Creating a Blended Learning Program for Non-Graduated Adults Supported Through the Community of Inquiry Framework to Obtain BC Graduation Requirements

by

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

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Abstract

Non-graduated adults need support when re-engaging with the school system to obtain high school graduation requirements. As an adult, course delivery options for graduation are limited. Many school districts in British Columbia, including Sea to Sky (#48), offer online-only programs with asynchronous delivery and little face-to-face supports. The purpose of this applied research project was to create a blended delivery context in which to shift existing online-only programs for non-graduated adults in order to sustain learner motivation and engagement. This was accomplished by implementing the Community of Inquiry framework to increase cognitive, social and teaching presences to promote engagement both through connection to other learners as well as through connection to relevant learning and discourse by means of a bridging online resource- accessible to assist in online and face-to-face learning. The Major Project deliverable, a web-based resource, serves as a landing place for adult students to learn and to gain skills to successfully navigate online courses. The project also serves as a collaborative resource for educators to implement a blended program in their own practice while promoting a shared learning community. The background research examines the unique characteristics of adult learners to provide methods for motivation and engagement in building effective online learning opportunities connected to my professional teaching pedagogy and supported through blended implementation. Conclusions include recommendations for course content in connection supported by the Community of Inquiry framework and suggestions for further development.

Keywords: A La Carte, Adult Dogwood diploma, adult learners; adult graduation program; andragogy; blended learning; Community of Inquiry; connection, culture, disruptive innovation; engagement; enriched virtual; LMS; motivation; non-consumers; UbD, UGT.

Major Project URL: http://educonnectadult.weebly.com/
Acknowledgements

This has been an incredible learning journey! My time spent in the Online Learning and Teaching Diploma (OLTD) program has helped to further develop my training and expertise in my current position as an online teacher. I have learned the importance of creating community and examining learning activities through the scope of collaboration and engagement. The activities completed in OLTD showed me that learning (and teaching) online does not have to be isolating and in fact, is rich with opportunity to learn through emerging technologies in a new way. Thank you to OLTD Cohort 5 for your diverse backgrounds and amazing ideas— it was a privilege to work with each one of you!

To my wonderful Sea to Sky Online colleagues, Brittany and Miriam, it has been great to apply our OLTD learning directly to our own program. I have seen the first hand benefits of what we have learned to enhance the learning opportunities for our students. I know our model has a community focus. Thank you for deciding to take this journey too, it has definitely enriched my own experience having you two as project partners and to bounce ideas off!

To Avi Luxenburg, Randy LaBonte and Justin Mark, thank you for your extended support beyond your OLTD courses. Your willingness to review aspects of my project from the early stages through to the end confirmed the caliber of the Education faculty at VIU.

Mary O’Neill— Thank-you, thank-you for all your ongoing support and encouragement. I could not have asked for a better supervisor; I knew from day one we would be a great fit! Your positivity really uplifted me when needed – it has been an absolute pleasure!

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Major Project Context

Graduation from secondary school should be an achievable pursuit for all students in British Columbia; however, this is not always accomplished. The existing organization of a traditional bricks and mortar, face-to-face learning environment does not always accommodate all learners and their specific learning needs and styles. Data from the British Columbia Teacher’s Federation (BCTF) shows that from 2000-2017 adult enrolment in secondary school courses has declined. Reasons for this include tuition changes and limited supports available to adults when they can no longer enroll in the traditional delivery to meet graduation requirements.

![Chart showing adult enrolment in BC public schools from 2000-2017](https://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Publications/FactSheets/StudentEnrolment.pdf)

*Figure 1. Adults in BC public schools. (BCTF, 2017, fig.3)*

The rigidity of the traditional structure does not always allow for engagement and motivation in learning, and thus, some students fall short in meeting Dogwood requirements when they are school-aged students. As noted by the BCTF (2018) only 83.7% of students in the 2016-17 school year obtained Dogwood Completion in six years.
For the remaining percentage (adult learners who are returning for Dogwood diplomas after this six year period) personalization and flexibility of content delivery is needed for these students who are disengaged with, and disconnected from, the traditional delivery of educational programming. They require a new approach in which to re-engage and re-connect (Horn & Staker, 2015) to meet graduation requirements. An extensive report from the BCTF in 2012 examines students who take longer than six years to graduate high school and of those students, 92.7% graduate between the ages of 20 and 24 (BCTF, 2012). These adult graduation rates reflect the importance of offering adult programs as support for adult learners overcoming barriers to meet Dogwood diploma requirements.

For many adults who have disengaged from the school system, fully online learning was the only option available to meet secondary school graduation requirements. But without careful program planning and design students are likely to again fall into the pattern of disengagement. My experience, as part of School District Sea to Sky (#48), allowed me to reflect on an opportunity for adult learners to re-engage with the school system through online courses; however, an asynchronous online-only option for graduation equivalency requirements does not
lend itself well to creating community and culture in which to support and encourage these challenged students. My hope is for as close to 100% as possible of students to graduate high school regardless of their age.

The purpose of this graduate project was create a resource website titled, “Adult Education Reconnection” (http://educonnectadult.weebly.com/) with the goal to shift support for adult students from an online-only option to a flexible blended delivery program. In a blended program, graduation requirements can be met through flexible delivery and personalization to increase engagement and motivation in building a sense of community— rather than learning in isolation (Anderson, 2008; Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004). The program consisted of a combination of A La Carte and Enriched Virtual delivery models (as described in Chapter 2 and Definition of Terms table).

I currently work in a blended environment where I support secondary learners in grades 10-12 face-to-face, as well as online. In addition, I am also the grad plan coordinator and overseer for non-graduated adults. Our adult program existed exclusively online with asynchronous intake with no face-to-face supports. In our program we were so busy supporting our school-aged learners that we fell short in extending ongoing connection with our adults. I felt that we assumed that since these students were adults, they were capable of meeting the expectations to succeed, given that they took the initiative to sign up for courses and work with a teacher to create a grad plan. It seemed simple— they have the plan, so just do the courses. In reality, this was often not the case. Communication with students consists mainly via e-mail with the occasional phone call or in person meeting. This hands-off approach did not yield very good success rates as these adult students fell through the cracks because no one was connected to them on a regular basis. Within this model, communication happened only after a month or so of
no submissions, or if a student requested clarification. I found I was not supporting these learners with the transferable skills needed for success in life after graduation.

Many of these adult-age students lack the wherewithal to be self-motivated and work independently to complete their fully online courses. These students often start with the best intentions and then fizzle out once they really have to apply their dreams to tangible work. In order to keep motivation high and to support learning endeavours for follow-through to graduation, adult learners need a community where resources and interaction is available to them, not only online but also in person. In late 2017, I began to think of ways to implement a blended delivery program and in spring of 2018 I began to offer a weekly face-to-face drop in session to support adult students working in online courses. The blended program allowed for flexibility of delivery and personalization based on students’ needs and wants.

**Major Project Justification**

Since community and culture are integral aspects of an engaging and effective graduation program, and especially in online learning that is asynchronous and offers continual enrollment, specific and deliberate instructional designs need to be implemented to increase engagement and motivation and contribute to the overall academic success of the student.

My studies in the Online Learning and Teaching Diploma program (OLTD) introduced me to Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s Community of Inquiry (CoI) model. With this model, engagement in learning and community is promoted through support of cognitive presence, social presence and teacher presence (CoI, n.d.). Students need connection to all three aspects for success; when one aspect is lacking students are not equipped with all the necessary tools to be successful.
‘Beginning with the end in mind’ (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005 p.18), my personal Credo depicts the vision I have for all learners in my courses. When students graduate they should:

…have the ability to be competent problem solvers, inquisitive thinkers and life-long learners when supported in a learning community that reflects connection, engagement and choice. They are guided to use various learning tools and strategies to develop purpose and drive; and discover passion through exploration. Transferable skills are refined through self-assessment and reflection. They are equipped to take on challenges, persevere and overcome (Borsoff, 2018).

It is important to pursue these goals in an established blended program as many adult learners fall short in connecting their education beyond the courses they complete in isolation. Students
need to develop and apply the skills to a greater context. When supported in opportunity to learn and use Web 2.0 tools to meet their graduation requirements, students can also optimize these skills further while pursuing opportunities post-graduation (Afip, 2014; Hashim et al, 2015; Lloyd-Smith, 2010). When skills are relevant, students are motivated to continue with program requirements as they are engaged knowing what they learn has a versatile and practical application.

In a complete context, I have yet to find a specific study that examines the impact of community and support in a blended program for adult learners reconnecting with secondary school curriculum. Community in online classes is crucial for follow through and overall satisfaction on completion of a program. Students need to be overtly told and reminded that the teacher’s job is to provide opportunities for connection and to support learning through cognitive, social and teacher presences (Community of Inquiry, n.d.; Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000). As noted by Wehler (2018), “building community in the online environment increases the likelihood of student success” (para. 2). Community can be supported by teacher availability; communication plans; encouraging interactions between learners; creating support spaces outside of courses; and making useful resources available (Wehler, 2018).

This Major Project was justified by combining effective strategies for engagement and motivation presented as something new—a web-based resource site that supports adult learners in reaching BC secondary school (Dogwood) graduation requirements through online courses and blended interactions.

**Critical Challenge Question Addressed**

By introducing a blended delivery program, support through face-to-face and online interactions helps adult learners stay organized; connect to the teacher and to each other; and
ultimately achieve academic success. This project addresses the Critical Challenge Question (CCQ): ‘How can educators support adult learners’ success in a blended learning delivery model by implementing a Community of Inquiry framework?’

The connection between my Credo and CCQ was critical for the context of why my project was important. Students needed community to be supported in learning various tools; it made their educational endeavors more relevant and engaging.

The Critical Challenge Question was answered through research in the following areas in the literature review as presented in Chapter 2.

- Unique Characteristics of Adult Learners
- Effective Online Learning Designs
  - Strategies for motivation and engagement
  - Uses and Gratification Theory
  - ARCS model
  - Digital Divide and Cultural Lag
  - Transactional Distance
- Community of Inquiry
  - Social Presence
  - Cognitive Presence
  - Teacher Presence
- Blended Learning
  - Disruptive Innovation
  - Models: Enriched Virtual/A La Carte
  - Promotion of Culture and Sustainable Change
Project Overview

Students need to know they are connected and belong to a learning community. With this project I wanted to investigate how to best establish a blended delivery program that increases engagement and motivation of learners who are working towards the ultimate goal of high school graduation in order to be prepared for careers, society and life with 21st Century skills. I also wanted to create and provide resources and strategies for both teachers and students that help develop social presence in a blended environment to assist in achievement and course engagement. This also increased teacher presence and cognitive presence and resulted in meeting the goals outlined in my Credo.

