TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Methods</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Needs for Personalizing an Implementation Plan</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders Balancing Their Roles and the Learning Process</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaking Down Silos to Cultivate Reciprocal Learning Opportunities</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for All Stakeholders</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Buy-in Through Constant and Transparent Communication</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing Mini Pilots Within Schools</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering Teachers Using a Train-the-Trainer, Sustainable Professional Development Model</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letting Go of Perfection and Control, Embracing the Art of Failing Forward, and Cultivating a Safe Space for Change</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary &amp; Future Research</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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STATEWIDE BLENDED LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION: Voices from Fuse RI Stakeholders

Introduction

This report is the second in a series focused on research being conducted with the Highlander Institute on their Fuse RI project, a state-wide blended learning implementation initiative in Rhode Island (RI). Fuse RI is a three-year project funded by The Learning Accelerator with a goal of developing a statewide system for sharing, implementing, evaluating, and expanding blended learning and instructional personalization across the state. For more information about Fuse RI, please see the first publication in this series. As was presented in that report, the first cohort of Fuse RI consisted of 13 Fuse Districts and 28 Fuse Fellows. In order to be involved in Fuse RI, districts participated in an application process with the Highlander Institute to indicate interest in piloting blended learning in their schools. Once chosen, districts were set on a path of blended learning implementation. Additionally, the Highlander Institute called for applications from RI educators who were interested in helping these districts with their implementation process. These educators, once selected, were known as Fuse RI Fellows. The Highlander Institute provides clear contracts outlining both the District’s role and the Fellow’s role. The purpose of this study was to understand stakeholders’ experiences as they implemented blended learning in their district, schools, and classrooms. The stakeholders involved in the study included Fellows as well as district representatives, such as superintendents, curriculum specialists, teachers, technology directors, and principals from participating districts, as well as some of the Fellows themselves. The next section delves into a brief overview of the research methods.

Research Methods

This exploratory study used semi-structured interviews to understand stakeholders’ experiences as they implemented blended learning in their district, schools, and classrooms. Participants were chosen because of their involvement in the Fuse RI project (purposeful sampling - Patton, 2002). There were 19 participants (six Fuse Fellows, nine Fuse District representatives, and four Highlander Institute staff), and they are listed under Acknowledgments.

Each participant shared their experiences in an interview or focus group for between 60 and 90 minutes after their first implementation year (the 2014-2015 Academic Year). When additional information was needed, the researcher corresponded with the participants via email. The interview protocol is located in Appendix A. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes within the data set (Hatch, 2002). Data for this study were validated using member checks (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The results are shared in the next section and illustrate the themes identified in the interviews and focus groups.

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**Results**

A total of seven themes were identified from the interviews and focus groups as being crucial for meaningful blended learning implementation at the district level:

1. Assessing Needs for Personalizing an Implementation Plan
2. Stakeholders Balancing Their Roles and the Learning Process
3. Breaking Down Silos to Cultivate Reciprocal Learning Opportunities for All Stakeholders
4. Building Buy-in Through Constant and Transparent Communication
5. Establishing Mini Pilots Within Schools
6. Empowering Teachers Using a Train-the-Trainer, Sustainable Professional Development Model
7. Letting Go of Perfection and Control, Embracing the Art of Failing Forward, and Cultivating a Safe Space for Change

Each of these themes is described using participant data in the sections below.

**Assessing Needs for Personalizing an Implementation Plan**

A major component of the Fuse RI project is the Highlander Institute’s use of the Blended Learning District Readiness Survey (housed in Metryx), designed to support districts in determining what blended learning practices are already in place and what is still needed for meaningful blended learning implementation. All stakeholders involved in this study felt that the use of the survey was critical to understand fully where the districts were, where they wanted to go, and what they needed to have in place to get there. The survey results were essential for the Fuse RI Fellows to understand how to best personalize a plan for their assigned Fuse District. Each district had multiple stakeholders filling out the survey so they could account for the many perspectives across their personnel. As one Fuse RI Fellow mentioned, “To listen to what their needs were was so interesting, and there were a bunch of different perspectives from different roles, and so it was a collective way of looking at what truly are the needs of the district.”

