

Flexible Learning Design: A Turning Point for Resilient Adult Education

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Abstract

Readiness for content delivery is essential in supporting instructional quality at all levels of the education system. The study's purpose was to explore the effectiveness of implementing flexible instruction during a period of disruption. The research explored ideas of teacher readiness and the characteristics of structured content delivery using teachers from three schools in Montserrat. This multiple case study examined the importance of administrative support and the teachers' mentoring and direction for teaching within a flexible approach. The research used surveys and focused group interviews for collecting the participants' perspectives and reflections on online teaching. Critical comparisons between the preference for in-class, face-to-face, and flexible learning helped to determine best practice implementation opportunities. The study results suggested that (a) professional development improves teacher readiness for flexible engagement and (b) Ongoing coaching and mentoring are critical for maintaining student engagement in a flexible learning environment. The recommendation is that institutions interested in implementing new learning pathways should utilize a guiding framework for professional development that reduces teacher readiness gaps and implement ways to realize key performance indicators (KPIs) through coaching and mentoring strategies. This research is vital for opening a new perspective for educators and policymakers on effectively planning for sustainable education in small states, both now and in the future.

Keywords: Teacher Readiness, Web-based Instruction, Flexible Course Design, Models for Teacher Resilience, Online Delivery.

Introduction

“Sun a shine but tings no bright; Doan pot a bwile, Bickle no nuff; River flood but water scarce, awl; Rain a fall but duty tough.”¹

Online and flexible learning has become more prevalent over the past decade. The coronavirus pandemic has also made it critical for educational institutions to identify structures and tools to sustain education during the public health crisis. Across the globe, educators considered changing teaching trends across continents and within countries to reach students who were unable to meet in classrooms and schools. To support the development of resilient, flexible education systems, the researcher examined the process of a training mechanism and its effectiveness for creating a sustainable approach to flexible delivery. To help address education continuity, the researcher sought to discover the following: What training objectives will guide the development of flexible learning pathways? And what kind of learning development would be suitable for adult learners or teachers at any level of the education system? Both questions guided the creation of a teacher training workshop series that forms the basis of this research. The researcher thought it essential to address these questions since video conferencing platforms such as Zoom have supplemented in-person education and hybrid delivery since early 2019. A deeper look at the benefits of a training process in one school system might provide transferrable data to new locations to support resilient, flexible learning approaches.

The trainers of the teacher training preparation workshops described in this report acknowledged the changes to the status quo. Trainers would need to identify the contradictions in their position, like Bennett’s poem, that all the knowledge they had was inadequate to meet the emerging needs and therefore was no match for this new normal of the Coronavirus Pandemic.

Trainers brainstormed the approach to delivering teacher training in the “special projects” that came as teachers and schools prepared to take the delivery into a flexible format. Everyone drew straws, decided on the presenters, and started research for teacher training workshops that were a priority. A Covid-19 Emergency Education Response Initiative was in full swing.

1. Duty Tough a poem by Louise Bennett Coverley indicates that having plenty is not all that useful in cases where the value of what you have is challenged by the current circumstances. (best-poems.net).

The trainers got ready to offer the support required to the Caribbean education communities. Resources that would be meaningful for transferring knowledge, such as the Ba Future report (2020), furnished strategies shared during the training process. The audiences included university faculty, ministries of education personnel, and specialists from schools, seminaries, and colleges who came to the “experts” for guidance.

The ministry of education in Monserrat was an early recipient of the emergency education initiative. Through initial workshops, trainers prepared the teachers from three education institutions (Alpha, Beta, and Gamma) for the flexible learning pivot. This report outlines the teachers’ engagement from three education institutions, Alpha, Beta, and Gamma, in an emergency training workshop series – prerequisites for delivering flexible learning due to changes required by the pandemic. The information from this report will be valuable to education boards, educational administrators, novice, and expert teachers to implement a flexible approach or design lessons for delivery in a flexible-learning environment. Generally, academic institutions will have a backup plan for flexible learning in the future.

Literature Review

Teacher training programs often consider how teachers conduct lessons and use teaching models for implementing effective practices. The theoretical approach utilized for professional development delivery is experiential learning. Experiential learning is learning by doing and reflecting on the actions to mastery. In the experiential process, the learner is involved and benefits from a structured experience. Irving (2019) identifies the option as a best practice of teaching and learning in action suitable to deliver professional development to adult educators. These models often operate through professional development options that support collaborative engagement in face-to-face settings. Proponents of the experiential approach often use the following quote attributed to Confucius to express the conviction that experiential learning is effective: Tell me, and I forget; Show me, and I remember; Involve me, and I understand! Experiential learning includes instructional design, course delivery, evaluation, and participant feedback. Flexible learning is a model that gives students the freedom to select learning content, pathways, and timing. Not limited by time or space, flexible learning complements an experiential model helping the learner build schemes from known to new information. The researcher uses both students and learners interchangeably to denote the recipients of the flexible learning design created by workshop participants.