As I moved forward with this project I used the Sea to Sky (#48) School District’s Pathways to Learning (2013) initiative to frame my research. The document helped by providing a context based on the following questions, which also provided a navigational structure for my website:

- Where do we as a school go in terms of goals when using Pathways to Learning (SD48) as our framework?
- What are we doing in our classrooms/schools to create a learning community?
- What do we need in order to create a culture of community and learning?
- We need to create something that is—safe, purposeful, powerful
- How can we improve the experience and success of non-graduated learners?

Although the context was drawn from my own environment, the findings can be extended to support learners in the broader educational community.

My research supported reasons, and provided rationale, for why there should be a shift from exclusively self-directed online delivery for non-graduated adults to an environment that is
reinforced through a blended approach where students have the option to connect with facilitators both online as well as face-to-face. The reason for this pedagogical change was intended to support learners who had become disengaged, for a variety of reasons, and had become ‘non-consumers’ in the education system. Because of this, they needed equal representation of cognitive, social and teaching presence to make connections, increase engagement and ultimately be successful. A more dynamic adult program needed to be designed and implemented— it supported a shift that changed adult students’ attitudes towards education and learning.

**Key Deliverables**

In the form of a website, both educators and adult students are provided with tools for implementing blended delivery and supporting learners in meeting high school graduation requirements. This project deliverable presents resources for teachers to create a virtual homeroom—as a landing place for adult students to connect with their teacher and track progress in their courses, as well as other information pertaining to high school graduation. To frame what was needed to be included in the website, the following questions were helpful in providing the background and context: *Who* is the learner specifically? *What* kind of community needs to be built? *When* will the implementation take affect? *Where* will this community be located? *Why* is this important? *How* will it take shape? It includes other resources to promote the social, cognitive and teacher presences in the learning community, both online and in a blended environment. This website also outlined resources that will assist students with navigating online courses via screen casts and specific community building resources.

As I looked into shifting the fully online adult program into a blended opportunity, I needed to keep in mind the importance of building culture to help lessen the transactional
distance between the learner and the teacher (Gunardena and McIsaac, 2004). Adult students (non-grads) “still need to be managed as a cohesive group of learners” (Wolpert-Gawron, 2017, para. 2). Knowing that effective classrooms build community and create an engaging environment reinforced my commitment to connection and engagement. Classrooms that are organized and have routines help students be at ease (Wolpert-Gawron, 2017).

My website proved to be an important resource for adult students and educators alike. It is a place to be present, give helpful tools and assist with skills beyond courses. Wolpert-Gawron (2017) suggests that teachers should be provided with opportunities to learn about each participant, not just what they submit for an assignment and this website resource endorses that contention.

Definition of Terms

Included below are common terms that were referred to in the project and subsequent chapters of this paper. The table serves as an overview for terms that are not defined in greater depth elsewhere.

Table 1

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tr>
<td>A La Carte</td>
<td>A model of blended learning where the course in available online and the teacher of record is at a distance.</td>
<td><a href="https://www.christenseninstitute.org/blended-learning-definitions-and-models/">https://www.christenseninstitute.org/blended-learning-definitions-and-models/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult learner</td>
<td>Sometimes referred to as a mature student, or returning student who is pursuing educational goals.</td>
<td><a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adult_learner">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adult_learner</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Reference</td>
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<td><strong>Asynchronous</strong></td>
<td>Learning that takes place at anytime. Students access material at own pace; have the ability to speed up or slow down learning process.</td>
<td><a href="https://www.edglossary.org/asynchronous-learning/">https://www.edglossary.org/asynchronous-learning/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bricks and Mortar</strong></td>
<td>Term used for a physical location ex: a traditional high school.</td>
<td><a href="https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/brick-and-mortar">https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/brick-and-mortar</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blended Learning</strong></td>
<td>A type of course delivery made up of online and face-to-face interactions with flexibility of access.</td>
<td><a href="https://www.blendedlearning.org/what-blended-learning-is-and-isnt/">https://www.blendedlearning.org/what-blended-learning-is-and-isnt/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community of Inquiry</strong></td>
<td>An educational framework consisting of social, cognitive and teacher presences to support the learning experience as a whole.</td>
<td><a href="https://coi.athabascau.ca/coi-model/">https://coi.athabascau.ca/coi-model/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture</strong></td>
<td>Building community and interactions between learners to make connection and encourage cooperation.</td>
<td><a href="https://www.education.com/reference/article/impact-culture-education/">https://www.education.com/reference/article/impact-culture-education/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disruptive Innovation</strong></td>
<td>Paradigm shift to replace the existing structure, it improves the student experience with a new approach</td>
<td><a href="https://www.christenseninstitute.org/publications/hybrids/">https://www.christenseninstitute.org/publications/hybrids/</a></td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Dogwood Diploma</strong></td>
<td>British Columbia high school graduation certificate. Adults who obtain high school credentials are awarded an Adult Dogwood diploma; which is comprised 20 secondary credits.</td>
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<td><strong>Enriched Virtual</strong></td>
<td>A model of blended learning where students meet the teacher of record in face-to-face scheduled learning sessions and then can work at a distance the rest of the time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Management System (LMS)</strong></td>
<td>An online learning platform that houses courses, learning content and student records. An effective tool to manage online learning.</td>
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<td><strong>Non-Consumers</strong></td>
<td>Disengaged students in the education system who are in need of a new approach to learning to meet graduation requirements.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Uses and Gratification Theory</strong></td>
<td>(UGT) A theory that promotes engagement and motivation in learners by taking into account a person’s various needs.</td>
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Summary

Adult learners who have not graduated have special characteristics, and thus, must have an educational program that caters to their unique needs. As these students commit to re-engage with the education system, to meet secondary school requirements, it is evident that ongoing support is required to oversee the adult learner and to encourage regular progress for course completion. The challenge was to design a manageable program for the already-busy adult. A blended delivery strategy can provide a context in which Web 2.0 tools are incorporated and 21st Century skills are developed. Because adults might be disconnected with learning for a sustained amount of time, it was important to offer resources to develop the soft skills required in order for them to feel confident in their abilities to complete online courses. Non-graduated adults may not have the technological skills needed to work independently and as such, their skill level becomes a barrier. With teacher support through a blended delivery, adult learners can find flexibility and personalization in learning to create a realistic schedule for a timely completion. The connections made between social, cognitive and teacher presences provided a context for students to feel part of something bigger. “The power of culture is that members of an organization reach a shared paradigm about how to work together to be successful” (Horn & Staker, 2015, p. 251) and create community within learning.

By providing a web-based resource for adult learners and fellow educators alike, I was able to create something new for sustained change in the hopes to promote engagement and increase motivation in learning. Having the ability to support students in a blended program reflected that online learning is not an isolated environment, and in fact, with the right tools and program design, can be dynamic, collaborative and rewarding. The specifics for the project design were informed by the literature review as depicted in the following chapter.
Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Introduction

Online learning is rapidly gaining popularity for delivery of the redesigned BC secondary school curriculum. The option to take courses in a virtual environment allows for flexibility of pacing and content choice, where students access content online through interactive technology (Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004; Horn & Staker, 2015). Many BC school districts, such as Sea to Sky (#48), offered an online-only program for non-graduated adults to meet their high school graduation requirements. The rationale behind this shift to an online-only program supported lower overhead costs and a more open timeline; however, the question still remains how to best support these students who might not be comfortable or familiar with using Web 2.0 technologies in an educational context? A combination of online and face-to-face instruction, a blended delivery, can optimize learning opportunities and experiences for students.

Current research addresses the Critical Challenge Question: How can educators support adult learners’ success in a blended learning delivery model by implementing a Community of Inquiry framework?

Research shows that motivation and engagement for adult learners can be increased by applying deliberate strategies for online learning and by building culture created through a blended program. These interventions can address many of the perceived difficulties in online learning such as the digital divide; where limited access to technological resources extends beyond connectivity as it also reflects on socio-economic backgrounds, where the issue is more about use than access (Hengstler, 2016; Hengstler 2017). Students may also have difficulties with transactional distance, and the level of interaction between learner and teacher that affects the rate of engagement with learning (Anderson, 2008; Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004; Moore,
1997). Such interventions can build the adult learner’s confidence and assist with follow-through to graduation and their Dogwood certificate.

Students who have been non-consumers - a term that can be defined as individuals who are not attending school nor actively pursuing education (Horn & Staker, 2015), often have a difficult time returning to their educational goals. A recurring theme in the research is that effective strategies can be implemented to support adult learners learning online through teacher initiatives, whether in online communications or in face-to-face interactions. However, gaps have been found in the ability to define what drives adult learners’ motivation (or lack thereof) to reconnect with their education - it is not clear whether it is a lack of familiarity with technological tools; engagement with materials, peers and teachers; time commitment, or a combination of all factors which lead to whether or not a student will be successful in completing high school graduation requirements.

This chapter will outline research findings that connect to the themes of the CCQ. It is expected that the literature will confirm that adult learners need to be motivated intrinsically, and extrinsically, and supported by effective online learning designs through a blended program. Research shows that culture can be created within a Community of Inquiry framework (CoI), (Anderson, 2008; Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000; Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004) to provide opportunity for students to reconnect in education and promote sustained learning. A dynamic adult program needed to be designed and implemented to create a shift, to change students’ attitude towards education and learning. This initiative can be accomplished through disruptive innovation, a paradigm shift to replace the existing online-online structure with something new (Horn & Staker, 2015). This new structure, a blended program delivery, helped support sustained change for adult learners to follow through to graduation. In order to meet the
specific learning needs for the adult, their unique attributes were considered when designing an effective program.

**Attributes of an Adult Learner**

According to the province of British Columbia, adult students who are pursuing high school courses in order to achieve high school graduation are referred to as “non-graduated adults” (Adult Graduation Program, 2018, para. 6). Adult learners have varying needs that differ from those of high-school learners. As such, they require different tactics and scaffolds to encourage sustained learning. “Adult learners can be characterized as self-directed, highly motivated and know what they want to achieve from their education program” (Hashim, Tan & Rashid, 2015, p. 383). This is a well-intended goal but not often achieved without careful program design and guidance.

