

Bio: I currently teach 5th-grade math, science, and social studies at the STEAM Academy at Mambrino, which is part of Granbury ISD. I have been an educator for 10 years and have taught Kindergarten, First Grade, and now Fifth Grade. ~Jennifer Bloodworth

Shifting the Traditional Classroom with Blended Learning

By: Jennifer Bloodworth

Glancing at my calendar, I feel like the White Rabbit in Alice in Wonderland.

Always running from one thing to the next. Always checking the time. Always feeling behind. How do we create the one thing we need most in schools? Time. We need more time to work with that one student. We need more time to reteach something difficult.

The students need more time to process but we do not have the time to slow down the scope. We always have a shortage of time. What if we could create more time?

Obviously, we cannot add minutes to the day, nor would we want to; but maybe we could actually remedy the issue of needing more time by reallocating the time we have.

Changing the way that teachers and students approach learning is the best way to begin to revolutionize education. Using a blended learning station rotation model, like that illustrated in *Blended: Using Disruptive Innovation to Improve Schools* (2014), in the classroom, would certainly change the balance of responsibility in the classroom as well as allow for innovation. This method of learning allows students to really own their learning and allows students to show their understanding in unique ways. The stations cover the same content without the teacher using valuable class time doing a live lesson introducing a concept and creating a reference in an interactive journal. The teacher could video that lesson prior to class and assign it to students to work independently. This would allow the student the ability to work through the lesson at the

student's pace by allowing them to pause and rewind during the lesson. Students would also work through other stations that focus on a specific concept but allow for unique proof of understanding through open-ended tasks.

In January of 2020, I began implementing a blended learning station rotation model in my 5th-grade math class. My goal was to spend more time in small groups and individualized instruction while the entire class was engaged in meaningful practice. When implementing any new procedures with students, it is critical to allow time for adjustments. I also found that gathering feedback from the students helped me organize and adjust when the plan did not work exactly as planned. Some of the programs I used are paid for by my district, and some are free for teachers everywhere! Be sure you thoroughly vet programs yourself and with your district's technology department to ensure safe use for students. Because my students are under 13 years old, I had to work with extra boundaries, but nothing that stopped this plan from being successful. When planning, keep it simple and purposeful.

In the beginning, I continued using stations to practice and spiral content as I have in the past. The first change included a shift from whole group instruction for creating our interactive journal. This change would ideally add instructional time in the week for small groups instead of doing one large whole group lesson and then several small group mini-lessons to ensure mastery of the content. This shift meant that instead of providing remediation for students that did not understand the whole group lesson, the teacher would address misconceptions immediately during the lesson when it was clear that the student was not understanding.

Stations were composed of digital programs such as Khan Academy, Reflex Math, Splash Learn, Education Galaxy, and Brain Pop. Students were also working with ZSpace machines where they could manipulate math tools in a three-dimensional environment. One station was always hands-on. Students had some autonomy in creation because we are a STEAM Academy and they had the ability to show how math was relevant in all aspects of life through intentional STEAM-based activities

The shift into small group instruction was driven by data. Instead of hosting small groups with every student, every week, over the same concept, my small group instruction will be determined by what each group of students needs based on the data I collect. If a student proves mastery of a concept, they will move to an extension activity and then to the next concept. Each child will have individualized instruction.

I began with a “Choice Menu” that allows students to choose alternative ways to submit evidence of learning such as a Flipgrid video, a Kidblog post, or the like. As students became more confident, I shifted to an open-ended choice. I conference with students twice per grading period to review data, help the students set goals for themselves, and reflect on their prior goals. This is the phase of implementation where our schools were suddenly closed and I was unable to complete the pilot of this plan. I do believe that my students were able to adapt more efficiently when we were forced to conduct class virtually in the spring. Without intentional instruction on how to use our educational technology, it is doubtful that my students would have had such a seamless transition!

When the 2020-21 school year began, I was able to teach the procedures initially and begin the transition into a much more student lead and student-centered classroom

environment. Students are learning to become more independent and take ownership of their own learning. The best part is that more students are excited about coming to math class because they are not having the same struggles that they were before. Blended Learning Stations give students the opportunity to learn at their own pace and with as much practice as they need. Instead of memorizing, students are truly learning!

References

Horn, M. B., & Staker, H. (2015). *Blended: Using disruptive innovation to improve schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.