

Project 267

December 2017

Time, Pace, Place

Using Flexible Design and Delivery to Support Learners

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This research was partially funded through a grant from the McDowell Foundation. However, the points of view and opinions expressed in project documents are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

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Question

What is the experience of teachers when they are required to explore alternatives in time, pace or place of learning?

This executive summary is part of a video report that can be found here:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLhJi6-1MXHb3sLR3NMhuz4lxu9ZRMYPeJ>.

Background

In August 2015, teachers at John Paul II Collegiate were directed by senior administration to develop and make available one course in the Moodle Learning Management System before the end of June 2016. Moodle is a learning management system that enables educators to create online courses with a focus on interaction and collaborative construction of content.

In conversation, teachers, administrators, and school division personnel agreed that the opportunity to make instruction, content, and learning materials available through the Moodle system had potential to meet a wide range of goals related to attainment of high school credits, remediation, enrichment, differentiation, intervention strategies, credit recovery, and graduation rates. The school, along with other program supports already in place, can now provide greater flexibility to students in terms of time, pace, and place for learning. School programs potentially benefitting a wide range of learners needing to work or care for family members during the school day, experiencing anxiety in the regular classroom environment, or struggling to complete courses, inevitably causes need for change on the part of teachers. Christensen et.al. (2008) reminds us that schools, as a result of improvement initiatives and societal concerns, have been required to do the equivalent of rebuilding an airplane in mid-flight. Furthermore, they have done so successfully by adjusting and improving constantly, regardless of the fact that new measures are continually added to the public education agenda. This pressure to perform leaves educators feeling overwhelmed by seemingly competing priorities.

The primary purpose of this action research project was to explore the experience of teachers as they were required to adjust the time, pace, or place of learning in order to support students at a central Saskatchewan high school. This action research project was undertaken to understand both the individual and collective experiences of teachers and to determine how to support them now and in the future.

Findings and Conclusions

Our experience challenged us to think differently about:

Time

Essentially, this entire project was born out of time. The need and mandate to provide alternative time, pace, and place for student learning. Time is a quagmire. It is finite and essential to provide and prioritize if we are serious about growth, improvement, and innovation. However, time is more than money and even when provided funding for collaborative action research time, teachers have difficulty finding the time to be away from their classrooms and the priorities it demands. Time was a consistent challenge mentioned in our biweekly reflections. Therefore, our recommendation is that schools and school divisions consider establishing one area of focus for a period of several years. Teachers not only need time to learn but also to plan, try, and reflect before any change becomes part of our ongoing practice. Expectations, initiatives, and mandates need to be limited if teachers are going to become proficient and improve their practice.



Even with release time, at the start of a new term there is a lot of relationship building and norm developing that goes on, and I don't want to take a day away from that.

Cheryl Dunitz

Teachers also found that their experience was affected by student experience with time. Like their teachers, having access and opportunity to course materials and resources was not enough to ensure that students would take advantage. One teacher participant spent a good deal of time talking with students to find out more about their experience in an altered learning environment in order to be able to use that information to help our teaching practises. Her experience led her to conclude that students liked the idea of individual pacing but floundered when the existence of a relationship with the teacher was absent; this was primarily occurring in situations where students were at a distance. Furthermore, she found that they lacked the study, time management, motivation, work planning skills, and the necessary proactive communication skills to feel successful if face-to-face help and prompting from the teacher was not present. This further solidified our beliefs that a blended environment where students were expected to attend and check in was better suited to most learners. For this teacher, who is also the guidance counsellor, this led to

further reflection regarding the role of guidance personnel and student support services within the school when learners were taking courses from third-party service providers.



Technology makes it possible for learners to more effectively learn outside of the classroom and keep on pace with the rest of the class . . . Using a LMS enables teachers to have all their material out there and potentially not have to re-teach concepts. However, if the student is not or does not feel supported, or does not know how or feel confident about seeking help, or lacks the self-discipline and motivation to complete assigned work consistently and on time, then they will flounder.

Shelly Fransoo

Technology

It was unanimously agreed that technology was essential to providing greater flexibility for learning with regard to pace, place, or time. Access to devices, stable internet/Wi-Fi, a learning management system, and opportunity to use additional applications was crucial.



Greater pace, place, and time could be accomplished without technology but is much more time-consuming and is an organizational mess. Material can be offered in printed format but lessons and instruction would have to happen at various times and the teacher cannot be in two different places at once. With the technology the instruction can be recorded and viewed whenever the learner is ready.

Frazer Donahue

The opportunity provided for students to overcome barriers as a result of technology, especially those that interfered with their ability to be in class, were viewed as paramount by both classroom teachers and student support teachers.



The role of technology is very important for pace, place, and time. This allows students to access assignments in different places throughout the school and at home. As well they can communicate with teachers through technology if they are unable to come to school. It also gives them the opportunity to look at where they are at in the course they are taking and can give them immediate feedback as to what they need to be doing to be successful. As well it allows them to have more time to work on assignments where they struggle and also provides the opportunity for others, peers, or teachers to help them with different subject areas, for example Student Services or Braided Journeys.

