BLENDED LEARNING MODELS FOR CORE FRENCH INSTRUCTION

by

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

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Abstract

Recognizing the potential of both online and face to face learning opportunities this project examined the implementation of blended learning courses in both the traditional and online core French 9 classrooms. It addressed the critical question: how can student engagement and community be fostered in a blended learning program for core French 9 students who are learning in either a traditional classroom or at a distance? The project presented three courses designed to meet the learning outcomes of the British Columbia Core French 9 curriculum. The first two courses represented a model for blended learning in the traditional classroom. The first course presented a model centered around a paperless class using online portfolios and integrating the use of online learning tools to supplement face to face teaching strategies. The second course was built around a central inquiry question and attempted to integrate ubiquitous access to technology into the traditional classroom settings. It was also designed around the integrated use of a closed social media community. The third course was designed for students working primarily from a distance, and attempted to integrate and promote aspects of face to face learning to engage and foster a greater sense of community among learners. Results from the beta testing indicated the need for flexibility and student choice when balancing blended activities. The results also affirmed the benefits of an inquiry model and ubiquitous integration of technology in the classroom. Final conclusions of this project suggested that a face to face classroom blended approach may be better suited to addressing student engagement and community than a blended online model.

Course 1  http://mrmarkteachescedar.weebly.com/french-9.html
Course 2 (See appendix B for course outline)
Course 3  http://lahfrench9.weebly.com/

Keywords: blended learning, online learning, core French 9, language learning, face-to-face learning, engagement
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Chapter 1 Introduction

Background

Upon registering for Vancouver Island University’s Online Learning and Technology Diploma (OLTD http://www2.viu.ca/education/OLTD/) and ensuing Masters in Leadership program in the spring of 2012, I didn’t initially have a clear vision of how online learning would fit into my teaching practice. After fifteen years experience as a classroom middle school and secondary French teacher I was ready to embrace new teaching methods and ideas, but I did not have a strong foundation in online learning or the theory and tools associated with it. In fact I had just purchased my first ever cell/smart phone two months prior to the start of the program. After my first week of OLTD 501: Introduction to Online Learning, I remember asking myself if I had made a mistake enrolling in the program. Initially there was a heavy emphasis on distance online learning theory, and I wasn’t sure how to relate it to my role as a classroom teacher. As a successful face to face (F2F) teacher with a passion for engaging students I had no desire at that time to work at a dedicated online learning school. I made it my mission to adapt my learnings in the OLTD program to fit my goals and philosophy as classroom teacher. What I began to realize through my studies and readings was that education was on the verge of a revolutionary change being driven by the way information is consumed and produced online (Siemens & Tittenberger, 2009). Slowly, I began to translate my work and experiences in the OLTD program towards enriching my classroom with online tools and instruction. Following the conclusion of OLTD 501 I chose to focus my major project on blended learning in the F2F classroom.

With the theme of blended learning as the focus for my major project I continued to experiment with the integration of online tools and methods in all of my classes. In the summer
of 2013, based on what I had learned in OLTD and my early classroom trials, I began to develop a fully blended paperless course for the Core French 9 British Columbia curriculum. The implementation and feedback from this course in the fall of 2013 led me to a second F2F blended model which I beta tested in the spring of 2014. In this past year with the closure of the secondary school I had worked at for the past six years, I took advantage of a new opportunity to work at Learn@Home, School District 68’s online learning school (http://www.sd68.bc.ca/?page_id=524). Although initially transferred to another local secondary school, I recognized the unique opportunity to apply my project work from a F2F blended learning environment into an online one. The first part of my major project represents my journey to adapt online technologies and teaching methodologies to a traditional classroom environment while the second part flips this and examines the challenges of a blended learning from the distance learning perspective.

The overall purpose of this major project was to examine a progression of course models for developing blended Core French programs in both traditional face to face and distance education environments. This paper will outline the development and progression of my F2F blended courses and further examine my first attempt at a blended course in a mainly online environment. In both cases I will outline the design challenges and reflect on their implementation and reception from students, parents and colleagues. Both my F2F and online blended courses were designed specifically for the current 2014 British Columbia Core French 9 curriculum (http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/cf512.pdf).

**Purpose of the Major Project**

The purpose of the project was to create a blended Core French 9 program for both F2F and online learning environments. With an emphasis on fostering community, increasing
engagement, and introducing students to new tools and methods of showcasing their work and communicating, I ultimately sought to increase student success. My review of the current research and practical experience in the field revealed that there was limited research and models specific to secondary language education. While some research existed for computer mediated support of language learning at the postsecondary level, I was unable to identify specific models for the context of the British Columbia Core French 9 curriculum. Based on the conditions that I observed at my own school at that time I saw several barriers to adopting a blended approach and I felt that creating a flexible model that adapted to the limiting conditions was an important challenge. Working in a traditional F2F school with limited access to technology is a significant obstacle to implementing a blended learning approach. Overcoming the technological limitations and finding a way to equitably implement powerful online tools in a setting that fosters community and engagement can be a frustrating process for both teachers and students and often outside of the scope of a teacher’s responsibilities and training. Working at Cedar Community Secondary School in 2012 I identified a lack of online technology being used in the classrooms and I felt that by adopting a blended approach to my core French classes I could not only increase engagement levels, but also introduce students to powerful online tools. By integrating a diversity of tools such as basic website design, online language programs, presentation software and networked word processing that fostered collaboration, I felt students would acquire an additional set of relevant skills outside of my French core learning outcomes. Another major obstacle was confronting a resistance to changing methods. Fostering an open and patient attitude towards embracing new styles and online tools for learning among students, parents and staff in a safe and responsible manner was an important aspect of my project. Essentially, in addition to learning the French language, students would also learn technology
In June 2014 I left Cedar Secondary as the school was closing and began teaching in a distance learning model at Learn@Home (L@H, http://www.sd68.bc.ca/?schools=learnhome-8-12-program) where my challenges to implementing a blended course were different. Learn@Home operates as an “Enriched Virtual Model” (Staker & Horn, 2012) where students typically access the curriculum remotely and may only report to the school for check ins or field trips. Although my experience at L@H has been limited, my initial observations were as follows. The majority of students in my new school completed their work independently at home. L@H courses are for the most part hosted through the Blackboard 9 learning management system (http://www.blackboard.com/Platforms/Learn/Overview.aspx). Students are commonly accompanied into the school by their parents for check ins, updates and support in their classes. The physical layout of the L@H classes most resemble a support room in a traditional school, with teacher work-stations on the side, student computers against the wall and round tables in the middle. Student teacher interactions were largely characterized by students seeking support or clarification of assignments from their online course work. The students I observed were for the most part on task and motivated to complete their course work. Teacher responsibilities were consumed by online (email) communication and marking. The majority of student interaction was through email.

The established routines and learning styles of Learn@Home made it difficult to directly establish the blended course I had developed for my F2f students. I felt that a transition course was first necessary to develop before I was able to implement the style of blended course I had enjoyed success with at Cedar Secondary. In the paper, Preparing Instructors for Quality Online
Instruction, Yang and Cornelius (2005) write about adapting and adjusting attitudes to fit teaching in an online environment. They explain that, “since the role of instructors has been changed in online courses to facilitator, mentor and coach, the instructors will need to adjust their attitudes towards technology and new teaching styles to meet the challenge” (p. 1). They further explain that in order to foster deep learning through an online environment that it is necessary for, “...the instructor to design collaborative and problem-based projects which will involve students to think critically, actively, and deeply” (p.1).

In attempting to establish a blended learning program for my French 9 course one of the changes I would have to implement would be to require students to participate in F2F activities. For Learn@Home students this was not an expectation for most of their course, however it was not unprecedented. Some of the course expectations, for example the physical education program, required a F2F assessment component or “Fit-Test”. In other courses field trips were expected and many students took advantage of drop-in opportunities to meet F2F with their teachers in order to seek tutoring or assistance in their courses. This precedent opened the door for implementing a blended model and having some of the course requirements involve F2F activities which could assist in building community and help students form partnerships from which they could cooperatively work together in inquiry based learning projects. While Learn@Home operates primarily as an “Enriched Virtual Model”, the potential to introduce a more blended approach and move towards a “Flex Model” where an online platform provides most of the curriculum, but teachers are able to act as facilitators and work more closely with small groups existed. However, there remains some significant obstacles to implementing this model, and this would present a major challenge to me moving forward.

During my first three months at Learn@Home I observed that the nature of students
learning primarily from a distance and their needs seemed to differ from the students I had previously taught in a F2F classroom environment. Specifically, many full time enrolling students attending Learn@Home in Nanaimo were typically doing so because they were unable to function well in a F2F classroom environment. The reasons for this ranged from students who were pursuing high level extracurricular pursuits such as dance, music, or sports to students who had difficulties adapting to the social culture of their neighbourhood schools. Certain students were suffering from anxiety or had difficulties learning in a traditional classroom and many opted for the Learn@Home program as an alternative. In these cases it was not uncommon for both parents and students to have an apprehensive attitude about school and teachers in general. My general observation was that expectations for these students who struggle were typically low, and an emphasis was placed on helping them complete the minimum core requirements. The other segment of students served by Learn@Home consisted of part time “non-enrolling” students. These students were typically enrolled at their neighbourhood high schools and taking an online course either because it was not offered at their school, or because of a timetabling issue. In rare cases students took courses because they were unable to resolve a conflict with their F2F teacher and were seeking a learning alternative for a specific class. Diverse and challenging student needs also factored into my design and adoption of more flexible or voluntary F2F requirements of the blended model. The goal of creating a blended Core French 9 program centered around strong student engagement and community. It was an ambitious and complex goal given the complexities of Learn@Home’s established structure and diverse student population. Recognizing that established routines, teaching medium and student makeup was drastically different from the F2F environment was central to designing a course that could work in this specific environment.
Justification of the Major Project

My original interest for developing a blended learning model was born from the desire to apply my learnings in the OLTD program to my then position as a classroom teacher. At that time I had observed a philosophical shift towards integrating online tools and providing students with online access at Cedar Secondary and throughout the district. To illustrate this transition I recall attending a department head meeting three years prior where one of the agenda items was calling for a ban of smart phones and electronic devices from the classroom. Today the entire district provides students wireless access in the secondary schools. My interest in blended learning was essentially simple. It lay in the recognition of both F2F and online learning techniques and creating a structure that applied the benefits of both. This is eloquently expressed in Garrison and Kanukas’s (2004) definition of blended learning where they describe it as the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences. The authors argue that teaching presence and face-to-face engagement is crucial in building a sense of community. Through F2F encounters teachers manage and facilitate student participation, while the online elements and asynchronous internet engagement provide flexibility, reflection, and collaborative learning environments. Further, they explain:

What makes blended learning particularly effective is its ability to facilitate a community of inquiry. Community provides the stabilizing, cohesive influence that balances the open communication and limitless access to information on the Internet. Communities also provide the condition for free and open dialogue, critical debate, negotiation and agreement—the hallmark of higher education. Blended learning has the capabilities to facilitate these conditions and adds an important reflective element with multiple forms of communication to meet specific learning requirements.” (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004,
Ultimately Garrison and Kanuka assert that blended learning has the potential to be more effective than traditional face-to-face learning. In *Blended Learning Systems: Definitions, Current Trends, and Future Directions*, Graham (2004) stresses that every learning environment is unique and that designers must carefully develop their blended learning strategies so as to consider the strengths and weaknesses of each learning environment. He explains that the strengths of a computer-mediated environment are flexibility, participation, and depth of reflection. He describes the weaknesses as lack of spontaneity, procrastination, and lack of human connection. This project attempted to confront the unique challenges presented by the traditional F2F classroom and Learn@home’s current virtual enriched model and proposed a transition towards a flex model. I present two blended models designed both the F2F and third for the distance learning environments where both F2F and online learning opportunities are offered in an attempt to increase student engagement and foster community.