Several proponents of flexible learning include Garrison, Anderson, & Archer (2000), Kilgore & Al Freih (2016), and Eldridge, Watts, Guy, Lalongo & Zoe (2021). Garrison, Anderson, & Archer supports a community of inquiry that encourages multiple opportunities for presence in an online setting. The community of inquiry model has three key elements of an educational experience: Teaching presence, cognitive presence, and social presence. The authors propose that the best learning experiences occur when the three areas combine to create a setting for learning with intentionally selected content and opportunities for supported discourse. Kilgore & Al Freih argues that there is critical support for personalizing the learning environment through course design options that create high-impact interactions. Kilgore (2016) extends the ideas of a humanized approach where the teacher persona and learner characteristics combine to create the learning environment. Kilgore's research supports the notion that courses should not be a disembodied voice or words on a computer screen but rather convey the human element. Eldridge, Watts, Guy, Lalongo & Zoe considers flexible learning design a trigger for structuring a learning community, developing teaching practice, and reducing learner isolation. UNESCO Institute (2020) presents the Chinese "Disrupted Learning Undisrupted Classes" initiative, which supports a flexible online learning approach under the following six dimensions:

1. Infrastructure,
2. Learning tools,
3. Learning resources,
4. Teaching and learning methods,
5. Services for teachers and students, and,
6. Cooperation between government, enterprises, and schools

When considering flexible environments, designers must combine these elements with other successful practices for supporting effective content delivery and learner engagement.

Pivoting to a Flexible Approach

In Response to Pandemic Conditions

*"Good manning, Teacher – ow is you? My name is Sarah Pool; Dis is fi-me li boy Michal; An me just bring him a school."*²

2. Opening stanza from "New Scholar," This poem by Louise Bennett-Coverley encapsulates the interrelation of parent-school relationships and how they protect learners' interests and education continuity. (PoemHunter.com)

In 2019 the world learned about an impending health phenomenon from a virus in Wuhan, China. Bertacchini, Biota, & Pantano (2020) studied the virus and its longevity, which caused it to be named .

Named an epidemic. In response to the rapid spread of the Covid-19 disease, testers in the United States urged the protection of vulnerable populations (MENA report 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO), in similar steps to countermeasures for the Ebola virus, declared a public health emergency of international concern (MENA report, 2019). Barsocchini, Bilotta, & Pantano (2020) reported the rapid spread of the virus across countries and aligned their findings with the virus becoming a pandemic. The world's economic, religious, and social systems were affected, and the pandemic did not spare the education system. The WHO Director-General, six months into the pandemic, in his August 2020 media briefing, remarked, "WHO fully supports efforts to re-open economies and societies. We want to see children returning to school and people returning to the workplace – but we want to see it done safely. At the same time, no country can just pretend the pandemic is over" (World Health Organization, 2020).

Several countries closed their borders and non-essential businesses to control the virus and limit its spread. Teachers retooled to meet the growing demands of flexible learning. In the manner Bennett's New Scholar suggested, parents released the authority for student learning to teachers even when they had "suggestions" for learner treatment and classroom management. The Barclay Training Institute recognizes this rite of passage from home to school. It provides teachers with the tools and skills to deliver the best student development experience ten understand the interrelated roles of the two locations. The emergency education initiative was just a necessary extension of this established practice. Casey & Wilson (2005) argues that flexible learning has five key dimensions (time, content, instructional approaches and resources, entry requirements, and delivery logistics). Casey & Wilson believe these dimensions lie on a continuum that moves course delivery from teacher-led to student educational processes and choices (p. 6). In this approach, the teacher gradually releases responsibility as the learner increases in proficiency and autonomy.

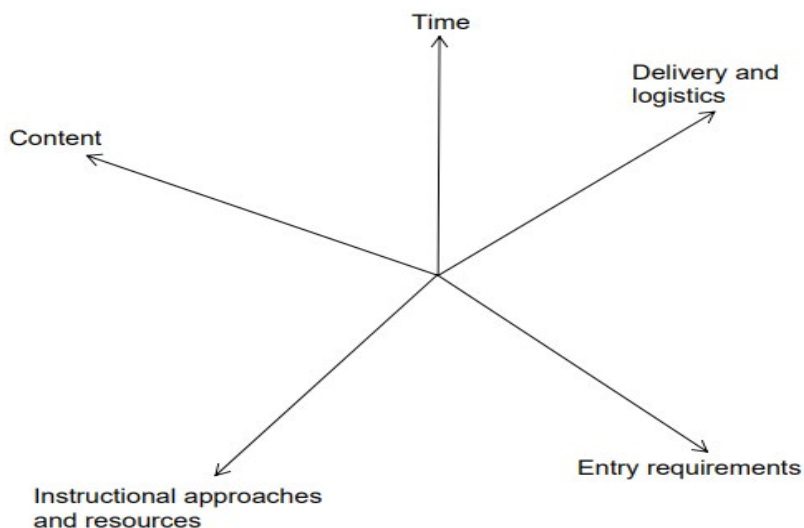


Figure 1 - The Five Dimensions of Flexibility

The training workshops aligned with this approach and covered topics in technology, course design, and flexible delivery pedagogy. Therefore, this report reviews the Barclay Institute's response and the teachers' reflection of their preparation for this new delivery model with each participant's teaching, supporting interactivity and learner control. In retrospect, how effective was the implementation of this model for flexible instruction for students based on the prior knowledge and content level? One extension of this question resides in Eldridge, Watts, Guy, Lalongo & Zoe's (2021) study, which examined the strategies for disseminating emerging practices for flexible learning beyond workshop participants. This engagement aligns with the need to adopt changes in culture as learning moves from traditional into more flexible frameworks. Therefore, the workshop needed to consider the structure of the system for which training and later teaching were created.

