

**The Effectiveness of Blended Learning:  
Students Owning Their Learning & Impacts on Reading**

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## **Introduction**

In today's fast-paced world of technology, digital learning has become a more prevalent tool for learning, and because of this, we must change our education system. Learners deserve authentic learning experiences where they get choice and voice over their learning. We are in the digital age, yet we still see a lot of pushback in classrooms regarding technology and students being in charge of their learning. Blended learning implementation with station rotations is one way we can work toward creating significant learning environments for students.

"The reason so many people are opting out of education is that it does not feed their spirit. It does not feed their energy or their passion. So, I think we have to change metaphors. We have to go from what is essentially an industrial model of education, to a manufacturing model, which is based on linearity and conformity, and batching of people. We have to move to a model that is based more on principles of agriculture. We have to recognize that human flourishing is not a mechanical process; it's an organic process. And you cannot predict the outcomes of human development. All you can do, like a farmer, is create the conditions under which they will begin to flourish (Robinson, 2010).

Therefore, when you give learners the best conditions for learning, they will begin to grow.

Whole group teaching and passing out packets of work is in the past. The 21st-century learners need teachers to guide them to see their full potential so that they can flourish. Students will take ownership of their learning by creating digital lessons and web-based platforms. To complement the technology station in the blended learning classroom, students need a place to record and reflect on their knowledge and share easily. ePortfolios are necessary for creating student ownership of learning and closing gaps in their learning.

**Why is it important?**

This model allows the teacher to work alongside students as a guide. Teachers do not always feel like they have control over what they teach, but we do control the learning environment. Implementing blended learning with a digital platform for teaching reading is more effective and engaging than traditional learning. Online reading platforms can efficiently target specific areas of need for all learning needs in the classroom. Closing learning gaps and ensuring students have proper reading growth by the end of 6th grade is imperative for students' future success. Once students have established the why behind tracking their reading and ownership of their learning, they are no longer doing school work; they are learning to learn. What is most important to me as an educator is preparing learners for the future. In creating significant learning environments where ownership of learning is on the learner, I will guide them to be adaptable, flexible, and innovative additions to our society.

**What Does the Research Say?**

Student engagement is defined as the quality of involvement, enthusiasm towards learning, and the student's interest level during learning (Fisher et al., 2018; Henrie et al., 2015). The most significant challenge for teachers is engaging students in authentic learning opportunities which suggests that creating opportunities for students to engage in deeper, more relevant, and more powerful learning may be the most challenging personalized learning domain of all, even for the most experienced and skillful practitioner (Arnesen et al., 2019).

In a traditional classroom setting, it would be impossible to capture every student's attention and keep them engaged throughout the entire lesson (Tucker & Umphrey, 2013). With students' needs constantly changing, student behaviors going up and down, student interests being different, and ability levels differing from student to student, teachers need to find a

strategy to help corral student engagement and motivate them to learn. In a case study summarized by Kocour (2019), they found a positive relationship between blended learning and student engagement in two preschool classrooms. By giving students a choice during blended learning, student engagement increased. Kocour stated, "this correlates with studies done by Al Mosawi and Wali (2015), Chai (2017), Fisher et al. (2018), and Henrie et al. (2015), who also found the positive relationship between blended learning and student engagement in the classroom" (p.29). When students can choose their activities and the amount of time they spend working on them, they are more likely to be engaged (Mead, 2021).

### **Blended Learning with Station Rotations**

Blended learning can ensure that teachers are utilizing technology to its fullest potential in the classroom for the success of their students. "Blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online learning with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/pace and at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home" (Horn & Staker, 2017, p. 54).

In a station rotation model, students rotate through various stations, stopping at each station with at least one of the stations being an online learning station (Linton, 2018; Tucker et al., 2017). For this model, all students are supposed to rotate through every station. Staker & Horn also reported that students could move in a specific way (i.e., clockwise or counterclockwise) or at the teachers' discretion (2012). Additionally, Arnesen (2019) stated that the station rotation is similar to a daily five rotation for literacy or a daily three rotation for math. This model allows the teacher to work alongside students while they work through their stations. Station rotations can give teachers the time to work on small group instruction where students

can gain more knowledge and feel more confident to ask questions. Differentiating lessons to meet the needs of students at varying levels of mastery can be done with the station rotation model (Arnesen et al., 2019).

### **Benefits of Blended Learning to Students**

Blended learning gives students more opportunities to choose their learning paths through the significant learning environment created by the teacher. It allows students to choose where they are learning, what they are learning, and how they will learn. Teachers can use real-time feedback from the online platform or individual student tracking information to create a more personalized learning experience for their students. Teachers can get to know their students' interests and what motivates them as they guide them to hone in on their passions. In a study, Pytash and O'Byrne describe blended learning as combining face-to-face instruction with online learning (2018). Students have flexibility in accessing digital tools at various locations and times, and teachers can utilize online activities to adapt their teaching to meet individual students' needs, including those at-risk for academic failure. In addition, teachers can use real-time performance data offered in the digital component to provide individualized instruction.