**Critical Question/Challenge**

How can student engagement and community be fostered in a blended learning program for core French 9 students who are learning in either a traditional classroom or at a distance?

**Definition of Terms**

**BYOD** - Bring Your Own Device. This refers to the policy where students or employees are permitted to bring their own devices to school and are provided wireless access to the internet.

**BL** - Blended Learning. A learning model where students participate in a combination of face to face and computer mediated activities. Also referred to as "hybrid," "mixed-mode instruction," "technology-mediated instruction," and "web-enhanced instruction." For the purposes of this project the term blended learning will be employed.

**CALL** - Computer Assisted Language Learning.

**Core French** - From Grades 5 to 8, all students in B.C. are required to have second language
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instruction - Core French is taught at several schools. These courses help students communicate in French and experience francophone cultures. (DL – Distance Learning

**F2F** - Face to Face learning. Face to face methods taught and employed in a traditional classroom.

**L2** - Second Language

**LMS** - Learning Management System

**MEDL** - Master’s in Educational Leadership program offered through Vancouver Island University.

**OLTD** - Online Learning and Teaching Diploma. A diploma program offered through Vancouver Island University. A prerequisite to the MEDL program.

**Overview of the Project**

The creation of the Masters project was a 2 year process that has been shaped through my transition from a face to face (F2F) classroom teacher at Cedar Community Secondary School, a small high school in School District #68 - Nanaimo-Ladysmith (SD68), to a French teacher working at SD68’s Learn@Home (L@H) program ([http://www.sd68.bc.ca/?schools=learnhome-8-12-program](http://www.sd68.bc.ca/?schools=learnhome-8-12-program)). L@H is self described as a grade 8-12 hybrid online/face-to-face high school in Nanaimo, British Columbia. My project was comprised of three Core French blended courses for the grade 9 level.

My first attempt (Course 1) represented my initial foray into the world of blended learning. As a classroom teacher I created the course with the intent of integrating aspects of online learning that I was experimenting with in my OLTD course work. Having chosen blended learning as my topic of study for the major project I wanted to create a new course that bridged my learnings in OLTD with my day to day teaching. In Course 1 I created a teacher website using Weebly ([http://mrmarkteachescedar.weebly.com/french-9.html](http://mrmarkteachescedar.weebly.com/french-9.html)) which I used as a hub or a rudimentary learning management system (LMS) for students to find their assignments and
project work. Lessons and projects were presented in a blog format. Students also created their own Weebly websites, which acted as online binders/portfolios. All student websites were linked through my teacher site. This course was hosted in an open online environment. I instructed this course for two semesters of French 9 and also used the same template for my other senior French courses and a variation for my History 12 class. The setting for Course 1 was split between a traditional classroom with only a teacher computer and a computer lab which we had shared/limited access to.

Course 2 was also developed for the F2F classroom, however it was dramatically different as it was framed around a central inquiry question. It represented a move from a more teacher centered blended online model to an inquiry model hosted both in a classroom and in a Google Plus Community (https://plus.google.com/u/0/communities/100389526661439730110). Google + is social media platform that allows you to create a closed group with which you can create events, post information, share links, and comment on them. The setting for this course was primarily in my classroom, although students were given a great deal of freedom to complete their video project work in various locations outside the classroom. Access to a mobile lab and student wifi access allowed students to use their own devices in the classroom providing ubiquitous interaction with technology tools and resources. A Google + community was used as hub to showcase student work and to build a library of French resources. Commenting, and online discussion within the Google + community was an assessed element of the course.

The third course, Course 3 was designed for the Learn@Home school environment where most learning takes place at a distance and cohort based learning groups are challenging to organize because the school operates on a continual enrollment cycle. In addition, Learn@Home students are both full time and cross-enrolled at other schools. In the case of cross-enrolled
students, they had a more limited access to the F2F opportunities as they were enrolled in their neighbourhood schools and usually only take single L@H courses. Where Course 1 and Course 2 were both designed around a blended model, the diversity of L@H students made consistent and equal F2F opportunities very difficult to implement. Course 3 had to provide a flexible design to accommodate a diversity of student settings. To ensure a successful transition from past L@H language courses, Course 3 integrated textbook learning with a heavy emphasis on content, online tools, presentation and project work. The content heavy nature of this course made it closer in philosophy to Course 1 than Course 2, although it could be accessed and completed from a distance. The course followed a pedagogical unit cycle of vocabulary acquisition, practice, structure, practice, and then application of learning in small then larger projects followed by a summative unit assessment.
Chapter 2 - Literature Review

My studies and experiences in VIU’s Online Learning and Teaching Diploma program and subsequent Masters project have demonstrated to me that technology is rapidly changing the possibilities for learning in the context of British Columbia’s 8-12 classrooms. The new British Columbia Education plan outlines 5 key elements: 1) Personalized learning for every student; 2) Quality teaching and learning; 3) Flexibility and choice; 4) High standards and 5) Learning empowered by technology (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2012). When considering how to integrate these elements into a Core French 9 program, blended learning affords the opportunity to include the best of both F2F and online learning strategies. This paper presents course models for blended learning in both F2F and online environments. In reviewing the literature surrounding blended learning my goal was to better understand the definition of blended learning and various models, finally evaluating what skills are best served with online learning strategies and what skills work best with a F2F model. The research on blended learning and specifically integrating online learning practices in a traditional F2F environment provides evidence supporting the benefit of this approach but there is a lack of specific studies relating to Core French instruction at the secondary level. Specific to second language learning (L2), authors such as Garrett (2009), Blake (2004) and Chenoweth, Ushida, and Murday (2006) have demonstrated how online technology can benefit language acquisition if a program is designed with special attention provided to the relationship between pedagogy and technology. Where there appears to be a gap in the research is in the area of specific blended models which incorporate the use of online tools. More recent online tools such as Google Communities can be integrated into the blended language class and provide powerful learning opportunities for students. The opportunities these new tools provide are not addressed in the current educational
research literature. In addition, integrating mobile technology into the blended language classroom environment and allowing ubiquitous student internet access is not addressed either.

The body of this literature review examines the general research on blended learning: definitions and categorizations. It then shifts towards examining the research on the benefits and drawback of online learning specifically for the purpose of L2 learning. Finally it focuses on the research for the implementation of a blended learning model for the F2F second language classroom.

In the article *Blended Learning: Uncovering its transformative potential in higher education*, Garrison and Kanuka (2004) examined the benefit of implementing blended learning at the postsecondary level. They argued that a blended learning approach is a needed approach at universities as communication technology and the internet are disruptive technologies that are redefining the 21st century. They demonstrated that by adding online learning activities to traditional F2F methods students are afforded flexibility of time and place in addition to an alternative forum to engage in discussion that supports a network of inquiry. Blended learning is defined as the thoughtful integration of classroom F2F learning experiences with online learning experiences. They argued that teaching presence and F2F engagement is crucial in building a sense of community, managing and facilitating student participation while the online elements and asynchronous internet engagement provide flexibility, reflection, interpersonal and teamwork skill development, motivation, and collaborative learning environments. Their findings also explain that blended learning has the potential to be more effective than traditional F2F learning as evidenced by the study conducted by Heterick & Twigg (2003) which found that students demonstrated improved learning on 19 of 30 projects and recorded higher satisfaction rates. Finally they suggest that if universities refuse to change and adopt blended learning strategies students may look elsewhere for alternatives to the traditional lecture based learning model.
In Graham’s chapter, *Blended Learning Systems: Definitions, Current Trends, and Future Directions* (2004), he explains that blended learning provides the best of both worlds, however he also warns that it can mix the least effective elements of both worlds if it is not designed well. Graham further elaborates that most people choose blended learning for improved pedagogy, increased access and flexibility and increased cost-effectiveness. He points out that most teaching strategies in business and in higher education are focused on transmissive as opposed to interactive strategies, and that this is a trend that needs to change and can be addressed through blended learning.

In examining how to best implement a blended learning program for grade 8-12 FSL instruction it is crucial to not only look at the research on specific models of blended learning language implementation as this paper will do later, but to start with the fundamentals of blended learning. The first chapter of *The Handbook of Blended Learning Environments: Global Perspectives, Local Designs*, by Charles R. Graham and Curtis J. Bonk (2004) is an important work in defining blended learning and providing a context for its use and function in both education and industry. Similar to the Garrison and Kanuka (2004) definition of blended learning as, “...the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences” (p. 96), Graham (2004) introduces a simple working definition: “blended learning systems combine face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction” (p. 5). The graphic below demonstrates how these two previously separate forms of learning are merging.