Janet Benoit

Collaboration

Time and technology in the absence of support from colleagues for professional learning will not shift practice. We found success as a result of:

- Administrators who encouraged inquiry and risk and accepted when something did not work as anticipated.
- Professional sharing and capacity-building among staff through strategically planned professional development and planning time. PPT was a school-wide focus. Nobody could opt-out. Everybody worked together to share knowledge and frustrations.
- Ongoing on-site professional support provided by the project coordinator.

While we did experience some challenges, they were not unanticipated. In a small high school, it is common to have only one physics, calculus, and band teacher, or other specialist positions. This makes collaboration within a subject area or course difficult. Therefore, the fact that this project aimed to focus all staff on one area for growth, all staff were able to help support each other by sharing their learning. Essentially, a third point of focus was provided, enabling teachers to set aside their subject matter and move their attention to assessment, differentiation, and instructional strategies as well as how to use technology tools to meet these needs.



I am learning to ask questions more quickly of my colleagues and to overcome my tendency to “bunker down” in my room. This has pushed me to “make use of” my colleagues, not try to do it all on my own. It has made me question “how else can I make this learning more accessible for all my students”; actually to view my students as more active participants, fellow journeyers, in this venture we call education; to see us as both learning to improve. I think I have allowed my students to see me as uncertain with technology; learning with them as my “guinea pigs” and that what they say will impact my teaching. I am more actively asking them how I can make this activity/assignment more engaging; and am hearing more “can we do it this way?” than I have heard before.

Anne Crozier

Action Research

Some teachers readily admitted that they believed themselves to be reflective practitioners even before understanding what action research was. What they found was that the opportunity to establish an area of focus and have to complete ongoing biweekly reflections helped them to better understand the model and to commit the time to “dig deep” in order to continue or change something about their practice. Once again, we come full circle to our first finding, time. Teachers unanimously agreed that while this project has made them more attentive to their instructional practices, they are unlikely to be as diligent in following the model once the daily rigours of planning, marking, reporting, and attending meetings occur in the absence of research time being available.



This project has really provided me with a focus for my professional learning.

Carlo Hansen



The learning experience has assisted in my development of using technology in the classroom for differentiation for students, being made to feel comfortable to take risks, to ensure organization and planning is up-to-date, and to give students the option of working at their own pace. From this, the idea to offer a PACE class has been very welcomed by me as I have been doing it with my students and see the advantages of letting students work at their own pace if they so choose.

Tracie Harty

Summary

Alternatives for students are essential in our busy, diverse world. Together, when able to focus on a single important task, we can achieve greatly and shift attitudes. It is our belief that the culture of John Paul II Collegiate has changed and will continue to change in order to better meet student needs now and in the future.

Appendices

Appendix 1: What the rest of the team said about Time, Pace, Place: Using Flexible Design and Delivery to Support Learners



This project has allowed me to see some of the interesting strategies that some teachers are utilizing in their courses. I had experience before with teaching an online course for Social 30, so I liked the idea of students being able to work at their own pace. I found that all of the students in that course were successful due to the fact that they were able to have a choice in how much they got done at a certain time.

Jean Fauchon



Personally, this learning experience has really reminded me of all of the different ways that we can help our students achieve the credits that they will need to graduate and build a foundation of success upon. It has provided me with a focus for the year, which is important.