Fellows were asked to create playlists — or personalized learning paths — for their districts each month. While the districts were reviewing their playlists and moving forward with implementation, they used Fellows to ask questions and develop resources. For example, one district asked their Fellows to help them develop a rubric that could be used to measure how each classroom was using...
technology, including if the technologies were actually being used, how each classroom was using it, and if the technology was being used effectively. These classroom technology-use walkthroughs with the rubrics helped to inform the district about what they need to do differently to implement blended learning in a meaningful way. Having the Fuse Fellows and Highlander Institute Team available for support also helped the districts get farther in a shorter amount of time than if they were working on this effort individually. When a path was not completely clear from the district or the Fellows’ perspective, Highlander Institute mentors would help clarify the path for all involved. The districts needed support and direction, and the magnitude of the state-wide blended learning initiative called for the support itself. Fellows attended district meetings and corresponded via phone calls and email with district and school-level personnel. One of the Fuse RI Fellows said, “Every district is in a different position, and that’s the best part about it: the Fuse Fellowship for them is very unique. It’s not a one-size-fits-all approach. We [Fuse Fellows] go into our districts, and we see what’s working for them, what have they done so far, and where they want to go; and then we try to adapt a program to suit their needs. So it’s always evolving.”

Fuse RI Fellows created playlists for district teachers and administration. Working at their pace, educators moved through the playlist which introduced, reviewed, or cemented concepts of blended learning. This helped to acknowledge various entry points, valuing the individualized path and pace of each learner, and celebrated the success the district made as it advanced through its journey of blended learning. As cohorts of teachers worked to establish professional learning communities, their learning evolved into more asynchronous collaboration, where they became empowered in their own professional development and began to affect change in their districts, working to create, communicate, and collaborate in ways that modeled the process in which they would engage students.

### EXAMPLES OF BLENDSPACE PLAYLISTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Playlist</th>
<th>Description of the Playlist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Playlist for an Introduction to Blended Learning</td>
<td>This playlist provides resources such as books, webinars, videos, and blogs to serve as an introduction to blended learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playlist for Differentiated PD for GAFE</td>
<td>This Google Apps For Education (GAFE) is an introduction to Docs, Slides, Forms, and Sheets.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PD for Intro to Blended, Differentiation, Assessment – Elementary focus</td>
<td>This slide deck served as a launch pad for a Fuse district elementary school professional development day. It provided competency based opportunities for exploration with GAFE, differentiated instruction, creation stations, and asynchronous collaboration within the classroom.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PD for Intro to Blended Learning – Middle and High School focus</td>
<td>This slide deck was shared with Fuse district MS/HS staff on the day before their first day back to school. It provided inspiration and sharing, questions, and guidance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision of Personalized Learning</td>
<td>One of the Fuse Fellows created and has used this slide deck as an overview of blended learning, both as a Fuse Fellow and within her own district.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deeper Dive into Blended Learning</td>
<td>This slide deck was used as a recap of the great success of a Fuse district in their first year and as a preview of their second year of blended learning. It provided administrators and teachers with a walkthrough tool as educators began to develop “lighthouse classrooms.”</td>
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Some of the key improvements suggested for the Fuse RI program that related to personalizing the implementation plan included investigation about how human capital might change – the districts wanted to know what additional positions might be useful, i.e. blended learning coaches or data analytics specialists. Additionally, some districts felt that not all of their needs were met by the Fellows, especially when the Fellows were unfamiliar with the particular context of the district’s situation; and it took educators in the districts awhile to understand how their Fellows could best meet their needs. They felt that having the Fellows start sooner than half way through the first year might help bridge the gap between learning and implementation.

