

Teacher Evaluation in a Blended Learning Environment

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TEACHER EVALUATION IN A BLENDED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Overview

The Polk City Public School District has recently implemented a rotational blended learning program for two middle schools and one high school in the district. Horn and Staker (2014) defined *blended learning* as formal education that incorporates student online learning, supervised *in situ* (brick-and-mortar setting) learning, integration of learning modalities that are chosen for each learner's needs. The authors also explained that the *rotational model* of blended learning "...includes any course or subject in which students rotate--either on a fixed schedule or at the teacher's discretion--among learning modalities, at least one of which is online learning" (p. 38). One type of rotational model that is being implemented in schools is the flipped classroom wherein students independently complete lessons and lectures outside class and use classroom time for teacher instruction (Horn and Staker, 2014, p. 43).

In school, they participate in lab experiences, group work and individual work. Teachers are present in each of these settings to provide guidance and coaching. Each student completes an assessment daily, which is used to generate a personalized playlist of tasks for the next day. Students control the order of their online experiences as they progress through their assigned playlists.

Our district is a one-to-one Chromebook setting, which means that the availability of Internet-capable devices is not an issue. The schools in the district are adequately equipped with digital infrastructure as to support the technology needs of educators and learners in a classroom setting. This model allows for students to rotate from a classroom setting into a lab setting. This model will minimize renovations to our facilities, as our existing classrooms can be used. Some investment is required for flexible seating for group and individual work.

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Content for this learning model will be sourced from a single vendor for each subject area. As teachers grow more comfortable with this model, they may wish to create some content themselves, or broaden the selection of vendors for each subject. The teachers will undergo periodic professional development training on the basics and features of the online environment programs the students will be using at home for the flipped learning program.

Student Experience: Formative Feedback in Blended Learning

Moreno (2004), Schimmel (1983), and Wager and Wager (1985) mention that, “In technology-assisted instruction, similar to classroom settings, formative feedback comprises information—a message, display, and so on—presented to the learner following the learner’s input (or upon request, if applicable), with the purpose of shaping the perception, cognition, or action of the learner” (as cited in Schute, 2007). The online learning environment to be used by students at home is designed to automatically provide feedback on students’ performance in online-based home assignments and lessons. The teachers will then access usage reports on students’ use of online learning resources at home and use the data to individualize classroom instruction according to each student’s needs.

Recommendations for Teacher Evaluation Process

According to the State of New Jersey Department of Education (2014), teacher evaluation can be achieved using: 1) teacher practice (usually assessed by observing the teacher in the classroom); and 2) student achievement (measured by student growth objectives set by teachers and principals and through the student’s state assessment performance). As it transitions to the flipped rotational model of blended learning, the Polk City Public School district will use the Danielson Framework to guide teacher observations. To assess student achievement, teachers

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and principals will continue to set individual student objectives for learning, and the PARCC test results will be considered for PARCC subjects.

Danielson Framework

Charlotte Danielson developed her framework for effective teaching practice in 1996. It is meant to be a multipurpose framework, used for teacher self-reflection, preparation of pre-service teachers, and evaluation of teachers. The framework is currently used by 20 states as the single model, or one of the accepted models of teacher evaluation (Danielson Group, 2017).

The Danielson Framework consists of four domains, each of which plays an important part in teacher evaluations. The first domain, *Planning and Preparation*, details standards for teachers to demonstrate their planning of lessons and knowledge of students. Planning in the blended environment presents different challenges than the traditional classroom. Rather than planning a single lesson for a large class, the teacher must plan a series of small group lessons for groups that rotate through various stations. Students complete an assessment daily, which gives them their playlist for the next day. The assessment also identifies what skills are appropriate for their group sessions, which drives some of the teacher's decisions. Some activities the teacher can perform are:

- design appropriate, student-centered lessons for small groups and individuals as indicated in daily assessments
- access online learning environment usage reports to assess students' general compliance with online assignments at home
- demonstrate a basic proficiency of accessing online learning environments' data analytics in order to personalize classroom instruction

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The second domain, *Classroom Environment*, pertains to the physical space in which learning and instruction occurs. This concept also involves the relationships and interactions that occur in that space. The environment in a blended rotational classroom is very different than a traditional classroom. The environment must include a lab space for individual students to work independently as they address their daily playlists. Some activities that the teacher can perform are:

- maintain a professional attitude at all times in the classroom
- demonstrate responsible and ethical digital citizenship in online learning and interactions
- assist in organizing classroom and lab space to optimize student learning
- maintain classroom spaces for quiet reading, individual study, and group work

The third domain deals with *Instruction*. The teacher must be able to maintain a productive learning environment for students. The teacher must also be able to communicate with each group and with individual students effectively, and to assess if they are understanding the lesson. Above all, teachers in this environment must be flexible and able to adapt to ever-changing situations. Some activities that the teacher can perform in this domain are:

- demonstrate effective communication skills, both face-to-face and online, with large and small groups of students, and with individual students
- use various techniques and online resources to engage students in these settings, and to elicit responses that indicate understanding
- explain clearly to students about how to effectively use the online learning environment system at home and act as a basic technical resource for parents and students on issues regarding online learning environment use

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The final domain is *Professional Responsibilities*. The teacher in the blended rotational environment must ensure they always conduct themselves in a professional manner. They must also maintain their own skills, by attending both required and optional professional development sessions (Danielson Group, 2017). Some recommended tasks that the teacher can do for this domain are:

- keep accurate grade books and attendance records
- communicate with families at scheduled conferences and throughout the year as necessary
- participate in all required professional development sessions

Conclusion

The Polk City Public School District will attempt to use the best pedagogical practices in implementing a flipped rotational model of blended learning in its schools. Students will utilize district-approved online environment programs as instructional resources for their home assignments and lessons. After completing the assignments and reviewing online-based lessons at home, the students will go to class the next day for individual and collaborative group work. The teachers will facilitate student-centered, individualized instruction after reviewing the students' online learning environment usage and performance. The District will also align the assessment of teacher instruction and student learning in the blended learning program with the Danielson Framework.

References

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