Allowing students to choose what they want to read, where they want to read, and how they will respond to reading is the first step in creating a sense of ownership in learning. Traditional education ignores that learners need to know why they need to do something, but they must realize the why on their own. We cannot force our why on the learner. It is the teacher's job to motivate and inspire the learners, and in turn, they become self-aware, self-directed, self-monitored students that learn to lead their learning instead of following the instructions of others.

Students track their progress, whether it is through the online platform or personalized digital tracking pages that can be easily accessed and shared with peers, teachers, and parents. As the learners begin tracking their progress and setting goals, they start to see that they are in charge of their learning. Teachers cannot force the why on the learners. Instead, they must figure out the why on their own. Once students have established the why behind tracking their reading and ownership of their learning, they are no longer doing school work; they are learning to learn.

### **Impact on Reading Growth**

When using blended learning in the classroom with station rotations, students can bring their interests into their learning, which will help them and the teacher find their passion for learning. In addition, station rotations in reading will help teachers close the learning gaps that are drastically rising. Teachers can collect student data like Istation, NWEA MAP, STAAR, or student reading ePortfolios to determine a learning path that will impact reading growth. Research shows that blended learning can support reading skill development. Studies have also shown that classrooms that implemented blending learning with station rotations to improve reading proficiency achieved better results. The study compared students in a blended learning classroom to students receiving traditional instruction.

The study compared students who did or did not use iStation in their classrooms and found that students who used iStation showed higher performance than non-users on basic reading skills such as letter-sound knowledge. In addition, within classrooms using iStation, the authors identified a relationship between the level of teachers' literacy support and performance on higher level reading skills (Macaruso, 2020).

## **Student's Ownership of Learning in Reading**

Throughout this innovation plan, we have focused on improving 4th-grade reading comprehension skills by building stamina and owning their learning. In addition, blended learning with station rotations must be implemented in 4th-grade reading classrooms. The online station will be for students to digitally set reading goals, track their reading, respond to reading, and choose reading material as they take ownership over their learning in reading and other aspects of their learning lives. When students take ownership of their learning, they are more successful because they can change their mindset and engage in challenging school work.

When students have a sense of ownership and responsibility for their learning, they (Rutledge & Cannata, 2016):

- Believe they can achieve challenging academic tasks.
- They are personally invested in academic success, the immediate learning task in front of them, and long-term outcomes such as college and career readiness.
- Demonstrate their sense of responsibility through behavior such as coming to class prepared, completing assignments well and on time, making up missed work promptly, and seeing additional help when they are struggling (i.e., going to tutoring).
- Demonstrate their investment through engagement in class, asking questions when they are confused, monitoring their own learning, and attempting to master material with which they struggle.
- Demonstrate life skills such as initiative, self-direction, productivity, and accountability.

## **Summary**

### **Contributions to the Broader Field of Education**

The benefits of adopting a blended learning approach in education will teach learners that they are in charge of their learning. When they own their learning, they take the initiative and become self-directed, productive, accountable members of society. For example, when learners take ownership of their reading learning, they become more curious about the world and less focused on making mistakes.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of Blending Learning**

#### **Strengths**

Blended learning gives students an individualized learning experience. It saves teachers time planning using technology to check for growth and understanding of skills. Blended learning allows students to take ownership of their learning. At the same time, teachers get to know the learners better while guiding them in the right direction to be successful members of society.

#### **Weaknesses**

The research clarifies that blended learning makes learning much more engaging and exciting, but it has a few setbacks. One that comes to mind is having an engaging, reliable, easy-to-navigate online learning platform. Teachers need time to learn how to use the online platform or create digital content for students to track their learning. Time is difficult to find when teachers live in a whirlwind of educational must-dos and the red tape—cannot dos. Teachers need time to practice and feel comfortable moving forward with blended learning. Teachers and learners must establish routines and hold each other accountable, but daily disruptions make routines challenging to establish. Professional learning must be significant and

ongoing with constant support within specific disciplines. Modeling station rotations and creating student ownership of their learning must be constant. When routines are established with station rotations and students track their learning, quantitative and qualitative measurements should be developed.

### **Drawbacks and Challenges of Research**

There is not much information on station rotations being a catalyst for students taking ownership of their learning in 4th-grade reading. I found a lot of research on students owning their learning at high school and college levels. I want to find more information on professional learning created to train teachers on implementing blended learning with station rotations and how to guide elementary students to own their learning.

### **Conclusion**

Research has shown that blended learning with station rotations positively affects student growth and is being integrated into more classrooms yearly. The research also proved that blended learning with station rotations gives students choice, voice, and, most importantly, ownership of their learning. When students have autonomy over their learning, research states that meaningful learning is more likely to occur. In conclusion, using blended learning with the station rotation model in classrooms is a positive motivator for students, and teachers can give their students a more individualized learning experience. I believe the skills gained through meaningful experiences in authentic learning environments will ensure lifelong learning and the critical skills necessary to be successful members of our society.

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