"Participation in the Fuse RI program helped our district focus on our vision for implementation of blended learning and create a leadership team who were charged with establishing programs and guidance to move the blended learning initiative forward. We identified a group of technology leaders who became a close group of educators full of energy and excitement about their role in the district. When they are together with our Fuse Fellows, the ideas regarding implementation flow freely. The leaders plan technology showcases as well as establish lighthouse classrooms as learning models for other educators." ~Fuse District Administrator

Stakeholders Balancing Their Roles and the Learning Process

Fuse Fellows called their role as educators within their own district and their role as a Fellow supporting their Fuse District a balancing act. It is more time-consuming than they thought it was going to be when they signed on. They admitted that when they are Fuse Fellows, they are also tapped for additional tasks because they have a greater knowledge of technology in general. They shared that their role is a bit of a juggling act because they are asked to do tasks that are above and beyond both their roles as Fuse Fellows and their roles as RI educators. One of the principals in the study recalled being asked to help with a technology issue at another meeting because he was “one of those Fuse Fellows.”

One Fellow mentioned, “While it’s hard to balance at times, it’s applicable to my own work so whatever I do in the fellowship, I am able to apply right away for my own work and share information with the teachers and administrators that are in my own building.” Another Fuse Fellow mentioned that the balancing is difficult because the day-to-day work trumps the Fuse work, and some of the Fellows felt guilty for not always following through on promises they made either with the other Fellows they were working with or with their district. A few of the Fellows suggested incorporating more work releases, which might help ease that tension.

Despite this juggling act, all of the Fellows believed that learning from each other was a meaningful experience. Because of their experience as Fellows, their day-to-day functions have become more mobile in nature given their use of technologies that they have learned through their Fuse training. They’ve also been able to show other educators in their own districts, as well as their Fuse district, a different side of themselves. The Fuse RI experience was a great way for both Fellows and districts to build a network that they might not have otherwise.

District administrators sometimes felt that figuring out where they were going and how the Fellow would fit into their plan moving forward with blended learning implementation took a bit of time. The process typically started off focusing more on vision at the beginning rather than a practical action plan to be carried out. Initially, both Fellows and districts were sometimes guarded and
skeptical about the agreed upon path. Fellows and districts mentioned needing to sometimes have patience with, and respect for, the process. Fellows and districts reported that they often felt overwhelmed about “living up to expectations,” but then other days felt that they had “grown because of what [they’ve] learned.”

The program pushes both districts and Fellows to be leaders in the field and to explore the edges of their comfort zones. They also commented that their Highlander Institute mentors helped to form a community and a trusting connection. As their work progressed, they saw a reason to be open to seeing what change could happen in a meaningful way. The Fellows and districts had a desire to learn best practices and wanted to be a part of an initiative that was going on across the state.

“One Fuse Fellowship has challenged me every single day. After teaching for 25 years, 18 of them in the same grade, you can get your feet comfortable. This just pushes me to a place where I’m a little uncomfortable today, and that’s good. That’s how I feel every time I get together with the Fuse Fellows, and it’s a great place to be. It has been the most fulfilling thing I’ve ever done. I wish it wasn’t just a two-year program.”  ~Fuse RI Fellow

One of the Fellows felt it was very important that the District and Fellows participate in the program because it is a great example to set for students: “It’s really important to have a balanced life and to be involved in what you’re passionate about, and it’s important to share that with your students so that they can see the importance and benefit of being involved in the community so that you can make an impact in important and authentic ways that will make a difference for you and those you work with.”

Breaking Down Silos to Cultivate Reciprocal Learning Opportunities for All Stakeholders

This theme builds on the previous one and focuses on the reciprocal learning opportunities that have been afforded via the Fuse RI program. Fellows and districts have found that they have learned a lot from the Fellows with whom they’ve worked and from the Fellows that they’ve provided to other districts in the state. The collaborative nature of the work has been eye opening for the Fellows to “see growth in both my own district and the district with which I am working; it has been amazing because it is a way to see the true potential of how blended learning can work in two different contexts with different factors and different players involved. It’s not a one-size-fits-all, and this is the best way to see that it can work in different environments.”