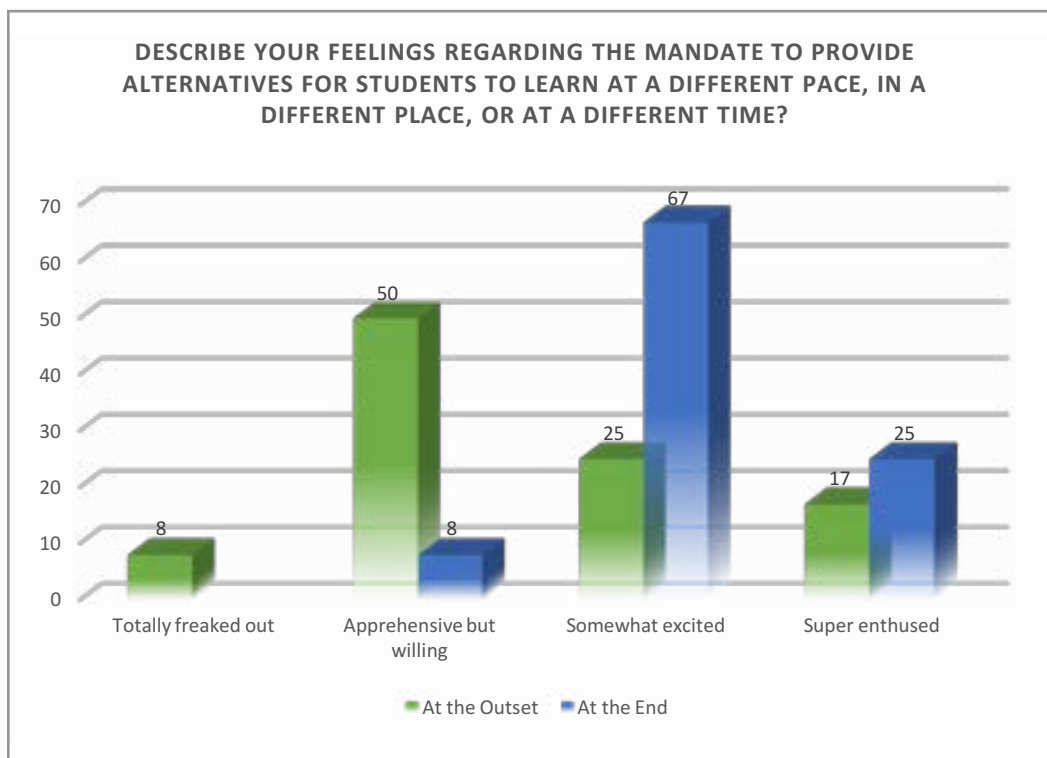
Nate Jurgens



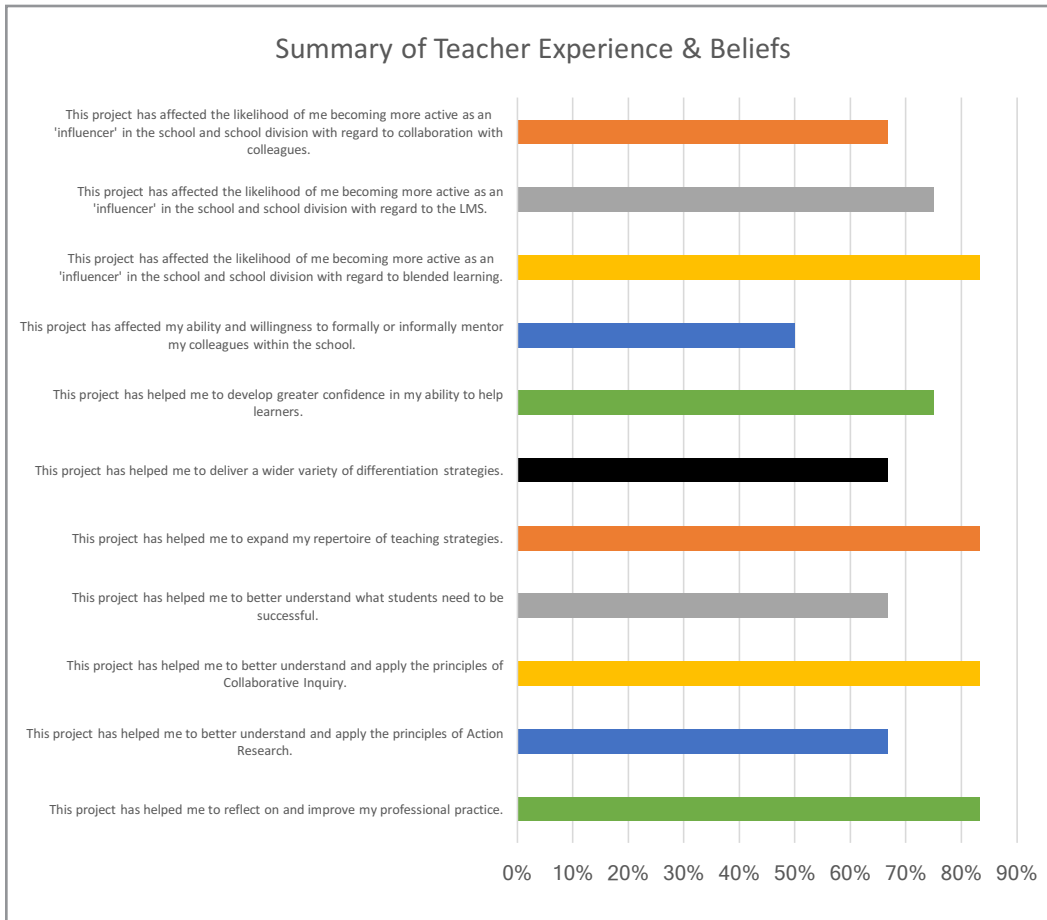
I have enjoyed being involved in the experience because I have grown as a professional in many areas. I have reached out to colleagues and also had to learn new methods of teaching which will allow for student success. Student success is our ultimate goal and when we take the opportunity to look at different ways to meet student success. I feel I have grown professionally and successfully as a teacher who strives to deliver to all students the knowledge and personal skills required to be successful.

Roxanne Stynsky

Appendix 2: This chart demonstrates how teachers felt about the project mandate at the outset of the project and how they felt at the end of the project.



Appendix 3: This chart demonstrates how teachers experienced the project and what beliefs they carry forward.



See our full video report series on YouTube at:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLhJi6-1MXHb3sLR3NMhuz4lxu9ZRMYPeJ>.

See the #teacherproject video "Tracie's Story" at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1aXndsS_3y0.

Appendix 4: Full video report series

See our full video report series on YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLhJi6-1MXHb3sLR3NMhuz4Ixu9ZRMYPeJ>.

See the #teacherproject video “Tracie’s Story” at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1aXndsS_3y0.

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