The Social Justice and English 12 Initiative: Design, Development, and Implementation of a
Course for Blended Online Learning Environments

by

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

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Abstract

Blended learning, the thoughtful integration of face-to-face and online learning, is a growing practice in schools both within and beyond Canada that has the potential to enhance and transform Canadian high school education. Emerging in response to the increasing need, flexibility and demand to respond to diverse students’ needs, blended learning provides engaging and meaningful learning experiences for today’s students while providing the digital literacies essential for the 21st Century learner. Blended learning allows for creative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. This research project explored the process of development, design and implementation of a blended learning course, one that thematically bridged the learning outcomes from two BC Ministry developed courses, English 12 and Social Justice 12. The intention of the blended learning course was to develop pedagogical strategies that foster more authentic learning experiences and offered the potential for deep learning for students—through connecting course material with their own lives and their surrounding communities with the hope of empowering and encouraging student-centered learning. The course was designed such that students influenced the content, activities, materials, and pace of learning. In its entirety, this course offered senior high school students a flexible option for learning with many online interactive technologies, such as blogs, social media, and discussion forums to enhance students’ engagement and learning key 21st Century learning competencies. The Social Justice-English 12 Project website (http://projectsocialjustice.weebly.com/) provided access to the course content and educational material, and to foster student learning through collaboration, a private Google+ community was created as a hub for sharing, discussion, and learning from one-another (https://plus.google.com/u/0/communities/115328321514016307671).

Keywords: Blended learning, flexible learning, 21st Century Learning,
Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Purpose of Major Project

The rapid emergence of digital technologies is transforming teaching. With the wide-spread adoption of technology and greater accessibility to the Internet, the K-12 education system is witnessing a dramatic evolution of teaching taking place—one that is challenging traditional pedagogical paradigms, and providing opportunities for transformative educational practices. Digital technologies offer huge possibilities to enhance learning by offering flexible learning opportunities and by better preparing students for the relevant and real-world 21st Century workforce. Innovative, flexible and digital learning environments offer the potential to transform education, but it is naïve to report that technology alone is transformative; rather it is the underlying pedagogies that support the use of technology that have the potential to transform the learning experience. (New Media Consortium, 2014, p. 17). Blended (hybrid) learning, which is defined as a formal learning program that allows the student to learn through online learning and in some part in a brick and mortar location (Horn & Staker, 2012), offers a pedagogical possibility to reinvent and innovate the classroom experience and offer flexible learning experiences. With flexible learning, students have a choice over “when, where and how they learn” (Higher Education Academy, 2013).

The trend to rethink the traditional classroom approach is fueled by the influence of innovative learning approaches, and as learning becomes more student-centered and personalized, flexible initiatives offer students choices in their learning (New Media Consortium, 2014, p. 16). The concept of flexible learning recognizes that learning takes place everywhere, not only in the classroom, and students are empowered with more control over when, how and
what they learn (Education Alberta, 2014). Student demand for alternative learning options are among the many factors contributing to the growth of innovative learning approaches, and as brick and mortar schools grapple with decreased enrolment, the online schools are on the rise. In fact, the British Columbia Ministry of Education (Kuehn, 2012, p. 96) reported that an estimated 70,000 K-12 students took at least one course in Distributed Learning (DL) in 2010-11, and “the growth has been steady each year for the past five years” (Barbour, 2013, p. 13). Whereby, in the 2011-12 school year, five percent (284,963) of all Canadian K-12 students were enrolled in an online course (Barbour, 2013, p. 13). These facts reveal that there is a growing need for flexible and creative learning options, those that are not traditionally available for students within the brick and mortar schools. The critical challenge for this project is to create a unique blended learning option for high school students. This course will be blended in design, highly participatory, interactive, co-created by students, and one that thematically unites two courses, English 12 and Social Justice 12 within an authentic learning experience.

**Justification of Project**

The world that our students are entering is technology-rich, highly personalized, and socially interconnected one. Technology has forever changed the educational landscape in ways that shape how we interact and communicate, and understand the world. The BC Education Plan (BC Ministry of Education, 2010) encourages districts and schools to design learning environments that go beyond traditional learning practice to focus on students’ needs, interests and creativity, and to support the development of educated citizens in the 21st Century. The government’s education plan proposes that in order to prepare students for the future, the curriculum must be redesigned. The new curriculum must support the use of technology in a learner-centered and flexible learning environment, while striving for deep learning experiences.
This renewed learning experience is one that allows for creative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, which “combines learning standards in various ways to create cross-curricular units, modules, mini-courses, and courses tailored to the learners in their communities” (BC Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 3).

Online learning solutions present themselves in many different incarnations, but the common thread in K-12 online courses are for participants to engage in self-paced, asynchronous learning activities without being physically present with a teacher (Natriello, 2005). This course format provides the best option for students who require flexibility—students are able to participate and receive information when it is most convenient to them. Students then have time to digest and comprehend the course content and put it into perspective, at their own pace. Whereas synchronous learning limits flexibility, but benefits student communication, interaction and immediacy of feedback. In my own experience, as an adult learner in an online setting, both asynchronous and synchronous learning opportunities were beneficial to my learning style and learning preferences.

Blended learning involves the thoughtful redesign and rethinking of face-to-face, online teacher-student, and student-student interactions (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). The typical blended model, when designed and implemented effectively, allows teachers to leverage both the virtual and face-to-face learning environments; enabling students to use their time together for inquiry and project-based learning activities and providing students with a more personalized learning experience (Christensen, Staker, & Horn, 2013). Blended learning can be further delineated into models that reflect how a course is designed and organized. Staker and Horn (2012) propose four models that are emerging across K-12 schools: rotation model, the flex model, self-blend model and enriched virtual model. The Learn@Home program
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(http://lah812.weebly.com), offered through the Nanaimo-Ladysmith school district, delivers an enriched virtual model. In this program all the learning is offered using online delivery of content and instruction, and students may choose to come in to the school for face-to-face support, meetings with the teachers, and for field trips. On a course-by-course basis, cohort experiences are offered for full-time Learn@Home students who are wanting more social learning experiences. In this case the delivery of content and the majority of instruction is delivered remotely, but students come in for weekly class meetings in which they participate in a variety of learning experiences.

More than ever our students are being challenged by a “technology driven global economy that requires a skilled and deeply literate workforce” (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2012, p. 1). In order to better prepare students for higher education and for the critical skills that will endure throughout their life there needs to be a shift to deeper educational experiences in the classroom. Deep learning is a term that is used to describe a variety of educational approaches that aim to provide innovative ways to allow students to learn and apply what they learned (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011, p. 1). This is what educators refer to as learning by doing, which has been shown to be a beneficial method of engaging learners in the learning process. The Alliance for Education (2012) proposes that deeper learning is what highly effective educators have always provided, but we must continue to promote the following components in order to better prepare them as 21st Century learners: “mastery of core academic content; critical thinking and problem solving; working collaboratively in groups; communicating effectively and learning how to learn” (p. 1). Deeper learning experiences align with the proposed Education Plan for BC schools that focus on authentic and real-world skills, such that learning opportunities build on existing skills and emphasize “key-competencies, like
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Many educational experts believe that in order to better prepare students for citizenship, post-secondary education and their future career, emphasis must be placed on providing authentic experiences and teaching real-world skills (BC Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 4). The use of authentic learning strategies aims to “increase the engagement of students seeking connections between the world as they know it exists outside of school, and their experiences in school” (New Media Consortium, 2014, p. 8). Authentic experiences may involve real-life experiences that bring connection to the outside world, such as community involvement, and also emphasize “key competencies like self-reliance, critical thinking, inquiry, creativity, problem solving, innovation, teamwork and collaboration, cross-cultural understanding, and technological literacy” (BC Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 4). Pedagogical strategies that foster more authentic learning experiences offer the potential for deep learning for students—through connecting course material with their own lives and their surrounding communities with the hope that students become excited to learn, and delve into the subject matter more deeply.

As a result of decreasing enrollment issues in most school districts, brick and mortar schools are increasingly unable to offer a variety of course options for students. As student enrollment is a key factor in course implementation, invariably brick and mortar schools are only able to offer the required courses for graduation and a minor list of elective courses. With an online school, student enrollment is not a determinant to course implementation. Potentially, online learning schools are able to offer innovative courses and a wider breath of programming options for students that may not available through the traditional school system. Innovative
course development is notable in many online schools, for instance, the online school Navigate (http://www.navigatenides.com/) in Courtenay, British Columbia, has developed a variety of high-quality blended programs for K-12 students: the Fine Arts.eCademy for grades K-9 and eCademy of New Technology, Engineering & Robotics (ENTER) for grades 6-7 and grades 8-9. In keeping with the BC Education Plan, schools will gain new flexibility to design programs that work for students (BC Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 4). This concept embraces the growing pedagogical movement that personalized and flexible learning is essential for developing 21st Century thinkers.

The purpose of this Master’s project was to address the principles of the proposed BC Education Plan (2010), with the goal of creating a blended online course within a cohort model; a course that embraces student-centered learning, and integrates authentic and personalized learning opportunities for students. The thematically-based course is unique in its conception; as it would integrate Social Justice 12 with English Language Arts 12, whereby students would receive credit for both grade twelve courses. The blended learning model benefits the busy student by providing flexibility and accessibility, as well as promoting opportunities for personalized learning and the development of 21st Century skills.

Thematically linking disciplines such as social studies or science through literature is a practice that is widely used in elementary school as it provides a rich and meaningful understanding of subject matter. The thematic approach is a natural and less fragmented way of teaching and learning, in which many areas of the curriculum are connected and integrated within a theme. The proposed BC Education Plan (BC Ministry of Education, 2013) encourages educators to reimagine education in creative and flexible ways. By giving educators discretion over how to organize learning, and how to teach in their classroom, educators are better able
address the passions, interests, and abilities of the learners in the classroom. The Social Justice-
English 12 Initiative is a unique approach by high school standards as most high school courses
are only able to deliver the stand-alone subject areas.

Methodologies

Overall the intent of this project was to encourage student-centered learning in which
students influence the content, activities, materials, and pace of learning through a blended
learning cohort model. The Social Justice-English 12 Initiative is a student-centred course that is
thematicallt driven, based on the Social Justice 12 curriculum, which includes the core
competencies, big ideas and learning standards that meet the requirements of the BC Ministry of
Education’s curriculum objectives from both English 12 and Social Justice 12. The lesson
objectives also promote critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills. The framework for each
lesson was designed to build on background knowledge about a particular social justice issue and
to address at least one or more English language arts learning outcomes. Collectively the units
address all of the prescribed learning outcomes for Social Justice 12 and English 12, and provide
one suggested means of organizing, ordering, and delivering the required content.

This Master’s project proposed to develop a blended online course that successfully
bridges the learning outcomes from both into one thematically-based course: English Language
Arts 12 and Social Justice 12. Both are four-credit courses, and as such require approximately
90-110 hours of instructional time each. The instructional design and learning content was
implemented as a blended course to balance both face-to-face and the online learning. The
intention was to create a course that was both dynamic and interactive within a blended cohort
model. There was weekly face-to-face meetings with a small group of full-time Learn@Home
students (SD#68, Nanaimo-Ladysmith). As well, the overall structure and design of the course was student-directed with project-based and inquiry assignments.

In terms of instructional design, the course was driven by student input and one that followed the project-based learning format in which learning begins with an essential question(s), where students work either individually or in groups to discover, understand and find solutions to real world issues and problems (Buck Institute for Education, n.d.). When not working with the project based learning format, the deliverables followed a standard format with three distinct components of learning: anticipatory set (engagement), new learning (instructions, readings, etc.) and the demonstration of learning. In both formats the role of the teacher was to facilitate learning by initiating discussion topics, questions, readings, answering student questions, supporting students to work together and to provide feedback as the students moved through the course.