Districts have also seen benefit from their own educators who are Fuse Fellows because the Fellows bring what they learn back to their own district. One Fellow said, “The Fuse work that I do with my district and with the other Fuse Fellows is something I also bring into the classroom with my own students as well as to the other educators in my building. And because I’m using it with my own students, I feel comfortable going into my Fuse District as well as my own district and saying, ‘This is what I’m trying, let me show you where I’ve failed first and maybe you won’t fail, or maybe you’ll make it better, and then you can show me what you did if it works or doesn’t, and we can go from there.’” Everyone acknowledges that, while they have different perspectives, there is mutual respect from both sides, and it typically is a win-win for both Fellows and districts.
Another triumph for the Fuse RI Fellows and districts in developing relationships outside their own territories was the increase in communications between and among districts. For many of the participants in the study, working with other schools and districts has been the most beneficial piece of this experience because it has allowed them “to share what worked, what didn’t work, what we need to know, and find out what I can learn from others. It’s as if the name of the program is really doing just that, ‘Fuse-ing Rhode Island’ – knocking down walls and sharing among educators across the state.” This program gives educators another means of interacting with people outside the walls of their own building.

“We have benefited from having Fuse Fellows from other districts and having a Fuse Fellow in our own district as many ideas were shared. Our Fuse Fellows helped to focus our efforts, which were not well developed before their involvement. While our district embarked on a 1:1 computer initiative, the expectations of that program had not been well developed. Our Fuse Fellow facilitated discussions, which helped our leadership team formulate more solid, reasonable expectations for the program. Classrooms within our district were visited as well as classrooms in other Fuse districts. Our team expressed more excitement after seeing what was happening in classrooms here and in other schools.” ~Fuse District Administrator

Building Buy-in Through Constant and Transparent Communication

District stakeholders reported that writing a plan for communicating about the blended learning implementation is part of the process of building buy-in within the schools and community. Having Highlander Institute help propel the process was a must. Some of the districts had started a 1:1 initiative already in their primary schools and planned to roll out to their middle and/or high schools the year they started the Fuse program. The most important part of the buy-in and communication plan was for the districts to be transparent about their work with their educators and with the community at large. As part of the transition, superintendents had to be clear with their schools’ administrators about what their expectations were for the implementation plan. Additionally, getting a sense of what their districts’ teachers were already doing was important for the Fellows. Fellows did walkthroughs to understand what was going on in the classrooms and gathered feedback on what trainings were needed by talking to teachers and students.

One district administrator mentioned that educators in the district were reluctant to hand over laptops to their students. The educators’ concern was “How do you manage that with high school students? How do you manage what they access? How do you manage the care of their computers?” Because the educators had these concerns and more, the high school offered an alternative plan to house the computers in classrooms where they would stay, and students would use them throughout the day. At that time the Fellows and the district’s administrative team had to communicate the importance of trusting the students with the devices. They devised a plan for parents to purchase insurance for the device so there was a level of accountability outside of the school. That helped the district get buy-in at the educator level as well as with parents and students. Parents also received a letter outlining the program. Some schools incorporated a digital night or open house to share the news about Fuse RI. These efforts helped to inform parents about what the students were taking home and what kinds of things they were doing in the classroom.
In order to communicate the blended learning implementation initiative to the schools and community as a whole, the superintendents met with their schools’ administrative teams who then took the information to their faculty. The superintendents also shared an email about Highlander Institute and the Fuse RI program and the special resources they made available. The email communicated that Fuse Fellows were helping the district with the transition. The Highlander Institute organizers believed that the faculty were more likely to listen to other teachers; thus the implementation process went more smoothly because the Fellows were educators, namely teachers and school administrators.

The school administrators also put effort into communicating the plan with parents, requiring they sign for the insurance on the device and asking students to sign an acceptable use policy. Since computers are on loan to students and not owned by students, they are subject to examination if there is suspicion of misuse. This helped to give a sense of responsibility to the students. Some districts also opted to send out notes from Fuse RI-related meetings so that the work being done was transparent. Additionally, some offered open forums for questions and answers about the implementation process. This was especially important when districts were feeling pushback from educators and the community. In some cases, because people hadn’t been to the workshops and information sessions, there were “rumors and fears that we are getting rid of teachers just because we have technology – it’s just a tool. It’s just a different way of doing the same thing, and we’re collaborating so that we don’t have to reinvent the wheel. But it’s always fear of something new.” Open communication on what’s going on is imperative.