Graham explains how the progression of technology in the last 50 years has opened the possibility of synchronous activities in the distributed environment. He argues that computer to human interaction is becoming more social and interactive and that virtual environments are becoming potential learning spaces. As suggested by the above graphic, he explains that as the move towards blended learning becomes more ubiquitous, the term *blended learning* will simply be replaced with learning. In the context of British Columbia K-12 education this theory is eloquently supported by David Truss (2014) who in his “Flexible Learning” published slides from the 2014 BC Distributed Learning Conference writes, “...I think we are only 5-7 years away from the term ‘blended learning’ being obsolete in the same way that the term Distance Learning is now” (p.1). He uses the analogy of cordless phones to describe the shift from distance learning to distributive learning, cordless phones to cell
phones to demonstrate the shift from distributive and blended. Finally he finishes the analogy by explaining that data rich phones capable provide ubiquitous online access represent the future. He writes, “Blending won’t be something done to classes or students, rather it will be the modus operandi… the way teaching and learning happens. In fact, even ‘distance learning’ could have synchronous ‘face-to-face’ meetings in virtual worlds.” (p.1).

Michael B. Horn and Heather Staker’s 2011 paper, *The Rise of K-12 Blended Learning* followed by *Classifying K–12 Blended Learning* in 2012 are important works to consider as they focus on blended learning in the context of the K-12 American public education system. Although their research is based on the American public education system, many of their findings translate very well to the context here in British Columbia. They emphasize the potential for blended learning as a student-centric, personalized and more productive model that may also allow schools the flexibility to produce higher test results at a lower cost. These goals correlate very closely with the new BC Education plan (http://www.bcedplan.ca/).

In an effort to fully understand the implementation of blended learning models at the K-12 level, Horn and Staker (2011) examined 60 U.S. organizations including states, districts, schools, for-profits, charters, start-ups, and independent schools that were using some form of blended learning models. From their research they established six categories of blended learning which they later refined to four. This refinement was made on their earlier work and provides a more robust and accurate classification of blended learning models. The image below represents their new classification and eliminates the F2F drive and online lab categories. This revised model offers a simpler and more accurate categorization.
Figure 2. Blended Learning Taxonomy. Adapted from “Classifying K-12 blended learning,” by M. B. Horn and H. Staker, 2012, Innosight Institute, Adapted with permission.

Model 1 the “Rotation Model” occurs when students rotate between traditional classroom activities to self paced online activities in a different environment. Model 2 “Flex” provides an online platform that provides most of the curriculum. Teachers act as the facilitators in this model, often working with small groups. Model 3 “Self Blend” is a model where students would take traditional classes, but may also choose to take fully online classes to supplement their schedule. Model 4 “Enriched Virtual Model” is a completely online school where students access the curriculum remotely and may only report to the school for check ins or field trips. In
In the context of the three courses I have designed for this project, my blended courses at Cedar Secondary followed a “Rotation Model” with Course 1 falling in to the “Lab-Rotation Model” and Course 2 being a little harder to categorize, but probably closest to an “Individual Rotation”. My Learn@Home Course 3 falls into the “Enriched Virtual Category”, but with an effort to shift towards a “Flex Model” by gradually introducing more F2F opportunities.

In Graham’s (2004) chapter, *Blended Learning Systems: Definitions, Current Trends, and Future Directions* he explains that blended learning can occur at four levels: the activity, course, program and institutional level. The activity level is where blending occurs when a learning activity contains both F2F and computer mediated elements. The course level incorporates a combination of distinct F2F and computer mediated activities. The program level is where students choose between F2F courses and online courses as is laid out by the program. Finally the institutional level is where an organizational commitment to blending F2F and computer mediated instruction is made by the school.

Graham further categorized blends: enabling blends, enhancing blends and transforming blends. Enabling blends concentrate on providing flexibility, by providing a similar learning experience through different modalities. Enhancing blends begin to change the pedagogy but for the most part preserve the way teaching and learning has occurred traditionally. In this instance a F2F course may be supplemented with online materials. Finally Graham described a transforming blend that represents a significant change in pedagogy. This transformation facilitates learning that was not possible before the transformation. For the purposes of my research, implementing a transforming blended learning program for the Core French 9 curriculum was the focus of my study.
With the stated goal of developing blended learning for core French instruction in a F2F grade 9 environment, an examination of the strengths and weaknesses of online learning practices for L2 instruction must be undertaken in order to distinguish which skills are best suited to online learning strategies. In the final section of his chapter, *Blended Learning Systems: Definitions, Current Trends, and Future Directions*, Graham (2004) examines the challenges faced when blending. He states that the strengths of a computer-mediated environment are flexibility, participation, and depth of reflection. He describes the weaknesses as lack of spontaneity, procrastination, and lack of human connection. He further explains that it is easier to develop human connection and encourage spontaneity in a F2F learning environment. Graham explains that every learning environment is unique and designers must carefully develop their blended learning strategies so as to consider the strengths and weaknesses of each learning environment. Reflecting on my own research I think this is a recurring theme and a central component to creating any successful blended Core French course. Further to this Horn and Staker (2011) point out that online learning strategies allow students to, “learn at their own pace, use preferred learning modalities, and receive frequent and timely feedback on their performance for a far higher quality learning experience” (p. 6). They also explain that online programs often have the ability to record student achievement data which can be further used to help students personalize their learning. In addition, online learning strategies lend themselves to asynchronous communication such as discussion forums. In his article *The Use of Technology for Second Language Distance Learning*, Blake (2009) writes that this form of communication, “…encourages universal participation as opposed to the more complicated dynamics found in face-to-face dialogues, where certain individuals can often dominate the flow of the discourse” (p.825). He also points to synchronous texting and how synchronous computer-mediated communication can alleviate some of the stress involved in a F2F environment. Blake
identifies the scheduled rigidity of traditional classroom learning and points to the flexibility of online learning models to provide additional learning opportunities outside of the physical classroom.

Online learning strategies are not without their difficulties and Blake (2009), while generally supportive of the integration of online strategies for language learning, explains, “... faculty acceptance, the demands of learning new teaching methods, and the lack of student discipline in the online learning environment were all cited as the most important barriers to the implementation of online courses and programs” (p. 103). What resonates for me in this statement from my experience at Learn@Home is the reliance on student discipline, or parent support in a mostly distance learning setting.

Blake also explains that despite advances in distance learning language delivery, F2F interaction with native speakers is the preferred approach to reach advanced proficiency. He writes that while online learning may provide an adequate learning experience for those seeking flexibility or who find themselves at a distance, it is inherently geared to the adult learner who typically displays a high degree of maturity and motivation. I’m not sure this describes the typical grade 8-12 student in British Columbia. Blake looks at the technology of teleconferences as an alternative to face-to-face interaction, and classifies them into three categories: a) teacher-to-class; (b) student-to-student; and (c) class-to-class. He suggests that all three types, “potentially suffer from sound delays, gaps in fluidity in handovers that make the medium critically different from face-to-face interactions, the tendency toward passive viewing; and other logistical problems” (p. 826). Blake adds that coordinating group activities are much more practical in a F2F environment. Examining studies on the subject he points to the inability of distance learning to motivate as the leading cause for high dropout rates. Citing the work of Garrett (1991), Blake explains that any curricular implementation of computer assisted language learning needs to focus on the principles of
authenticity, interactivity, agency or learner-centeredness, expert guidance and focus on process. He concludes his article with the notion that a blended learning environment may be ideal as:

The qualitative data suggest that students need instructor guidance and that both students and instructors need ongoing technical support for the successful implementation of online language courses. (Blake, 2009, p. 832)

Isolating the positive aspects of online learning strategies and melding them with effective F2F practices is central to developing an appropriate strategy for the implementation of blended learning model for the Core French program. Summarizing Blake’s research in the context of creating my blended course designs is the emphasis on a strong teacher presence to guide F2F discussion and to support in the implementation of technology.

Nina Garrett’s seminal article, *Technology in the Service of Language Learning: Trends and Issues* written in 1991, still serves as an important and guiding influence on topic of integrating technology in the F2F classroom. Garrett explains that the computer, “... is rather a medium or an environment in which a wide variety of methods, approaches, or pedagogical philosophies may be implemented” (p. 75). She points to different language learning activities such as audio-lingual drills, cognitive analysis and the learning and practice of grammar that can be suited to the use of computers in a classroom. Garrett categorizes computer assisted language learning into three categories: tutorial, engagement with authentic materials and communication. She argues that computer assisted program are more efficient at giving instant individualized feedback than traditional methods, and can free up time for more engaging conversational F2F activities. This premise forms the basis for many of my design decisions in all three courses. The employment of the Duolingo program (https://www.duolingo.com/) and providing an online workbook support in Course 3 are evidence of this.
Garrett (2009) observes that the most common placing of computers at the high school level is in a lab. My own observations of BC high schools finds this configuration is largely still the norm. Garrett argues that the full benefits of computer assisted learning will not be realized until technology is fully integrated into the classroom. Written well before the development of wifi and the almost ubiquitous proliferation of mobile technology we are now finding ourselves at the point where bring your own device (BYOD) programs may allow students to integrate computer assisted technology into the F2F classroom environment. Garrett wisely predicts the impact of computer assisted learning to go beyond simple drill and skill exercises and, “...create an environment in which students might learn some of what is involved in behaving like native speakers or, at later levels of study, like scholars of language or literature” (Garrett, 1991). With the proliferation of virtual worlds this may be very close to becoming a realistic option for today’s FSL teachers. Further to this my second course identified limitations of the lab environment which was heavily employed in Course 1, and focused on integrating technology that afforded ubiquitous online access in the more community oriented regular classroom.

Chenoweth, Ushida, and Murday’s 2006 article, *Student Learning in Hybrid French and Spanish Courses: An Overview of Language Online* further supports the adoption of a properly designed blended or hybrid model. Their research concluded that, “hybrid courses are believed to be more effective than completely online courses by providing more guidance and helping students stay focused on their learning, rather than depending entirely on students’ self-regulation” (p. 116.). Finally Blake (2009) explains that computer assisted language learning is a perfect fit for managing culturally authentic digital materials. As we adapt to the increasing opportunities afforded to us by emerging online technologies the possibilities for integrating authentic culture through social networking and online services such as Google Communities which I utilized as central tool in Course 2 are almost limitless.
In her 2009 follow up to her 1991 work, Garrett explains that developing technology is, and
must, redefine pedagogy for language instruction. The possibilities afforded by developing technology
therefore need to be responsible for reshaping the pedagogy. She writes, “we need constantly to remind
ourselves and those outside the field that ‘CALL’ [computer-assisted language learning] is not shorthand
for ‘the use of technology’ but designates a dynamic complex in which technology, theory, and pedagogy
are inseparably interwoven” (p. 719). She reinforces the idea that existing infrastructure must be
considered along with pedagogy, theory and technology when implementing online strategies into the
traditional F2F classroom. She also adds that familiarity with online tools is not enough to guarantee
mastery and that guided teacher support is necessary. This further supports the need for synchronous or
F2F teacher presence in the implementation of a blended model. Chenoweth, Ushida and Murday (2006)
also echo this sentiment. They suggest that students need instructor guidance and that both students and
instructors need ongoing technical support for the successful implementation of online language courses.
This may suggest that a F2F blended model “Enriched Virtual Model” where the teacher has more daily
contact with students may provide more opportunity for instructor guidance than the environment at
Learn@Home, for which Course 3 was designed for.