The implicit objective of the course was to encourage students to think for themselves about things that matter; to do this students must actively partake in the discovery and construction of knowledge (Froyd & Simpson, n.d.). The learning outcomes for Social Justice 12 are grouped under the curriculum organizers: defining social justice; recognizing and analyzing social injustice; and moving toward a socially just world. Through connecting with rich and relevant social justice literature, the students were provided with tools, methods, and frameworks for constructing their own learning plans and initiatives in regards to social justice issues. Students were encouraged to become critically conscious of their own agenda and to begin articulating their own developing commitments to social justice issues as they undertook the readings, assignments, discussions, and self-directed projects.
Technology is a powerful way to structure the learning environment, and the intention with the Social Justice-English 12 Initiative was to tap into technologically enhanced active learning opportunities. The benefits to using an online platform for this project were many. An online course provides students with flexibility in terms of time, place and pace of learning. The BC Education Plan (2013) welcomes technology in the classroom with its smart use, with the hope that its use better prepares “…students to thrive in an increasingly digital world” (BC Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 7). Technological tools played an integral role throughout the course, and students were encouraged to explore and utilize a variety of Web 2.0 tools for projects and presentations. Student worked through the classroom resources and lessons on the classroom website, which was hosted by Weebly for Education (http://education.weebly.com/).

Weebly is a non-learning management system, which is ideal for creating visually appealing, and easily navigable classroom websites and student e-portfolios. For a cost, Weebly for Education provides a protected and private environment for student websites, an important factor during the planning phase of this project. Another key factor for using Weebly for Education is its user-friendly and intuitive features, including simple-to-use drag and drop features. In using Weebly for Education for this project students created e-portfolios in order to store, share and showcase their portfolio of work.

Building a robust and healthy community was key to the success of this course. Students must feel safe and comfortable sharing and discussing with their peers. A Community of Practice (CoP) is a term coined by Etienne Wenger, to describe a group of people who share a common concern, a set of problems, or interest in a topic and who come together to fulfill both individual and group goals (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Communities of Practice
(CoP) are important social structures that help to provide a means of connecting people for the purpose of learning, gaining knowledge, sharing and for collaborating. Cultivating a CoP initially requires a creating a forum for interacting. Within the structure of the Social Justice-English 12 Initiative, the community engaged both online and offline activities in order to connect, engage and share.

In the online community, students contributed to the learning community through Google+ which was created as an online forum for authentic communication and self-reflection. With the Google+ community, students contributed to the weekly discussion board activities, showcased their work and projects, shared resources and information, commented on others’ posts and responded to invites for weekly face-to-face meetings. Involvement in the community was required and specific expectations for Google+ activities were linked to rubrics within the course.

Offline students met face-to-face for a class meeting. The agenda for the meeting was posted in the Google+ community. During this time students were expected to engage in structured and collaborative learning and knowledge sharing activities, group projects, and discussions that were rooted in the weekly learning objectives. The goal of the weekly meeting were to increase participation and contributions and to cultivate and assess learning and knowledge of key ideas and concepts.

The cost for the development and implementation of the Social Justice-English 12 course were included within the budget allocated to Learn@Home by School District #68, Nanaimo-Ladysmith. Costs incurred included the yearly fee for a personal Weebly for Education account; costs for school district approved literature, such as a small class sets (eight to ten copies) of the
novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the play, *The Laramie Project*, and other student choice novels for literature circles; costs for small gifts presented to guest speakers; and costs incurred for special outings (field trips).

**Challenges to be addressed**

The aim of the project was to increase student engagement and to cultivate a community of practice by shifting the typical course design and implementation in three ways: (1) by empowering and encouraging student-centered learning, such that students influenced the content, activities, materials, and pace of learning; (2) by creating a blended cohort model for learning; and (3) by offering a thematically centred course that addressed the learning outcomes for two provincially designed courses under one umbrella.

**Timeline of project**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expected Dates of Completion</th>
<th>Masters Project Component</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September-October 2014</td>
<td>Prepare Major Project Proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October-November 2014</td>
<td>Build the online Social Justice-English 12 Initiative course on Weebly and Google+Community Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2015</td>
<td>Completed Process Paper and Project for review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2015</td>
<td>Finished Project and Process Paper Accepted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 2 - Literature Review

As today’s students are using technology more than ever to interact and communicate, it becomes important for educators to determine how best to use e-learning strategies to connect information with knowledge in an authentic way. In this review it is argued that while it is impossible to see what the future holds for e-learning, the trend toward integration of technology in education is increasing. It is critical that we ask ourselves if technological innovation can provide a means for improving our education system. The idea that technology is a disruptive innovation that alters our traditional view of education is taking shape in our schools, but there is speculation about its effectiveness in the classrooms. A common way to mediate the pedagogical concerns of the use of technology is a move toward incorporating e-learning components in a variety of instructional formats. This phenomena is coined blended learning, and in today’s classroom technology is being utilized more to create a blended learning environment (face-to-face in a classroom and in computer-mediated and online environments via technology). However, there are very broad interpretations of what constitutes blended learning, and research reflects this ambiguity.

So how do we define blended learning? This paper stemmed from a personal endeavor to implement a blended learning teaching environment in the online classroom, which in turn, necessitated a better understand the concept of blended learning, and demanded interpretive consolidation of the existing research that is relevant to implementing a blended system in an online environment. To accomplish these goals, this paper addressed seven key questions that relate to blended learning systems, specifically:

1. What is blended learning?

2. What current blending learning models exist?
3. How are teachers’ conceptions of blended learning reflected in their approach to teaching and design for learning?

4. What are the best and effective practices of blended course design?

5. How do students respond to a blended model approach?

6. How do online communities support student learning and aid in their perception of learning?

7. How do teachers observe and assess student learning in blended environments?

With these questions in mind a review of the literature on blended learning environments was undertaken. While research on blended learning environments is abundant, most is situated in the area of higher education, with a modest number looking at high school environments. However, the conceptual framework and application of blended learning as expressed in higher education research lends itself well to modes of delivery and models of teaching for high school environments. In taking a broad view of blended learning in education, much of the research acknowledges the desire to understand how to create effective blended learning experiences that incorporate both face-to-face and computer-mediated elements.

The Community of Inquiry (Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008) is a theoretical framework that is often referred to in the literature to guide the research and practice of blended learning environments. This literature review looks at research findings on blended learning to provide insight on:

1. Understanding how teachers’ conceptions are related to their approaches to teaching (Bliuc, A., Bachfisher, A., Casey, G., Goodyear, P., 2012);
2. What best and effective practices of instructional design for blended learning environments are (McGee and Reis, 2012);

3. How to better understand the role of social, teaching and cognitive presence from a students’ perspective (Voegele, 2013);

4. How the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008) fosters learning from a students’ perspective; and

5. What research on assessment shows about the learners ability to transfer knowledge (Demirer & Sahin, 2009).

What is blended learning?

Blended learning has become a buzzword in online learning, and it has grown in popularity in educational settings. The definition for blended learning is an evolving one and is somewhat ambiguous by nature. This ambiguity provides for broad conceptual models for classifying the types of blended approaches that are utilized today. Steve Sorden (2011) shares that the metamorphosis of blended learning must change its focus from “brick and mortar vs. online learning to using more appropriate methods to maximizing learning,” such that “the focus changes from learning space to learning design” (slide 13). Thompson (2012) proposes a general definition which simply states that “In principle, the blended learning approach is one that brings together the best of both face-to-face and online strategies, building from each an innovative and effective learning experience for students” (What is Blended Learning section, para.1).

Blended learning is emerging as a disruptive force in education, such that it is supporting innovation relative to the traditional face-to-face classroom. Gonzales & Vodicka (2012) observe that based on changes in society coupled with the transformative and disruptive
advances in technology this is a great time for educators (p.10). It is the disruptive aspect of innovation that helps to improve a system (p.8). Educators now have the opportunity to reinvent teaching and learning, primarily through a hybrid of face-to-face and online learning strategies, also known as blended learning. “Simply put, blended learning is learning facilitated by the effective combination of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning, and applying them in an interactively meaningful learning environment. Think of it like this: mobile learning + eLearning + classroom learning = blended learning” (Gonzales & Vodicka, p. 8). Combining different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning, blended learning offers the possibility for educators to reinvent teaching and learning, such that “we are immersed in a paradigm shift in learning whereby blended learning has emerged as a flexible, differentiated, up-dated approach to learning” (Gonzales & Vodicka, p. 8).

What blended learning models exist?

Blended learning can look different depending on the situation but unlike strictly e-learning environments where students are separate from their teacher and peers, blended learning combines the flexibility of online learning with the supportive classroom learning model. Staker and Horn (2012) from the Innosight Institute have developed flexible, broad definitions that help to govern and classify blended learning models. They define blended learning as learning, “any time a student learns at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home and at least in part through online delivery with some element of student control over time, place, path and/or pace” (Staker and Horn, 2012, p.1). However, the definition is further broadened to include four flexible models of blended learning that are currently emerging as typical models in K-12 learning environments. The Rotation is a blended learning model where students rotate between teacher-led instruction and online learning. There are four sub-model approaches
under the rotation model: (i) station rotation where within a given course or subject, students rotate between teacher-led instruction and online learning; (ii) The lab rotation where within a given course or subject students rotate through different locations, where at least one location is an online learning lab; (iii) the flipped classroom where within a given course or subject, students rotate between guided practice with a face-to-face teacher and the primary delivery of content online in a remote location; and (iv) the individual rotation model where students rotate on a custom designed schedule where at least one rotation is an online learning station. The Flex is blended learning model where students experience most learning online, while the educator provides personalized instruction and opportunities for personalized learning within a flexible schedule. The A La Carte or Self-Blend is a blended learning model where students supplement their regular courses (with face-to-face teachers) with some online-course(s) that are being offered either at their school or off-campus. The Enriched-Virtual is a blended learning model which differs from the previous as it is not course-by-course, but is a whole-school experience in which students divide their time between attending a brick-and-mortar campus and learning remotely, using online delivery of content and instruction (Staker & Horn, 2012).

How are teachers’ conceptions of blended learning reflected in their approach to teaching and design for learning?

Blended learning requires consideration of the individual educational experience, as adding an online component to a course does not necessarily meet the definition of blended learning. Vaughan, Cleveland-Innes & Garrison (2013) argue that there must be a thoughtful contemplation of how we approach the learning activities and experiences, with “organic integration of thoughtfully selected complimentary face to face and online approaches” (p. 8). The authors denote the term organic, as meaning grounded in practice. What distinguishes
blended learning as unique is the union of the most thoughtful and appropriate face to face and online learning opportunities. Further to this, Vaughan et al. (2013) state that educators must create purposeful extensions of the thinking and discourse activities and avoid adding extra activities and responsibilities that make the course unmanageable (p. 9). The key to blended learning is to enhance engagement through purpose driven activities that allow students the time to “reflect thoughtfully on meaning and engage in discourse for shared understanding” (Vaughan et al., 2013, p. 9) with an additional advantage of nurturing sustained academic communication over time.