It was most important for Fuse Fellows to build trust and rapport with district teachers. In some of the districts, Fellows were offering help, suggesting changes, and leading activities in classrooms when teachers were unfamiliar with them. When teachers do not trust a person or a process, they usually do not embrace change. A suggestion for improvement of the program was to have the Fellows be more involved in the classroom, at the administrative level, etc., so that they could be a part of the community and get to know the teachers to build their trust.

There was also a suggestion that Fuse Fellows be aligned well with district needs. For instance, if a Fellow is well-versed in 1:1 roll out, it would be beneficial for the district that is preparing to do a 1:1 roll out to be matched with that Fellow. Both districts and Fellows also mentioned benefiting from a meaningful matching system.

Establishing Mini Pilots Within Schools

One of the keys to ensuring other educators in a school understand what blended learning is and how it plays out in the classroom is the establishment of mini pilots within schools. One district explained that they identified a few classes in one school where they could incorporate blended learning into the curriculum. Once they had the mini pilots set up, they aligned the schedule to allow for common planning times so that other teachers could observe what was happening in the pilot classrooms. An additional benefit of on-site pilots was not having to hire substitutes for teachers to visit blended learning classrooms in other schools/districts. It was also mentioned that it is easier for the district to incorporate pilots into their initial plans because that is “manageable” and “piece by piece rather than everything at once.”

Having these mini pilots within schools has helped cultivate positive relationships for collaboration within buildings as well, encouraging people to share ideas and come together as a team. As one administrator said, “The middle school is talking to the high school, and they’re sharing why they’re successful. These pilots have encouraged our faculty’s openness to learning, and reflecting on, and documenting the successes and what needs to change.”
One of the district teachers also mentioned that “the more that I am doing things in my building, the more questions people are starting to ask. For example, ‘How did you do that? Can we come in and watch you?’ Another thing is that open door policy — we’re not behind closed doors anymore like we used to be, and that’s refreshing.”

Empowering Teachers Using a Train-the-Trainer, Sustainable Professional Development Model

The Fuse RI program encouraged districts to adopt a sustainable professional development model to continue the training beyond the typical one-time events. In order to accomplish that change, districts opted to train teachers to help create the professional development (PD) plan and to facilitate the PD events. District teachers and administrators noted that teachers found this process empowering and had a renewed level of engagement in the implementation efforts. Teachers within some of the schools have also started presenting at leadership meetings to share different tech tools that can be incorporated into the blended learning roll-out. This model is the same one that teachers are encouraged to use in their own blended classroom: helping empower students to take control over their own learning. Some of the district teachers commented that, “We’re constantly participating in PD that is a complete waste of time. And for this [blended learning PD], I wish it were longer and more intense because for every new thing we learned, I came away with a desire to learn more.”

During the PD events, Fuse Fellows admit, “People always start off with the phrase, ‘I have a stupid question.’ You have to encourage them to continue to ask questions and let them know, ‘It’s not a stupid question – you just don’t know something, and that’s okay.’” Everyone starts out at the same place, especially with technology changing so much; nobody is an expert at anything. Fellows are comfortable with saying that they do not know something, and they model that in their interactions with educators in their districts.

The PD is structured like a Google Summit, consisting of two days and 49 sessions led by teachers within the state. One district administrator mentioned, “We could pay someone else to help us, but instead we empowered folks to give their expertise to the district.” Participants reported that everyone was staying after the training because they were so interested in what they were learning. So instead of investing in someone outside of their system, they empowered those from within to share what they know. The PD was seen by teachers as “not top down” and a space where everyone was “building you up” and “on an even playing field.”

The Summit is followed by monthly PD events focused on technology and blended learning. Students and teachers also presented what they were doing in the classroom in a showcase. In addition, teachers were working with and learning from their data teams who address what instructional strategies need to change in order to understand where students were and what they needed to move forward.

