practices?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Other: __________________________

What types of supports that are not currently available should the district provide? Check all that apply

☐ Pro D
☐ Inservice/Training (online)
☐ Inservice/Training (face to face)
☐ Mentoring (online)
☐ Mentoring (face to face)
☐ Better Infrastructure
☐ Better access to technology
☐ Other: __________________________

Which of the following would be helpful in establishing and maintaining an effective mentoring relationship? Check all that apply

☐ Mentoring networking
☐ Online Toolkit
☐ Recommended Readings
☐ Training
☐ Other: __________________________

If the district were to develop and implement a formal mentoring program, how would you benefit?

______________________________
Would you participate as a mentee?
- Yes
- No
- Other: ________________

Would you participate as a mentor?
- Yes
- No
- Other: ________________

What specific knowledge, skills and abilities do you look for in a mentor and/or mentee
check all that apply
- Organizational Skills
- Interpersonal Skills
- Role Model
- Flexibility
- Demonstrable competence
- Allowing the development of initiative and independence
- Objectivity
- Advocacy
- Commitment
- Sincerity
- Other: ________________

Do you currently or have you in the past received any type of mentoring? What were the
benefits/drawbacks?


Do you currently or have in the past participated in being a mentor? What were the
benefits/drawbacks


What things would you like to see implemented in a district mentoring program?
Appendix F: Overview of School District 71 Mentorship Proposal

Implementing a Mentorship Program to Sustain and Support Flexible Learning in SD71

Phase 1: Getting Started: Clear goals and construction of knowledge base.
Implementing a successful mentorship program will require an assessment of district needs as well as clear program goals.

Phase 2: Evaluation of Program
Once the mentorship program is underway, evaluation and reflection will aid in determining what parts have been effective and what will need to be revised.

Phase 3: Sustaining and Supporting the Program
In order to support and sustain a mentorship program, there needs to be an investment of resources and a commitment to leadership.

Key ideas for GETTING STARTED in a Successful Mentorship Program
Year one:
> Completing a needs assessment at school and district levels
> Determining goals of mentorship program
> Identifying process for selection of mentors and mentees
> Gathering feedback of key stakeholders
> Establishing supporting policies and procedures
> Ensuring effective mentor and teacher matches
> Using an online community of collaboration to provide support and resources for participants
> Celebrate and acknowledge work of program participants

Year two:
> Continuing to provide support and resources for participants
> Expanding the online community to reach outside of school
> Designing and implementing mentorship program evaluation

Key ideas for EVALUATION of a Successful Mentorship Program
Year one:
> Identification of goals and results of the mentorship program
> Gathering information from participants through online community
> Determining how we will know if program goals have been met – what evidence is required
> Celebrate and acknowledge work of program participants

Year two:
> Evaluating the information that has been gathered both formally and informally
> Preparation and presentation of results of findings
> Using the findings to make revisions to the program
> Celebrate and acknowledge work of program participants

Key ideas for SUPPORTING and SUSTAINING a Successful Mentorship Program
Year one:
> Identifying persons responsible for overseeing the mentorship program and supporting them adequately
> Oversee and acknowledge program participants

Year two:
> Provide opportunities for support, resources, and learning for all involved; continue to keep the online community viable
> Establish an annual budget specific for the program
> Expand the group of mentors available to work with teachers requesting mentoring
> Share program results with all stakeholders
> Celebrate and acknowledge work of program participants

The overarching principle of this program is the concept that there is a distinct need for flexible learning options within our classrooms. Mentorship will provide scaffolded support for teachers to implement technology supported flexible learning.
Appendix G: Screenshots of Google+ Community

Appendix H: Screenshots of SD71 Collaborative Mentorship Website

The story of Mentor comes from Homer’s Odyssey. Odysseus, king of Ithaca, fights in the Trojan War and entrusts the care of his household to Mentor, who serves as teacher and overseer of Odysseus’ son, Telemachus.

After the war, Odysseus is condemned to wander vainly for ten years in his attempt to return home. In time, Telemachus, now grown, ventures in search of his father. Athena, Goddess of War and patroness of the arts and industry, assumes the form of Mentor and accompanies Telemachus on his quest. Father and son reunite and cast down would-be usurpers of Odysseus’ throne and Telemachus’s birthright.

The word Mentor evolved to mean trusted advisor, friend, teacher and wise person. History offers many examples of helpful mentoring relationships: Socrates and Plato, Hayden and Beethoven, Freud and Jung. Mentoring is a fundamental form of human development where one person invests time, energy and personal know-how in assisting the growth and ability of another person.

History and legend record the deeds of princes and kings, but each of us has a birthright to actualize our potential. Through their deeds and work, mentors help us to move toward that actualization.


http://sd71collaborativementorship.weebly.com/
Appendix I: Screenshots of the Learn71 Portal’s Mentorship Page

http://www.learn71.ca/mentorship/