Montserrat's education system follows a British model with primary, secondary, post-secondary, and tertiary education institutions. Primary education covers approximately six years of engagement with students from five to twelve years in kindergarten to grade six (Sheldon, 2021). Teachers impart several core curriculum areas (English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, Integrated Science, and Social Studies). Specialist teachers cover complementary areas (Personal

Moral and Social Education, Physical Education, Information Technology, and Theatre Arts), mandatory for all students. The primary level is the foundational years of education. Students develop a frame of reference and create a foundation for building later years of schooling. Therefore, these years need to be meaningful whether the children learn in a face-to-face or online modality. As such, adult educators must approach flexible learning delivery systematically. The training that forms the foundation of the study targeted teachers who practiced in these primary schools. The experiential approach, principles of self-direction, and autonomy facilitated direct involvement in the process. Teachers' immersion into the process allowed them to plan for flexible delivery by designing their lessons and preparing for facilitation.

Preparing for Online Delivery

"Draw; therefore, O governor, prime minister, parson, teacher, shopkeeper, politician, university lecturer, resonant revolutionaries, draw carefully that last fine line of your responsibility."³

The Barclay Institute devised a response expanding teaching and learning from an in-person to a virtual format. The Institute developed this format to facilitate and support teaching continuity for other tertiary level institutions and, for this training situation, in the Montserrat primary school system. Kilgore and Al Frei (2016) suggest that the human element is necessary for online courses. The authors support this view by defining the online instructor's role in three presences: instructor, social, and cognitive. The authors review the value of social learning in synchronous and asynchronous settings. In Montserrat's Alpha, Beta, and Gamma schools, teachers geared their instruction to in-person engagement with students using the Barclay Institute's guided approach. The response model embraced the challenge of Mordecai's responsibilities in leadership to carefully design a policy that encompassed all students' needs, regardless of their social context. Therefore, the initiative examined teaching and learning practices and how familiar in-person strategies are applied in the online modality to support these teachers' transition. Bush & Hall (2013) reviews several best practices from which they suggest future steps for training activities within a defined structure.

3. Closing stanza from "Last Lines," a poem by Pamela Mordecai from Morais (2012). The general idea of these lines is that the decisions made by those in authority will live on in our minds and histories long after the decision-maker dies. So, the importance of making good decisions and living well should take precedence.

The training team looked at the alignment between pedagogy and technology and how the Learning Management System (LMS) tools could support a structured community development and connection process. An important factor was to help the teachers see how technological approaches are applied to reinforce traditional content delivery strategies. Covid-19 became a catalyst for change, manifesting the importance of its application for concretizing learning.

What are the most critical areas for shifting your teaching to an online delivery model ?

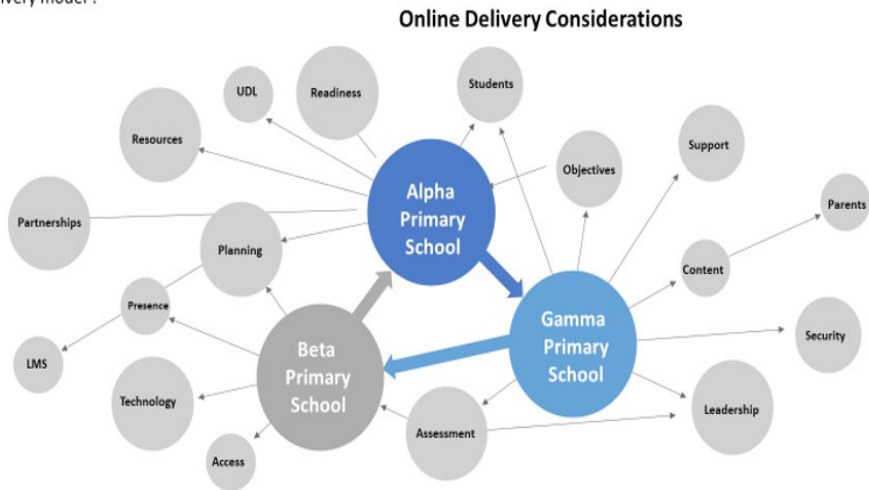


Figure 2 - Online Delivery Considerations

Several considerations were, therefore, essential for the workshop support structure, design, and delivery. Figure 2 presents a map of the vital elements for preparing the teachers at the Alpha, Beta, and Gamma primary schools for their foray into a flexible delivery format. At the start and end of each training workshop, the trainees (teachers from the three schools) shared their perspectives on flexible delivery preparation. Teachers' views on their readiness for several elements were collected through surveys and are included graphically in the narrative.

Vital pre-questions for teachers yielded information on their challenges with preparation and their hang-ups with getting started in flexible delivery. Their access to technology was limited and ranged from having their own devices, borrowing from others, and depending on the school's equipment. Teachers gained a new appreciation for context and connection through the engagement options addressed in the training sessions.

Which challenges do you currently face regarding shifting your instruction to emergency remote teaching?

Preparation Challenges



Figure 3 - Preparation Challenges

Teachers from the three sites included flexible delivery familiarity, ranging from zero to five years, some having completed online studies. Several of the teachers from Gamma had no engagement with online delivery. Overall, respondents from all sites shared the same inhibitions and challenges. Critical areas in which they needed assistance based on their schools are listed below:

1. Alpha Primary – Designing online content, including converting teaching materials using online tools, quiz and assignment creation, and options for engaging students effectively.
2. Beta Primary – Creating authentic student assessment pieces, including training for students and technology tools for quiz development.
3. Gamma Primary – Using a variety of applications to conduct classes, including the creation of digital portfolios. One respondent indicated that having a computer would be the most critical support factor.