The attributes of adult learners differ from those of school-aged learners and therefore require their own classification. Malcolm Knowles developed the study of "andragogy"-- (as cited in Afip, 2014; Pappas, 2013) the practice of teaching adult learners. Knowles identified the adult learner through five unique characteristics: self-concept; experience; readiness to learn; perspective of learning and motivation to learn (as cited in Afip, 2014; Pappas, 2013). As adults see a need, and have a desire, to re-engage with the school system, it is important to recognize these factors when designing an effective adult graduation program.

Oftentimes, non-graduated adults consider obtaining their high school requirements but this endeavor is not always well thought through. Although they have the best intentions, the execution of the plan is not factored into their already busy lives. As noted by Afip (2014), “adults constantly live in an accelerated and multi-tasking mode and thus, prefer learning
programs that cater to their hectic lifestyle” (p.37). Hence, the adult favours flexible schedules and learning modes that can be tailored to their preferences and needs. Adults need programs that are accommodating and accessible and can clearly direct students to pursue goals to increase their motivation for completion.

However, it is noted by Hashim, Tan and Rashid (2015), that “lack of attention has been given on adult learners as they are said to have difficulties adopting online learning” (p. 382) because focus is on the regular secondary student. Although adults might be “highly motivated” (Hashim et al, 2015, p. 383), the online platform is often a new instrument to learn and to navigate and without specific support catered to their needs they are more likely to become disengaged and disinterested in finishing high school requirements. Intentional designs and strategies need to be implemented for the specific context, and unique challenges of online learning, to increase confidence and to promote engagement and motivation in the adult learner.

**Effective Online Learning Designs for the Adult Learner**

**Definition.** In order to create learning opportunities that are engaging and motivating to the adult learner, we need to first have a working definition of online learning. As stated by Ally (2005), online learning is “the use of the Internet to access learning materials; to interact with the content, instructor, and other learners; to obtain support during the learning process, in order to acquire knowledge, to construct personal meaning, and to grow from the learning experience” (p. 7). Online learning cannot be merely paper resources transferred to a digital environment but [must be] designed to be something new (Anderson, 2008; Bates, 2015; Staker & Horn, 2015). Educational experiences delivered through technology need to apply specific design methods to create a new learner experience. The environment and program needs to provide context to help motivate and engage the learner. Effective online learning designs also connect pedagogy to
technology. Beginning with the end in mind, (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) an educator’s credo, (as shared in Ch. 1), can direct and guide the overall learning goals for all students; and also determine what skills we want students to apply; and knowledge we want them to gain upon school completion.

As learning environments shift from delivering traditional, mainly paper-based materials to more digital formats, it important to recognize that:

…rapid advancement of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is changing the landscape of how learning is delivered to students. Education providers are using ICT as an alternative media to conventional face-to-face interaction between professor and students within a classroom setting (Hashim, Tan & Rashid, 2015, p. 383).

This can pose a problem when adult learners are unfamiliar with digital learning environments, as they lack the digital literacy needed simply to access the learning material (Afip, 2014). As noted by Lloyd-Smith (2010), as many as 50% of adult learners have underdeveloped tech skills and experience computer-related phobia. Afip (2014) suggests that in order for non-graduated, non-consuming adults to succeed in this new landscape:

…appropriate instructional methods, as well as meaningful curriculum, are the important elements in order to establish an effective learning environment... after the educator developed the curriculum, the educator must also consider on the instructional activities that cater to the needs of the learners (p.36).

Instructional methods for the online environment need to be clearly articulated so that learning intentions are clear for the student. Learning opportunities also need to provide multiple avenues for students to meet outcomes in a variety of ways.
Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Effective online learning designs take into account both intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation. The desire to continue educational endeavours is connected in the student’s original intent to pursue graduation, illustrating that they are intrinsically motivated to reach this goal. Student confidence in online learning hinges (or results from) their familiarity using the Web 2.0 tools required for program success. When students are given training and ‘how to’ information to master the basic skills required to navigate online learning platforms prior to the start of their courses, then their motivation is increased. The teacher extrinsically affirms students’ motivation by providing clear, well-planning learning opportunities to establish success (Afip, 2014; Anderson, 2008; Bates, 2015; Hashim, Tan & Rashid, 2015). Students are then intrinsically motivated to continue with course progression because the learning expectations and pathway to success has been outlined in a cycle of support through both intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

Strategies for motivation and engagement. Students need to know that their initial reasons for returning to school are supported by the teacher and through the program they enroll in. To increase motivation and engagement, learning activities need to be relevant and the Learning Management Systems (LMS, as defined in Ch. 1) that host these activities need to be easy to navigate. Research argues that students need to be encouraged and motivated to continue to learn (Afip, 2014; Anderson, 2008). Once intrinsically motivated, the motivation needs to be sustained for follow-through that happens when adult learners see a purpose, and know there is a benefit, to using a specific technology. To encourage adult learners, and to increase engagement, Hashim, Tan and Rashid (2015) contend that effective online learning needs to capture the “ability of the medium to allow … personal fulfillment and a pleasant experience when using the medium” (p. 388). For adults, and all learners, learning also needs to connect to life experience
and prior knowledge for authentic application and relevance (Afip, 2014; Anderson, 2008; Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2014). When students can see the connection between what they are doing in the classroom and their personal experience, they consider completion of high school credentials to be important to furthering their life and career goals.

**Uses and gratification theory.** Hashim, Tan and Rashid (2015) discuss the motivational Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT, as defined in Ch. 1) where students’ motivation can be classified into three categories: “(1) cognitive need, (2) social need and (3) affective need”, (p. 384). “Students are more likely to have positive attitude toward adopting a medium if it (the medium) is able to provide them with a wide range of information and also ensure the quality and accuracy of the information” (p. 385). Learners need motivation to use a tool or learning platform. Although familiarity with technology is important, it is the social aspects and motivations for learning that should be the focus when designing online learning opportunities. The teacher’s responsibility “is the design of the educational experience … [and] facilitation is a responsibility that may be shared among the teacher and some or all of the other participants or students” (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000, p. 90). As noted by Hashim et al, (2015) motivation and engagement increases when students actively participate and take partial responsibility in their learning. With adults, communication should be a two-way relationship, as this educational experience is their initiative. The intent of instructional design uses technology to provide opportunities for quality learning outcomes (Afip, 2014).

The ARCS model could be effectively applied specifically to online activities and communications to help meet the needs of adult learners and can also support the navigation of technology by connecting relevant application of the tool with future knowledge.

**Digital divide and cultural lag.** By designing learning experiences for non-graduated adults that encourage engagement, and include social and communicative aspects of learning, motivation is increased; therefore, resistance to eLearning is decreased (Calvin & Freeburg, 2018; Lloyd-Smith, 2010). As these adult learners reconnect with the school system, they are most likely learning in a new way and may have limited access to Internet based learning resources and tools, creating a digital divide, as noted by Hengstler, (2016). Additionally, adults may lack the knowledge of how to use the technology in a specific learning context, thus experiencing ‘cultural lag’ and a knowledge gap, which makes the organization of learning a task in itself, as they try to catch-up with technological advancements. Although lack of access is problematic in the digital divide, the issue now encompasses bandwidth and skills to use tech tools (Hengstler, 2016). Gunawardena and McIsaac (2004), argue “learners who do not have the basic skills required to use the interface of a communication medium spend inordinate amounts of time learning to interact with the technology in order to be able to communicate with others or learn the lesson” (p. 362). When the learning curve for building a technological skill set is steep, students find the learning daunting and might not proceed to actual interaction with the curriculum needed for graduation. The acquisition of skills is broken down into manageable steps to keep motivation levels high.

Although the fastest growing demographic for web-based learning is adults, the drop-out rate for these learners remains very high (Calvin & Freeburg, 2010). Their study (2010) reported mixed findings about varying level of skill and confidence towards course completion and
success rates. Students had varying perceptions of learning, and experiences with learning, that lead to varying experiences with technology. This study provided an alternative perspective, in that, no solid findings were found correlating technology use and skill to confidence itself but rather in the delivery, schedule and accessibility to teachers and helping resources that caused varying obstacles for course completion. “In order to better assist online learners, instructional designers and instructors should re-evaluate the directions provided for assignments and the frequency and type of guidance being provided to online learners” (p. 70). Teachers should provide training so that students may navigate the online platform more effectively and support learners who are new to learning online. These students need to be explicitly taught how to use the learning platform so that they can dedicate time to the learning activities themselves.

**Transactional distance.** The theory of Transactional Distance states that as the level of interaction between teacher and learner decreases, learner autonomy must increase (Moore, 1997). It is also noted by Gunawardena and McIsaac (2004), that “distance is determined by the amount of dialogue which occurs between the learner and the instructor, and the amount of structure which exists in the design of the course” (p. 361). Distance is not necessarily determined by geography but rather by the time between dialog and interactions of the learner and teacher. When students are supported in timely communication with teachers they subsequently will be more familiar with the technological tools needs to support their eLearning endeavours. The more communication is present, the less transactional distance there is between the learner and the instructor (Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004; Moore, 1997) and the more confidence the learner will have in their abilities when a teacher provides guidance and support (Afip, 2014; Anderson, 2008; Moore, 1997). Effective programs have sustained communication that supports social interactions and cognitive skills overseen by the teacher as a facilitator.
Community of Inquiry

The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Community of Inquiry, n.d.; Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000) is an effective instructional model in which to support the learner as a whole--connected by distinct three presences: social presence, cognitive presence and teacher presence. These presences connect together for a well-rounded [learning] experience (Afip, 2014; Garrison et al, 2000). As referenced in my credo from Chapter 1, the CoI framework supports the presences to create a holistic learning approach for the student. The student does not merely learn curriculum but connects it to build relationships and a support network for lifelong learning (Borsoff, 2018). For non-graduated adults who often feel disconnected to learning, CoI illustrates that “the concept of interaction is fundamental to the effectiveness of distance education programs” (Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004, p. 362). CoI is used to build a person as a learner by meeting individual needs and encouraging meaningful learning, and interaction within a community of these three elements (Akyol and Garrison, 2011; Anderson 2008; Garrison et al, 2000; Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004). It is important that “adult learners should be able to interact with the course materials, discuss and collaborate between instructor and other students, and integrate their past experience with the course content or assignment” (Hashim, Tan & Rashid, 2015, p. 384). All elements help to build rapport in education that is particularly important in maintaining motivation and engagement and to building relationships.