The varying definitions of blended learning show the diversity of approaches to teaching and learning, and not all approaches are made equal with some more effective than others. Bliuc, Bachfisher, Casey, Goodyear, (2012) found that teachers involved in designing and teaching blended learning tend to have a spectrum of ideas about blending learning, as such they often have, “qualitatively different conceptions about blended learning, and tend to adopt qualitatively different approaches to both teaching and design for blended learning” (p. 237). Bliuc et al (2012) analyzed teachers’ conceptions and their approaches to blended learning contexts by asking participants to respond to the following questions:

1. Conceptions: what do you mean by blended learning? What is blended learning?
2. Approaches to teaching: how do you approach teaching in blended contexts? What do you do and why do you do it?
3. Approaches to design: how do you approach design for learning in blended contexts? What do you do and why do you do it? (p. 240)

Bliuc et al (2012) discovered five basic hierarchical categories that illustrate teachers’ conceptions of blended learning and their approach to teaching and design. These conception
categories ranged “from descriptions that focus on lifelong learning needs of the students…to categories that describe blended learning as a way to deliver learning materials in a more convenient and practical way by using online tools” (p.241). Bluic et al categorize teachers conception toward blended learning as follows (p.242):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category A</th>
<th>Blended learning empowers student toward lifelong learning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category B</td>
<td>Blended learning for meeting students’ needs and learning goals as it is more flexible to meet students’ needs:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category C</td>
<td>Blended learning allows for a combination of different delivery modes in order to improve access to learning and meeting the needs of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category D</td>
<td>Blended learning as a mix of face-to-face and (mainly) online but also other types of technologically driven delivery and the deliver of the modes are not necessarily integrated, but are distinct from one another and delivered separately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category E</td>
<td>Blended learning is seen as a mean of delivery and use of technological teaching tools only (p. 242)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Category A and B place student learning at the centre, and are “mainly concerned with enriching the student experience in order to make knowledge more usable in the real world” (p.241). The flexibility that a blended learning module provides is seen as “better meeting the learning needs” (p.243) of the student and as a means to empower students, beyond the classroom, to become life-long learners. On the other hand, categories C to E describe teachers’ conceptions about blended learning that are mostly pragmatic, focusing on “practical and
logistical needs” (p.241) with limited acknowledgement of student learning or any underlying pedagogy about teaching and learning.

Next, Bliuc et at (2012) addressed teachers’ approaches to design for blended learning, and identified five categories ranging from a holistic approach that is focused on blended learning design which complements student understanding and learning to the most simplistic design, which focused on re-using existing resources for blended learning purposes. The categories A-B were most concerned about meaningful learning experiences, awareness of learning outcomes and how to direct and empower students with technological skills and knowledge. These approaches reflect the concern that educators, in designing blended learning experiences, ensure they design blended learning experiences to enable students find “innovative learning activities and adjusting the existing ones (strategy), with the purpose of helping students achieve meaningful learning” (p.248). Categories C-E were focused less on design for learning and more concerned about practical matters such as, student completion rates, increased flexibility in terms of space and time for students and teachers, and approaches to design that focus on the convenience of reusing available resources.

The findings from Bliuc et al. (2012) suggest that quality online learning experiences require a dramatic transfer from teacher-centered to learner-centered perspectives. The research findings show that teachers’ conceptions about blended learning are related to their teaching approaches, which implies that teachers who see that student learning as vital to the implementation of blended learning tend to be more apt to employ this approach with the intention of supporting meaningful connections between the content and student learning. The implications from these results suggest that “it is possible to achieve improvements in the quality of students’ learning experience by challenging teachers’ conceptions of student learning in
blended contexts” (Bliuc et al., 2012, p.253). Essentially, teachers’ need to have a clear understanding of what blended learning is—one that shifts to a supporting student-focused approach that fosters a reflective thinking about student learning and learning outcomes rather rather than thinking of blended learning as a practical approach or as means to use technological tools in the classroom.

**What are the best and effective practices of blended course design?**

Considering the range of blended learning approaches available, it is imperative to have a clear understanding of blended learning in order to make decisions about blended learning design. McGee and Reis (2012) utilized a qualitative meta-analysis in order to answer their research question: “What patterns exist across publically available documents that articulate best or effective practices in hybrid or blended course design?” (p. 10). Their findings suggest that the best and effective practices of “instructional design considers the learner, learning outcomes, the content of what is to be learned, instructional strategies, and the results of instructional interventions” (p.15). The pedagogy is core to the blended course, and may be the most challenging to design. While many strategies are seen as beneficial for student engagement, there is a belief among educators that the key to student engagement lies with interactivity and prompt feedback (p. 13). The authors propose that any adverse outcomes, or downsides of blended learning are a result of poor planning during the design process.

*There is clear consensus that the best strategies for design begins [sic] by clearly defining course objectives before coming up with course activities, assignments and assessments. Course objectives are particularly critical for blended courses because objectives can inform content delivery mechanism (in class or online), pedagogy*
(bridging between the classroom and online activities), and requisite amount and locations for class meetings and interactions (p. 11).

By their very nature, blended learning courses are dynamic and fluid. McGee and Reis (2012) speak of having a degree of control during the design phase, but also of a “loosely articulated design process” (p. 10) allowing for a degree of flexibility and changeability when designing blended courses. At times, educators will need to adapt and revise the plan based on student needs and desires, availability of technology, learning environments and other unknown variables. With the outcomes, purpose and context in mind, the designer is able to select, combine, and organize both elements of online and traditional instruction. The overall process of planning for blended learning design is “one of re-design, implying that those involved in the design process are willing and able to see beyond what has been done in the traditional classroom and re-conceptualize what can be done in multiple delivery modes” (p. 10). The idea of course re-design begins with existing course objectives and avoiding mimicking the classroom course in the online version. The authors speak of the immense variability in what a blended course looks like, but recognize that best practices of re-design should not be guided by the technology, but by sound educational principles.

**How do Communities of Inquiry support student learning and their perceptions of learning?**

In considering best practices for blended learning environments, educators need to consider the social interactions, teaching presence and cognitive presence that help to bring a sense of community to its members, and how these elements foster learning from a students’ perspective. The concept of presence has emerged as a means to understanding how blended environments can support learning communities. Vaughan, Cleveland-Innes & Garrison (2013)
describe the *Community of Inquiry* theoretic framework as a “collaborative and individually constructivist learning experience” (p. 10). This framework conceptualizes teaching and learning in terms of three overlapping components: social presence, teaching presence and cognitive presence. Social presence is “the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally, as ‘real’ people, through the medium of communication being used” (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 1999, p. 94). Teaching presence is “the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes” (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001, p.5). Cognitive presence refers to “an environment that enables learners to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse in a critical community of inquiry” (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001, p. 11).

In order to better understand the role of social, teaching and cognitive presence, Janelle Voegele (2013) researched how *Community of Inquiry* practices foster learning from a students’ perspective. The author evaluated responses from focus groups who responded to questions about their learning experiences. Three key questions were addressed: (1) what indicators of social, teaching, and cognitive presence emerge from students’ perception of blended learning? (2) How does social, teaching, and cognitive presence help or impede learning in blended courses, from students’ perspective? (3) What pedagogical practices are associated with indicators of social, teaching and cognitive presence in students perceptions of learning? (Voegele, 2013, p.94). Specific indicators were further delineated within each of the three categories: social presence as defined by open communication, group cohesion, and interpersonal expression; teaching presence as defined as instructional design and organization, facilitating discourse and direct instruction; and finally, cognitive presence as an inquiry cycle consisting of
triggering, exploration, integration, and resolution (Garrison, 2007 as cited in Voegele, 2013, p.94).

Through analysis of the findings, Voegele (2013) discovered that:

Various aspects of presence connected to students’ perceptions of what was helping or hindering their learning...reveal[ing] not only the importance of peer interaction, but also the dynamic interaction between presence categories. For example, students connected comfortable self-expression in class and online (social presence) with an environment that motivated them to explore and sustain critical reflection (cognitive presence) (p.96).

In addition, the participants perceived that more interaction and meaningful interaction improved learning. Finally, the researchers focused on pedagogical practices associated with presence. The students’ perception of blended pedagogy were “linked with presence that emphasized the pedagogical integration between face to face and online learning…[noticing a] social connections between peers and instructors were strengthened, and perceptions of worthwhile learning increased” (p.97).

In utilizing the Community of Inquiry framework within a blended learning environment, educators may begin to develop effective learning that enables students to be metacognitively present. According to Tobias and Everson, (2009, as cited in Akyol and Garrison, 2011) metacognition is “a higher order, executive process that monitors and coordinates other cognitive processes engaged during learning, such as recall, rehearsal, or problem solving” (p. 189). Akyol and Garrison (2011) view metacognition as “inherent to communicating, explaining, and
justifying one's thinking … [and as] learning in an educational context that is socially situated and [therefore] involves community and sharing thinking; this in turn encourages the development of metacognition” (p.189). A transformative aspect of blended learning “stems from the ability of online learners to be both together and apart—to be connected to a community of learners anytime and anywhere, without being time, place, or situation bound” (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004, p.96). Both asynchronous and face to face features of blended learning are viewed as beneficial for metacognitive thinking and development.

Akyol and Garrison (2011) agree that collaborative activities, such as peer assessment are beneficial to improving metacognitive skills (p.189). Both synchronous and asynchronous activities enhance collaboration and work to provide a sense of community, as these communities support metacognition through questioning, feedback and direction (p. 189). Akyol and Garrison (2011) state that “while the individual must assume responsibility to construct meaning, this is greatly afforded by a collaborative structure that can provide multiple sources of information, sharing thinking, and the diagnosis of misconceptions” (p. 189). Asynchronous activities alone are also fundamental to metacognitive processes, as they allow students to think deeply and ponder ideas, choose creative outlets to express their ideas, reflect, invent, investigate, monitor, and engage in thoughtful asynchronous discussion forums. (p.189).

Through the process of metacognition, students have “time to think about their learning, how they approach specific tasks, and the success of their strategies” (p.183). Again, it is argued that the Community of Inquiry approach naturally embraces both asynchronous and synchronous strategies to foster the development of metacognition.
How do teachers observe and assess student learning in blended environments?

The asynchronous and synchronous components of blended learning are vital aspects to knowledge construction and to the transfer of learning as these elements help to establish a sense of community between learners (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). Learning becomes more than the acquisition of knowledge—it is the pursuit of contextualized meaning—whereby students are actively engaged in shaping their own learning experiences through a process of interaction, discovery, and reflection. The educational benefits of blended learning are tremendous when students are given the opportunity to form social connections with other learners, to take control over the direction of their learning, and given the opportunity, to represent what they know in a variety of formats. It is in the representation of knowledge that learning is seen to occur, in fact, Haskell (2001) states that “the aim of all education…is to apply what we have learned in different context…and it is the very meaning of learning itself” (p. 4). It is in the application or transfer of knowledge that we observe learning taking place.

A crucial step in any teaching experience is to check students’ level and depth of understanding—if students are able to transfer learning to new contexts, this is a clear indication that learning has occurred—this is the theory of transfer of learning. Demirer & Sahin (2009) researched the theory of transfer of learning in both traditional and blended learning environments; specifically, they analyzed whether instructional methods had an effect on students’ ability to transfer learning, that is, the ability to extend and apply learning in new contexts, situations or tasks (Haskell, 2001). In their research methodology, Demirer & Sahin (2009) analyzed whether methods of instruction made a difference in students’ academic achievement and they also explored the transfer of students’ theoretical knowledge to their project work as an indicator of a permanent change in behavior or knowledge. The author’s
results aligned with previous research on blended learning instructional methods, such that “blended learning environments provide strong support and create opportunities for students to actively engage in shaping their own learning, facilitate greater reflection on course content and broaden students’ learning” (Demirer & Sahin, 2009, p.526).

In a similar research study on knowledge transfer conducted by Martyn, (2003, as cited in Demirer & Sahin, 2009), students were 10 to 12 percent more successful in transferring knowledge to projects than those from traditional classrooms. Likewise, Demirer & Sahin (2009) found that in comparison to traditional instructional methods the students who participated in the blended course produced better results for transfer of learning. Does a blended course establish the conditions for reflexive abstraction and the search for connections that mindful transfer provides? This research suggests that a well-designed and implemented blended learning course is important to the construction of knowledge and the transfer of learning and it also “provides not only an alternative way of learning a subject, but also an effective approach of putting the course content into practice” (Demirer & Sahin, 2009, p. 527).

Conclusion

Educational pedagogy and theory challenge educators to explore the relationship between their own conceptions of blending learning and how to best and most effectively design a blended learning environment. Effective course design must begin with a teachers’ clear understanding of what blended learning is as their conceptions of blended learning tend to shape how they design a course. McGee and Reis (2012) conclude that the best designs clearly define the course objectives before deciding on course activities, assignments and assessments. Course objectives are particularly critical for blended courses because objectives can inform content delivery mechanism, and the pedagogy (McGee and Reis, p. 11). Also, research suggests that a
well-designed and implemented blended learning course (as opposed to a traditional course) produces better results for the transfer of learning (Demirer & Sahin, 2009).