Based on these areas of opportunity, the workshops included the design for presence in the selection of the technology (G Suites for Education), the creation of content (Digital Literacy), and the delivery of the content (Active Learning). Trainers created the workshops around the Community of Inquiry (Col) model (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000).

The Col model represents a process of creating meaningful engagement through interconnected elements for social, cognitive, and teaching presence. The original Col model examined educational experience in a text-based environment. Hughes, Thomas, and Scharber (2006) extended the model to include the transformational learning experience possible in an online space that provides accessibility and content presentation.

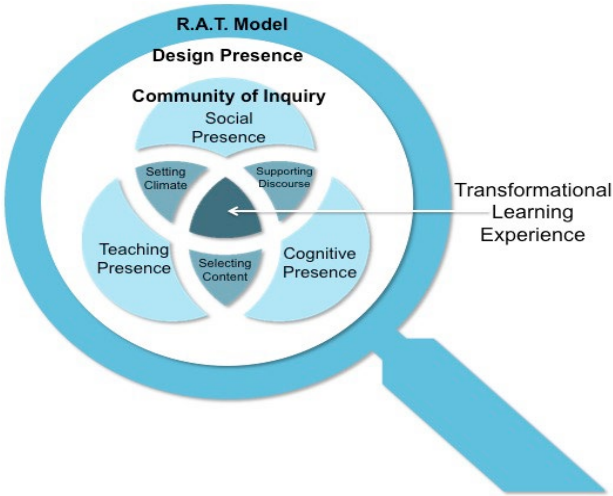


Figure 4 - RAT Col Model

Trainers considered Hughes, Thomas, and Scharber’s RAT model for replication, amplification, and transformation in the Community of Inquiry framework. The RAT model (Figure 4) forms a valuable base when reviewing how course design and delivery work together to meet students’ needs in a flexible learning environment. McNulty (2021) provides a comprehensive guide for educators who employ a flexible learning approach. Trainers investigated a new taxonomy suitable for flexible and flipped environments. The trainers urged trainees to replace existing content guided by Bloom’s Digital Taxonomy.⁴

4. Bloom’s Digital Taxonomy, developed by Andrew Churches, to extend the original taxonomy. The digital taxonomy creates a hierarchy of learning activities in a digital environment. The flexible learning approach aligns with this digital model and supports a framework for curriculum implementation in a digital teaching and learning model. Techniques that support the teaching and learning environment are critical components for successful flexible learning. Classroom structures must incorporate unique strategies and a humanized approach to meet the needs of all learners (Kilgore, 2016).

Pacansky-Brock, Smedshammer, & Vincent-Layton (2019) have examined the process for humanizing digital learning environments. They believe that learning is addressed through the development of instructor-student relationships. Their guidance for the adoption of humanized teaching has seen growing success in online and virtual environments. Stephan (2017) supports this theory. His ideas suggest that technology tools and strategies facilitate learning engagement in online environments. These combined approaches are valuable resources for educators who seek a flexible learning approach. To meet the Col model's requirements and support student engagement, teachers should plan for collaborative engagement and create communication and meaning-making opportunities in reciprocally understood contexts. Planning and reflection are critical first steps in the transition process. They are recursive elements revisited and revised during the teaching and learning process.

The theories and research support the view that flexible learning environments effectively pivot teaching practice in a pandemic. However, teachers fail in delivering effective methods in these environments if specific conditions are unavailable. A readiness mindset and the tools and techniques that support the teaching and learning environment are critical components for successful flexible learning. Classroom structures must incorporate unique strategies and a humanized approach to meet the needs of all learners (Kilgore, 2016).

Materials and Methods

The researcher sought to critically compare in-person and flexible learning preferences to determine compelling implementation opportunities. The research used a qualitative approach in a descriptive study design to identify flexible learning design characteristics and the consequences of a specific training process in an uncontrolled environment. The report utilizes a recursive embedded rhetorical structure⁵ to analyse cross-case themes, participants' perspectives, notions of online delivery, and findings from online delivery practices into a unified, case-based account. Themes of institutional planning, partnership arrangements, and the adoption of flexible learning pathways are explored and used to evaluate ongoing support strategies and the flexibility of teachers' educational roles.

5. Rhetorical relationships between the report themes and existing literature contextualize the work and describe the interconnecting roles - through description, interpretation, and clarification. Recursion supports cross theme analysis that leads to efficiency by removing coding redundancies.

Instrumentation

Surveys and focused group interviews were instruments for data collection. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic content analysis.

Sample

The researcher used a purposive sampling technique (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to identify teachers and workshop presenters to be the primary informants of the study. The workshop presenters and Montserrat's selected schools' teachers were best placed to insights and direct the researcher to information that clarified the research question. Further, establishing the schools as multi-site cases supported the teachers' privacy while collecting information about the sites and their administration. Participation was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw from the study without affecting their workshop participation. In keeping with the guidelines for ethical considerations (Creswell & Poth, 2018), the researcher selected an approach to ensure informed consent and a release to use the data collected and remain accurate in reporting. As an active participant, the researcher is also an instrument of the study. The report may convey preconceptions, given the researcher's close involvement with the process. The participant identifiers are undisclosed in keeping with the data collection protocols' protection requirements and informed consent. The researcher uses pseudonyms to represent the presenters and schools and alters functions for privacy purposes. Any similarity to people and places is coincidental.

Results

The study resulted in a guiding framework for teacher professional development for flexible learning. Amidst the shift to a flexible learning approach, several limitations emerged. Teacher preparation requirements that serve as barriers to flexible course design included challenges of uncertainty, teacher readiness, inadequate resources, and limited exposure to virtual learning opportunities. Training options that participants found useful were active learning, community development, and post-training access to course design and development resources. The perspective of institutional planning captures the qualitative feedback from the 'study's informants.