Building relationships. Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares (2012) support the importance of building rapport with learners. In distance education it is especially important that students know that teachers support them in their education re-connection. Rapport is linked with “enhanced learning, attention, motivation, attendance and involvement for students” (p. 168). It is also true for teachers that increased rapport leads to more rewarding teaching experiences.
(Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2012; Horn & Staker, 2015). Rapport supports dialogue, which is a crucial element in connection of teacher and student and decreases transactional distance (Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004; Moore, 1997).

The CoI framework connects the interactions of the student with both the curriculum and the teacher to increase engagement and to promote sustained motivation to learn. The importance of relationship and interaction is built upon established rapport. Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares (2012) recognize that specific rapport indicators help to develop a positive and meaningful relationship between learner and teacher that also supports pedagogical ideals that model strategies for lifelong learning. Students need to know they are not learning in isolation, but rather through a community, in which social support is critical to the follow-through of course completion.

**Social presence.** When students are supported through social connection it reflects that “Attitude... is influenced positively by the students’ cognitive, affective and social needs” (Hashim, Tan & Rashid, 2015, p. 384) and promotes success. Non-graduated adults expect the traditional interactions of the face-to-face classroom so it is important to uphold this familiarity and discourse between learners and teacher. Social presence is the key factor that makes the difference between a “collaborative community of inquiry and a simple process of downloading information” (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000, p. 96). Students are given opportunity for interactions in a group that promote motivation and collaboration in learning process (Garrison, 2007; Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004; Hashim et al, 2015) which results in a person feeling “socially present” (Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004, p. 363) and are more likely to stay in the [educational] program (Garrison et al, 2000). It is important that social presence is developed, even when it proves challenging, when conducted in less conventional ways where students do
not feel completely at ease with the technology that supports collaboration (Lloyd-Smith, 2010). Purposeful communication gives recognition and encouragement and promotes collaboration for group cohesion (Akyol, Garrison & Ozden, 2009).

It is noted by several sources, (Akyol, Garrison & Ozden, 2009; Calvin & Freeburg, 2010; Hashim, Tan & Rashid, 2015; Horn & Staker, 2015; Garrison, 2007) that social presence can be limited in an online exclusive environment and is better supported by a blended community where adults have the ability to connect and interact with a teacher face-to-face when needed.

**Cognitive presence.** Although cognitive presence is created through deep and meaningful approaches to learning (Akyol & Garrison, 2011) and increases engagement and participation; it is difficult to separate cognitive experience from social experience as they work in tandem to provide overarching support for the learner. “Collaboration is seen as an essential aspect of cognitive development since cognition cannot be separated from the social context” (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000, p. 92). Once a student extends their intent to reconnect with learning the cognitive presence builds student confidence in gaining new skills and knowledge. As the adult learner is in an environment where they might not be completely comfortable they need to be reassured that how, and what they are learning, is worthwhile; currently and in the future. Learner preparation (review of study skills) can give students the background for success in courses when they can participate in pre-learning activities (Ally, 2005; Anderson, 2008) to increase digital literacy. It is also important to connect pre-existing skills to assist in learning new ones. Adults are “usually aided by their life experience, and their reflections and actions are integral components of the adult learning process” (Hashim, Tan & Rashid, 2015, p. 384).
Assessment of prior knowledge needs to be acknowledged when working with adult learners. Their experience, whether positive or negative, will shape their learning experiences.

A wide variety of learning activities can connect soft skills like time-management, tech application and communication skills to the learning experience as a whole (Bates, 2008; Schultz, 2014). Soft skills are just as important as hard skills learned through the curriculum and, it can be argued, they may be even more vital for the connection of learning and cognitive skills. As adults need to see relevance in learning (Afip, 2014; Anderson 2008; Hashim, Tan & Rashid, 2015), soft skills should be integrated into learning activities for students to apply existing skills and see potential for learning new ones. By implementing these skills, teachers take into account the importance of reshaping learning habits of adult learners for better success and to construct and confirm meaning in educational activities (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000).

**Teaching presence.** When teachers create opportunities that connect students’ prior experiences and abilities, they support cognitive and social needs to provide the connection adult learners often lack when deciding to come back to school (Anderson, 2008; Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000). The teacher's active participation in “continual tutor presence, characterized by short messages acknowledging a student's contribution and followed by guidance, increases student activity” links all presences together. (Garrison et al, 2000, p. 96). Teacher presence is crucial for guiding and facilitating students' interactions with curricula and with each other. Motivation and engagement are supported by the teacher's ability to check in with students on an ongoing basis.

Social presence reflects “the development of climate and interpersonal relationships in the community. Cognitive presence provides a description of the progressive phases of practical inquiry leading to resolution of a problem or dilemma. Teaching presence provides leadership
throughout the course of study” (Akyol & Garrison, 2011, p. 235). Despite findings by Akyol and Garrison (2011) that some students have no need or desire to create a network, others argue that “‘if one of those presences is missing, you do not get the same degree of inquiry’” (p. 244), which reflects that different approaches are needed for differing needs of adult learners.

Moore (1997) also suggests that the structure of the program contributes to the level of interactions and dialogue where the teacher facilitates the social and cognitive components. Teachers have control over a program’s effectiveness. The presentation of the program supports the learner’s motivation; stimulates analysis; gives advice; arranges practice, application and evaluation and also gives opportunity for student creation of their own knowledge. Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) also reconfirm Moore’s structures—it can be noted that the teacher presence is directly responsible for integration of social and cognitive presences in distance education.

**Blended Learning Environments**

CoI is a framework that can provide organization and guidance for online and blended learning environments (Akyol & Garrison, 2011; Akyol, Garrison & Ozden, 2009; Garrison, 2007). When students have the opportunity for both online and face-to-face interactions, such as in a blended delivery program, studies show that there are higher perceptions of learning, satisfaction, cognitive presence, teaching presence and social presence (Akyol & Garrison, 2011; Akyol, Garrison and Ozden, 2009; Garrison, 2007). When learning communities are built, it helps to enhance student autonomy in participation and equips them with applicable skills for life-long learning (Borsoff, 2018). Students need the opportunities in both the flexibility of online learning as well as having the option to connect with a teacher face-to-face for support when needed.
Since there is a challenge, especially when educators are trying to assess the content required for graduation, rather than the work habits or social skills, to develop community in an asynchronous and text-based virtual environment (Akyol & Garrison, 2011; Bates, 2015; Murphy & Rodríguez-Manzanares, 2012), “it is imperative that adult learners have access to the support necessary to successfully engage in the online portion of blended course delivery” (Lloyd-Smith, 2010, n.p). It can be a challenge for non-graduated adults with limited computer proficiencies to overcome anxiety and self-doubt (Lloyd-Smith, 2010) when attempting online courses without the option of face-to-face support.

Another advantage of blended programs allows for collapse of time and space and control of place and pace (Anderson, 2008; Horn & Staker, 2015) giving flexibility to learners. Learners “can improve their information, communication and technology skills by using a blended learning mode, because they can interact with friends and facilitators at any time and the course [is] flexible in term of learning location, time and process” (Afip, 2014, p. 38). “Returning adult students are sometimes surprised at the time commitment involved when one returns to school” (Lloyd-Smith, 2010, n.p). By seeing a teacher face-to-face students can learn how to best manage their time in web-based courses (Calvin & Freeburg, 2010).

Students can choose to engage in learning both in the online environment and face-to-face as needed, which is important as many non-graduated adults may not have positive experiences with school so it is imperative to build relationships for support and is critical for retention and success (Lloyd-Smith, 2010). Blended programs allow for flexibility that is beneficial for tailoring courses for varying needs of students (Afip 2014; Anderson, 2008; Horn & Staker, 2015) and can support various formats of materials to maximize student engagement (Lloyd-Smith, 2010). Blended delivery is suggested to encourage non-graduated adults to pursue
their education when they may have been let down previously by the traditional educational structure.

**Disruptive innovation.** Change for adult educational programs needs to come about, creating something new to change the existing structure (Afip, 2014; Arnett, 2014). A paradigm shift is needed for “developing new attitudes and behaviours in which it requires peer-to-peer interaction and a risk-free environment” (Afip, 2014, p. 38) and can be tailored to individual in an alternative environment to the traditional system (Afip, 2014; Horn & Staker, 2015). Disengaged students, non-consumers, need to feel encouraged and reassured in a safe and supportive environment. Teacher and social presence is heightened in a blended environment where students can find a new direction and sense of belonging where they can contribute to the direction of their learning (Akoyl, Garrison and Ozden, 2009).

Because an exclusive online environment can be isolating and disengaging for non-consuming students, a blended environment to support non-graduated students is supportive of sustained change. Through disruptive innovation we can create a program to support non-consuming students over time. An online-only program loses opportunity to include all students (Christensen, Raynor & McDonald, 2016) due to the fact that adult learners in particular might lack the resources to fully engage with learning. A blended program can lessen the digital divide and shrink the cultural lag by providing one on one assistance and access to technology (Hengstler, 2016; Hengstler, 2017).

Another positive attribute of a blended delivery is that learning can be more personalized. The traditional factory-based, industrialized model of schooling does not differentiate well. A blended program creates something new by allowing for customization and personal fit for differing student needs (Anderson 2008; Bates 2015; Horn & Staker, 2015). As an adult grad
program can meaningfully assess prior knowledge (Adult Graduation Program, 2018; Hashim, Tan & Rashid, 2015), personalization is crucial for sustained engagement and course completion.

**Blended Delivery Models**

Personalization can be delivered to students through a variety of models. To support non-graduated adults, voice and choice is important to reengage in the educational system (Horn & Staker, 2015). As adults have established schedules and other commitments (Hashim, Tan & Rashid, 2015; Lloyd-Smith, 2010) flexibility is key for course completion (Horn & Staker, 2015). Courses can be still delivered online in an asynchronous environment but can be supported by a blended approach, which accommodates synchronous check-ins and offers guidance when needed. Disruptive models of blended learning can provide non-consuming adults something new that will allow them to reconnect with the school system (Horn & Staker, 2015). When traditional approaches no longer work, the engagement is gone and therefore a new vision is needed moving forward to support student success.