Much of the research in this area found that students’ opinions and perception of blended learning tend to rate on the positive side when students are given the opportunity to form social connections with other learners—to be connected to a community of learners, to take control over the direction of their learning, and given the opportunity, to represent what they know in a variety of formats (Bliuc, A., Bachfisher, A., Casey, G., Goodyear, P., 2012; Demirer & Sahin, 2009; Voegle, 2013). As well, in order to foster deep learning among students, it is crucial to consider social presence, teaching presence and cognitive presence which essentially provide a sense of community to its members, and how these elements foster learning from a students’ perspective. The Community of Inquiry framework for e-learning provides a practical focus and solid foundation, which fosters conditions for critical thinking, metacognitive thinking, and understanding through the group or community of learners (Vaughan et al., 2013, p.5). Overall, blended learning is seen as more engaging, community focused, aiding in active construction of knowledge and deeper learning experiences (Bliuc et al., 2012; Demirer & Sahin, 2009; McGee and Reis, 2012; Vaughan et al., 2013; Voegle, 2013).

The findings and literature on blended learning helped to cement ideas on design and implementation of e-learning opportunities in a face-to-face high school classroom. Recognizing that blended learning is an approach to teaching that integrates both online learning and face-to-face learning, but it is also important to recognize that simply adding an online component does not constitute blended learning. It is the thoughtful redesign of learning that is “grounded in practice…of the best and most appropriate face-to-face and online learning activities…the key to
avoid at all costs, is simply layering on activities and responsibilities until the course is unmanageable and students do not have time to reflect on meaning and engage in discourse for shared understanding” (Vaughan, Cleveland-Innes & Garrison, 2013, p.9). An e-learning scenario must be effective in terms of student engagement, facilitating a deep understanding of content, providing personalized learning opportunities and constructing opportunities for students to connect to each other and the world outside of the classroom. Successful educators never limit themselves to one solution or one practice—they are always exploring new and creative ways to improve student learning and to make their teaching practice relevant and meaningful. Based on the research in this literature review, blended learning environments are an essential ingredient to effective teaching practices. It is crucial that teachers enable all students to benefit from the dynamic and transformative nature of blended environments, use of technology and connectedness within a Community of Inquiry framework.
Chapter 3 – Procedures and Methods

Major Project Design

School districts across BC are currently offering a variety of online programming options to students. Clayton Christensen (2010) projects that, “By 2019, 50 percent of all high school will be delivered online” (p. 98). Online learning environments are part of the solution to addressing the need for flexible learning alternatives in BC schools, but are they a pedagogical solution to transforming educational practice? If we acknowledge that students learn differently, then we also need to teach differently, by providing our students with options for learning. Online learning environments have the ability to offer options to students in the form of creative programming, flexibility, personalization and convenience. As a teacher in an online school, it is my belief that there is room for improvement with online learning environments, and part of the solution is to impart more than simply content, but to create blended learning environments that bring innovative 21st Century learning skills.

The intention of the project was to create a blended online course that elicits student engagement in learning through constructivist practice: beyond being passive recipients of knowledge to become the builders of knowledge. The result was an eight-credit, thematically based course that shifts the typical instructional design and implementation by: empowering and encouraging student-centered learning, such that students influence the content, activities, materials, and pace of learning; creating a blended cohort model for learning; and offering a thematically centred course that addresses the learning outcomes for two provincially designed courses under one umbrella. The course was offered to eight full-time Learn@Home students--Learn@Home is a district program that serves students from kindergarten to twelfth grade,
providing online courses for students within the Nanaimo-Ladysmith School District (http://lah812.weebly.com/).

The pedagogical approach to designing the course was focused around the idea that learning should be interactive, social, and collaborative, and these factors must be integrated and complimentary in the face-to-face and online component. This required creating online assignments that carry over to the face-to-face meetings. As a teacher, this involved consideration of how students will consume the course content and how they will interact and engage with one another through a blended learning approach. Blended learning involves a thoughtful design that examines the relationship between online and offline behaviour and the relationship between teaching and learning (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). The ability to provide face-to-face interactions along with online discussion was crucial to the design process as research affirms that together, they are indicators of student success and satisfaction (Boyle, Bradley, Chalk, Jones, & Pikard, 2003). Pedagogical design for a blended course involved integration of the online and in-class activities, with consideration of how the face-to-face and online classroom are connected. According to the Higher Education Horizon Report (2014), “The quality of community and interaction is becoming a key discriminator among [blended] learning environments, as emerging digital tools make it easier for students to ask and respond to each other’s questions and for instructors to provide feedback in real-time” (p. 10).

The intention for the Master’s project was to encourage high quality interaction, in which the online activities contribute to the progression of face-to-face activities and, correspondingly, face-to-face activities advance the online portions of the course. In creating these two communities (online and face-to-face), was the recognition that both may have different dynamics that depend on the group of students. Technology was a key factor in facilitating
student learning, where online activities involved more content acquisition, self-directed learning along with opportunities for socialization and collaboration. The goal with off-line behaviour was to spend less time facilitating content acquisition in the offline environment, and more time building skills, abilities, and attitudes that support learning. Course planning centred on the core learning occurring online, face-to-face discussion meetings and volunteering in the community. With the significant self-directed learning occurring outside the classroom, there were more opportunities for formal and informal approaches to class meetings. In planning both formal and informal meetings, the focus of formal meetings included debating, active learning tasks, discussion around topics, workshops, guest speakers, case-studies, while informal activities included integration and use of learning technologies, small group conferences and group work, self-directed learning activities, and field trips.

The fundamental premise of blended learning in all its representations is it offers “...the best technological solutions for teaching and learning with the best human resources...” (Dziuban, Hartman, & Mehaffy, 2014, p. 332). With the Social Justice-English 12 course, it was important to encourage the development of highly interactive and collaborative activities mediated with technology and in-class instruction. Implementing blended learning allowed for the opportunity to tap into a larger range of learning strategies that offered a “pedagogical approach that combines the effectiveness and socialization opportunities of the classroom with the technologically enhanced active learning possibilities of the online environment” (Dziuban, Hartman, and Moskal, 2004, p. 3). Learning was the impetus that drove the use of technology, with the understanding that the students in today’s world must learn to search and discover knowledge in order to make meaning; to actively communicate with others, and to solve problems.
Major Project Development

Developing a blended course involved consideration of the instructional design for the course such that two courses, Social Justice 12 and English 12, were thematically linked. Careful consideration was given to the learning outcomes, organization of content and materials, integration of discrete subject areas, interactions among students, and use of technology. Previous experience creating a blended learning course in a face-to-face environment helped to drive the decisions that were made with this course. From the beginning, the decision was to create a course that was directed by student needs and wants. Within these parameters, the learning outcomes were prioritized from the English 12 Integrated Resource Package (2007) and Social Justice 12 Integrated Resource Package (2008), but the content, or what was to be taught, was more fluid and flexible.

As English 12 is a provincially examinable course worth 40 percent of the overall mark, the prescribed learning outcomes in English Language Arts were to be covered through viewing, reading, oral and listening tasks within a broad range of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry texts. All of the texts would be thematically related to social justice content, tied to the Social Justice 12 curriculum, with the intention of promoting “a deeper cultural awareness among students … with text that embody a range of voices from around the world,” (BC Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 17). The major consideration in choosing a variety texts (including visual) was for students to be able “to reflect on the human condition by connecting to the experiences of others” (BC Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 17). It was important to choose texts within a social justice context; those that were authentic, elicited a critical response, and allowed for the reader to attend to a variety of contextual factors. The novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, by Khaled Hosseini and the play, *The Laramie Project* by Moises Kaufman were two such texts, both of which allow the reader to
interpret and analyze the social realities through different lenses, such as gender, religion, race, sexual orientation, politics and/or class.

Smith and Wilhelm (2006) write, “an authentic task speaks to something that is of importance to humanity, something that we care about, something that is of great significance in our lives” (p. 58, as cited in Ministry of Education, 2007, p.22). Within each unit of study, both authentic tasks and challenging tasks were developed whereby students were making connections with topics that at first seem unfamiliar and beyond their experience, and then through the experience they would begin to understand and solve real-world issues, discuss and interpret controversial topics, analyze literature, and create purposeful writing. Provincially designed curriculum for Social Justice 12 suggests nine modules in which to explore social justice issues, but during course development it was decided that in order to create a course that is meaningful and authentic for the students, they would help design the course: the students would choose which of these units/modules fit the needs and interests of the class. Within the self-selected curriculum students would be able to demonstrate learning outcomes identified in the curriculum while exploring genres, themes, social issues, or other topics of interest to them. As there are a good selection of topics for study within the social justice curriculum, it was important to acknowledge that within each topic there are several layers of meaning that can be connected to a variety of social justice curriculum areas. In choosing specific topics, all the learning outcomes may still be fully addressed.

Curriculum design began with identifying key concepts and then working backwards to develop instruction. Egan (1997) suggests that teachers introduce concepts that challenge students and require them to develop and use related intellectual tools (i.e., language processes), such that students use these tools to better understand the world. The structure of this course was
purposefully organized within units or modules that were designed around social justice themes with overarching essential questions. Organizing the curriculum conceptually around essential questions creates a means to learning about ideas and concepts. In extending students emergent or abstract understanding of the concepts, the instructional activities begin with the students' current understanding and abilities and build from there to develop the required expertise about a concept (Smith & Wilhelm, J., 2006).

The crux of the design of this course was built on the premise that we must “blur the conventional boundaries between discrete subject areas” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 3) and in doing so, it is only natural that students gain opportunities to see beyond the immediate learning outcomes, focusing on the big ideas in both subject areas. According to Orr (2004, as cited in Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013) we must be careful not to “imprint a disciplinary template onto impressionable minds and with it the belief that the world really is [as] disconnected …”(p. 3). Integrating the Social Justice 12 and English 12 curriculum played a key role in the design process, and supported creative thinking about the curriculum, such that integration of the discrete subject areas gave rise to opportunities for inquiry learning. It was determined that inquiry learning could provide opportunities for students to become builders of knowledge rather than passive recipients of knowledge, “capable of creative and innovative solutions to problems” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 3). Inquiry provides the means for students to explore, investigate and express the essential questions and big ideas found in the social justice curriculum, and also gives reason to value, use and develop skills that are essential to the English 12 competencies (reading, writing, viewing, speaking, and representing).

Organizing the curriculum conceptually around inquiry created a context for learning about ideas, concepts, and interpretive literacy processes that are built on students’ own natural
curiosities. Moving students along the path of inquiry, from initial curiosity to developing personal inquiry, was harnessed through designing and modelling ways to exhibit this process. Structurally, the course was designed to establish a classroom culture in which ideas matter and where students regularly engage in sharing and discussing each other’s learning. Through collaborative inquiry using a variety interactive and socialization techniques and tools, students could ask questions, clarify, make connections, share and respond to the big ideas and essential questions of the course. Planning interactions among and between students was crucial to the design and an important contributor of students becoming members of an active learning community.

With the Social Justice-English 12 course, it was important to encourage the development of highly interactive and collaborative activities mediated with technology and in-class instruction. The use of technology alters the traditional paradigm of the teacher providing knowledge and the student absorbing it, as such, technology allows teachers and students to become partners in the learning process. Learning was the impetus that drove the use of technology, with the understanding that the students in today’s world must learn to search and discover knowledge in order to make meaning; to actively communicate with others, and to solve problems.

Technology was key to planning ongoing interaction and feedback outside of the face to face environment. With the creation of a Google+ community, it was expected that students would regularly share, engage, and interact online. Embedded in the course design were specific pedagogical focus areas that were essential to creating a successful online blended course: access to content housed in an online course website (http://projectsocialjustice.weebly.com); reflections, including blogs and journals; social/emotional interactions, including face-to-face
interactions and collaboration, asynchronous online collaboration and sharing; student generated content, such as use of document sharing tools and online collaboration tools; discussions through use of online discussion tools; synthesis and evaluation (assignments and assessments), including student presentations (Prezi, PowerPoint, etc.), electronic portfolio (https://students.weebly.com/), an online gradebook (https://login.jupitered.com).