Institutional Planning

“If you can keep your head when all about you, are losing theirs and blaming it on you, If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you, But make allowance for their doubting too...”⁶

Tyson (2020) urges a response that fits the actions of several higher education and adult training institutions to support a flexible approach. The Barclay institute was instrumental in charting the emergency education initiative path for the Caribbean. Sir Hillary Beckles asserts, “We have raced to transition our courses and programs to online delivery.... Our commitment is to ensure Access for our people, Alignment with the needs of our society in this time of crisis, and Agility in our response to these rapidly changing times - preparing the Institution for a new technologically-enabled future...” (Beckles, 2020). He affirms the Institute’s readiness to lead and maintain its status quo while offering support regionally. The Barclay Training Institute faced the current crisis with the stoicism and the humility that Kipling advocates in his poem. Montserrat’s Alpha, Beta, and Gamma schools bought into the vision of a technologically enabled future for both the teachers and the taught. School Administrators led from the front, asking essential questions, and joining the training processes. It seemed that the school leaders adopted the idea of standing together.

School Leaders took their instructional leadership role seriously, attending sessions and joining the conversations to broker engagement support for their teachers with the workshop presenters. They engaged in email communication, often requesting additional information, and seeking clarification for the presented content. The collaborative engagement suggests that teacher professional development improves teacher readiness for flexible engagement. The Alpha school principal was quite interested in learning how teachers could prevent others from completing the students’ work and mentored teachers in options for combating cheating. Academic dishonesty remains a critical question for all educators today, and adult educators must take notice. Le (2017) shares six principles of sticky ideas designed to support effective communication. Outlined in the SUCCES acronym – Simple Unexpected Concrete Credible Emotional Stories – these ideas form a pattern for success. Le believes that these principles apply to many contexts. The theory proposes a simple strategy for innovatively approaching an old problem.

6. “If,” by Poet Laureate Rudyard Kipling is seen as a set of rules for ethics and excellence that drives personal norms. In this case it is used as a model of humility and integrity mirrored in institutional and organizational visions and values. (poetryloverspage.com)

The report describes four ideas in Figure 5, aligned with the schools’ responses to institutional planning and preparation forFlexible learning. The respondents agree that successful strategies were derived from the workshops and left several “sticky ideas” worth repeating and replicating.

What area of the training series was the MOST useful for your online preparation?



Figure 5 - Sticky Ideas

The stepwise approach outlined above discerns the notion of academic continuity stripped to its core, revealing the simple yet profound process of keeping students engaged. In the unexpected flexible path, teachers deviate from the standard teaching method and use a student-centred model. This model helps teachers care for the learner’s needs by diversifying the material and engagement strategies to meet all learners’ needs. Concrete delivery addresses the communication piece, ensuring that all students understand the material regardless of their interest and familiarity with the content. Credibility aligns with an authentic approach to assessing learning and tracking student achievement. The teacher then mediates behaviour and reteaches content with shared learner experiences to ensure applicability and support inclusion in the process. The idea of shared experiences ties back to the RAT model above. The concept of shared experiences ties back to the RAT model above, allowing the teacher to apply new skills to teach in the digital space. While the teacher at the primary level is in the driver’s seat in the face-to-face classroom, the home becomes a critical part of the process with the integrated online teaching approach.

Ongoing coaching and mentoring are essential for maintaining student engagement in a flexible learning environment. Therefore, schools must support parental involvement by designing guidelines for managing online learning and implementing policies for keeping children (our most vulnerable population) safe in times of crisis.

Discussion

“Just like moons and like suns, With the certainty of tides, Just like hopes springing high, Still I’ll rise.”⁷

“Covid-19 has forged a strong alliance between the home and the school. A connection slowly eroded over years of defining the public and private environments. All the principal players – or partners – have returned to the table (willingly or unwillingly) to determine the rules of engagement for education to continue. “Still, I Rise,” the well-known poem by Maya Angelou, could be the motto for the education sector that has reinvented itself over the last several months. Beckles (2020) writes, “I have reflected that there is no return to the past, and as we struggle beside our people to overcome the terrible threat of COVID-19, we are heartened that we have the skills, the talent, and the robustness to build an even better ... future.” Schools have a strategic opportunity to build partnerships to ensure the learner’s ongoing development in non-traditional learning spaces. With parents and other alternative teachers’ assistance, a sense of community is created and maintained to monitor learners’ growth and connection in the learning communities. Together, we can continue to work towards progressive school and educational reform agendas. In the discussion, several themes and vignettes present the findings and discussions. Pathways and Partnerships (Figure 6) seeks to review the teachers’ starting positions and identify growth trajectories that support the emerging partnerships for the long term.

7. The third stanza of “Still I Rise” by Maya Angelou recounts the resilience of hope, reminding us that determination and strength will have a similar effect as the certainty of moons, suns, and tides. (2021 Regents of the University of Minnesota). Education systems.

Which challenges do you currently face regarding shifting your instruction to emergency remote teaching?

Pathways and Partnerships

Communication
Lack of communication
between students and parents.

Service Resources
Lack of quality Internet access
(for your students).



Time Management
Prioritization of personal needs
(home needs, elder care,
parenting, home schooling,
etc...)

Content Delivery
How to create or convert
teaching materials using online
tools and uploading them.
Effective content delivery and
online Marking.