Horn and Staker (2012) aptly write, “just as a hybrid car can be either efficient or a
clunker and still be a hybrid car, blended learning can be both good and bad” (p. 2). The general
theme indicated by the research suggests that the success of integrating online learning strategies
for Core French Language learning depends largely on the design of the blend. Blake (2009)
writes, “still locked in this old paradigm, many researchers today continue to ask if technology
really works and, moreover, does it work better than traditional methods. This is the wrong
research question for the DL[Distance Learning] field…” (p. 823). I believe he is suggesting that
as a disruptive technology online learning is not going away. The question I believe he is
suggesting is how can traditional methods be integrated with online learning to produce a more successful student in today’s 21st century world? The research surveyed in this literature review points to a careful consideration of the specific learning environment when implementing a blended model. The importance of a trained teacher familiar with online tools and who can implement their use using a pedagogically guided approach is key to the success of the blended model. The research also suggests that in terms of discussion and speaking activities that the F2F format is preferential. I would also conclude that a strong teacher presence perhaps offered by a “Flex” or “Rotation” model is more conducive to success in student language acquisition than an “Enriched Virtual Model”. Where I believe the research could be bolstered is in providing specific examples of blended French language courses in both F2F and distance learning environments. In addition, I believe there to be a lack of research surrounding the integration of online tools, ubiquitous access to technology through portable devices and the role of social media in Core French language instruction.
Chapter 3 - Procedures and Methods

Blended F2F First Attempt: Course 1

Course 1 (http://mrmarkteachescedar.weebly.com/french-9.html) represents my first attempt at adopting a blended approach in the face to face classroom. The concept was to take my regular face to face course which was supported by Glencoe’s Bon Voyage 1 textbook (Schmitt, 2004) and to host it in an online environment. My traditional F2F course followed six theme based units with each concluding with project work. In addition to the textbook introduced vocabulary, structure and culture content, I would integrate games, oral activities, presentations and field trips. I had received positive feedback from both students and parents on my previous approach and my classes were quite popular. This was reflected by a program growth from six to ten French courses in three years. In 2010 I had experimented with integrating iPods and using social media pages to engage students, however most of my methods and activities could be categorized as F2F. With Course 1, I wanted to create a paperless class where student work was posted in a portfolio style website or as I often referred to it, an online binder. I also wanted to have student and teacher course material online to increase flexibility, for students who were away sick, or traveling during the school year. In addition many of my lessons integrated the use of online tools like Google Docs (https://docs.google.com) and Duolingo (https://www.duolingo.com/) which I hoped would encourage collaboration, help contribute to a positive community and increase engagement levels.

I chose to use Weebly (http://www.weebly.com/) for student portfolios and for my teacher website for three main reasons. The first reason being because of the low cost. Weebly offers a free version which does not offer as many tools and functions as the Pro version, but was more than suitable for the purpose of student portfolios. Secondly I have found Weebly to be
user friendly and intuitive, making use a simplified drag and drop tool menu. Having been introduced to this tool in OLTD 501 to create our own personal learning websites (http://jmarklearnsonline.weebly.com/), I found it intuitive and easy to work with. In my beta testing for my major project I found that even students at the grade 8 level were successful using Weebly to create student websites, so it seemed an obvious choice for my grade 9 course. My final reason for choosing Weebly was its blog function. I did not want to create a full learning management system with every aspect of my course mapped out as I would later do in Course 3 for my distance learning students. By utilizing the blog format, I could provide students with a general course outline, but control the pace of the lesson delivery and adapt the day to day assignments, activities and projects to each specific group. This was developed as a cohort based class not a self paced course and by not having every lesson mapped out ahead of time allowed me more flexibility to make running changes. This was very important as I was delving into new territory and was not sure how students would react or adapt to the transition from my traditional teaching methods.

The first assignment of the course was having students create their own websites (http://mrmarkteachescedar.weebly.com/2/post/2013/09/creating-your-french-9-website.html). Weebly has an education specific service titled https://education.weebly.com but I chose instead to use their regular service and have students create their webpages/portfolios/online binders in an open environment. I created a permission form for online use (see Appendix A for a copy of the form) and presented my plan to parents at our scheduled meet the teacher night. Although I was prepared to offer an alternative paper option to the online binder format, I received full support from the parents and students. Prior to the construction of the websites I taught a two period lesson on privacy issues, safe internet use and how to protect your privacy online. To get
this component of the course launched I booked the computer lab for the week and students constructed their websites.

Student websites included six sections. Section 1 was titled “Moi” (me) which was a brief splash page and displayed an image representing the student’s interest. They were not permitted to post personal pictures in order to protect their privacy. Section 2 was titled “Personal Dictionary” and they used this page on their website to create their own dictionaries of French words that they were using throughout the course. Section 3 was titled “Journal” where they posted their weekly French journal reflections. Section 4 was a page designated for notes on structure and grammar. Section 5 was a page dedicated to project work, and they created this using a blog format. Section 6 was titled “Links” and was a page created for them to gather useful online tools and links that they required for their coursework. The teacher home site, Quizlet, online dictionary, verb conjugator, and command codes to write accents are examples of resources that students housed on this page.

After establishing their websites students began a series of lessons hosted online to acclimatize them to working in an online environment. They engaged in a small inquiry where they researched and shared a minimum of three different methods to writing accents on their computers. Some students chose to access the course through their phones using their personal data plan. This was not mandatory, but an adaptation I encouraged with certain students who were keen and had unlimited data plans for their phones. The first unit required more lab time than consequent units, as the routines were new, and students were less familiar with using many of the online tools. After the first month with the majority of time spent in the computer lab, we transitioned back to a more equal balance between classroom and lab time, generally splitting our time between both locations.
Assessment criteria for each activity was outlined in the assignment instructions. Some of the major projects included a self-assessment form. In my teacher page I built a hub where I could access student pages to mark work. Using the comment section I had the ability to comment on student work through Weebly, however for major projects I would review the criteria with students in a face to face interview. Marks were collected and recorded outside of Weebly using BCeSIS Teacher Assist (https://www.isw-bc.ca/csi/node.do?method=home), a program our school staff had been trained in and committed to using. For mid-term and final assessment I used the same format I had previously used comprised of an interview conducted in French, a translation and reading comprehension section and a written section. Translations and written sections were done electronically on the student web sites and they were allowed to use their notes, personal dictionary and verb conjugator tools.

Blended F2F Refined Attempt (Course 2)

Course 2 represents my refined attempt at creating a blended course for my F2F classroom students at Cedar Secondary. I introduced in the spring semester of 2013, the semester following my experience with Course 1. A great deal of the course material and student work can be found at the following Google Plus Community (https://plus.google.com/u/0/communities/100389526661439730110/stream/5302be0d-56aa-40f1-8162-f6d2081f1921). The inspiration for Course 2 came from two sources. First was my experience as a student in the OLTD 505: Open Educational Resources course. This course was hosted in a Google Plus Community outside of the program’s learning management system. I found this environment more accessible, easier to navigate than the learning management system we had used in our previous courses. The overall organization, appearance, and interface for sharing material in Google Plus Communities is robust and intuitive. Working in this
environment allowed me to envision hosting a grade 8-12 French course in the same environment. In addition, unlike the course LMS, creating a Google Plus Community is a free service with a Google + account. The second major inspiration came from the sad reality that Cedar Community Secondary School was scheduled for closure due to district budgetary constraints. As this was my last semester teaching at a school I had grown to love, I wanted to do something unique and special with my students. I had used inquiry style learning and questions in the past with smaller project work, but I had yet to build an entire course around this model.

The crux of this course was developing a central question that would engage students for the entire course and still allow for the flexibility to meet the British Columbia Ministry prescribed outcomes for Core French 9. Eventually I settled on the following question: How does one survive in (insert French speaking location) for a month? The idea was for students to create a written document or guide and an instructional video that instructs a non-French speaking person how they can survive in a given French locale for a month. I organized the project into 12 units or projects and students were given the freedom to choose their own units based on what they felt were the most important themes or skills required to communicate and adapt in their chosen environment. This was outlined in the course outline (https://docs.google.com/document/d/12TnN-5IJLD3r00t48A5_XWV-kfP-CPO3ZZFJ2Bq6rg0/edit?hl=en&forcehl=1&pli=1) (Appendix B) and shared in our Google Community. Using any resources available to them, including open online material, class textbooks and material they could request from myself, students constructed their chapters, learned and mastered the material and finally constructed a “How to…” style video in French demonstrating their new skills and creating a resource for others. We used our Google Plus Community to post instructions, resources, showcase outstanding work and for commenting. In
lieu of a final exam students were responsible for showcasing their final documents and editing their separate video clips into a final product. Students were given the option of working individually or with a partner. Working with the students and a school calendar we divided the course into 12 segments with deadlines created for each unit. We built in flexibility for students to reduce the number of chapters depending on interruptions outside of our control and we scheduled three weeks at the end of the semester in June for students to prepare their final documents and videos.

In terms of organization and assessment I wanted to integrate other elements into the course in addition to the inquiry. In order to practice speaking skills typically every day would start with a conversation question. Attendance and participation in daily discussion represented 20% of the course and was calculated daily. In addition I would include grammar and sentence structure lessons each week which students were expected to integrate into their chapters. To ensure accountability and check for progression in student written ability I administered small quizzes where students could check on their progress and redo them if they were struggling with a concept. Each student was also responsible for organizing a cultural activity that linked directly to their project. Students were given instructions to present a cultural aspect of their chosen French region and organize an interactive activity that engaged and taught the rest of the class. These activities were scheduled for our weekly double block. At the end of each unit deadline, I would meet with each student and assess their written and video work. Working from a criteria sheet produced in Google docs I would give feedback to students on their work, discuss what they had produced and even give them the opportunity to make revisions if they wanted to. Exceptional work was showcased on our Google Community with permission from students, and
we would often take time to share exceptional student work as a class using a digital projector and screen.