Major Project Delivery

In mid-November, 2014, seven full-time Learn@Home students were invited to join the course, with the intention of completing in June 2015. Prior to course start-up the Weebly site was created (http://projectsocialjustice.weebly.com/) with the following sections for students to access: Home Page, which included pages for Course Feedback, Course Rationale, Assessment and Rubrics, Student Resources; and Objectives and Start-up, which included the page titled Activation Assignment. As this course was driven by student input, student design and it followed a cohort model, whereby the students work through the course materials together, the subsequent course sections were password protected, such that students were not able to access them until the entire class was ready to view the material.

The students began working through each set of lessons within a unit of study on a weekly basis, beginning on the Monday of every week. Every Monday morning, the group came together in a face-to-face setting in order to engage in discussion, sharing and collaboration structured around the course material and content. In February 2015, Wednesday morning was added to the face-to-face time for community volunteering opportunities. During a typical week, the students continued our face-to-face conversations and shared information on the Google+ community as well shared their writing and projects on their personal Weebly websites. In terms
of assessment, all of the assignments were posted with rubrics attached and students grades available for viewing in Jupiter Grades. Students continued to have access to the course until June 2015.

After two months of working through the course with students, the project was ready for peer review. In an effort to have educators provide anecdotal feedback, the course website and a link to the Google+ community page was shared with former instructors, administrators, and peers who had either worked or who were currently working in an online educational community. In the email, the links were provided to the course, the Google+ community and to Beta Testing feedback page with the message providing a comprehensive list of suggested areas for feedback (see Appendix A). The Beta Testing feedback form was created using Google Forms. Responses that were submitted through the Google Forms were automatically collected and presented in a Google Docs spreadsheet.

The qualitative feedback from other educators helped to capture the aspects of the project that seem to work and areas for further development. The findings of the Beta Testing recommendations were compiled in a narrative form for chapter four, Beta Testing and Findings and Conclusions, and in chapter five, Recommendations. Upon completion, the process paper and project were submitted to my faculty supervisor prior to it being forwarded on to the Dean of the Faculty of Education at Vancouver Island University.
Chapter 4 - Field and Beta Testing

Methods and Process

The goal of this Master’s degree project was to create a blended online course to teach English 12 and Social Justice 12 concurrently and thematically. For this project, blended learning environments were researched looking specifically at effective pedagogical practice for design, delivery and implementation of the course. The course development was guided by the principles of learning, such that: learning requires the active participation; students learn a variety of ways and at different rates; learning is both an individual and a group process; students must reflect on the process of the learning in order to improve (BC Ministry of Education, 2007). Effective learning strategies were considered for both classroom and blended learning environments, such as active learning, inquiry-based learning, and project-based learning. As well, strategies that focus on engagement practices, such as socialization, developing communities of practice, technology integration, assessment and feedback were employed. Next was to choose appropriate technologies to house the course and ensure successful student socialization practices. As a result, the Weebly website (Appendix D) and Google+ (Appendix E) site were created.

After consideration for the design and delivery of this course, the intended deliverables, as outlined in the project proposal, were created on the class Weebly website. The Integrated Resource Package sets out the provincially prescribed curriculum for English 12 (http://bit.ly/1ErveVE) and Social Justice 12 (http://bit.ly/17SHktG), and the learning outcomes are required to be met for both courses. After reviewing the prescribed learning outcomes, the activation assignments, were created for both English 12 and Social Justice 12 (Appendix D). Resource web pages were created, including an assessment and rubrics webpage, a contact
webpage, a student resource webpage, a webpage for the course rationale (Appendix D), which included learning outcomes and curricular areas addressed. Ten units were added to the website, each with specific learning objectives, and webpages for lesson development, including learning activities, assessment rubrics, and texts (Appendix D). In this document, the term “text” is used to describe a variety of written language forms, oral, visual, including electronic media.

Several webpages of lesson development were created for the class novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, along with webpages for the play, *The Laraime Project* (Appendix D).

Upon completing the main sections of the course, the students were invited to join the course and work through the material at a scheduled pace. Only specific lessons were open to the student cohort at a time, as the course was guided by learning principles that learning is both individual and a collaborative process and learning requires active participation. After a month of active participation in the course, it was important to solicit feedback from other educators along with parents in order to gather constructive feedback for the purpose of making improvements to the course. A feedback form was created using Google Forms and embedded in a Feedback page on the Weebly course (Appendix B). A letter was sent out to a select group of peers, administrators, former instructors from Vancouver Island University, and parents with a link to the course on Weebly, a link to the community forum in Google+, and a link to the Feedback page on Weebly. The letter requested feedback on the design and delivery of the course as a blended learning experience (Appendix A) and sent to ten recipients. Responses were submitted anonymously through the Google Form, and the information was automatically collected and presented in a Google Docs spreadsheet (Appendix B). Two verbal anecdotal responses were also provided by parents. In addition, personal reflections of the course’s
effectiveness were garnered through observation of students working through the course material.

Within a four-week window, seven out of ten respondents were able to review the lessons on the Weebly class website and in the Google+ community forum and provide feedback on the course (Appendix A). The respondents shared their feedback on the Google Form or through email. The feedback questionnaire requested beta testers to analyze and evaluate the overall design and delivery of the course as a blended model, looking at: level of critical thinking applied to the course material and discussion area (Google+); level of student engagement and collaboration; teacher engagement; strength of the course; areas of improvement; and effectiveness as a blended learning course. For confidentiality purposes, the respondents’ names were not shared, only the identifier, Feedback#number, was used to protect and conceal the true identities of the beta testers.

**Findings of the Beta Testing--Strengths**

The respondents’ feedback was overwhelmingly positive and provided a lot of quality suggestions that would improve the overall design and function of the course. Feedback from four Vancouver Island University instructors, who are currently working in the educational technology field, were particularly coveted as they are leaders in this area and have pedagogical knowledge and understanding of blended learning environments. It was also pleasing to read feedback from a student, who without prompting, gave very valuable and useful information from her unique perspective. Generally, the reviewers rated the overall design and layout quite positively, “[I]love the site! I really admire how you have or organized posts and discussions and linked it back to your course and objectives” (Feedback#1 as cited in Kennedy, 2015), as well as accolades that speak to the design decisions that went into developing the site, “[t]he course is
extremely well done and demonstrates Michelle’s incredible skill set and instructional design prowess. It is also extremely visually appealing” (Feedback #2, as cited in Kennedy, 2015). It was meaningful to receive recognition for the online learning strategies within the course. One respondent stated, “[t]his is a superb course. You have woven together several best practice aspects (social media), a variety of methods for interacting with content (video, Padlet, concept mapping… it is like a smorgasbord), and a variety of ways to process and present. Very impressive. I would want to be in your course” (Feedback #6, as cited in Kennedy, 2015).

Online educational pedagogy often emphasises that in order to entice students to learn, they need a variety of instructional strategies and a purpose to go online. The respondent’s feedback often spoke to these factors. One respondent noted that the learning units “… are very well organized [with]…[e]ngaging activities and so varied … addressing many different learning styles here” (Feedback #1, as cited in Kennedy, 2015). Another respondent stated, “[f]rom what I have seen, you have used many different methods of presenting content (Scribd, links, simple files with download etc.) and also getting students to use Google+ and blogs to express their own thoughts and interact with others. I think this is very solid” (Feedback #6, as cited in Kennedy, 2015).

Best practices in online education often mention the pedagogical techniques to promote interaction among students and between students and the teacher is particularly important to engagement and interactivity. Interaction in online instruction often includes online discussion forums, and student collaboration. Within the course, an online Google+ community was created in order to promote such interactivity, and as one respondent noted, “[t]he discussion area looks fantastic. I wanted to get involved because it was so good, but refrained so that I wouldn’t interfere with the process” (Feedback #7, as cited in Kennedy, 2015). All of the respondents
provided positive feedback about the Google+ community as a means to promoting community among members of the class. One respondent mentioned that “[t]he Google+ community is active with student posts and discussion. Michelle maintains an active teaching presence in the community, and combined with the face-to-face meetings with her students she has created an engaging blended learning cross-curricular course. Definitely something worth showcasing” (Feedback #4, as cited in Kennedy, 2015). Not only does interactivity promote community, but is also important for constructivist thinking, critical thinking, and higher-order thinking (problem solving through creative and critical thought). One respondent noted that “[t]he Google+ Community is a huge scaffold for learning …” (Feedback #1, as cited in Kennedy, 2015). Another respondent mentioned that, “… the strength of the course is that the students have a social media style connection to their live classes. This is more engaging than a typical school environment. Also, the students seem very excited about the content” (Feedback #7, as cited in Kennedy, 2015).

The fact that blended learning offers the flexibility of an online course with the benefits of the face-to-face classroom works well for many busy students. It also has the power to be transformative in terms of learning. One respondent addressed that fact that having the face-to-face meetings is a great motivator for students, “… allow[ing] for the group dynamic to develop, and having the online setting allows them to interact with the materials in their own time. This is meeting their needs at a great level. These students already have quite a high level of technological understanding, but using a social media site for deeper discussion may improve the way that they use their personal social media sites and apps (being more mindful of the footprint that they leave)” (Feedback #7, as cited in Kennedy, 2015). Another respondent noted that inviting students to face-to-face meetings, is a mindful approach to encouraging students to
attend the face-to-face meetings, helping to, “… pull folks into the community and asks them to commit” (Feedback #4, as cited in Kennedy, 2015). Personal observation of student participation in both the online and offline community was encouraging, as it seemed to flourish with fully engaged and in-depth reflections and respectful responses to each other’s work, as well as students’ actively constructing knowledge and sharing new information within the community of learners. A final note about learning through community, particularly online and face-to-face, came from a student who noted that “[t]his course is the perfect option for me because it mixes online learning with a small group setting, where some really enlightening and eye-opening conversations happen” (Feedback #2, as cited in Kennedy, 2015).

**Findings of the Beta Testing—Constructive Feedback**

Much of the improvements to the website and delivery of content can be attributed to the constructive feedback provided by the respondents from the beta testing. Notable suggestions for improvement were to change the headings “Assessment & Rubrics” to “Grading & Evaluation” in order to ease student understanding, and secondly, to create a webpage for the Do’s and Don’ts for the course, labeled, “Getting Started & How To Succeed in This Course,” this included the rules of web etiquette, posting comments in discussion forums, and communicating concerns to the instructor, as it is important to structure an online course by providing guidelines for participation and various policies to help students learn more effectively. Other suggestions that were easily amendable, and promptly added to the course, were the addition of prescribed learning outcomes for not only Social Justice 12, but also for English 12, as well, to move the “Contact and Feedback” webpage to the bottom of the nested page under “Home” and include face-to-face office hours on the page (Feedback #3, as cited in Kennedy, 2015).
Included in the online Weebly course is an introduction about the instructor, but as two reviewers suggested, the site should include an introduction that “… shares personal information with students both formally and informally…” (Feedback #3 as cited in Kennedy, 2015) with the suggestion of using an avatar, such as Voki as a fun and appealing way to share introductions, instructions and directions to the students. As the instructor sets the tone through teacher-student interactions, it is important to attempt to model good online behaviour. Another suggestion included using a podcast to welcome students and to further personalize instruction and learning, and using audio for “… feedback for your students who struggle with text and having them articulate their thoughts via a microphone/audio file …[l]ikewise, the use of a video interview or vignette where they record themselves or a friend might be useful” (Feedback #5, as cited in Kennedy, 2015).