To best serve adult learners, are several blended learning models that work best to effectively deliver the hard skills of course content and also to support the soft skills needed in order to complete the coursework. The “a la carte model [and] enriched virtual model” (Horn & Staker, 2015) are two suggested models that support disruptive innovation, and are needed to transform traditional ways of learning, providing new opportunities for non-consuming students. A successful graduation program for adult learners integrates disruptive models to allows for own-paced learning and for tutorials and courses to be available anywhere [and at anytime] (Afip, 2014; Anderson, 2008; Arnett, 2014; Bates 2015; Horn & Staker, 2105; Lloyd-Smith, 2010).
A La Carte model. This model supports learning where students take a course where the teacher of record (the course teacher) is not physically present (Horn & Staker, 2015). The student is supported through technology for communication and discourse. Stronger students may opt for this model as they may only need limited face-to-face support to work autonomously.

Enriched virtual model. In this model a physical space is provided that compliments the learning being completed online (Horn & Staker, 2015, White, 2016). Here, students can get face-to-face help with course content or help with the specific technology needed to complete assignments. In an enriched virtual environment accommodations can be made for personalization and access (Arnett, 2014; Horn & Staker, 2015; Lloyd-Smith, 2010) and there is an expectation to attend on some pre-determined schedule (Horn & Staker, 2015; White, 2016).

Since traditionally-delivered education has suffered from lacking resources, especially to support adult learners, a blended approach can provide opportunity for personalization and access as well as keeping costs lower (Arnett, 2014; Horn & Staker, 2015; Lloyd-Smith, 2010). Blended learning models also allow for more student control, something which is key for adult-learners who are incorporating their educational goals into their already busy lives (Afip, 2014; Calvin & Freeburg, 2010; Hashim, Tan & Rashid, 2015; Lloyd-Smith, 2010).

Promotion of Culture

As noted by several sources, interaction to promote engagement and motivation is supported in a community and establishes culture (Afip, 2014; Anderson, 2008; Bates, 2015; Hashim, Tan & Rashid, 2015; Horn & Staker, 2015). Creating a positive learning environment is essential to the success of a blended learning program. Cultural norms need to be established for a positive culture where students will be more motivated to attend school and learn (Horn &
Staker, 2015). Culture can promote personalized learning goals, social experiences and open communication with the teacher. As argued by Schein (as cited by Horn & Staker, 2015):

…culture is a way of working together toward common goals that have been followed so frequently and so successfully that people don't even think about trying to do things another way. If a culture has formed, people will autonomously do what they need to do to be successful (p. 250).

Culture is formed through repetition and is better promoted in a blended environment rather than one delivered exclusively online. Blended learning offers learners and teachers the opportunity to create culture to potentially increase the effectiveness of the teaching and learning [experience] (Lloyd-Smith, 2010).

**Conclusions**

Adults, more so than school-aged students, need to be reassured that their re-commitment to the educational system will be safe and inclusive. Teachers take special care to provide a welcoming, non-threatening environment and provide effective strategies for the promotion of culture. As supported by the literature, “increased interaction results in a more inclusive environment, leading all students to experience a richer and more diverse learning experience” (Lloyd-Smith, 2010, n.p). As argued, a blended program is best of both worlds.

A program tailored to the specific needs of students can be formed through a blended delivery to help increase accessibility for support, reducing cultural lag and anxiety concerning an adult learner's return to school. Relationships can be built to increase course interaction with effective strategies to navigate online learning and support social, cognitive and teacher presences in a Community of Inquiry framework. Building a successful culture of learning can encourage pedagogical effectiveness and student success.
The reviewed literature indeed suggests that adult students need the support of a blended program to sustain their motivation and engagement for follow-through of their high school graduation requirements. Non-graduated adults need specific resources and time frames in which to structure their schedules for follow-through. As adults who have been disconnected from the education system for a prolonged period of time, their technological skills need to be supported through soft skill development, which can be transferred beyond graduation requirements. As argued by Calvin and Freeburg (2010), although as important as these skills are, the evidence does not fully support that increased levels of computer proficiency directly effect students’ success for graduation. To ensure success for all learners an effective adult program must have clear intentions, resources and processes to support all levels of students (Afip, 2014; Anderson, 2008; Bates, 2015; Hashim, Tan & Rashid, 2015).

The need to provide resources for both teachers working with non-graduated adults, and non-graduated adults themselves, as strategies for connection and support is crucial for engagement, follow-through and student success. Students need to understand the learning environment in which they are expected to interact before they understand the context of the curriculum. Designing a virtual space to serve as a ‘landing spot’ for help and resources will engage learners through social, cognitive and teacher presence and increase motivation to meet their high school graduation goals.

The findings of this comprehensive review will be applied as strategies to the design and development of this virtual space as the key deliverable for the MEdL Major Project as presented in Chapter 3 of this Process Paper.
Chapter 3 – Procedures and Methods

Major Project Considerations

While designing this project, my current assignment with Sea to Sky Online School in School District Sea to Sky (#48) included being the grad plan coordinator for non-graduated adults. Students from anywhere in the Sea to Sky Corridor and other regions in British Columbia were able to sign up for courses with us to fulfill graduation requirements. But because these courses were offered via an asynchronous online delivery, connection and engagement were challenging to sustain, due to limited basic digital communication. These students were not supported in the same way that school-aged students taking online courses were— with face-to-face support— and suggested start and stop dates, and thus follow completion rates were low.

Research suggests that non-consumers of the education system — non-graduated adults in this instance— in fact require more support and guidance than the regular high school student (Horn & Staker, 2015). This is due to the fact that they already had difficulties with educational pursuits in the past, which resulted in non-completion. When adults make the decision to reconnect with the school system to graduate their excitement and anticipation should be matched with a program that will sustain their enthusiasm. The existing program in the Sea to Sky School district (#48), at the time of this project design, was largely independent learning that was generally unsupported; it left students feeling overwhelmed and isolated.

Important considerations for the project design included the goal of increasing direct teacher contact as an ongoing support for course completion. It is documented that increased interactions build relationships and provide greater motivation and engagement in which to learn (Anderson, 2008; Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000; Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004). Adult students can feel unsure of their ability to complete coursework. This insecurity can also be
compounded by lack of digital skills in which to navigate online coursework (Afip, 2014; Hashim, Tan & Rashid, 2015; Lloyd-Smith, 2010).

The original grad plan program needed a redesign to improve the faceless email correspondence that minimally supported non-graduated adults. It was not enough to keep them motivated to follow through to meet graduation requirements. The Community of Inquiry framework highlights the importance of relationships in learning and incorporation of cognitive, social and teaching elements (Garrison, Anderson & Archer 2000). Students need to know that they are being supported by a teacher in their learning, and know that someone is present to oversee the process.

**Major Project Design**

The Community of Inquiry framework provided context for designing a resource to improve learning experiences and teaching strategies for non-graduated adults that encouraged engagement with an overall program and included social and communicative aspects to learning; rather than taking courses in isolation. To support and answer the Critical Challenge Question (CCQ): ‘How can educators support adult learners’ success in a blended learning delivery model by implementing a Community of Inquiry framework?’ A website was created to provide an overview of relevant graduation information and a directory of where to access programs/courses needed to graduate. It was also intended to build a virtual community to support educational discourse for educators and learners alike; see Appendix A for a screen shot of the landing page.

The website also provided context for the adult learner by outlining recommendations for what type of education should be pursued. Support for students is included by listing resources to develop the soft skills needed to navigate online courses and that also extended to using digital
tools beyond the application of coursework. The website also offers a course tracking template to assist with time-management for adults. This is important because adults already have busy schedules and other life commitments (Afip, 2014; Hashim, Tan and Rashid, 2015) and provides the opportunity to set goals, reflect and assess their studying skills to stay motivated and on track with coursework.

For the teacher, information pertaining to adult graduation plans and recommended courses is included through samples and templates; as well as a space to reflect on pertinent academic articles related to motivation, engagement and connection. With the Community of Inquiry framework in mind, suggestions for building culture in a blended environment are proposed; which reflect upon my experiences with both a virtual homeroom and face-to-face connect sessions. As noted by Wehler (2018), community is best supported by teacher availability; ongoing communication; encouraging interactions between learners; creating support spaces outside of courses; and making useful resources available— which is the intent for this website.

To further support the connection between cognitive, social and teaching presences, a Google+ Community, (Appendix B) has been established and linked to the website to extend communication to more meaningful interactions between learners and teachers, and also to provide more occasions for learner-to-learner interactions. These interactions can extend beyond the online environment to be established in the face-to-face settings, providing a response to the CCQ in a blended context.

**Major Project Development**

The process in which this project developed came out of the need to build community and connection for adult students who are used to the traditional, face-to-face educational delivery of
bricks and mortar schools. Rather than taking online courses in isolation, students can learn about various routes for extending their education and gain direction for their plans post-graduation through a context of an all-encompassing program. The goal was for learners to feel that they were a part of a larger community and to have opportunities to learn the skills needed to navigate online coursework, and schedule time effectively.

Project development also extends to teachers as a space to learn how establish a blended context – what to include online and what to include in face-to-face meetings as well a space to share professional resources in support of a blended program to support non-graduated adults. The goal for teachers was to learn about each participant— not just what they submit for an assignment (Wolpert-Gawron, 2017). The website provides a place to be present, access helpful tools and assist with skills for coursework and other life applications (Wolpert-Gawron, 2017). An Understanding by Design (UbD) approach was used to determine what was needed to support the intentions and goals of the website.

**Understanding by Design.** The project was developed using the Understanding by Design approach (UbD), which is also referred to as backwards design principle, to develop curriculum materials as a method to identify desired results, assess evidence and create a learning plan. The Major Project website design used Wiggins and McTighe’s (2005) stages in backwards design process, as outlined in Figure 4, to determine what it is that is needed to know for an effective program to transfer learning for the non-graduated adult. In connection with my Credo (Borsoff, 2018), I examined the website schema as a whole to see the components not in isolation but through means of the overall experience.
The first stage of UbD, “identify desired results” (Wiggins and McTighe, 2011, p.14), considered all components of the website categorized into main pages, as described in Figure 5. The goal of the website was to provide students with the necessary skills to graduate high school and to extend their learning “to take on challenges, [to] preserve and overcome” (Borsoff, 2018) in other life applications.