Ubiquitous access to online resources and technology was a big part of my vision for this course. My previous attempt at a blended model (Course 1) was split between the classroom, an environment where there was limited access to online resources for the majority of the students, and the computer lab where online access was universal but the environment more segregated and individually structured. For Course 2 I wanted to create an open and sharing community with a classroom that had full access to online resources. I was fortunate enough to acquire access to a mobile lab for the semester. The lab contained 20 laptop computers with wireless internet capability, allowing students the freedom to create their projects not only in the classroom, but in other areas of the school. As the video component of their inquiries required a different setting, students earned the privilege to film outside of the classroom as long as they remained on task and didn’t disrupt other student learning. While each class would begin with a French discussion and a progress report, often students would share their learning plan for the day and sometimes move to another environment in order to accomplish their daily goals. Not having to transition to a computer lab to access technology allowed the class to form a stronger sense of community, and this was not only fostered through our daily meetings and activities, but also through our Google + Community.

In order to structure this class and build a dual F2F and online community students needed parent permission to create accounts for various online resources and specifically students who didn’t already have one, needed to create a Google account. Again, like with Course 1, I was very fortunate to receive unanimous support from the parents and the need to create an alternate program was not required.
Blended Distance Learning Environment (Course 3)

Course 3 was created and implemented in the fall of 2013. It is an open course created in Weebly and it can be found at [http://lahfrench9.weebly.com/](http://lahfrench9.weebly.com/). Course 3 was designed as a response to a change in learning environments. Moving from a cohort based F2F brick and mortar style teaching environment with the closing of Cedar Secondary to a distance education model at my new position with Learn@Home was a significant transition. With the closure of Cedar Secondary I was initially transferred to Ladysmith Secondary and was asked to take over the Language Department responsibilities at that school. With my final Masters project in mind I declined the position. I wanted to experience blended learning from a distance learning perspective and I was a successful candidate for the junior program and French department position at Learn@Home. My hope was that this change in setting and experience would impart me with a unique perspective to build, work and reflect on blended learning from both F2F and Distance Learning modalities.

In an attempt to facilitate a smooth transition, I created a course that fit with the current Learn@Home structure. I needed a course that could be immediately implemented for the start of the school year, but that also allowed me the flexibility to adapt and to integrate successful aspects of my past blended courses. Previously Learn@Home had purchased the Rosetta Stone ([http://www.rosettastone.com/learn-french](http://www.rosettastone.com/learn-french)) language learning software, but due to the high cost of licensing they no longer supported it. I had used Rosetta Stone personally and while I found it to be a powerful learning tool, I did not believe it adequately constituted the needs of an entire course, nor did it meet the full spectrum of Ministry prescribed learning outcomes for Core French 9 ([http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/cf512.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/cf512.pdf)) especially in the area of cultural relevancy (Amandolare, 2010).
In my blended F2F refined course I had presented a model that didn’t rely on a specific textbook, but that drew from various online and traditional resources. With Course 3 I returned to the textbook unit structure that I had adopted in Course 1. In both Course 1 and Course 3, Glencoe’s Bon Voyage 1 textbook (http://www.glencoe.com/sec/worldlanguages/french/bonvoyagelevel1/) framed the structure for sentence structure and grammar, vocabulary and cultural readings. Where Course 2 only used the textbook as one of many supporting resources, Glencoe’s BonVoyage 1 Chapters 7-12 provided the content and chapter themes for the entire Course 3. Course 1 and Course 3 also shared the similarity of supplementing the textbook program with projects and online learning tools which were designed to add engagement and diversity to the learning experience. Course 1 and Course 3 also shared the similarity of being hosted on Weebly, although they were presented very differently. Unlike Course 1, Course 3 had it’s own dedicated French 9 site and not a website shared with my other courses. In addition for Course 3 I registered with Weebly for Education as a private class, so unlike Course 1 student websites were not hosted in an open online environment. My justification for this was to provide a scaffolded approach to digital citizenship, allowing for an extra layer of protection for my junior students and transitioning them to an open online environment in their senior classes. This was also a response to not having the same level of contact and familiarity with my students as I had in my F2F classes.

Similar to Course 1, students showcased their work through their own Weebly websites. Students were assigned textbook and workbooks as the course retained a paper component. Ironically my blended online course had a larger paper component than my blended F2F courses, as workbooks and tests were all completed on paper. Students came in to complete their tests in a F2F supervised environment and this represented part of the standard procedure for other
Lean@Home Junior and Senior courses. Course 3 also differed because it was self-paced and did not follow the cohort model. In Course 1 lessons and activities were presented in a blog format and, for the most part, outside of minor adaptations the class moved at the same pace from lesson to lesson, project to project. In Course 3 the entire course was laid out into six units (http://lahfrench9.weebly.com/course-outline.html) that followed a four-week cycle. The cycle transitioned from vocabulary acquisition to sentence structure, to culture and translation and finally to test and project work, then repeated with a new unit. This was based on a pedagogical approach I had refined and modeled in my course work in OLTD 501. Students were expected to demonstrate their learning through written and spoken interaction. Students recorded their oral work and posted it on their site using an online recorder such as Vocaroo (http://vocaroo.com/). They did this in Week 1 where they demonstrated and practiced their pronunciation of the basic vocabulary and again in Week 3 when they completed a dialogue activity. Students were given the option of completing their spoken work asynchronously, synchronously using the phone, in an online classroom or alternatively in a F2F setting. This flexibility was built in to cater to the diverse situations of our current Learn@Home students.

Student websites were divided into five sections, similar to Course 1. Section 1 was a homepage meant to introduce their site and describe their interest. Section 2 was created for posting translations of cultural readings. Section 3 titled “Parler” was a section for posting spoken activities. Section 4, “Écrire” was designed as a specific page on their website for showcasing written work and projects. Section 5, “Oral Recordings and Vocabulary” was a specific page for listing and posting recordings of their unit vocabulary. In addition to the textbook vocabulary practice and oral recordings, students were asked to access Quizlet (http://quizlet.com/), a site where they could practice the vocabulary and engage in a series of
games in quizzes to help them with their acquisition. After completing the four week cycles students were to write a supervised test. Our Learn@Home junior program supports a F2F drop in class where students can come for teacher support between 8:30 - 3:00 Monday to Friday. Many of our students were cross enrolled at other neighborhood schools, so they were unable to take advantage of our drop in support. In this case each secondary school had a Learn@Home room where they could receive limited support through an imbedded teacher model. For specific support students contacted me via email, phone or by using my online Blackboard Collaborate classroom. The project section of the website allowed students to take their learning a step further. For the grade 9 level their first project was an introduction to the popular Duolingo French program (www.duolingo.com). This online tool is also supported through IOS and Android platforms, so students could use it with their smartphones. It uses a gamified structure which analyses student mistakes and structures lessons to support their learning.

Student assessment and feedback for Course 3 was established through Jupiter Grades (http://jupitered.com/?home=1). Jupiter Grades is powerful live online assessment platform where students and parents can track progress as soon as an assignment is marked. Jupiter Grades also links to the teacher's email so I was able to send out messages and reminders to individual students or the whole class quite easily. The grade page for Course 3 in Jupiter grades provided a checklist of all assignments for the course, with mark, percentage and comments. I also created a mirror checklist on my website for students to track their progress, by hand or electronically (http://lahfrench9.weebly.com/course-checklist.html). Where daily contact was not a given for a distance course this assessment tool was and continues to be very effective for maintaining contact and communication with the students and parents.
Chapter 4 - Field/Beta Testing & Findings

Beta Testing: Methods and Process

The goal of this project was to create and implement blended core French 9 courses in both traditional and distance learning environments. These courses were designed with an emphasis on integrating online tools and technologies to facilitate both student engagement and ultimately student success. The deliverables of my major project were my three blended courses. Two designed for a traditional brick and mortar school: Course 1, Course 2 and Course 3 which was designed for a distance learning environment, all outlined in depth in chapter 3. As I have been working on this project since the conclusion of OLTD 501 in the fall of 2012, I have had the opportunity to field and beta test all three courses both through sharing and working with colleagues and my OLTD instructors. Perhaps the most important feedback was obtained through integrating them into my teaching practice and sharing them with students and parents in a live environment.

Course 1 was initially delivered in the fall semester of 2012 at Cedar Community Secondary School. Soon after its implementation I invited the SD68’s French as Second Language district coordinator to visit my classroom to observe and review the course. I also posted and shared Course 1 on my teaching website and blog (http://jmarklearnsonline.weebly.com/reflections-on-education-blog/the-challenges-of-sharing), and received four peer comments and reviews, including comments from my OLTD instructors. Course 1 was significantly different in style and format from my previous non-blended courses and the adaptation to this new format was not always easy for students. My ongoing communication and meetings with students and parents was key to providing me feedback and leading me ultimately to create Course 2. I was fortunate to reflect and work with two parents of
students in my class who were also educators. Their advice and suggestions were invaluable to the beta testing process as they represented a more student based perspective.

Course 2 ran from February 2013 to June 2013 in the spring semester also at Cedar Secondary. In the process of developing my final project I consulted and shared my progress with my project supervisor, and a colleague at Cedar Secondary who was also working with an inquiry model. For the video aspects of the course I consulted with another colleague and worked closely with our district information systems officer who was instrumental in helping me to set-up and maintain a mobile wireless lab in the classroom. Like Course 1 the most valuable source of beta testing and review came from observing and conferencing with students and parents. The format of the course allowed for a daily meeting where as a class we would reflect on what was working and what wasn’t. More in-depth interviews and conferences with parents and students provided valuable feedback and even allowed for running changes.

Course 3 was introduced to grade 9 Learn@Home students at the beginning of October 2014 and at the time of writing this paper students are currently working on the course. Course 3 is a self paced course and students are scheduled to finish it at various times of the year depending on their individual learning plans. As Course 3 is still in progress I have received more student feedback on Course 1 and Course 2, especially in terms of overall satisfaction, engagement levels and completion rates. I have conducted early consultations with students and parents to gauge their progress and satisfaction level with Course 3. Working with my new Learn@Home colleagues, I relied heavily on their feedback and advice for shaping a course that would work within the specific characteristics of the Learn@Home program. As this course is hosted in an open environment, I will continue to use it with students and continue to share among my professional learning community. This course will continue to evolve and improve
based upon student and peer feedback.