Figure 6 - Pathways and Partnerships

The home, school, and community partnerships take a multi-faceted approach to creating new policies, roles, and responsibilities that support the primary school learner's ongoing development. Stefania Giannini (2020) opines, "We need to come together ... to address the immediate educational consequences of this unprecedented crisis [and] build up the longer-term resilience of education systems." UNESCO supports creating reliable network infrastructure, facilitating effective teaching, and providing support services, some of which the researcher examines below. Communication becomes an essential adhesive for keeping the parts of the partnership connected.

Administrators and school leaders must reinvent the timetable to support younger learners' engagement, limiting screen time while allowing adequate engagement with concepts.

Additionally, parent-school communication guidelines should come from the leadership to ensure parents' and teachers' buy-in at the school level. Teachers must form alliances along content lines to enable those more proficient in a content discipline to create learning objects and applications. A repository of tools and learning materials will be valuable for other colleagues to share and use with the students at the same level.

Providers of Internet services and other material resources needed for education should consider creating plans that enable schools and students to remain connected even beyond the current crisis. The ministry of education should broker deals with hardware companies and service providers to support learning websites, starting with those most essential for connection and learning. Media houses should offer support through programming to engage students around concrete concepts. These programs are most meaningful during the early learning years when children learn these ideas. The matter of time management, an often overlooked but critical aspect of teaching and learning, comes to the fore in flexible environments. On our diagram, we have the notion of prioritizing several services and tasks that fall to parents who are now teachers and teachers who are also parents and caregivers. Teachers should review the curricular concepts to support authentic learning opportunities. Students can find learning opportunities through creative play and discovery buttressed by teachers' guidance and encouraged by their home-school partners.

As teachers reimagine content delivery, they must have planning and brainstorming sessions that support selecting strategies and approaches for active learner engagement. Questions such as What will they discover? And how will they realize it? Change the narrative for both the teacher and the taught. The design stage covers ideas of creativity, role play, and student discovery. Teachers must design with the end in mind and differentiate the content to meet all students' learning needs and interests. As teachers and schools reinvent themselves to create novel and workable strategies, institutions must develop interconnected and interoperable systems. In Montserrat's case, the training in this report took a unified approach as a model for other schools and systems with similar needs and interests. Indeed, partnerships can guide the development of robust arrangements that can be resilient in the long run.

Lessons from Sustainable Alliances

"Dis poem is just a part of the story; his-story her-story our-story the story still untold; dis poem is now 'ringin talkin irritatin; makin u want to stop it; but dis poem will not stop."⁸

8. Excerpt of "Dis Poem," by Mutabaruka. The lyrics are a call to action that could cause the listener to analyze their stance and create their own story, aligned with a set of values that avoid past mistakes. (Lyricsmode.com).

Sustainable alliances are sometimes formed out of intentional meetings and occur when people are forced out of their comfort zones and pushed to the limit of their abilities. The latter denoted the partnership forged between the trainers and the teachers at the Alpha, Beta, and Gamma primary schools.

Like “Dis Poem” by Mutabaruka, the current circumstances have left many subliminal messages. Teaching in these pandemic times has caused educators to reflect, review, and reshape their thinking about what they consider the norm. The presenters approached sharing their insights and expertise with these groups with enthusiasm and in a reflective vein. They willingly shared their perspectives for the report. Each of the vignettes of their responses is represented by an ordinal in the ensuing discussion.

Vignette 1 – Mrs. First

“The preparation for sharing on Student Engagement to the Montserrat Phase 1 groups was fulfilling. We were allowed to provide support to this group during these challenging times. Once the goals and objectives were identified, putting together the relevant content, customizing materials to ensure they addressed the group’s needs, and ensuring the sessions were interactive and engaging. Working with the support of the [training] team is always advantageous. I am very passionate about primary education as this is where I gained my first teaching experience and because my two children are currently 4 and 8 years old. I therefore thoroughly enjoyed delivering this session.”

This report’s combined perspectives demonstrate that intentional choice and strategic vision are takeaways for institutions from the Covid-19 pandemic. As businesses lost key personnel to the virus, they had to make unplanned changes to survive. Likewise, in education, we must prioritize and operationalize continuity through succession planning and flexibility. Many schools were caught off-guard and must intentionally avoid a replay of that situation in the future.

Vignette 2 – Mrs. Second and Mrs. Third

“The session[s] provided a brief overview of preparing for instruction in the online setting. While the workshop was well received by participants, more time was needed to sufficiently enable teachers to successfully design materials for online delivery. It was a beneficial and worthwhile exercise given the current situation regarding COVID-19 and the rapid transition that needed to occur. The training certainly empowered those who participated in going and doing their best as they were equipped for the most part with the tools and knowledge necessary to get to the next level.”

The trainers supported the initiative and embraced the challenge of helping teachers prepare as they pivoted to an online delivery model. Figure 7 indexes the warmth of appreciation from the teachers in the study.