**Website planning grid.** To organize what should be included on the website, I created a planning grid to group information and resources under various categories. When a section was finished, it was checked off with an X to acknowledge its completion. Through the process the website planning grid changed several times during the version one build of the Major Project as website pages were moved to different section; headings were renamed and information was expanded or condensed.
Implementation of Major Project

Community of Inquiry. The second stage of UbD is to determine acceptable evidence (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, 2011). This stage was informed through the lens of the Community of Inquiry framework to determine how we know if students have learned what they need and what we want them to know. By connecting learners and teachers; learners and learners; and learners and curriculum through teaching, social and cognitive presences (CoI, n.d.; Garrison,
Anderson & Archer, 2000), students can apply and evaluate skills and resources that contribute to their overall educational experience. Whilst creating the web resource, I made sure to assess all included materials through the various Community of Inquiry elements to ensure they met the intentions to support community, motivation and engagement as well as to develop skills for various applications. Effective online learning designs connect pedagogy to technology, and when it is supported by the three presences, it helps the adult learner see the benefit of learning the skill (Afip 2014; Anderson 2008; Hashim, Tan & Rashid, 2015). Skills development was further supported by implementation of a blended environment for specific learning experiences.

**Blended environment.** Further deliverables for the project were implemented in stage three of UbD — the planning of learning experiences (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, 2011). Through the creation of a blended learning program, activities were presented to facilitate knowledge transfer for students and to encourage collaboration with educators to support a successful graduation program for non-graduated adults. Horn and Staker (2015) explain that through a blended program learning activities can be personalized for students but can also create the structure for students to have control over how to access materials and then to take ownership and responsibility for their learning. When used in conjunction with face-to-face meetings, the website provides the resources to structure grad plans and guide students to stay on track with course progression. Adult students are familiar with face-to-face interactions when it comes to educational delivery. The website provides a bridge to help students with online-only courses by connecting them with the needed skills to navigate Learning Management Systems (LMS), use online tools, plan time and to provide structure for face-to-face meetings. Activities on the website provide blended learning opportunities and allow “online and face-to-face components [to] work together to deliver an integrated course” (Horn & Staker, 2015, p. 35).
Feedback process. Once the Community of Inquiry resources and blended learning experiences were implemented for both teachers and students, the website (in draft format) was made available for reviewers—fellow educators, OLTD colleagues and project stakeholders—to provide anonymous feedback and critique its effectiveness.

An invitation for review was made through a survey, created by a Google Form (Appendix C) and sent out in email format. The results of the feedback findings are detailed in Chapter 4 and outlined below in the project timeline. Findings were collated and applied to version 2 of the website build.

Table 2
Project Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Component</th>
<th>Date/Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description of intent for Major Project in form of website overview (Table 2).</td>
<td>August 30 – September 14, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Project website build, version 1</td>
<td>September 14 – October 24, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Form for feedback completed</td>
<td>October 5, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call for Reviewer Field Testing – invitations sent</td>
<td>October 24, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewer Field Testing -- collating begins (Ch. 4) Major Project website build, version 2 revisions</td>
<td>November 1 – November 15, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion of Process Paper sent to supervisor for final review and sign-off</td>
<td>December 5, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean’s final sign off of completed project and paper</td>
<td>December 10, 2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4 – Field/Beta Testing and Findings

Methods and Process

Upon completion of version one of the Major Project website build in mid-October 2018, the survey, as formatted through a Google Form (see Appendix C), was sent out by myself through e-mail request to various audiences for review— including fellow teaching colleagues; district administrators; select Vancouver Island University (VIU) Education faculty and other project stakeholders. Through further support of my supervisor, Mary O’Neill and other VIU faculty, the project was shared with undergraduate Education students at VIU, OLTD cohort colleagues and other Education faculty members at large. The survey was accessible for ten days, after which the anonymous findings were reviewed and collated. The intended outcomes of the testing included qualitative feedback on website layout and clarity of provided information. The survey was completed by a total of seventeen reviewers who had a varying range of knowledge around blended learning and the BC Adult Dogwood diploma program.

Through anonymous response on the Google form, reviewers had the opportunity to provide honest opinions and constructive feedback in three separate categories. The first section, “Reviewer Profile”, gave insight as to what lens the reviewer was coming from and provided context of their specific role in the educational field and their experience with different learning delivery formats. Reviewers were asked about their current position and their familiarity with online and blended learning.

The second section, “Website Navigation and Design”, asked the reviewer specific questions regarding the layout and design of the website. The questions in this section were important to ask to ensure that the focus of the information on each page of the website was conveyed in a way that was easily understood and easy to navigate. Starting with the homepage
and the allowing for more general comments on subsequent pages, the survey questions followed the “Seven Principles of Design for ePortfolios” adapted by Luxenburg (2016), and used with permission. The various website components were evaluated against selected features to ensure effective design. For purpose of the feedback survey, intuitive structure, visual hierarchy and accessibility and design were chosen as focus points for reviewers to give comments and suggestions.

The third section, “Content”, included questions regarding how familiar the reviewer was with the adult graduation program and blended learning; and, if the information on the website helped to increase their awareness and general knowledge concerning these two topics included in the resource. Further questions in this section asked whether or not community building was supported in the specified activities and whether or not there was a clear purpose for use of the Community of Inquiry framework to create a holistic learning experience for the student which encompassed cognitive, social and teaching presences.

A final section— “Additional Comments— was included to provide reviewers opportunity to express any additional, anecdotal comments and to state what they liked the best and/or least regarding the content and/or the website design.

**Feedback Questions**

Feedback on the Major Project deliverables, content and design, and questions about the reviewer’s background were assessed on the Google Form through a variety of response formats including multiple choice, linear scale and long answer to convey the following questions:

**Section 1 – Reviewer Profile**

- Please check the option that best reflects your current position.
• If you are an educator (or administrator), please complete this question (if other – move to next question). Which grade levels have you taught in the last five years?

• If an adult learner, please complete this question. How long has it been since you have pursued educational goals?

• What type of instruction/learning have you experienced? (Check all that apply).

• How familiar are you with online/blended learning? (Either teaching or learning with).

Section 2 – Website Navigation and Design

• Home page: Does the home page provide the clear purpose of the website? Is the intent obvious?

• Home page: Comments/suggestions.

• Navigation: Was it easy to navigate the pages on the website?

• Navigation: Comments/suggestions for intuitive structure.

• Navigation: Is the information presented in a logical manner?

• Navigation: Comments/suggestions for visual hierarchy.

• Design: Does the theme complement the information and visual design?

• Design: Comments/suggestions for legibility and visuals.

Section 3 – Content

• How familiar are you with the adult graduation program?

• Content: Does the information provided on the website help extend your knowledge of the adult grad program?

• Content: Comments/suggestion for communication and content.

• Content: Is the information provided on the website suitable to support blended delivery? Why? Or why not?
• Content: Resources: How useful are the resources to students and teachers?

• Content: Do the resources help each group gain a better idea of how to support this type of learning? What did you like? Didn’t like?

• Evidence of community: Does the website provide evidence of community building (and Community of Inquiry) within the resources and suggested activities/tools? Explain why or why not?

• Implementation for educators: Based on the information provided on the website, would you now consider implementing a blended program into your practice?

• Implementation for educators: What specific ideas do you like, or what specific ideas need improvement?

• Educational experience for adult learners: Based on the information provided on the website, do you feel that your educational experience is enhanced through the suggested blended learning opportunities?

• Educational experience for adult learners: What other activities or resources do you feel could be added to improve the experience for the adult learner?

Section 4 – Additional Comments

• What did you like the best? What did you like the least?

• Please add any additional comments you may have to help in developing my website.

Feedback and Findings

Seventeen respondents completed the anonymous survey; eleven identified as teachers/professors; three as undergraduate Education students; two as administrators and one as an adult student. Of the eleven identified as teachers/professors—five were elementary teachers; two taught middle school; three taught junior high school; five were secondary teachers and four
were post-secondary teachers or professors. All respondents were familiar with face-to-face learning. The vast majority, fourteen out of seventeen, were familiar with online learning and thirteen out of seventeen reported familiarity with blended learning. One respondent also indicated learning through experimental hands-on training while another had experience with correspondence courses through paper and mail distribution. Close to half of the reviewers were extremely familiar with online/blended learning; while another half were very familiar with blended delivery. One respondent was only somewhat familiar with this type of learning.

The responses to the survey questions provided specific qualitative feedback to help improve the visual design of the website layout; as well as, the clarity of information delivered. The survey provided opportunity for reviewers to indicate if the information regarding adult graduation and blended learning increased their general knowledge of the two subjects. The anonymous feedback received was overwhelmingly positive. Specific constructive comments were applied to version two of the site build as deemed appropriate.

**Website navigation and design.** The homepage was designed as a place to share the intent and purpose of the website. It was important that the first impressions were clear and the viewer knew where to go next. The majority of respondents agreed that the website had a clear purpose and its intent was obvious. Twelve reviewers gave anecdotal comments regarding the homepage. There were varied opinions on what information should be included on the homepage including text to image ratio, as well as what section to navigate to after the homepage.

Respondents agreed that navigation structure worked well. The section tabs available at the top of the website and subsection tabs specific to each area: overview information, students, teachers and community reflected effective intuitive structure. As mentioned by one reviewer, “the navigation was very intuitive and nicely ‘chunked’ the different aspects of the information”.
The first version of the website had drop down tabs for the subsections but because the navigation for each subsequent page was also in each section, the drop downs were deemed redundant in the visual hierarchy. Most reviewers communicated that the structure of the majority of pages was clear and concise with only one recommendation to edit the “Overview Information” page. Another suggestion was made to add header sections with labels for each section as to help with navigation and also help with a more consistent design between sections and one suggestion was given to move the “Students” section before the “Teachers” section.

Feedback on design of the website centralized around font type and size, selection of colour scheme and chosen theme. Mixed feedback was given on visual design where five reviewers thought the layout was consistent and professional, ten reviewers thought it was somewhat effective and two leaned towards suggesting an amount of editing. Five respondents commented on the size and legibility of text and suggested a bolder font as well as changing the dark colour scheme to improve readability. Some suggestions were made to add more visuals to break up the text, while others commented that the visuals and text were well balanced.