Findings of Beta Testing

Blended F2F (Course 1) The main online tool used for establishing Course 1 was the Weebly website creation platform, both for my teacher website which acted as a central hub, but also for the student portfolios or online binders. Overall Weebly was well received by students. Most students found creating their websites on Weebly intuitive, and they enjoyed the personalized process. For many of my students this was their first time building a website. After completing their websites a few students commented that they were amazed by how easy it was to create a website, and indicated that they could use this tool for other personal and educational purposes, including hosting a resume. One student later used the Weebly platform to create an online cookbook as a variation for a major cooking project. Another obvious benefit to using Weebly was that students were universally able to create well organized and yet personalized online portfolios/binders and therefore student organization was excellent for the semester. Students were trained to first produce and save their work using a word processor, and then cut and paste it to Weebly. This resulted in almost no lost work, and written work was always legible. The few students who struggled with website creation were supported both by myself and peers, and adapted easily to learning the functions of the tool.

On the negative side we did experience several technical difficulties in the computer lab. In the first term we experienced several periods of bandwidth shortage which slowed my students interaction with Weebly. In addition the student lab was configured with an outdated version of Internet Explorer, in order to comply with district policy to use BCESIS. This led to an incomplete display of Weebly. As a solution, we adapted by installing Google Chrome at the start of each session. We also experienced on and off network delays with the Weebly website
which I was not able to resolve despite working with district information system staff. In sum total these technical difficulties resulted in both a positive and negative. On the positive, I attempted to instill a culture of problem solving where I explained to students that we were attempting something new and that we were working with limited resources. Many students embraced this challenge, and assisted me in developing solutions to help manage our technical struggles. On the negative side some students didn’t see the value in creating an online environment especially given the limitations of our lab and network access. Working against the culture of problem solving that I was attempting to foster was a building frustration which undermined the value of the blended approach.

The first month of Course 1 was heavily focused on technology. The course plan called for students to create their online Weebly portfolios, complete a small inquiry on writing French accents on the computer, establish their personal dictionaries, familiarize themselves with the Quizlet tool, write their journals and sentence structure notes online and complete a Fashion project using an online tool such as Prezi (http://prezi.com/) or Google Presentations (https://docs.google.com/presentation/u/0/). Consequently the first six weeks of the course were biased towards online learning, and lacked a balanced approached. I was very excited to see the students working with and learning the online tools, and I continued to book more lab time. In mid October I began to receive feedback from certain students that they were tired of the lab time and that the course wasn’t as “fun” as it had been the previous school year. They missed the atmosphere of the classroom, the games, the conversations and the sense of community.

Overall I was very impressed with the quality of their online work, especially as a whole class. The online format for presentation seemed to bridge the gap between high end and low-end students that I observed in previous hand written work. I could also observe students adapting to
the online format and tools, and improving in their overall computer skills. Despite a few comments from students, staff and parents that students were not enjoying the online approach I continued to convince myself that students often struggle with change and that to abandon the course plan in October would be premature. In late October I met with a parent and colleague whose daughter was participating in my class. The student's achievement at that time was excellent, and by accessing her online portfolio I was easily able to demonstrate her progress. Despite this, the concern was with the overall enjoyment of the course. The comment was made that the student no longer loved French like she had last year. During parent teacher interviews this sentiment was echoed by other parents, although they agreed that the skills and online approach was important and they were happy with their student’s overall progress. By early November I realized that while I was impressed with student progress in their written output, organization and use of online learning tools that a sense of community was missing in the class. At this point I decreased the number of computer lab sessions and returned to a more face to face approach, increasing the ratio of traditional activities, games, field trips and class discussions.

One of my greatest concerns in developing Course 1 was privacy issues and digital citizenship. In response to my concern I spent two classes reviewing privacy issues, and teaching responsible digital citizenship at the start of the course. I was happy to report that I had no negative issues related to the student portfolios, or commenting. Students adhered to outlined policies and their online behavior and digital citizenship was excellent overall.

Reflecting on the Course I was happy with organization, assignments, output of the students. All students successfully completed the course, and generally I felt that the quality and presentation of their written work and projects was higher on a whole class level. Results from student midterm and final exam, which included interview, writing sample and reading
comprehension components suggested similar progress from my non blended grade 9 classes. The one exception to this was that I felt that their written samples were slightly improved. A deeper and more measured analysis of this would be necessary to quantify, however I hypothesize that access to student created online notes was an advantage over hand written notes when measuring the whole class. Interviewing students at the end of the course revealed that satisfaction rates were not as high as my previous face to face classes. This came as no surprise based on my observations and meetings with students and parents during the course. Students commented that slow computers and too much time in the lab took away from their enjoyment of the course. Certain students expressed that they had wished they could have done their class assignments by hand.

**Blended F2F Refined Attempt (Course 2)** The stated intention of this major project was to create blended courses that focused on student engagement and fostered a sense of community ultimately furthering student success. To say that Course 1 failed completely to achieve its intended purpose may not be entirely accurate, however there were several elements of Course 1 that I felt were problematic and needed to be addressed. Foremost, despite student success with using Weebly, district network instability with the Weebly.com website made it unreliable to move forward with at that time. Secondly, the heavy reliance on the computer lab environment to access online portfolios and create work I felt was eroded a sense of classroom community. It was my observation that student participation in the lab setting defaulted to individualized contributions. I hypothesized that this may be a result of the cubicle style layout of the lab, but further research would be required to confirm this. As a result of these obstacles I decided to create Course 2 in an attempt to implement a blended program without dependency on the
computer lab environment and without using Weebly as a platform for my teacher site and student online portfolios.

Hosting the class in Google Communities instead of Weebly was the first major adjustment. This resulted in two obvious benefits: primarily it avoided the technical issues we were having with Weebly and secondly it protected student privacy. During our semester we encountered no technical issues with viewing, posting and commenting in our class Google Plus Community. Parents all consented for students to register Google Plus accounts and our community was private from outside viewing. While I support the concept of creating open source material to share with the larger learning community, this also exposes an element of risk that was eliminated by using a closed community. Students quickly adapted to posting and commenting in our Google Plus Community. I reviewed and posted criteria and etiquette for both commenting and posting. Students were respectful and adhered to this policy without issue for the entire season. At completion of the course, following conversations with both students and parents I felt strongly that the use of an online community added to sense of sharing and trust within the class. The ability to share both resources and showcase student work in a safe and easy to view medium was a powerful tool that did not exist in my traditional class models. For me this represented a strong argument for supporting a blended model in the face to face classroom.

Working within an inquiry class model was a departure from my previous class experiences. I was concerned that my question: *How does one survive in (insert French speaking location) for a month?* would not provide a strong enough structure to focus an entire semester on. In my discussions with other colleagues who have implemented an inquiry approach, this seems to represent the greatest leap of faith as we entrust our students to steer the direction of the
learning and relegate ourselves to a more supportive role. For this specific class the approach succeeded and I was rewarded with exceptional levels of student engagement. Students constantly exceeded my expectations and participation levels outside of class during student’s own time was an unexpected benefit. As student’s concluded each of their chapters with a video, they would often choose to film their projects away from school and this would occur outside of school hours. In addition they would often do much of the video editing on their own time. As outstanding written and video projects were showcased within the Google Community, it created a culture of excellence. Students seemed to be motivated by their peer’s efforts, and they sought to improve their own projects by constantly adding new elements, or experimenting with more powerful filming and editing tools. The growth and development in student work, both in their written samples and their videos was obvious and extremely rewarding to witness as a their teacher. I believe that the structure of the Google Communities contributed to this.

Feedback provided by the students on their class experience during and at the end of the course was almost universally positive. In addition, unlike Course 1 parent feedback was also positive. I specifically remember one comment citing that their son had never enjoyed French before this course. Student comments reflected that they enjoyed both the material and the process.

Reflecting on why this approach seemed to work so well I believe that it was empowering students with choice. Reeling from my first attempt at instituting a blending program in the form of Course 1, I was sensitive to the fact that not all students appreciated working in an online environment. I presented Course 2 as an option to the class, and I instructed them they could choose the blended format or the traditional class. Although I was prepared to offer both, students unanimously opted for the blended model. Another facet of choice was that
students genuinely seemed to appreciate choosing the themes for their own chapters and I believe this contributed to increased levels of student engagement.

Having my request for a mobile lab granted and having our school wired for wireless service allowed me to host the class in my classroom. This provided for a more open and warmer environment than the lab. Students were able to ubiquitously access online tools and this led to a much more natural interface than what I observed on Course 1. I was also fortunate to have a relatively small group of 20 students for the implementation of Course 2 and this may also have been a contributing factor to the success of this course. As this was the last semester before our school was scheduled for closure overall class sizes had dipped and this created an allowance for a class size that would not have regularly operated. This situation was ideal for beta testing, however if I were to implement Course 2 in a class of 30 I would expect further complications and negative issues to become apparent.

When reflecting on the negatives of this course I was happy with the class tone and dynamics, sense of community and every student successfully completed the course, however I had one group of students who struggled with the format in the second semester. The group in question was two boys who decided to work independently because they felt there was an imbalance in project contributions. After the split, one of the boys was producing excellent written work, but was struggling with his video submissions, the other struggled with both written and video. I had to intervene and work closely with both boys in order to ensure they successfully met the outlined requirements and completed the course. I imagine that in a full class of 30 students more students would require this type of intensive support and this may be difficult to manage. The other negative was that our course was cut three weeks short because of a labour dispute and this interfered with my outlined plan for 12 units and a final assessment.
Predicting this in the last month, we adapted by reducing the units to 11 and creating a class final showcase video and written book instead of individual books. This adaptation consequently resulted in an incredible team effort to produce our final project with limited time and I feel ultimately contributed to a positive class culture and overall sense of achievement.

**Blended at a Distance (Course 3)** Course 3 did not represent a pedagogical leap forward from my F2F blended progression. In many ways I now see it as a step backwards, but a necessary step. Pedagogically I was extremely happy with the results of moving away from a more textbook centered unit based course to an inquiry approach in the F2F environment. However my blended at a distance course draws more in design from my initial F2F blended attempt than my inquiry model. My rationale for this pedagogical regression was that with little familiarity and less opportunity for contact with the students and parents I felt that the textbook and unit structure provided instant academic legitimacy. This intuition was soon corroborated as many of our students and parents in both French and other classes requested textbooks for their classes, and reported a preference to using the paper textbook medium over digital resources. In the case of the French 9 blended online course, it was a positive to use the unit structure of the textbook to this point. In addition it created a natural progression from grade level to grade level for students. As the assigned textbook was used in two other secondary schools in the district it also provided parallel legitimacy to our program. As a new teacher at Learn@Home gaining student and parent trust was paramount and a necessary step when asking them to take educational risks at a future juncture. This was supported by my experience at Cedar Secondary, and I felt that my experimentation with blended online in the F2F environment was supported, despite the struggles of some students with the transition. Establishing this open dialogue and trust with students and parents requires time and patience and I wanted my first attempt at a
blended French 9 program to be a positive one. My initial feedback to date has been positive and the course seems to strike a balance between paper and digital resources. As Course 3 is ongoing it is harder to reflect on student performance and overall satisfaction, however my meetings and conversations with students and parents have revealed a generally positive response to the course at this point in time. My greatest concerns lie with enrolled students who are not engaging in or commencing course activities, however these students are also displaying a similar pattern for their other courses and require higher level intervention and support as they may not be appropriately placed in the Learn@Home program as it currently operates. I currently have three students who fall into this category.