Another recommendation of significance was the use of images on the website. One reviewer found the webpages “clean, uncluttered layout aids in visual appeal…and the graphics and images have been used simply but effectively” (Feedback #3, as cited in Kennedy, 2015), and another found that “[o]ne of the strengths is the amazing graphics and images … used,” but went on to question the licencing issues with images. Copyright is a tricky issue, and in order to engage students in the material, it is also key to add visual interest. The images were taken from Google Images (https://images.google.com/) and the source was cited at the bottom of each individual webpage. The content that came from elsewhere was also cited, but attribution often has little to do with fair use. The Fair Dealing Policy (http://copyright.ubc.ca/guidelines-and-resources/faq/basics/) allows for more flexible rules around the use of copyrighted material; that is, in this case the image, text, video, etc. is being used for educational purposes, in a non-
commercial venue. This is an area that requires more consideration as there are many grey areas that also apply to the Fair Dealing policy.

An additional concern was the use of Google+ as a community for students. One reviewer found Google to be a “…spammy platform, and if using for school purposes, it would be critical to have parental consent from all students, as well as tutorials on how to prevent Google from accessing all of your contacts and sending out frequent Google+ invites” (Feedback #7, as cited in Kennedy, 2015). This is a fair consideration as the British Columbia Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (http://www.bclaws.ca/Recon/document/ID/freeside/96165_00) requires the informed consent of a parent/guardian when a minor’s personal information is to be stored on a computer outside of Canada. The school permission form that students had signed when enrolling in Learn@Home does not specify which Web 2.0 tools will be used throughout their time with the school, and it does not apply to the online tools that were utilized for this class. As such, it is important to create a permission form that specifies the particular Web 2.0 tools that may be used as part of the course, and perhaps it may be worthwhile to create tutorials about the use of Google products.

On a final note, a respondent was concerned that the text may get “a little ‘heavy’ with content and the length of the page” (Feedback #5 as cited in Kennedy, 2015), noting that there were a couple uploaded documents on the Scridds pages that were long, and may lose the attention of the students. But the reviewer also noted that with a blended learning environment, “…there needs to be enough information” (Feedback #5 as cited in Kennedy, 2015). There is an art to having the right amount of text and the right amount of content, and that being said with any course this is a work in progress and you learn something new each time you teach a course.
In keeping with comments about text, a reviewer mentioned that although the writing on the website is “sublime” one should avoid overly-complex words that may be too “high-end” for students (Feedback #5 as cited in Kennedy, 2015). As this is an English 12 course, the vocabulary must be of a certain standard or expectation, but it is also duly noted that when it comes to writing most agree that clarity, simplicity and economy of words are what writers should strive for.

**Summary of Findings**

Beta testing of the online course website and online community provided a tremendous value to project, and although the feedback was limited in the numbers of beta testers who were able to give comments prior to writing this chapter, the quality of the feedback that was received was constructive, giving valuable suggestions and allowing for a means to improve by identifying areas for change and highlighting the positive elements in the course. As with any course, this online course was intended to be evolving with resources, technology, student input, and new ideas, and the beta testers were made aware that this course was not fully-completed, but was a work in-progress. What was learned from the review process was invaluable: a more critical understanding of blended learning environments. Deepening personal understanding of the effectiveness of a online course in a blended classroom comes with taking an outsiders’ perspective and noticing the gaps. The constructive feedback will help to improve the usability of the course for students and parents. The overwhelming positive accolades also provided by the beta testers were also valuable, as they provided a testament to the thinking and decision making that went into creating this course. The hope is that this course becomes a resource for other educators who are looking to implement blended learning in creative and unusual ways.
Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Educators are recognizing that we now have the opportunity to reinvent teaching and learning through a combination of face-to-face and online learning strategies, also known as blended learning. Blended learning is supporting innovation in the traditional face-to-face classroom that is facilitated by the effective combination of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning (Gonzales & Vodicka, 2012). Successful blended learning environments reject the assumption that all students are motivated by learning through technology, as there is growing research in online learning that speaks to success as derived from a combination of thoughtful course design and educational pedagogy (Lally & Wallington, 2002). Considerable research and personal ventures in blended pedagogical practice aided in the design and development of this Master's project. The online course described in this paper, The Social Justice-English 12 Initiative, was designed with educational pedagogy in mind, aligning itself with current findings from research and professional practice literature on blended learning environments. The goal for this course was to provide opportunities for active learning through face-to-face socialization along with delivery of the course content and socialization through online learning strategies.

Creating a blended learning course that provides successful learning opportunities is not a simple task, it requires a lot of brainstorming and development. During the initial phase of course development questions arose, such as: how will learners navigate and find information, how will they interact with the content, how do you create a learning experience that engages learners and provides content in a thorough and meaningful way? During the course development phase it was important to review the literature on the principles that guide
development of a blended course. The Social Justice-English 12 course was designed around the guiding factors that are often mentioned in literature as a successful formula for an online or blended course: students engage in active learning and they do most of the work, such that the more time they are engaged in content, the more they will learn; students should be interactive, beyond simple discussion-based activities; educators must strive for presence in the online learning environments, in the form of social presence, cognitive presence and teaching presence (Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Pelz, 2004). Beta testing feedback on the project confirmed that that the learning experience merged these factors with reviewers mentioning the varied content and delivery that addressed many different learning styles, and most importantly, “students seem excited about the content” (Feedback #7, as cited in Kennedy, 2015). Adding social media to the site added to the engagement factor and helped to scaffold student learning, such that learning is “more engaging than a typical school environment” (Feedback #3 & #7, as cited in Kennedy, 2015). It was also mentioned that there is an “active teaching presence in the community,” (Feedback #4 & #7, as cited in Kennedy, 2015) and the Google+ community combined with face-to-face meetings provided an engaging blended learning course.

Lally and Wallington (2002) stress that in order to entice students to participate, the learning environment must offer a purpose to go online in association with group activities, discussion groups, structure, and ongoing feedback and cajouling by both instructors and peers, which are the “combination of ‘arm-twisters’ and ‘carrots’ …exactly analogous to the strategies which are needed in more traditional teaching situations” (Lally & Wallington, 2002, para.13). These e-learning strategies must be built into the curriculum in order to encourage active learning, collaboration and participation, “lead[ing] to the creation of a community—bringing people together online with a purpose” (Lally & Wallington, 2002, para.4). Focusing on
interaction is a large part of the success of the course; the opportunity to tap into a range of purposeful online learning strategies allowed the Social Justice-English 12 course to evolve in such a way that the students come to the face-to-face meetings prepared and ready to actively contribute to the discussions. As well, the online discussion forum was found to be a vital and robust learning community with the majority of its members regularly participating with thoughtful and reflective comments. In both communities, online and face-to-face, students seemed to be engaged in deep and meaningful discussions of the course content. As one student stated, “[t]his course is the perfect option for me because it mixes online learning with a small group setting, where some really enlightening and eye-opening conversations happen” (Feedback #2, as cited in Kennedy, 2015).

As the aim of this learning experience was for students to be co-collaborators and active participants in the learning process, where they take charge of their learning. Anecdotal observation of student involvement in the course was noted to be active and fully engaged. Students seemed to show a high level of interest in most activities and full participation in both the online and offline community. Students also seemed to be taking ownership over their learning. Many students reported that the content was fully engrossing and four students agreed that this was the course they took time away from their other courses to work on—they procrastinated in their other courses in order to work on Social Justice and English 12 coursework. Out of the six students in this cohort, four exceeded expectations for engagement and participation with only two students participating at a minimal level in the online community forum and in the face-to-face community. The two students who participated at a minimal level appear to be a large number when dealing with a small student body, but there were other factors
at play including an ongoing medical issue. Disengaged behaviour is discussed further in the
Recommendations section of this paper.

Another consideration for review of this project was with timeline issues. The course
was originally discussed as an option for Learn@Home students in September, but by mid to late
October the course was given the consent to proceed in November. Consequently, the entire
course was adjusted to take into consideration the time that was required to complete all the
suggested units and to also ensure the learning outcomes would be fully addressed within this
time period. The limited timeline also impacted course design decisions, which some were
adjusted in the post beta testing period. The timeline was also a concern when it came to
requesting beta-testing and subsequently analyzing and summarizing the results of the feedback
responses. As the course began in mid-November, it was important to have the course fully
online and presentable before requesting feedback from peers and parents. Beta testing feedback
on the course was requested in early January, and as it was a busy time for other educators the
results were sparse, in all seven responses were noted.

Project Summary

In reflecting on the overall project, its significance lies in two areas. First, in the
anecdotal comments and feedback given by colleagues, peers, parents, and students. The
overwhelmingly positive experience from participants helped to guide teaching practice and the
design of the course as well as add to the value of blended learning course design. Second, in the
application of the findings to future practice and that of others in the areas of blended learning
course design, the key to designing a blended course lies in understanding the essence of the
course content and purpose and centering the learner in this environment. As many institutions
begin to employ blended learning in order to provide flexibility and personalized learning to
students, evidence from experiences with blended learning becomes ever more important to inform ongoing improvement of blended learning programs. In particular, the experiences of learners in a learning environment, such as the one described here, is a valuable source of information for teaching and it is hoped that other educators will build upon this project for their own blended learning environments.

**Recommendations**

After completing the beta testing phase of this project, further recommendations were considered for the betterment of this project: (1) Creation of intervention strategies to reach disengaged students; (2) Create an introductory activity, such as “about me” video or slide show to encourage community building; (3) Use Scavenger Hunts to orient students and help them make connections to the course; (4) Use of podcasts to welcome students, for closing congratulations, give feedback on work and use video and screencasts to provide students tutorials or to explain harder to grasp concepts; (5) Creation of a Capstone Learning section after Unit 10 to summarize student accomplishments; (6) To showcase the final product as a resource for high school blended learning environments.

Perceived student engagement and actual engagement are two different entities and in order to increase the overall value of this learning experience for all learners, all students need to have a voice. The fact that two students were participating at a minimal level speaks to the need for intervention strategies in place for online courses, it is important to reach out to the disengaged. One such method of providing the students with a voice is to include an anonymous survey after each unit that would addresses the need for greater student input and feedback. Feedback is important to any course as it helps to keep the teacher in touch with the students’ experiences in the course such that they are able to make adjustments as necessary. Another
method to reach out to those who appear to be disengaged is to send an intervention message that speaks to the course expectations and strategies that are necessary to change this behaviour. A final method to ensure student engagement is to use a discussion schedule tool to manage student to student interactions. This tool would look like a weekly commenting schedule between students, which indicates who they are expected to provide feedback and comments to.

It was recommended to include specific introductory activities into the Social Justice-English 12 course. Activities such as scavenger hunts and an introducing me activity are often used during the start-up phase of a course and are useful tools to help orient the student to the course material and bring them into the classroom community. These activities are also used as icebreaker activities, allowing students to get to know each other. The scavenger activity requires students to sleuth through the course in order to complete certain activities or answer specific questions. This activity provides an initial opportunity for students to become familiar with navigating through the online classroom and community. It also allows for students to locate specific resources that are essential for learning. Online environment can be surprisingly intimate and in order to be compassionate to students’ needs, it is advisable to use the discussion forum to build community through an icebreaker technique for students to initially introduce themselves by publishing online biographies, photographs and perhaps personal social media profiles, such as Pinterest (https://www.pinterest.com).

Personal biographies are also useful connecting tools to model to students. In establishing a community of learners it is key for the teacher to present as a real person to the learners. As was recommended by beta-testers, the use of video podcast, presentation etc. is an important element to introducing the teacher to the students and creating a community of learners. Welcoming students to the course helps to establish an online persona, add to
belongingness, and helps to build a social presence in the community and is also beneficial for introducing the students to the set-up of the course (Bellafiore, 2007). Use of videos, audio files and podcasts are also useful methods of addressing diverse learning styles in the online classroom. Feedback from a beta tester recommended providing audio feedback for students who struggle with text, and perhaps allowing students to also share their ideas through audio is important for personalizing learning (Feedback #5, as cited in Kennedy, 2015). Additionally, audio and video files can also be a way of capturing course content that would otherwise be difficult to explain in a textual format (Bellafiore, 2007).