The original theme of the website, “Let the Adventure Begin”, with its running graphic of various coffee cups in a camp-like setting (see Figure 6) was to stand as a metaphor for learning as a journey and to be welcoming and non-intimidating for adult learners making the first step to reconnect with their education. The theme was received with mixed appreciation, with those who “didn’t get it” stating that it was clichéd or not accessible to all learners who did not identify with camping and an outdoor lifestyle. A suggestion was made to select another phrase to connect learners to the information on the website.
Overall, the majority of the respondents gave positive feedback that suggested that the design of the website was clear and consistent throughout. The button links were effective for navigation and structure of all pages was clear and presented in a logical manner.

![Website Image]

*Figure 6. Original website theme overview.*

**Content. — Adult graduation program information.** Reviewers had varying knowledge concerning the adult graduation program. Findings showed that before viewing the website, three respondents had no knowledge at all of the program, three were very familiar but the majority had only some prior knowledge. After reviewing the information on the website about the adult graduation program there was an overwhelming agreement that the information provided extended knowledge about the adult graduation program (see Figure 7). Anecdotal feedback from the majority of reviewers stated that the content and information for the adult graduation program was thorough and provided extensive scope of content. A suggestion was made to clarify the overview information page as it appeared busy and its intended audience under the
“Background” section was not clear. Overall, the anecdotal feedback concerning the content was very positive.

![Pie chart showing responses to extending knowledge of the adult grad program.](image)

*Figure 7.* Responses to extending knowledge of the adult grad program

**Blended delivery information.** All respondents agreed that the website gave many different examples on how to implement a blended learning context to support adults while they re-engaged with education. Comments reflected that reviewers had an understanding of what blended learning entailed as well as how the resources could be used to enhance both face-to-face and online learning. One suggestion was made to include a step-by-step implementation on blended learning for educators. It was highlighted that the “How-To” tutorial videos were particularly helpful as well as the “Your Education Route” under the “Student Profile” page and the “Virtual Homeroom”. It was agreed that the online resources would enhance and guide the face-to-face meetings between a teacher and student as well as possibly build community.

**Evidence of community.** The comments regarding community were also generally positive and reviewers could discern the attempt on the website to initiate opportunities to build online community although suggestions were given to consider how to further entice
participation, especially with the Google+ Community where participants need to join to contribute.

The background information describing the Community of Inquiry framework for educators was considered by couple of reviewers as not clear in its intent; a potential reason for this, as noted by one respondent, is because the website tries to do a lot and the meaning is lost in all the information; although another outlined the Community of Inquiry as a “great tool to guide community building”.

*Educational experience for the adult learner.* Based on the information provided through the website, respondents considered the resource an effective tool to enhance the educational experience for the adult learner, as depicted in the graph, (see Figure 8). One suggestion was made to focus the Community of Inquiry background information on the Teacher page rather than on the general Background page so as not to complicate the experience for the student. Two reviewers suggested testimonials from successful adult learners to offer encouragement to other learners to increase motivation for follow-through. The findings for this section were positive overall and provided further consideration for keeping information simple and easy to follow. Other reviewers appreciated the visual accompaniments to explain information in a different format.

*Other findings.* Reviewers were given opportunity at the end of the survey to provide any additional comments that they might deem useful for further development and revisions of the website. Suggestions were made for fixing specific typos in text, linking missed URL’s and suggesting, in some areas, graphic links as well as text. Positive encouragement was also given to the overall dedication of the project design and implementation.
Summary and Thoughts on Feedback Process

The responses from the field/beta testing process were informative. An overall positive tone was noted in the anecdotal comments and constructive feedback given; this provided opportunity to view the Major Project through the lenses of the reviewers for a more objective overview of effective structures and areas requiring further development or improvement. The feedback influenced certain redesigns and for a clearer focus to address the Critical Challenge Question (CCQ) in relation to the implementing the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework in the various website resources.

As confirmed in the literature findings, students need community to succeed. Establishing culture through application of the cognitive, social and teaching presences of the CoI framework as applied in Major Project build is important in both an online and face-to-face context to increase motivation and engagement for follow-through of graduation requirements. The collated findings from the field/beta testing process will be applied towards recommendations and version two of the site revisions as described in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions as Applied to the Project Re-Design

The anonymous feedback on the Google Form (Appendix C) provided opportunity to view the website content and design through the lenses of the reviewers, which offered different contexts for possible revision. From the collated feedback, recommendations were considered in the specific sections of: “Navigation and Design”, and “Content”. The general consensus by the reviewers of the Major Project, as a whole, was mostly positive, but information about text size and style; colour scheme, clarity of information and website theme was gathered and considered for V. 2 revisions. As the various reviewers completed the survey at separate times, I took opportunity to immediately fix small errors as they become apparent. My rationale for this was to then get fresh feedback about other improvements that could be made on the website. The repetitive suggestions, that were made by two or more reviewers, influenced the significant redesigns of the website components as evidenced by the need more clarity.

Navigation and design. The website was first improved with attention to comments made under the “Navigation and Design” section. It was noted that the original text used was light and somewhat small which, in tandem with the dark background colour used in some sections made legibility difficult. The text style throughout the site was changed to a bolder font and the size was increased slightly to be easier to read. The URL link colour was changed from grey to traditional blue to provide more effective contrast. The dark background was changed to a lighter complementary colour to allow information to be read more clearly.

The homepage was considered wordy and a little confusing as too much information and the order in which it was presented had the potential to overwhelm a viewer. The rationale and purpose was edited for a simplified overview of the site’s intent and a button was added above
the navigation bar to guide visitors to directly to the “Overview Information” section as an initial place to begin.

Each section page was given a distinct header so that the viewer would easily know what section they were in. For flow and consistency from page to page, a button navigation bar was added onto each individual page with the current page highlighted in black as shown in Figure 9.

![Figure 9. Example of navigation bar with highlighted current page on website](image)

Each section was clearly outlined by a hyperlinked menu to make finding content more effective. A quick switch to move the “Students” section before the “Teachers” section illustrated the hierarchy of the intended purpose— to help students.

A suggested improvement for the design of the website was incorporate more visuals to break of the text in some areas. I also considered the initial theme of site, “Let the Adventure Begin”, and changed it to “Let’s Get Started” as an encouragement to students reconnecting with the education system. An image of a start line and finish line replaced the coffee cups to serve as a motivating graphic.
Content. The main focus for editing the content was to abridge the text on pages as to not overwhelm the viewer. The original “Background Information” page that was considered wordy and crowded was divided into separate pages and renamed “Overview Information” section. This section included FAQ’s; Ministry of Education information; finding a course or program; and upgrading information. This section also displays the mission statement that was moved from the homepage.

Another focus on the Content edit was to clearly define aspects of the Community of Inquiry in the various activities and samples shown on the website. A graphic was created to show how each component aligned with the different aspects of the “presences” (CoI, n.d.; Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000) on the site, as illustrated in Figure 10. In regards to the “cognitive presence” (CoI, n.d.; Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000) referred to in the “Students” section, the language was simplified for better accessibility and understanding for adult learners, as students do not necessarily benefit from knowing the context of the CoI framework. Further explanation was supplemented on the “Teachers” overview page to encourage teachers to incorporate the framework into their practice as modeled in the activities and resources.

The community building opportunities were considered somewhat limited in the first build of the Major Project. As it was agreed upon that the Educators’ Blog was an effective tool to promote dialogue and discourse for fellow teachers to connect and comment on topics of engagement and motivation in online learning, a second blog, “Student Voice Forum” was created to provide students with a more accessible platform to comment on topics and issues concerning their education. The Google+ Community was kept as a space to share resources (something which the blog format lacks). For further ease and convenience, the hash tag
#educonnectadult was launched on Twitter as a quick method to share current information about adult education. The final revision of the Major Project was consistent, effective and visually pleasing to the viewer with simpler explanation for greater understanding and application.

**Figure 10. CoI as modeled in relation to Major Project activities and resources.**

**Outcome Evaluation**

The intent of the project was to provide accessible and applicable online resources for adult learners, and educators supporting adult learners, to meet B.C. high school graduation requirements. The Major Project achieved its intended outcomes through the website,
http://educonnectadult.weebly.com/, by creating a one place resource to house start to finish information regarding obtaining a B.C. Dogwood or Adult Dogwood Diploma. As anticipated in Chapter 1, students that reconnect with their education via online courses need deliberate and direct teacher support for encouragement to follow-through on graduation requirements. Adult students expect the care and attention that they were used to while attending school in the traditional bricks and mortar school environment. The Major Project provides a bridge between learning online in isolation, with suggested activities for community building with fellow learners, an overseeing teacher and also as a fully encompassing program, rather than stand-alone courses. The website, as a whole, is a supplementary resource for students to use on their own to find resources and develop soft skills needed to complete coursework. As well, with conjunction of teacher support, students can set-goals, plan a schedule and have contact in a flexible environment that suits adult learners’ varying needs. Teachers can model the Community of Inquiry framework in their own practice to promote discourse between learners resulting in greater engagement with learning to follow-through with graduation requirements.

A blended program gives flexible delivery and personalization and through its context students are better engaged in learning and feel supported in a community of learning (Anderson, 2008; Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004; Horn & Staker, 2015). Adult students need to have programs and resources available to them 24/7 but also have the opportunity to connect with a teacher for clarification and guidance as needed.

Results of Findings in Relation to the Literature Review

While completing and revising the Major Project, engagement and motivation strategies were considered in all contexts. Because adult learners have varying characteristics and diverse needs (Afip, 2014; Hashim, Tan & Rashid, 2015; Pappas, 2013), the findings in the literature
review, as presented in Chapter 2, were considered and applied to website build as researched evidence.

**Attributes of an adult learner.** An effective web-based resource needs to consider what information is essential to the adult learner. As noted in the literature findings, self-concept; experience; readiness to learn; perspective of learning and motivation to learn (Afip, 2014; Pappas, 2013) should be considered when designing learning opportunities for adults. The materials on the website provide students with knowledge of the different routes to graduation and tools to set goals and manage time with the intent to increase engagement and motivation.