For Fuse Districts, continuous PD and sustainable support systems for teachers and students who are making the transition to blended learning are critical. Teachers have to have multiple PD experiences to understand how the technology is going to be used in their classroom and have the opportunity to transfer that knowledge to their context. This request for sustainable models is of crucial importance to future iterations of the program.
Letting Go of Perfection and Control, Embracing the Art of Failing Forward, and Cultivating a Safe Space for Change

The Fuse Fellows and Districts have found another major theme in their work: the necessity for educators to let go of perfection and control and to embrace the art of failing forward. One Fellow said:

*My students come into class, and I tell them, ‘This is what we’re going to do. It might sound easy, but you’re going to fail.’ And they know that they are going to work to make it better. Is it a flaw with the program? Is it a flaw with what we’re doing? How are we going to fix this? They want to figure out what’s wrong. When they’re running the show, it’s driven, it’s motivating. That’s the fun part is sitting back and watching them go. It’s a lot of outside work before I come in, it’s a lot of setting the stage.*

Fellows and districts emphasize that during a blended learning implementation, teachers need to lose the expectation that they have to be perfect and know everything. One of the Fellows shared, “I say to my students, ‘I just learned this yesterday, let’s try it.’ And they’re great about it. I can say, ‘I don’t know much about it. We’re just going to explore it, tell me what you like about it, tell me what you don’t like.’ And they’ll find things that I didn’t learn the day before.” She continued that the students are not afraid to “get dirty,” and she emphasized that “there are no leaders here…we just all kind of learn together. We all take on different things and that’s so empowering for them. I love to be the facilitator for them and just say, ‘This is the end point but we can meander at our own pace with our own styles, and we’ll all get there, but we’ll all find different ways to get there and have different experiences along the way.’”

With blended learning specifically, the control shifts to the students because the model is designed for students to understand where they are and need to be and empowers them to be a player in determining what they need to do to get to where they need to be. As another Fellow mentioned, “That idea of failing forward and knowing that they are responsible for finding a solution makes them really engaged learners.”

The Fellows and districts also see a need for change management strategies and have realized that it is important to create a safe environment and cultivate a willingness for educators to implement the change to blended learning. One of the district administrators mentioned that the middle school initially used the laptops just as word processors but that eventually, with training and help from Fellows and other personnel who were tied to the blended learning implementation initiative, the educators “truly moved toward blended learning with teachers incorporating research in their daily instruction and facilitating students’ use of Google Classroom to conduct research for their authentic projects.”
For teachers, the Fellows said that there is fear:

(F)ear that the kids will know more – teachers do not want to not know. There is a fear of not knowing and losing control of their classroom. And for the first time, it’s okay to not know everything before you present it, and it’s an uncomfortable space for teachers to be in. They’re thinking, ‘What if I make a mistake?’ And I say, ‘Take the risk; that’s when the real learning happens.’

Fellows are clear that “we’re all learning this together and that it’s okay not to know everything.” There is also a fear that computers mean the onset of teacher-less classes. In reality, the Fellows and district teachers acknowledge that they “have more personal interaction with their kids than they did before implementing blended learning.” If you’re using the technology but not in a way where you’re interacting with your students, then you’re not going to have the same experience.

One Fellow mentioned, “I’ve had more meaningful interactions with my students in the last year than I have had with my students in the past 15 years.” Meaningful conversations are now happening around change. They have found that more and more educators are willing to listen and see what needs to happen in order to implement blended learning. The Fellow felt that district support is so important because “it needs to be involved in everything. It’s not just about technology, it needs to be rolled into everything that we do.” The same Fellow said she has heard some building administrators say how messy and unorganized a blended classroom looks when they visit. When those administrators come in, she asks them “Well, what about the students? Are they learning anything?” The administrators typically reply that they do not know because they cannot get past the messiness and disorganization. This Fellow stressed that the building administrators need to do the following in order to show their support of the transformation:

- Go in and learn from the classroom activities
- Support teachers at the learning level
- Allow teachers to let their guard down
- Encourage teachers to ask for help
- Model risk-taking and failing for teachers and allow them to do the same

Additionally, building administrators can model self-reflection for their teachers, and then teachers can do the same for their students: “What did I do well and what do I need to do better for tomorrow? Showing them that they are in control of that, that they can make that change is important.”

