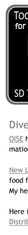
INNOVATIVE INKLINGS

Comox Valley School District Newsletter for Innovation

May 6, 2016



Diversity

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Diversity Links

OISE has a good site for those looking for projects, ideas, information, and research related to diversity in teaching.

New Learning (from the University of Illinois) provides a lot of food for thought. I really liked their page on Learner Diversity. My head is still spinning.

Here is a post I put up on my blog in February looking at shifts in Distributed Learning.

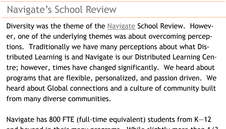
This site, though Americentric, has good information about blended learning.

Edutopia has a lot of great information and resources on many topics related to education. Information about blended learning is available by clicking here.

Personalized Learning

Personalized learning acknowledges that not all students learn successfully at the same rate, in the same learning environment, and in the same ways. It involves the provision of high-quality and engaging learning opportunities that meet the diverse needs of all students. Schools may provide flexible timing and pacing through a range of learning environments, with learning supports and services tailored to meet student needs.

Personalized learning focuses on enhancing student engagement in learning and giving students choices—more of a say in what and how they learn—leading to lifelong, self-directed learning.



> *"We have what we need, if we use what we have.*
> *- Edgar Cahn*
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> *"What if we could transcend the conventional pedagogical confinements of space (the four walls of the classroom) and time (the cells of the timetable)?"*
> *- Kalantzis & Cope*

Around the District

Innovative events and efforts from around our district

Navigate's School Review

Diversity was the theme of the Navigate School Review. However, one of the underlying themes was about overcoming perceptions. Traditionally we have many perceptions about what Distributed Learning is and Navigate is our Distributed Learning Centre; however, times have changed significantly. We heard about programs that are flexible, personalized, and passion driven. We heard about Global connections and a culture of community built from many diverse communities.

Navigate has 800 FTE (full-time equivalent) students from K—12 and beyond in their many programs. While slightly more than 1/3 of their students are from the Comox Valley, the quality of their programs have drawn students from 50 of the 60 school districts in British Columbia. I also found it very interesting that 25% of their revenue is generated by their marquee blended programs (FAs and DHTEB).

Part of the review included a presentation by the Navigate PAC and two key pieces came from that: they value the powerful relationships they have with the people in the school AND there is a pervasive culture of "Why don't you try this?" which drives much of what happens at Navigate. It is seen in the variety of activities students participate in and it is seen in the diverse approaches teachers use to meet very diverse student needs. Navigate has the most diverse student population in our district by all measures.

Melissa Mullis described the work she does in Nanaimo with John Gair and Ken Marcuzzi meeting students and parents in community spaces throughout the Qualicum Beach and Nanaimo region, including parking lots. They have one day a week that has set classes and then the other four days they support individual student needs. They work with approximately 270 students from K-12 and adults. They support workshops, community events, etc. and together have created another rich learning community of people with diverse needs.

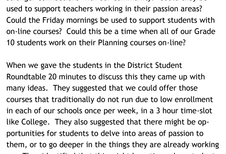
Brittany Hansen has been working in the blended learning environment for the past 3 years and came from a traditional environment. She indicated at the meeting that she has come to see the real value and power of blended learning. GP Vanier teacher, Christophe Abelin, never one to shy away from a challenge, decided to try working with blended learning in his French 8 class and has found it valuable enough in supporting student learning to do it again next year. The point behind me using these examples is to demonstrate that in our environment of increasing complexity and diversity, we need to look at multiple ways of supporting student learning and blended learning is one way that aligns with what we know about student learning.

Next year our secondary schools will build upon the success of their ILC (Independent Learning Centres) programs and GP Vanier's Room 200 trial by having teachers working with students online as part of their assignments; this will, in all likelihood, lead to ever increasing blended learning opportunities to support student learning. In addition to innovative courses, like the PACE course for high performance athletes, there will also be more, formalized, blended learning programs being offered at the Secondary Level.

At Highland, they are offering iMAKER for students in grades 10-12. Students will take a full time, 5 day per week program taking core academic courses inside the Highland timetable (with a choice of doing these courses on-line) and the other half of the time they will be with the iMAKER teacher doing the technology courses and IDS projects.

At GP Vanier they are offering THINKOSPACE for students in grades 10-12. This is a blended program that has face-to-face classes three days per week and two days of online learning at home and in the community.

By working to meet the diverse needs of their very diverse school community, Navigate has provided many examples and opportunities for us to personalize learning for our students.



Amended School Week

Last week our School Board passed a motion to change our traditional weekly schedule. The change at both levels will take some adjusting to, but they also invite us to explore some exciting possibilities. The change at the secondary level provides us with an opportunity to breakdown some of the structural barriers we have traditionally faced when trying to personalize learning for students. In October, when we were working to review the redesigned curriculum for students in grades 10-12 we repeatedly heard "this is great, but the structure won't let us capitalize on it. We could do so much, but we're locked in." Well, could the new work-week schedule allow for some structural changes to support the benefits of the redesigned curriculum?

These conversations are happening in all of our schools and some interesting ideas are already beginning to surface. Could the Friday morning time be used for students to work on projects based on their passions? Could we develop stronger connections with our community? Could they be used to support teachers working in their passion areas? Could the Friday mornings be used to support students with on-line courses? Could this be a time when all of our Grade 10 students work on their Planning courses on-line?

When we gave the students in the District Student Roundtable 20 minutes to discuss this they came up with many ideas. They suggested that we could offer those courses that traditionally do not run due to low enrollment in each of our schools once per week, in a 3 hour time-slot like College. They also suggested that there might be opportunities for students to delve into areas of passion to them, or to go deeper in the things they are already working on. They identified that this might be a time when students could get extra support in studies where they are struggling.

Jeffrey Pfeffer, a management guru, refers to a '*knowing-doing gap*' when identifying why businesses fail, while I prefer the oft re-quoted: 'when will what we know change what we do?' Suffice it to say, we have a golden opportunity to do things differently. The excitement, and fear, I have heard in many of these conversations is real. However, I also know the people having these conversations and know that we have the capacity to do great things. I am looking forward to having more conversations about how we can make some systemic changes to address what we know about improving student learning and then to rolling up our sleeves to make it happen. It will be very rewarding work.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and please direct any suggestions, questions, or inquiries to me directly: Gerald.Fussell@sd71.bc.ca