Course 3 returns to Weebly as a platform for students to present their work, and this has been more successful than my initial experiences in my first blended F2F class. District network issues with Weebly seem to be largely resolved although I still experience a slight lag compared to access from other networks. As students often access the course via their home networks this has not been a persistent issue. My experience using a closed site and managing a Weebly classroom through https://education.weebly.com/ has been positive. One negative issue that has surfaced using the closed Weebly education website tool is that the free version only allows for five pages on each website, whereas the open non-classroom version was less restrictive. For the purposes of the grade 9 course this was not a major concern, and in some ways created a simplified portfolio and works within my plan for scaffolding and transitioning my junior students from a closed environment to an open environment in their senior studies.

Students who started the course to this point have successfully created their websites and have been able to post their finished assignment on their Weebly portfolios. I have noted that the majority of students in this course required some form of support in the first unit and start up of
this course. Although I outlined all course instructions in the “Getting Started” section of the class website, most students requested further explanation and support with one or more aspect. Students who were not familiar with Weebly needed more support in establishing their websites, but once they were led through the first few steps they seem to have caught on quickly. Once students completed the first unit they seem to have completed the corresponding units much faster. This indicates to me that there is an adaptation process where the students seem to struggle with the initial employment of the tools and procedures required to complete each unit. I have been able to offer support in my Learn@Home classroom which has support room structure with computer banks on the side and round tables in the middle of the class. For students cross enrolled at other secondary school whose schedules have prevented them from accessing our drop in services, I have supported them through F2F email, phone and even through my online office/classroom in Blackboard Collaborate (http://www.learnnowbc.ca/inbresources/elluminate/default.aspx). As staffing needs have been recently addressed I will now have the flexibility to conduct school visits to offer further support or run F2F activities.

As a blended course in a distance learning environment the workbook and tests must be completed by paper with chapter tests done under teacher supervision. While I am not necessarily a huge proponent of this form of assessment the supervised tests have provided an opportunity to interact with the students in a F2F environment, and allowed me an affective way to gauge their program progress. The daily check ins that are afforded in a F2F classroom operating in a cohort style program are a tremendous luxury when considering education from a distance learning perspective. As a reflection of student progress at this point, I would summarize that the students seem to be either very successful with the course, or not engaging
and therefore not at all successful. This dichotomy seems to be a pattern in my other Learn@Home course subjects and observed by other teachers in the program. As my responsibilities with Learn@Home lie with the junior program, working with my teaching partners we have been offering F2F activities and field trips in order to increase our contact with students. Starting with board game activities every Friday during last block and bi-weekly field trips for rock climbing we are increasing our contact with students and their families, gaining their trust and encouraging students to come to school and engage in a F2F environment. A significant number of my students suffer from some degree of anxiety related stress, which has influenced their decision to pursue distance learning as opposed to enrolling in a more traditional brick and mortar secondary school. By offering a diversity of non-curricular opportunities that fit with student interests we are slowly building a warm and safe environment for these students. Drawing these students from the home back into a modified classroom and building a community is allowing us to begin to offer curricular activities in addition to games and field trips. We have started to integrate both math and English activities and I am engaging select students in brief French conversations. My goal is to continue in this direction and offer a French Cafe day where students can come and enjoy some French snacks and engage in basic French dialogue. While this is not a formal assessed aspect of the course, as we build trust, community and increase F2F participation rates we can realistically begin to offer this as a more formalized component of the course, or even work towards a scheduled blended approach with F2F and home learning days.
Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Recommendations

When I reflect on the progression of my three blended courses and their development since the beginning of my studies in online learning, I realize that there is no going back to the way it was before I began my graduate studies at Vancouver Island University. Today I understand that our society is in the midst of a profound change in the way that information is created and delivered. Schools and libraries no longer have a monopoly on educational content and knowledge (Siemens & Tittenberger, 2009). Blended learning is simply a natural reaction to advances in technology that are no longer possible to ignore. Ubiquitous access to technology and almost unlimited information through mobile devices is no longer a fantasy but a reality (Truss, 2014). Both Truss and Graham (2004) suggest that what we identify today as blended learning will simply be referred to as learning in the near future. The three courses that I have built both for the F2F classroom and a distance learning school represent a departure from a traditional model and a move towards a model that recognizes and takes advantage of online learning tools that are freely available to the public. In all three courses I have attempted to adapt both F2F and online learning strategies to the learning environments I had to work with. I have been rewarded with many successes, but also some failures in this endeavour. Change can be awkward and painful at times, and like learning to ride a bike it is not without its bumps and bruises. In this section I will outline the conclusions that I have arrived at from implementing all three of my courses.

Traditional F2F Learning Environment: Course 1 and Course 2

After reflecting on the feedback from colleagues, students and parents I concluded that I wasn’t satisfied with the results of Course 1. It is easy to blame students and parents for not adapting to change, but ultimately I feel there were elements in the structure of this course that led to lower student
satisfaction rates. Primarily the ratio of computer mediated activities was greater than F2F activities, especially at the outset of Course 1. Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) explain that in face to face and computer mediated learning environments the course designer must balance the strength and weaknesses of both environments to create an ideal course. Excited by introducing student online portfolios through Weebly, the first six weeks of Course 1 were hosted primarily in a computer lab and both the individual nature of the activities and the lab setting took away from building a sense of community. In many ways I think I was more engaged in the process of students using online tools than they were. In Course 1 I had students complete assignment and activities in their portfolios that could have just as effectively, or perhaps more effectively been done in a F2F manner. George Couros (2011) talks about the difference between “neat” as opposed “deep”. Reflecting on this I feel that in Course 1 I often fell into the trap of putting process ahead of pedagogy. While the paperless format was “neat”, the activities were often more isolating, less engaging and ultimately led to lower student and parent satisfaction. In addition, community was not fostered through Weebly in the same way as it was using Google Plus Communities in Course 2. As Garrett suggested in 1991, it is difficult to realize the full benefits of technology until they are fully integrated into the classroom environment. This was something I was able to accomplish in Course 2. The creation of our own Google Plus Community paired with a natural F2F classroom experience with daily dialogue activities proved much more successful at fostering a sense of community in the class as was strongly suggested by student exit interviews.

Course 2 offered much more choice and flexibility than Course 1 and I observed that this led to higher levels of student engagement and a more positive class culture. Students would often question why they had to use the computer for activities like journals or projects and would express that they didn’t see the value in using the computer. As one of my main goals in Course 1 was to have students learn the tools and produce an online portfolio I would only accept work if it was posted on their
Weebly site. When mixed with technical issues and slow performing computers this created a culture of frustration, and ultimately led to lower student and parent satisfaction rates. My teacher driven approach in Course 1 created an “us vs them” mentality that I was not used to. I sometimes felt like I was fighting the students to get them to use technology. Ultimately this led to lower student engagement as they were doing their assignments because they had to and not because they wanted to. This struggle did not occur in Course 2 and I feel that flexible nature and high degree of student choice created a more harmonious environment. Student engagement would commonly spill over into free time as was witnessed by their videos that were commonly filmed at their homes, and included friends, parents and pets. When considering the new BC Education Plan (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2012) Course 2 directly addressed the key elements of personalization, in addition to flexibility and choice both through integrating technology into the classroom and through the inquiry structure of the course.

Chenoweth, Ushida and Murday (2006) write that teachers need to provide students with a high degree of technical support and guidance in order to successfully integrate technology into classroom. Course 1 was fraught with technical difficulties. Consistent slow internet access, network instability with Weebly, and browser incompatibilities were recurring issues that plagued the student experience. Paired with the reality that this was my attempt at implementing many of the tools and lessons that I had designed, teaching this class was at times frustrating. Many lessons were learned in this experience, and I actually ended up taking on the Information Systems department head role at Cedar Secondary in the fall of 2013 so I could gain better access and understanding of technology for my students. Course 2 was largely successful because of improved access to technology and improved technology support for students. As my skills and knowledge of tools and systems improved I was better able to support students.
Course 1 was very much an exercise in converting F2F traditional activities into online ones. A strong example of this was my journal assignment. The difficulty with this is that the discussion component that followed student journal writing wasn’t as effective in the lab environment. Reflecting on the Course 1 activities I would conclude that too many of the assignments didn’t use the unique abilities of online tools, instead replicated F2F techniques. George Couros (2011) writes, “I really believe that using technology just to do the same things that we have always done, but on the computer, is not a good enough reason. There has to be more.” (p. 1). Too many times in Course 1 I felt like I was falling into this trap. As a teacher I was extremely impressed by the look of the portfolios and the output of students, however the students were expressing dissatisfaction with the process, ultimately leading to lower levels of engagement and enthusiasm towards the course. With Course 2 building on the ideas of Siemens and Tittenberger (2009) surrounding the changing nature of information and how it is created and co-created, I used a Google Communities as a shared resource library where students were able to build their own shared catalogue of resources, post successful projects and comment on each other’s work. The textbook no longer became the central component of the course, just another resource where students could evaluate its value in relationship to their learning goals as established through their inquiry project. The one element I would change if I were to run Course 2 again, is that I would follow a more structured plan for integrating sentence structure components. These lessons often felt like an afterthought and I think they could be improved. Perhaps adopting and adhering to a more scheduled approach would address this. I would also reduce the size of the project from 12 chapters to 8 as I felt in some cases the chapters became a bit redundant and repetitive.