The initial trepidation mentioned in the Buy-in/Communication theme above is that technology is going to take over and teachers will no longer be needed. In order to help change this mindset, districts and Fellows understand that they have to provide models for teachers that are familiar within their context. Also, a lot of change is required of teachers throughout their careers. As one of the Fellows pointed out about changes,

Trains move really slowly. In education, we see a lot of trains that come into the station. And some of the trains are moving in really great directions, so we’ve boarded those trains and we say, ‘Woohoo, we’re so glad we got on this train because it took me in the right direction.’ And then other times, we board the train and get off at the end, and say, ‘Where are we?’ When I talk to district folks, I’m saying that this is a good train to get on.

2. https://www.gafesummit.com/
Fellows and districts concentrate on promoting flexibility, being open to new things, having a clear direction, encouraging constant and clear communication, and “acknowledging that you don’t know what you don’t know.” As a Fellow, “having that outside lens really helps – you don’t really see outside your district at times, so it has been eye opening for us on how important it is to embrace the change to make our lives easier in the classroom.”

As with innovation in general, in many of the interviews/focus groups, Fellows likened blended learning implementation to “building the plane while flying.” Having structures in place ahead of time and a process for what is happening during that timeline is crucial. Fellows and districts relayed that cultivating the programmatic changes inherent in the Fuse effort require clear expectations for administrators about how they need to collaborate and support faculty and other principals. Continuous support from building level administrators, especially when it comes to failing forward, is crucial, too. The participants stressed that students learning it is okay for them to explore and fail and to persevere in challenging situations was very important. Allowing this type of open learning to happen and freeing teachers up enough to explore without stringent expectations is key.
Summary & Future Research

The purpose of this study was to understand stakeholders’ experiences as they implement blended learning in their district, schools, and classrooms. The results of the study included seven themes:

- Assessing Needs for Personalizing an Implementation Plan
- Balancing the Learning Process for All Stakeholders
- Breaking Down Silos to Cultivate Reciprocal Learning Opportunity for All Stakeholders
- Building Buy-in Through Constant and Transparent Communication
- Establishing Mini Pilots Within Schools
- Empowering Teachers Using a Train the Trainer, Sustainable Professional Development Model
- Letting Go of Perfection and Control, Embracing the Art of Failing Forward, and Cultivating a Safe Space for Change

Future research should include full program evaluation, including year two feedback from district and Fellow stakeholders, over the course of the two-year implementation as well as the supports that are needed at various levels to help ensure sustainability of blended learning.

References


Appendix

Fuse RI Fellow Interview Protocol

1. Why was it important for you to participate in Fuse RI?
2. How were you prepped for your Fuse RI service?
3. What do you do in your role as a Fuse RI fellow?
4. What do you do in your day-to-day life as an educator outside of Fuse RI? And how does that role play into what you’re doing for your Fuse RI Fellow role?
5. What supports do you have as a Fellow? Do you have a mentor?
6. How do you use data to inform what you do?
7. Reflection
   a. What were the triumphs?
   b. What were some of the pain points?
   c. What would you do the same?
   d. What would you do differently?
8. Is there anything that we haven’t talked about that you’d like to comment on?

District-Level Interview Protocol

1. Why was it important for your district to participate in Fuse RI?
2. How were you prepared for this experience?
3. Can you talk a little bit about the year process that you’ve been involved in?
4. What kind of supports were you given?
5. How was data used to help inform the decisions your district was making moving forward?
6. How did you prepare your classroom/school/district for this change?
7. Reflection
   a. What were the triumphs?
   b. What were some of the pain points?
   c. What would you do the same?
   d. What would you do differently?
8. Is there anything we haven’t covered that you’d like to talk more about?