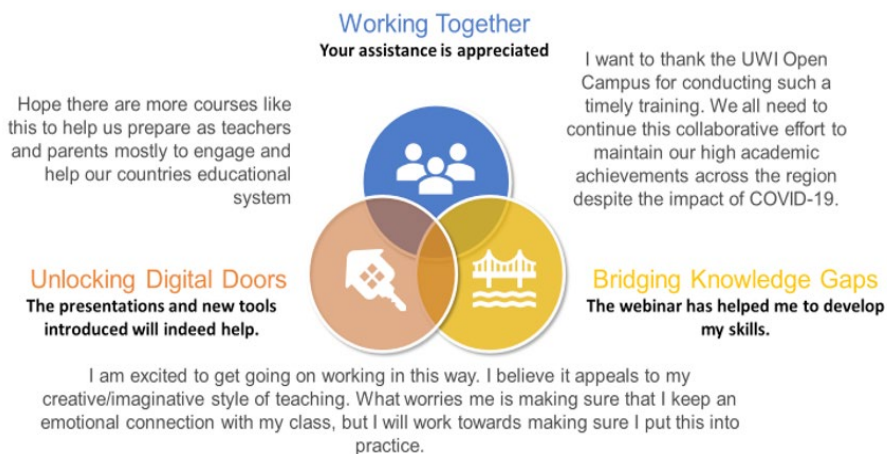


Figure 7 - Better Together

The Alpha primary school administrator had this to say:

“I would really love to implement Google Suite for Education for Alpha Primary by August 2020 and ensure that teachers have the requisite skills to engage pupils more efficiently, e.g., screen sharing.”

The Barclay Institute has scheduled time and created opportunities to continue supporting the Montserrat schools and other learning institutions in the future. Indeed, the focus is on standing together in hard times and collectively sharing the bright future planned through these partnerships.

Vignette 3 – Mr. Fourth and Ms. Fifth

[I] presented on Google Docs and Forms. They [the trainees] were eager learners and participated in the activity during the session. The participants were very engaged and demonstrated a high level of interest in the content.

Having pulled together the strands of these ideas and examined online learning practices in these pandemic times, the researcher considered it beneficial to add a personal perspective to the narrative. As a trainer of trainers, she enjoyed reviewing some ground-breaking research that has emerged since March of 2020.

The researcher presents the effective practices that could inform online delivery beyond the pandemic. Training colleagues consented to share their ideas as a preface to those offered by the researcher.

Stepping into the Future

“Don’t worry (don’t worry) ‘bout a thing, ‘Cause every little thing, gonna be all right!”⁹

People worldwide can identify the first line from “Three Little Birds” by Bob Marley and the Wailers. The researcher believes nuggets are in the report that educators can apply in some aspects of content delivery, teacher training, or faculty engagement. These strategies are valuable for implementing the RAT or Col model, reviewing sticky ideas, or merely looking back at the teachers’ thoughts and perspectives. Figure 8 presents several of the views from the teachers below.

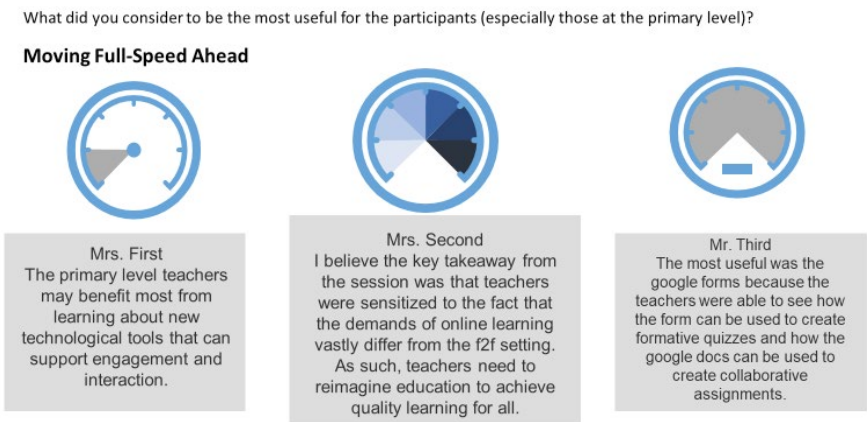


Figure 8 - Prefacing the Implementation Plan

The four proposed areas are as follows: classroom management; access and accessibility; planning; and minimizing distractions; expanding on the ideas offered in the scholarship and by the researcher’s ordinal colleagues. While this is not an exhaustive list, the concepts provide guidance and reminders for novice and expert online facilitators.

9. The first line of the song lyrics from “Three Little Birds” by Bob Marley and the Wailers. The lyrics that originated in a time of polarized political opinions resonates with the message of hope that no matter what side of the pandemic and immunization debate we take, it is more important to be peaceful, loving, and understanding of each other and embrace our differences. (metrolyrics.com)

Classroom Management

As part of management, there should be a set of rules for online delivery with specific and actionable consequences. Teachers could consistently enforce the guidelines by creating a list of implications and a conduct report form aligned with the learners' age and responsibilities. Schools should develop the rules and procedures at the institutional level with parent and student agreements and signatures for younger students. Teacher support highlights a meaningful enterprise and plays a role in learning aid for students. (UNESCO Institute, 2020). Schools and teachers should insist on safety, responsibility, and respect, considering differences in behaviour. It is crucial to create guidelines that set limits – determining the tone for responding to undesirable behaviour mediation. Teachers are responsible for behaviour modification as much in flexible environments as they are in a physical classroom. Some options that schools should examine include removing disruptive students from synchronous sessions (time out). As a best practice, school administrators should offer guidance on how teachers should escalate disciplinary matters and handle student deviation. One way to enact positive change is to invite and reward positive behaviours. Teachers should decrease anonymity and verbally acknowledge appropriate actions as part of the discussion in a synchronous session. Tyler-Wood, Christensen, Knezek, et al. (2015) believes that creating a token economy could be valuable and viable in a flipped or flexible classroom. Teachers can convert a reward system from the physical space into e-awards on a digital leaderboard to introduce gaming into the process. Group leaders and monitors could help the teachers with performance support and affirmations by keeping a good-behaviour checklist. Facilitators should consider giving verbal warnings to disruptive students before they are placed in time out. When teachers remove students from a session, the students should continue working on the content. Teachers could pre-prepare “think about” forms aligned to the lessons, and students could use the forms to submit apologies. In-school detention may take the form of after-class online activities. Teachers would refer to school administration based on the report escalation agreement within the school.