**Online Learning Environment: Course 3**

Course 3 was created in response to the current learning environment at Learn@Home. Using Horn and Staker’s (2011) model I categorized L@H as an enriched virtual blend, with the majority of
student teacher interactions taking place over a distance. Being a new teacher starting in an established environment I decided to create a course that I felt would immediately fit the needs of students in this environment and try to transition towards an increase in F2F interactions with students. Taking this into account I feel that Course 3 has been successful. By offering non-curricular activities focused on fun and engagement student visits to our site have increased and a community founded on F2F interactions is slowly building. In addition to “Board game Friday’s” and field trips to the indoor climbing gym and skating, I am starting to offer voluntary curricular activities and students are attending. Realistically we are only currently engaging about one third of our registered students, but it represents a start and a change from the previous established culture. Initial response to the course has also indicated to me that students benefit from a F2F presence in setting up their websites and working through the routines of the first unit. This idea was strongly reinforced by Blake (2009) in his paper, *The Use of Technology for Second Language Distance Learning*. Although I commonly offer support via email, students at this level seem hesitant to engage via my office phone, or online class, although this option is offered. In an attempt to proactively address the challenges of the startup I have reworked my initial instructions in an attempt to make them more clear. I may also supplement this with a screen capture style video, demonstrating Weebly creation.

Predicting success rates for this course I would hypothesize that they will be substantially lower than my courses offered in the traditional F2F environment. I hypothesize that this may be due to a more at risk student population, as many Learn@Home students have chosen the distance option because they have not been successful in traditional F2F schools. However, another explanation for this may lie in the reality that the Enriched Virtual Blend does not engage students as well as other models. The benefit of having daily contact with students in the Rotation Model seemed to have a stronger impact on student engagement levels than email or telephone reminders that are customary at Learn@Home. Meetings and
counselling interventions are required to reach students who are registered but not engaging in course assignments and these interventions are not always successful.

Course 3 represents a starting point for my work at Learn@Home. Just as Course 2 evolved from Course 1, I view Course 3 as a realistic first step at engaging L@H students within the context of the established program routines and expectations. Moving forward, the project section of Course 3 allows me to insert inquiry style projects, while my efforts to build trust and community outside the context of the French 9 course seems to be attracting more and more students into the F2F environment. Given enough time, it is conceivable that I could establish a grade 9 program that operates on a Flex model where students attend for curricular lessons in their classes for at least half the week. This will require student recruitment and administrative approval, but it seems a realistic goal. If a Flex model was established it would be conceivable to successfully offer a version of Course 2 which I have concluded provides the best balance of online technology and F2F interaction, lending to high engagement rates and strong and positive community fostered both through the F2F classroom as well as the Google Plus Community.

Conclusions:

Having implemented blended learning models in both F2F and distributed learning modalities has imparted me with an overall impression of their ability to engage and foster a sense of community among students. I recognize that Cedar Secondary and Learn@Home are specific examples and by no means reflect all F2F and online learning environments. Given my experience with this project I have concluded that the F2F blended classroom environment is more conducive for engaging students and fostering a sense of community than the Enriched Virtual Model. Recognizing the rationale for Learn@Home is to cater to a unique group of students whose learning needs for various reasons are not being met by traditional secondary
schools. In many case because of a host of unique circumstances Learn@Home students are not able to regularly attend F2F classes in a traditional timetable. Consequently an alternative learning environment is needed, therefore creating the need for an online learning school. I would challenge this by arguing that the implementation of a blended model in a F2F traditional classroom can potentially provide the flexibility and structure to engage students both in a F2F and at a distance. Last semester teaching at Cedar Secondary, I taught a student who spent 6 weeks of his semester in Australia. As my classes and lessons were posted online he was able to follow our daily progress and successfully completed his course working from another continent. He was even able to cooperatively work on a group project using the collaborative features of Google Docs. While this may not be an ideal learning situation for every student it demonstrates the potential for adapting students learning plans in order to accommodate distance learning exists when we integrate online learning strategies into our F2F classrooms.

I would also argue that overall the classroom model provides increased opportunity for engagement as F2F attendance and interaction is expected daily. In my experience working at Learn@Home there are a significant number of students who are not engaging in any form of learning and who are not motivated to work in an online environment. As a classroom teacher it was much easier to identify and support my at-risk students as I could put a face to a name, and more easily access learning supports. In my experience in both schools, class sizes are more manageable in the F2F classroom making students easier to track. As a F2F classroom teacher confronted daily with a room full of students my foremost duty was always to engage students in learning. As a new distributive learning teacher, my day is monopolized with answering email and marking online assignments, the expectation of engaging students in F2F activities seems to be afterthought. Implementing a blended model at Learn@Home and attempting to move
towards a Flex Model has been challenging as class size limits are not strictly regulated and by engaging students in F2F daily activities, marking and communication is often relegated to after school hours. Ultimately this has led to a workload that has far exceeded what I have experienced in a F2F classroom environment. In addition while my student participation rates for F2F activities has increased I am still consistently engaging less than half of my registered students. It has occurred to me during the implementation of Course 3 at Learn@Home is that by attempting to transition from an Enriched Virtual Model to a Flex Model that I’m essentially trying to recreate the situation that existed in my F2F classroom. While many of the tools that I have established in Course 3 allow students to engage in their language learning from a distance and are a necessity for offering a course at a distance, they often seem an inferior substitute to F2F interaction. As ubiquitous access to online resources becomes a reality in traditional F2F classrooms I can envision a reality where blended learning evolves into learning and perhaps the divide that exists between traditional brick and mortar schools and online learning schools will disappear.
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Global perspectives, local designs, Retrieved from:
http://www.academia.edu/563281/Blended_learning_systems_Definition_current_trends_and_future_directions


*Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 8*(1).
Appendix A

Permission Letter for Consent of Online Tools Use

In our course this semester we will be using a variety of online tools, including:

**Google Docs** - if they don’t already have one, students will create a **gmail** account, to take advantage of the free, word processing and presentation tools.
**Weebly.com** – personal website creation tool used to post student work and discussion **www.weebly.com**
**You Tube.com** – students may post their work on You Tube to share their work, lessons and view cultural material **www.youtube.com**
**Blackboard Collaborate** – a virtual classroom, where students will be able to meet with the teacher and classmates for conversations, (site information and link to join will be provided to students by the instructor)
**Quizlet.com** – interactive website to practice and test vocabulary **www.quizlet.com**
**Facebook** - students will have the option to view and comment on the Learn @ Home 8-12 Facebook page, that provides them with updates and provides an alternate way to contact the office and the instructors.
**Duolingo.com** – a skill and vocabulary building site that tutors and allows students to translate online.
*Students will also be using various other online resources.

Students’ online privacy and safety is important to us. Many educational internet tools use servers housed outside of British Columbia and therefore personal information is not protected by B.C. privacy law. Please be conscientious of the personal information they post online. Due to the nature of interaction in the course online students should consider the following when posting to an open forum:

1. Be aware of the information that you publish online.
2. Consider publishing your work under your first name or a pseudonym
3. Moderate your posts and comments to remove any identifiable information. (Names, nicknames, family member names, etc.)
4. Consider hiding your blog from the search engines
5. If you use a blog to publish your work, consider turning off the update notification service.

We will take every measure to ensure safety and privacy of information, as well as promote responsible internet practice.

I am writing to ask that you give permission for your child to participate in this Internet-based learning opportunity, under the conditions outlined above. If your child has your permission to participate in this project, please return this letter with your signature below. Please feel free to contact me at jmark@sd68.bc.ca if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Justin Mark

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I ________________________ give permission for my child _____________________ to participate in this class using online tools as outlined above.

SIGNATURE: _______________________________ Date: _______________________________
Appendix B

French 9 Class Outline (Inquiry Project)

Overview:
In this class instead of following the chapters and units of textbook program you will be guiding and choosing your own curriculum. We are going to shape the course around the creation of a small book and instructional video titled: “How to Survive in _ for a month.” You will fill in the blank with a French speaking destination of your choice. The next step will be to select 12 units of your choice. For each unit you will learn the material, master it, and finally present it as part of your final book and video. We will divide the year into 12 segments and you will have deadlines to finish and present each section. Finally at the end, in lieu of a final exam, you will showcase/publish your books and videos to the class. Along the way you will be given lesson on sentence structure and writing skills to help you develop your writing and readings skills. These will be specific to grade level and must be demonstrated in your book and video. This project may be completed individually or with a partner. If you choose to work with a partner choose carefully as you will have to work with them for the entire semester. For each term each group will be responsible for creating an engaging activity for their classmates and showcasing the material from a unit of their choice.

Assessment:
Typically every day will start with a conversation question, so we get to practice our speaking regularly. Therefore daily attendance and participation in the daily discussion will represent 20% of the course. The two semester organized activities will represent another 10%, testing on written ability and sentence structure will be 10%, translation activities will be 10% and the final project, divided into twelve units will represent 50% of the course. Each Chapter you need at least 30 or more individual words and expressions in the book, while the video content you choose whatever is relevant to the topic.

Daily Dialogue Participation 20%
Written Assessment 10%
Translation Activities 10%
Term Activities and Presentation 10%
Inquiry Project (12 chapters) 50%

Technology:
As we have access to laptop computers, iPods and lab time students will have the ability to present their material electronically if they choose. In this class we will promote the use of Google tools and
Google Drive. Students will be able to share work with their peers and myself using Google Drive. Therefore in order to take advantage of this, it is recommended that students set up a Gmail - email in order to take advantage of Google's free tools.

Contact:
If you have any further questions or concerns please feel free to contact me:
Phone: 250-722-2414
School email: jmark@sd68.bc.ca
School Gmail (for sharing docs): jmarksd68@gmail.com
Sincerely, Justin Mark

Potential Course Curriculum items:
- Politics
- regional slang
- Colloquial Expressions - Idioms
- Tourism
- Medical and Healthcare - What to do in case of an accident
- Manners/Complimenting
- Planes Trains and Automobiles.Busses
- Small Talk
- Date and Time
- Socially talking about Sports
- Talking about Music/Concerts and Festivals
- How to make friends -
- Ask for directions
- How to book a hotel
- Watching and Talking about the news
- Shopping
- Ordering Food/Buying Food
- Basic Sentence structures.
- Weather
- Schooling
- Communicating at Work
- Hockey
- Holidays - Customs and Culture
- Movies
- Calling a Cab
- History
- Dealing with Emergency Situations (Police/Fire)

Each Chapter you need at least 30 or more individual words and expressions in the book, while the video content you choose whatever is relevant to the topic
Appendix B

Justin Mark's language learning Model

- Speaking
  - Build Community
  - Safe/risk taking environment

- Writing
  - Differentiated Instruction
  - Build 4 basic skills

- Engagement
- Motivation

- Assessment
  - Formative and Summative

- Comprehension
- Cultural Appreciation

- Technology

Experiential inquiry based projects