**Effective online learning designs.** Ideal online learning is engaging and motivating. Students, especially adult students who are new to this context, require learning opportunities that are readily accessible and available to be easily incorporated into their already busy schedules (Lloyd-Smith 2010). The website offers on-demand, how-to resources so that they can feel comfortable in their learning at any time when it complements their schedule. To be successful in online learning, students need to be confident with soft technological skills first in order to apply the skills to the coursework (Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004). The website resource offers resources to build these skills. The information is presented in a simple way to understand and be applied so that the user is not overwhelmed (Afip, 2014; Lloyd-Smith, 2010). Students are supported as they acquire new skills and can learn in a safe environment with a teacher readily available if needed.

**Community of Inquiry.** As noted previously in this chapter, CoI is an effective model to provide opportunity for engagement. The literature supports that when cognitive, social and teaching presences are collaboratively used, students acquire a well-rounded learning experience (Afip, 2014; Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000). The website aims to provide the foundation of
a program for adult learners, rather than course work in isolation. In connection with my Credo, as referenced in Chapter 1, students are learn the skills needed to complete coursework but also apply the skills to other endeavours beyond graduation. The cognitive presence included in the website’s activities and resources are supported through the social and teaching presence. Access to other individuals through the community initiatives and connection with a support teacher reflects that, “the concept of interaction is fundamental to the effectiveness of distance education programs” (Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004, p. 362). The CoI framework connects the interactions of the student with both the curriculum and the teacher to increase engagement and to promote sustained motivation to learn. The structure of the website models what and how teachers can implement CoI in their practice.

**Blended learning.** Engagement and motivation to learn is extended through blended learning. When students have the option for meeting with a teacher face-to-face, it can heighten the connection between the presences of the Community of Inquiry. A blended delivery model gives students the flexibility in collapse of time and space and control of place and pace (Anderson, 2008; Horn & Staker, 2015) Course progress occurs when it suits students’ needs, which is essential for maintaining continued motivation (Horn & Staker, 2015; Lloyd-Smith 2010).

As adult students may need more direction than school-aged learners, the website is designed to guide face-to-face student-teacher meetings and to provide a resource that oversees learning as a whole— as “it is imperative that adult learners have access to the support necessary to successfully engage in the online portion of blended course delivery” (Lloyd-Smith, 2010, n.p). Teachers can clarify information and then students can discern the course material and technological applications on their own time. Through repetitive norms established in a blended
context – monthly progress checks, face-to-face grad plan set-up’s, and other suggested community building initiatives provided on the website, a positive culture and learning environment is created where students will be more motivated to complete their coursework to successfully graduate (Horn & Staker, 2015).

**Project Limitations**

Unfortunately, it is oftentimes realized after enrolment, that commitment to re-engage with school needs more attention and time than adults can allot (Lloyd-Smith 2010). Students have the best intentions for follow through when the decision is made to inquire about possible options for fulfilling graduation requirements. The Major Project is limited in that the website is an optional resource that students (and teachers) can opt to use, or not. Not all school districts have the capacity to offer a blended program; as a result, adult learners are enrolled in online courses in isolation and access to help is not readily available. Some students may be at a distance and do not have access to face-to-face meetings, or teachers do not have the time and/or resources to offer one-on-one help. Many distributed learning and online schools only offer courses as stand-alones and although a grad plan may be created, students can be left on their own, in isolation, to navigate what they need to do.

Another limitation is the balance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for follow-through. Adults can not be pushed the same way school-aged students can be encouraged to complete coursework for a traditional timeframe for graduation at the end of grade twelve. The adult-learner needs to first be intrinsically motivated before extrinsic factors become important (Afip, 2014; Anderson, 2008; Bates, 2015; Hashim, Tan & Rashid, 2015).

Keller’s (1983) ARCS model for motivation explains that a learner needs A: attention; R: relevance; C: confidence; S: satisfaction to be successful. If students cannot give attention to their
education goals then there will be no follow through on remaining components. Even with providing resources and information to increase familiarity with graduation requirements and the tools needed to complete coursework, a teacher cannot force an adult to follow-through on their initial intents; motivation must come inherently from the student.

**Further Recommendations**

To extend the Major Project and to provide possible solutions for its limitations, strategies to improve student motivation can be increased through incorporating the resources available on the website into an actual course for credit. Sometimes extrinsic motivating factors are required to encourage intrinsic efforts (Afip, 2014; Anderson, 2008; Bates, 2015; Hashim, Tan & Rashid, 2015). Further research in the area of motivational factors for adult learners could increase student success. Finding an accessible and straightforward means to the information illustrates the need to acknowledge the adult learners’ already busy lives and honour the time commitment they can devote to learning. The resources included in the Major Project are extensive and extremely valuable to anyone re-engaging with learners but could have a clearer and direct approach to access the material for a more relevant and structured purpose.

**Next steps.** To enhance the relevancy of the information provided for students in the Major Project, the “Students” section could be implemented into the new “Career Life Connections” (CLC) course from the new BC curriculum, (see Appendix D), with a focus specifically designed for adult learners. In connection to Keller’s (1983) motivational factors, when students are required to participate in activities, rather than optionally completing them, there is a greater attention given to the materials and results in increased confidence and overall satisfaction. The activities included in the virtual homeroom and connection to relevant topics in
forum discussions are framework opportunities for greater cognitive and social presence and can highlight the Personal and Social Responsibility component in the CLC course.

An additional website, or an additional section to the existing one, could be designed to organize material into structured lessons so that students would be able to work through the information in a sequential and logical manner for greater understanding and retention. By establishing a clearer order to access the information, students could refine the soft tech skills needed for progress in other courses needed to meet graduation requirements.

The key deliverable of the Major Project has great potential to enhance the learning experience for any adult learner but further exposure is needed to share and utilize its effectiveness. A goal of the project was to include the resource in my own practice. As of December 2018, it will be implemented into the adult graduation program in Sea to Sky (#48) school district. A further goal is to share the research findings and website resources with the greater educational community in British Columbia by sharing at future conferences/workshops, through my Twitter feed and through Pro-D opportunities with fellow colleagues.

**Overall impressions.** Overall, the Major Project, as is, was successful in assembling and presenting resources pertaining to the needs of adult students reconnecting with education by providing information in one, comprehensive locale. The process through which the desired results were achieved addressed the Chapter 2 findings through building enhanced cognitive activities for non-graduated adults in a deliberate attempt to extend the accessibility of the high school graduation process, increase adult learner’s skillsets and assist them in time management and goal setting. These opportunities were provided whilst also creating social connections to increase community, establish culture and lessen transactional distance (Moore, 1997) between learners and teachers. The design of a program, rather than a single course, provides unique
experiences for adult learners to associate skills and information gained in their re-connection to education to other applicable life endeavors. In a blended context, flexibility and personalization are accommodated so that each learner has a plan that is specifically tailored to their needs and personal goals.

**Final Conclusions**

Every student should have the opportunity to graduate regardless of the path they take to get there. When high school graduation is not met in the traditional time frame, students reconnecting with education may require more guidance to build confidence with technology, and to structure their time effectively. The Major Project offers resources to support students (and teachers) as they re-engage with graduation requirements as adult learners.

The intent of the Major Project was to provide the opportunity for students to be informed about graduation requirements and the various routes for post-secondary pursuits, access the tools they need, and to apply both towards engagement and motivation for successful coursework completion. The website, through reinforcement of the Community of Inquiry framework, and as reflected in my Credo, provides to students with the wherewithal

… to be competent problem solvers, inquisitive thinkers and life-long learners when supported in a learning community that reflects connection, engagement and choice. They are guided to use various learning tools and strategies to develop purpose and drive; and discover passion through exploration. Transferable skills are refined through self-assessment and reflection. They are equipped to take on challenges, persevere and overcome (Borsoff, 2018).

My Credo, as implemented through the Community of Inquiry framework, addresses the Critical Challenge Question, ‘*How can educators support adult learners’ success in a blended*
learning delivery model by implementing a Community of Inquiry framework? ‘ The intended goals presented in the CCQ are achievable for students through opportunities provided on the website and especially so when they are also supported by a teacher in a blended context. By combining strategies for engagement and motivation presented through disruptive innovation initiatives, something new— a web-based resource site that supports adult learners striving for graduation requirements through online courses and blended interactions— is presented.

As outlined by Sea to Sky (#48) school district’s Pathways to Learning initiative (2013), a program, rather than courses in isolation, can guide adult learners to gain confidence with technology as an opportunity for connection with other pedagogical strategies in order to learn applicable and transferrable skills. By way of reinforcement in a blended context, adult students can find purpose and authenticity in learning activities through collaboration with others and through building soft, and hard skills, resulting in engagement in their reconnection with education. The connections made between social, cognitive and teacher presences lend themselves to the greater context for students to be included when they might not have felt so previously. “The power of culture is that members of an organization reach a shared paradigm about how to work together to be successful” (Horn & Staker, 2015, p. 251) and create community within learning.
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Appendix A

Major Project: http://educonnectadult.weebly.com/

Screen Capture of Website Homepage

Adult Education Reconnection

A resource for adults in British Columbia looking to fulfill secondary school credits for graduation using an online platform for coursework and enhanced through face-to-face support.

Let’s get started!

Rationale: Purpose.

This resource is to provide non-graduated adults and teachers, the tools needed to re-engage learners with learning, particularly while managing online resources and curriculum. This website works best when also supported with face-to-face meetings wih a teacher and/or counselor.

Start on the OVERVIEW INFORMATION PAGE for content for graduation information. Click below.

OVERVIEW INFORMATION
Appendix B

Screen Capture of Google + Community

https://plus.google.com/communities/106563896938950711297?sqinv=akMxLW5hNkJqJV9yS20yZS1rTmRzYlBvNDRPYldR
Appendix C

Screen Capture of Field Testing Feedback Form

An anonymous web-based questionnaire created using Google Forms was used to invite feedback from a variety of anonymous reviewers.

How familiar are you with the adult graduation program? *

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all familiar  ○  ○  ○  ○  ○  Very familiar

Content: Does the information provided on the website help to extend your knowledge of the adult grad program?

○ Yes
○ No
○ Somewhat

Content: Comments/suggestions for communication and content

Long answer text

Content: Is the information provided on the website suitable to support blended delivery? Why? or Why not?
Appendix D

Screen Capture of the Draft Curriculum for “Career Life Connections”