Another recommendation was the addition of a Capstone Project after students have completed the Social Justice Action Plan. The capstone learning project allows students to learn from their experiences and share what was learned. This type of project would be centred around the student, allowing her to determine the focus and scope of their personal project. This could be a celebration of learning and as mentioned in beta feedback, is a way to summarize student learning and accomplishments and essentially congratulating them on meeting the course expectations (Feedback #4, as cited in Kennedy 2015).

The Social Justice-English 12 course continues to evolve and transform as a model for blended learning environments. The course design, development, implementation and review provided an invaluable understanding of the guiding principles for online learning course design and a more critical understanding of blended learning environments. A major point of meaning in the light of the recommendations and conclusions from this project lies in its transferability to other blended learning courses. In recognizing that the best way to provide ongoing support for good teaching practice is to share with other educators, this course may be instrumental in providing the vision and resources to support understanding of blended learning environments,
as an evidence based practice for ongoing professional development. In continuing to build upon the lessons and structures already in place to create a solid and infallible blended learning course, the hope is to share it as an open education resource for use with other educators.

For many educators, student engagement is the key factor in creating, designing and implementing course material. Engagement is further strengthened by the growth of technology and e-learning options. In our technologically enhanced world, blended learning offers an innovative solution to engaging with students by supporting a personalized education that speaks to self-directed and self-paced learning. Blended learning environments not only offer flexible options for students, but also offer creative, challenging and compelling learning alternatives for students with the hope that students become excited to learn, and actively delve into the subject matter and more deeply. Through online and offline learning opportunities, students are potentially exposed to more in-depth experiences that strengthen their ability to think critically, problem solve and make informed decisions in the future. Blended learning embraces the growing pedagogical movement that personalized and flexible learning is essential for developing 21st Century thinkers who take ownership over their learning and develop an attitude for lifelong learning.
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A BLENDONLINE MULTIDISCIPLINARY COURSE


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Appendix A—Letter Requesting Feedback

Letter to Beta Testers requesting feedback of course:

I am looking for feedback on my major project for VIU’s Master of Education in Educational Leadership. My major project concerns the development of a blended online thematically-based Social Justice-English 12 course. Presently, I have eight students participating in the course, which began in November. We meet on Monday mornings for weekly discussion meetings. The blended learning model is intended to be flexible and adaptable, such that I am able to create instructional activities and assignments that are able to tap their interest and abilities within a social learning model. Also, the upcoming assignment in unit three will be student-led and self-directed—where pairs of students will conduct research and prepare a teaching module for their classmates.

The intention of using Weebly to situate the course materials is as a model for students own Weebly websites. Students are expected to create online portfolios to showcase their learning. Students retrieve their assignments on the class Weebly and use our Google+ community to keep in contact and for discussion purposes. The class website is evolving, so I am only looking for feedback on the areas that are published.

If you are able to provide me with feedback, I will require your gmail in order to add you to our Google+ community.

The following is a list of suggested areas you may want to provide feedback:

1. Presentation of course materials and instructional practice. For example: are the course objectives clear? Do the assignments support the objectives? Is the amount of course work appropriate? Overall, how does the course look? Is the course easy to navigate? etc…
Level of critical thinking applied to the course material and discussion area (Google+)

2. Level of student engagement and collaboration

3. Teacher engagement with students

4. Strength of the course

5. Areas of improvement

6. Blended Learning: effectiveness as a blended learning course, where blended learning is defined as an instructional practice that combines teaching methods from both face-to-face instruction and online learning. Does the methodology (online and face-to-face methods) address student needs? Does the course address personalized learning and personalized instruction? Does it address students’ diverse learning needs, learning styles and support effective intervention? Are the pedagogical strategies using technology effective? Does the course support learners direct experience with technology-supported skills that are essential for 21st Century learners? Overall, how does this blended learning model fair? Does it perform well in comparison to a typical face-to-face model or a fully-online course?

Links: Google+: https://plus.google.com/u/0/communities/115328321514016307671

Course: http://projectsocialjustice.weebly.com/

Course Feedback Form: http://projectsocialjustice.weebly.com/course-feedback.html
Appendix B—Beta Testing Feedback Form

Beta-Testing Feedback Form located on Weebly website: this online form was created using Google Forms to collect feedback on the course from educational professionals, parents and students.

(http://projectsocialjustice.weebly.com/course-feedback.html)
Appendix C—Beta Testing Feedback Responses

Feedback #1:

- Love the site! I really admire how you have organized posts and discussions and linked it back to your course and objectives. I see you are getting some student original posts and responses. Impressive start!

- I am wondering how much time and involvement is required in the community? Do you use a rubric to let students know what you expect from their involvement in the community? How do you ensure safety of expression in the community?

- Are there other forms of communication you are using with your students? Emails? Phone calls? F2F meetings? I am wondering if some of my questions and your guidance with students is outside of these two sites.

- Have you thought about a time-limited challenge to post in the community to attract attention? Something topical?

- Do you see a way to bring in a project-based learning approach that would be shared and developed in the community?

- Finally, on your G+ page I see how you can bring different facets of communities into one place for you. I want to learn in my own G+ practice from what you have done here.

  Thanks!!

Feedback #2:

This course is helping me explore and learn about different social justice issues in the world, from women's rights to LGBT rights, sexism, racism, etc. I love Michelle's flexible teaching style, and she has amazing ideas for resources. This course is the perfect option for me because it mixes online learning with a small group setting, where some really enlightening and
eye-opening conversations happen. I also really appreciate how we get to explore social justice issues through different forms of learning, such as art, movies, online articles, etc. as well as the more traditional methods such as books and course material. Overall I am extremely happy to be part of this course, and think it is my favourite course that I have taken in high school so far, due to Michelle's wonderful teaching and guidance, the amazing format we get to study this in, and the topic of the course that we are doing.

**Feedback #3:**

- Love your descriptor on home page “The Social Justice--ELA 12 course is designed to encourage students to think for themselves about things that matter.”
- Might you include the specific PLOs for both SJ and Eng 12?
- Should you include your email address and office hours?
- I might move Contact and Feedback to the bottom of the nested page listing under HOME as they are less important?
- LOVE your course rationale rubric. Is this more of a Teacher’s Resource? Might that be worthy of a special heading?
- Will students understand the term “Assessment & Rubrics”? Perhaps use the term Grading and Evaluation?
- Under Objectives & Start Up might you have a section labelled “Getting Started-How To Succeed in This Course”?
- Perhaps describe what is required for the Activation Assignments? What are they used for?
- LOVE the layout of your Novel Study! Great activities.
• I assume the Play and other areas are supposed to be password protected. Should you note that students need to contact you for the password here? Perhaps this is just while you are developing?
• The Units are very well organized and you have done a truly amazing job here Michelle. Engaging activities and so varied! You are addressing many different learning styles here.
• Might there be a Capstone Learning section after Unit 10?
• Is there a timeline for the course? Week by week or…? Perhaps it is self-paced?
• Should you include an “Information for Parents” section”?
• The course is very well designed and easy to navigate.
• The clean, uncluttered layout aids in visual appeal.
• Graphics and images have been used simply but effectively.
• Might you include a simple podcast to welcome students and perhaps as a closing congratulations. Perhaps you will not be the only one teaching it though? Nice to have an alternative to text if you think this might be helpful.
• I love vokis as an additional way to share instructions and directions using avatars. Check out voki.com. They are fun and might appeal to this age group? Maybe try one for the Intro and Closing activities
• The Google+ Community is a huge scaffold for learning here Michelle. I’m glad you included this vital aspect of a blended course.
• Do you plan to have f2f “office hours” when students can meet with you in person? If so perhaps note your office times and locations?
• Just awesome all around!
Feedback #4:

The course is extremely well done and demonstrates Michelle’s incredible skill set and instructional design prowess. It is also extremely visually appealing. The Google+ community is active with student posts and discussion. Michelle maintains an active teaching presence in the community, and combined with the face-to-face meetings with her students she has created an engaging blended learning cross-curricular course. Definitely something worth showcasing.

Feedback #5

- Overall, very impressed with what I see. Without knowing the content/course itself, I think that it is structured well and supports students in a number of different ways.

- Very professional home page – picture is high quality, wording is excellent (vocabulary might be a bit “high” but it depends on your kids) and links at bottom are so useful and relevant.

- Question: Is the course password protected? This might not be important but I do it for mine – extra layer of security for parents/students.

- Google+ will hopefully help in this area. I have taken on Avi’s “gamification” angle (500 XP to Level Up!) in OLTD 508…might be worth a try at some point

- One of the strengths is the amazing graphics and images you have used. Honestly, the one in Part IV of a Thousand Splendid Suns (woman’s eyes) is so good. Question: Where do they come from? Permission given or Creative Commons or…;D I only got super serious about this when I started working for VIU – it is hard and requires time and effort. If you have permission or it is CC you are a rockstar.
• In some places (very long page of Scridbs) it gets a little “heavy” with content and the length of the page; however, I don’t have a ready made answer for this. I have been guilty of this at times; I try to not make students scroll down a long ways – some won’t – attention span is pretty short at times. That being said, as it is blended, there needs to be enough information that they can do the work without you being there and I think you have done a great job of this.

• Vocabulary – your English is sublime but sometimes using a big word with a smaller word works; not sure how “high end” your students are.

• I get lots of feedback about my feedback and how it means something compared to the crap that is shoveled out in some online/traditional courses. It is worth taking the time and hard to measure at this point. You have structures in place though, that should make this very achievable. Well done.

• [The upcoming assignment in unit three will be student-led and self-directed—where pairs of students will conduct research and prepare a teaching module for their classmates] This would be interesting to see as I value this sort of teaching/learning but some of the things we do in our own Masters don’t always translate well.

• I am a big fan of “guided practice” and exemplars in order to give students “an idea” so I have done this myself in terms of how I structure my course site for Social Studies 9. Interesting that both of us saw this as effective and important. I too have them do an eP based on a project based/inquiry model of learning.
• From what I have seen, you have used many different methods of presenting content (Scribd, links, simple files with download etc.) and also getting students to use Google+ and blogs to express their own thoughts and interact with others. I think this is very solid.

• So…I don’t always look at a course/tabs in order. I just looked at your “Cool Online Tools…” page – some great tools there – Powtoon I have been meaning to use; great list that addresses various ways for students to present their work – major personalization and allows for choice which is motivational big time! Again, well played

• It more than “fair” in my opinion. It is well thought out and supported overall;

• One of the things I might suggest (and if it is used on the site my apologies) is the use of audio feedback for your students who struggle with text and having them articulate their thoughts via a microphone/audio file. I know for English that writing is important but this allows for personalized instruction/learning. Likewise, the use of a video interview or vignette where they record themselves or a friend might be useful.

• Overall, this is a very organized course with a ton of information that addresses all of the components one would see in an online or blended environment. I think what I am learning/re-learning is that the teacher’s “voice” or “presence” is critical whether the course is online/blended/traditional. How we do this in each case will vary and figuring out what this looks like takes some burning and learning or R and D – it’s a work in progress for me (Have done History 12 as a blended model for three years now and still learning new things)
Feedback #6

- This is a superb course. You have woven together several best practice aspects (social media, variety of methods for interacting with content (video, padlet, concept mapping… it is like a smorgasbord), and a variety of ways to process and present. Very impressive. I would want to be in your course.

Site:

- Getting started page is solid. I love that you have included the tips for success, including guidelines for conversations, interaction and netiquette. This is not done enough in many online courses.
- Will they know to go to the dropdown for the activation assignment? Perhaps a link right on the first page? Maybe.
- Novel: I loved that you had a link to the rubric for the poetry activity right on the first page.
- FYI the Sribd works fine on my computer but you cannot scroll on my iPad. Design thought… the design of the fourth novel page is striking. Why not on all four pages
- Couldn’t see anything under “Play” or “The Laramie Project”
- I love the 1.1 activities, including the G+ posts.
- Did you have a previous “introduce yourself” G+ post that I missed? Is it your intent to just get right into the content with this G+ activity? Not against it… just asking
- 1.2: Again, I liked the evaluation rubric link right on the page. How did the multimedia part of this go? Did they post their work

Community
• I popped into the community at this point, scrolled to the very bottom, and started moving up to see if there were any multi-media posts. I came up with a few other thoughts… so, to be completely random, I will share those here and come back to the site.