One option might be (class teacher to senior staff, teacher supervisor to the principal) and parent conference conducted via a phone call or other online option. Kilgore (2016) describes this movement as the qualitative improvement of online education that reduces the principal players' imaginary distance for the best effect. Schools should seek to answer the following questions: What does classroom management look like online? Who is responsible for mandating and managing attendance? Who has access to behaviour logs and reports?

The teacher is the time and process manager in synchronous sessions. It should select the appropriate strategy and related protocols to facilitate learning. The video conference is the communication medium preferred by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000). The teacher and students navigate the educational experience together. Therefore, teachers set clear guidelines for task completion, identifying these completion timelines aloud and in writing. As with the physical classroom, teachers manage contingencies and moderate engagement for students at different developmental and cognitive levels in their classes. They determine the strategies for interaction and assign both individual and collaborative tasks based on content suitability. In synchronous sessions, teachers should insist on basic meeting protocol and expectations such as raised hands, muted microphones, and how to handle Screen and video sharing.

Consider Access and Accessibility

User management is essential for administering student and guardian email addresses and school-related applications. The UNESCO handbook outlines several dimensions of flexibility where learning materials are available to students anywhere and anytime (UNESCO Institute, 2020). Therefore, schools are responsible for setting policies and defining the purposes for using tools and applications – management and support of the learning or content management tool in the long term. Stakeholders should think about access, students' access to technology, and the consistency of their connection to the Internet. There should be a standard orientation to the online delivery process. Policy documents should outline how engagement happens in and out of the class. Questions for consideration might include the following: What human resource support do practitioners require at the school level – help desk, lab technician, or systems administrator? What are the submission timelines for worksheets and assignments? What types of devices are to best?

Should students download apps for mobile devices to help with functionality? Will we allow students who have access to mobile devices and no computer to complete assignments physically and take pictures of their work for submission? Teachers and schools must think about how students will connect with their classes. Determine if “lesson drops and pick-up” will be a part of the learning process and integration of student-school partnerships into online delivery. Training, assistance, and guidelines for using digital tools and platforms are needed to support a practical online experience. With the shift to direct teacher-parent support for younger students, the parent-teachers association (PTA) is a community concern and not for the few parents who always show up to meetings. Schools expect parents to understand where students are in learning the curriculum. This knowledge will help better position parents to provide feedback and reinforcement as an integral part of the assessment process. Schools must also consider the frequency of online access and feedback for teachers and students. To support ongoing assessment, schools must have a standard timeline built into the process for pacing. Now that everyone is an online learner, leaders must determine the students’ age and screen time duration to mandate standards across the board.

Keep Planning and Delivery Simple

Schools and teachers should continue to use monthly or weekly plans based on their practice. Team planning is possible through creating, drafting, and scheduling student tasks ahead of time. Suppose the teamwork method mentioned earlier is selected. In that case, teachers could share the objectives and schedule ahead of time for work continuity. Teachers should break lessons into manageable chunks. Each content segment should align with the lesson objectives for asynchronous teaching to support the exploration and information exchange using Garrison et al.’s Community of Inquiry (CoI) model. Create worksheets with differentiated reading and ability-level options using Bloom’s Digital Taxonomy. While many tools and applications are available, teachers should limit applications and tools for consistency and comfort.

Minimize Distractions

Safety and rigor are endemic to the educational environment at every level. The most vulnerable population is at the primary level. Schools must consider how students’ personal information will be stored and accessed synchronously or recorded digitally. Each lesson needs to have an active learning component.

Teachers can implement Mini-lectures (student-led or team-focused) to support engagement and provide practice opportunities.

Additionally, polls could help to keep students engaged in the process. Teachers may create pre and post discussion questions to check student understanding and assign individual work using worksheets, quizzes, and assignments. Connect the lessons and assessments to the learning objectives. Since students know the learning goals, they can see the connection if educators meaningfully integrate tasks into the structure. The final suggestion for minimizing distractions and keeping everyone attentive is to create a class schedule or task page for each class. Integrate a bulletin board or calendar to keep students focused on the tasks.

Teacher-student communication is an inseparable part of the structure for student engagement and development in the educational setting. Solid relationships and alliances between training institutions and training recipients are factors that determine the quality of course design and delivery across flexible environments. Several preparation requirements and resource equity create barriers to effective course development in schools. Therefore, institutions should draw on existing models to reduce challenges to effective, flexible design. This research is vital for suggesting new options for educators and policymakers to plan sustainable education in scalable and effective ways.

This report starts and ends with a description of the processes that guide flexible learning development and partnerships for sustainability. The discussion leaves the reader with a question for the next steps in practice. How will the ideas in this report inform the planning for token economies, school management, and the application of new ideologies? The research is available for review and application in new contexts. In addition to the question above, teachers and administrators can implement policies and praxis that coordinate succession plans for learning institutions. Reflecting on the sticky ideas from Le (2017) and implementation of flexible processes from Casey & Wilson (2005) might drive success for people and their organizations. These implementations could make education sustainable and resilient in education institutions globally. The decision rests with you.

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