• You started by posting links to sites like amnesty international… I was not sure about the purpose of those. Did they come up in conversation? Are these the kinds of links that should go on your site? I loved that you had invitations to your face-to-face sessions in the community. It pulls folks into the community and asks them to commit.

• I noticed a link to Isabel’s site. Well! That is certainly working. Very robust so far. It really demonstrates what you have the students do… I was noticing things like the her posts, and presentations, creative assignment… what a wonderful variety of activities you have offered these students.

• I might consider taking all of the multimedia portions and having them post to the community.

• A word about that… you have created such a nice balance of individual and social media aspects in the course. It is truly a transformation of online and blended learning. Although there is conversation in the community, it is tending to be “all business”. Is that bad. Heck no. But there is potential for personalization (in the the personality sense), where more of the multi-media that is created is shared, more questions that are meant to develop some heat in the discussions… You probably have this in your f-2-f sessions, but I would have loved to see more of that in the community. Example: Your response to my one post was very real and seemed to be imbued with your interest (The
gun post)... because I am an adult, you don’t have to worry about my thinking, or how I am handling a post… I think it made it more natural.

- I may be off the path here. You may be doing exactly what you wish. This is a fantastic course.

- 2.2: I loved the padlet activity… another way to help them read each other’s thoughts.

Feedback #7

- Course materials are very attractive, and well placed on the Google site. It isn’t super clear to me what module you are working on (although that might be a function of the students being engaged in the ideas rather than units).

- The discussion area looks fantastic. I wanted to get involved because it was so good, but refrained so that I wouldn’t interfere with the process.

- It looks as though the students are mostly engaged. There appear to be more postings by I.P. and C.L. than from the others.

- Teacher engagement looks good.

- I think the strength of the course is that the students have a social media style connection to their live classes. This is more engaging than a typical school environment. Also, the students seem very excited about the content.

- The one thing that concerns me is that Google is a spamy platform, and if using it for school purposes, it would be critical to have parental consent from all students, as well as a tutorial on how to prevent Google from accessing all of your contacts and sending out frequent Google+ invites.

- I think that the course is very effective for these students, particularly given that they can’t all attend all of the time. You have a student with a severe health condition, one that
is cross enrolled with NDSS (and has enormous outside commitments, one with
significant family obligations, and one in a full day pre-professional dance program.
Having the face-to-face meetings is a great motivator for them, and allows for the group
dynamic to develop, and having the online setting allows them to interact with the
materials in their own time. This is meeting their needs at a great level. These students
already have quite a high level of technological understanding, but using a social media
site for deeper discussion may improve the way that they use their personal social media
sites and apps (being more mindful of the footprint that they leave).

- Comment not related to the questions that you asked: Parents have spoken to me about
how happy they are with the level of conversation that they are having at home, and that
the students are really being challenged to think about the implications of things, and that
the critical thinking that they are seeing is fantastic. Parent stated that they are generally
extremely happy with the course.
Appendix D—Components of the Online Course

Course Aspects: Screenshots of course webpage details

Rationale for Social Justice-English Language Arts 12 (The SJ-ELA 12 Initiative)

More and more emphasis has been placed on the power of literature to integrate curriculum, linking disciplines through literature provides a richer, more meaningful understanding of subject matter. The ELA SJ 12 Initiative is a student-centered and student-driven thematically based course, which includes core competencies, big ideas, and learning standards that meet the requirements of the BC Ministry of Education's curriculum objectives from both English 12 and Social Justice 12.

The framework of each lesson builds on background knowledge about a particular social justice issue and addresses at least one English language arts skill. The lesson objectives also promote critical thinking skills and integrate authentic and personalized learning opportunities for students. This online model benefits the busy student by providing flexibility and accessibility, as well as promoting opportunities for personalized learning and the development of 21st century skills.

THE SOCIAL JUSTICE-ELA 12 INITIATIVE

Getting Started

This course is designed to provide you with the tools, methods, and frameworks for constructing your own learning plans and initiatives in regards to social justice issues. You will be encouraged to become critically conscious of your own agenda and to begin articulating your own developing commitments to social justice issues as you undertake the readings, assignments, discussions, workshops, etc.

Course texts (readings, novel, play, poetry, video, audio, etc.) will enrich our discussions and will help you gain perspective on the topics we will be discussing. Texts are a means for you to reflect on the human condition by connecting to the experiences of others. As well, there will be a large component of the course that will require you to reflect on your own perceptions, and ideas about social justice topics.

I look forward to the learning we will share in the coming months.

ACTIVATION ASSIGNMENT

You must complete the activation assignment in order to be fully registered in this course. As you will be receiving final marks for both English 12 and Social Justice 12, you must complete activation assignments for both courses.

WEBSITE & BLOGGING

You will create a personal website to submit all your work as the majority of your reflecting, writing and presenting will take place in your website. This will become your personal e-portfolio, which will be a final showcase of your learning in the course.

You will create one blog post a week and one comment on the blog post of another per week.

COLLABORATING:

You will be collaborating on several fronts:
English 12 Activation Assignment

*Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow.*  
Albert Einstein

**Time:** 3-4 hours

This assignment is worth 5% of your overall course.

**ACTIVITY 1: The World is Coming to an End**

"Love is the most powerful weapon on the face of the earth. Robert Kennedy once said that few will have the greatness to be in history, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events ... So yes, the world is coming to an end, and the path towards a new beginning starts, within you." – Prince Ea

In this video, rapper Richard Williams, a.k.a. Prince Ea, gives us a rundown of various issues our generation is facing in his spoken word piece. He begins with the bold statement, "The world is coming to an end," and proceeds to highlight key issues our generation is facing.

A) Prince Ea conveys his strong and expressive opinion about this topic with passion and feeling.

In a paragraph, speak to your own feelings about the language of the rap and its topic. What images (words) were the most profound or had the biggest emotional impact on you?

Use specific examples/quotes to convey your own ideas/thoughts.

B) There are many links between the arts, education and social justice. Art (poetry, spoken word, dance, illustrations, music, etc) has the potential to open up challenging conversations about race, gender, privilege and fairness.

In a paragraph, address the following essential question about the role of art and social justice. In what ways has art (in its many forms) contributed to debates on social change or influenced social change?
THE SOCIAL JUSTICE-ELA 12 INITIATIVE

Social Justice 12 Activation Assignment

This course’s focus of study is upon social injustice in Canada and around the world— in the various forms it appears, its causes and consequences for human survival and livability, and the nature and degree of our responsibility working towards a more socially equitable network of countries, nations and communities.

In this course you will be asked to examine your own beliefs and values and realize your capacity to effect positive change in this world.

This first assignment will show how well you can:

- Observe situations with a critical eye
- Consider the opinions/feelings of both sides
- Share your thoughts on a sensitive issue in writing
- Discover how learning more about a topic can sometimes change your long held opinions

Time: approximately 2-4 hours
This assignment is worth 5% of your overall course.

Part 1: What Does Social Justice Mean to You?

Create a visual interpretation that depicts your personal definition of social justice.

I want to know:
1.1 Defining Social Justice

Most people have a furious itch to talk about themselves and are restrained only by the disinclination of others to listen. We must have an open mind and an interest in human beings. Human nature may be displayed before you and if you have not the eyes to see you will learn nothing. (Somerset Maugham)

This course is designed to encourage you to think for yourself about things that matter.

Activity 1: Attitudes, Values & Principles

In a journal/blog, answer the following questions three well-written paragraphs.

A) Why are the youth of today so rude?

In a one-paragraph (or more), respond to the following article, "Why are the youth of today so rude?" (Blakie, T., 2008).

B) Personal Experiences of Negative Attitudes

In a well-written paragraph, reflect on your personal experiences of negative attitudes. Consider the following questions in your response:

- What values and principles guide how you treat others and how you would like to be treated by others?
- What negative attitudes or stereotypes do many adults have toward youth? Which of these are not valid? How do you feel when
**Curriculum Organizer for English 12**

### Aim
The aim of English Language Arts is to provide students with opportunities for personal and intellectual growth through speaking, listening, reading, viewing, writing, and representing to make meaning of the world and to prepare them to participate effectively in all aspects of society.

### Goals
- Comprehend and respond to oral and written language critically, creatively, and articulately
- Communicate ideas, information, and feelings critically, creatively, and articulately, using various media
- Think critically and creatively, and reflect on and articulate their thinking and learning
- Develop a continuously increasing understanding of self and others

### Curriculum Organizers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral Language (Speaking and Listening)</th>
<th>Reading and Viewing</th>
<th>Writing and Representing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purposes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Purposes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Purposes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use oral language to interact, present, question, explain, persuade, and listen.</td>
<td>Read and view to comprehend and respond to a variety of grade-appropriate texts.</td>
<td>Write and represent to create a variety of meaningful personal, informational, and imaginative texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategies</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strategies</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strategies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use strategies when interacting, presenting, and listening to improve speaking and listening.</td>
<td>Use strategies before, during, and after reading and viewing to increase comprehension and fluency.</td>
<td>Use strategies when writing and representing to increase success at creating meaningful texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thinking</strong></td>
<td><strong>Thinking</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Use oral language to improve and extend thinking.</td>
<td>- Use reading and viewing to make meaningful connections, and to improve and extend thinking.</td>
<td>- Use writing and representing to express, extend, and analyse thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Analyse and explore multiple viewpoints through speaking and listening.</td>
<td>- Analyse the influence of context through reading and writing.</td>
<td>- Explore multiple perspectives through writing and representing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Use metacognition, self-assess, and set goals for improvement in oral language.</td>
<td>- Use metacognition, self-assess, and set goals for improvement in reading and viewing.</td>
<td>- Use metacognition, self-assess, and set goals for improvement in writing and representing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Features</strong></td>
<td><strong>Features</strong></td>
<td><strong>Features</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognize and apply the features and patterns of oral language to enhance meaning and expression.</td>
<td>Use the structures and features of text to derive meaning from texts.</td>
<td>Use the features and conventions of language to enhance meaning and expression in writing and representing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Curriculum Organizer & Learning Outcomes for Social Justice 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Prescribed Learning Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defining Social Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 1: Introduction to Social Justice</td>
<td>A1, A3, A4, A6, A7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 2: Social Justice Beliefs and Values</td>
<td>A5, A6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 3: Research Skills</td>
<td>A2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 4: Systemic Analysis and the Dynamics of Poverty</td>
<td>A3, A4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 5: Aboriginal Peoples and the Law</td>
<td>A5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 6: Examining LGBT Issues</td>
<td>A1, A3, A6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 7: Women and Social Justice</td>
<td>A1, A2, A3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 8: Genocide</td>
<td>A1, A2, A3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 9: Globalization</td>
<td>A1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 10: Social Justice Action Plan</td>
<td>A3, A6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For full text of the prescribed learning outcomes and suggested achievement indicators, please refer to the Student Achievement section of the Social Justice 12 IRP (available online at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/irp_ss.htm).
Appendix E - The Google+ Community

The Google+ Community is a platform where users can share their experiences and ideas related to the course. The community is private and has been actively engaging with 14 members. Users can engage through posts, discussions, and events.

The ELA 12 Initiative is a student-centered and student-driven thematically-based course that meets the requirements of the BC Ministry of Education's curriculum objectives from both English 12 and Social Justice 12. Students have the opportunity to contribute to the community by sharing resources and learning activities for the first set of student-led seminars. The initiative also supports learning through the exploration of the Feminist Movement.

Upcoming events include a workshop on Wednesday, February 11, 201x, from 10:00 GMT to 11:00 GMT, focusing on understanding the Feminist Movement. The event is aimed at promoting social justice and is facilitated by the course instructor, Michelle Kennedy.