

Access: Blended Learning for the Diverse Student

Wendy F. Thompson

New Jersey City University

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The United States continues to work to provide a quality educational program for all students. (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/02/02/u-s-students-improving-slowly-in-math-and-science-but-still-lagging-internationally/>). The subgroup of students identified as members of the one percenters, Students with Severe Disabilities (SSD) are one aspect of the issues facing educators. (<http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-takes-action-deliver-equity-students-disabilities>). Recent shifts in delivery methods for educational content to the K-12 student population, include the use of what has been described as a blended learning approach. Blended learning models according to Horn and Stalker (2015) are now being reviewed for potential answers to reaching this yet unattained goal. This researcher posed the question, can blended learning meet the needs of the diverse and divergent learner? To answer that question the literature was reviewed for an understanding of past and current research into the emerging relationship between the use of blended learning as an instructional delivery method for students with severe disabilities.

A transformational worldview was undertaken for the purpose of this research, supporting a constructivist- child centered framework model using quantitative data gathered through surveys to discover stakeholders' perceptions of the level of inclusion of one percenters, Students with Severe Disabilities (SSD) in the blended learning age. Christensen, Horn and Johnson (2011, p.23), states "there is considerable certainty that people in fact learn differently, considerable uncertainty persists about what those differences are." One of the stated benefits of a blended learning instructional model is the ability to differentiate instruction to the needs of the differently abled learner. Holland (2014, p. 20) wrote "the exceptionalities in intellectual ability,

communications, sensory, behavioral, physical, and combinations, sometimes acquire special learning accommodations? ”

The growing number of online and blended learning programs in K-12 schools as reported in the study by Picciano, and Seaman (2007) were surveyed for a perspective of their potential growth. Close to 70 percent of those who responded identified at least one student participant in online instruction with the potential for a large shift to a blended learning model with 61 percent planning for growth in implementation in the next two years. How SSD students are accounted for in these numbers is unclear. In a 2010 U.S. Census report of SSD in public schools the distinction per disability categories as described by Brault (2011) were:

With a disability—having vision, hearing, cognitive, ambulatory, selfcare, or independent living difficulty
Vision difficulty—blindness or serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses
Hearing difficulty—deafness or serious difficulty hearing
Cognitive difficulty—serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
Ambulatory difficulty—serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs
Self-care difficulty—difficulty bathing or dressing
Independent living difficulty— having difficulty going outside the home to shop or visit a doctor’s office (status determined for the population 15 years and over) (p. 1)

Literature Review

A review of the literature was undertaken to determine the past connections to current practices supporting the use of blended learning approaches to the delivery of instruction with diverse learners specifically those described as SSD in K- 12 education. First, the researcher sought to provide a definition of the terms deemed important for clarification through the research to allow for a unified understanding of their use within this research project. The terms

defined were instructional design, blended learning, diverse learner, significant disabilities, mobile learner, instructional technologies, and online learning. Transformational philosophy as it relates to providing an agent to effect change for a subgroup of the population Students with Significant Disabilities was the foundation for the critical evaluation of the inclusion of literature.

An understanding of the current state of the field was approached through the compilation of descriptive knowledge on the K-12 practices in the U.S. relating to blended learning with a special focus on the inclusion of SSD. Past research selected for inclusion was based on its relevance to topic and social significance to help provide a basis for the continuation or call for supportive change in the inclusive practice for the SSD in blended learning instructional programs.

Methods

A mix-method approach with the collection of quantitative and qualitative data was used to identify the percentage of current programs utilizing a blended learning method. Qualitative data in the form of surveys and phone conversations were employed to gain participants perceptions of the benefit of K-12 blended learning with SSD. To ensure validity, the researcher gathered data from primary sources in the form of surveys similar to those compiled through the 2006 Sloan Consortium report of online learning in American colleges and universities.

The method of design utilized in the development of the survey measure was established based on a transformational worldview which addressed the social status of the diverse learner by asking and answering the question through the research of the inclusionary practice surrounding SSD and blended learning in K-12 educational programs in the U.S. An effect found within the research was the lack of access afforded students with cognitive disabilities to

opportunities to participate in blended learning. As defined by Cooper, Heron, and Heward (2007, p. 6) “Philosophic doubt requires the scientist to continually question the truthfulness of what is regarded as fact.” This study calls into question the practice of Blended learning as applied to the K-12 population of SSD. The surveyed participants were randomly determined from a selection of identified K-12 schools with blended learning programs.

Study Significance

Stepping firmly into the 21st Century, the preparation for all students to become college and career ready has been mandated through governmental regulations and public calls for standards based educational options. While merging the benefits of the disruptive practices afford through the integration of instructional technologies, many have begun to redefine delivery of instructional content to be more child-centered, collaborative, and project based with the integration of mobile technology. How those on the margin are affected by these decrees must be viewed in this ever changing kaleidoscope of instructional directives.

This study provides an aspect of research into one area being considered for the provision of services for SSD in K-12 school placements, Blended Learning. Smith and Meyen (2003) report “Thus, the broad use and access to the Internet have created significant advantages for individuals with disabilities, their families, and related educational professionals with great potential still in store.” (para. 7). Yet, few of the early studies focused on students with SSD. This study adds to the current body of research in addressing the scarcity of available data on the number of students, types of programs or actualized benefits to students with severe disabilities. As the use of blended learning takes a more central role in K- 12 education, the needs of the diverse student remains a side issue in the development of curricular and instructional practices.

The researcher provides through addition of this paper a divergent avenue that in our socially conscious society requires further study.

Appendix A
Literature Map

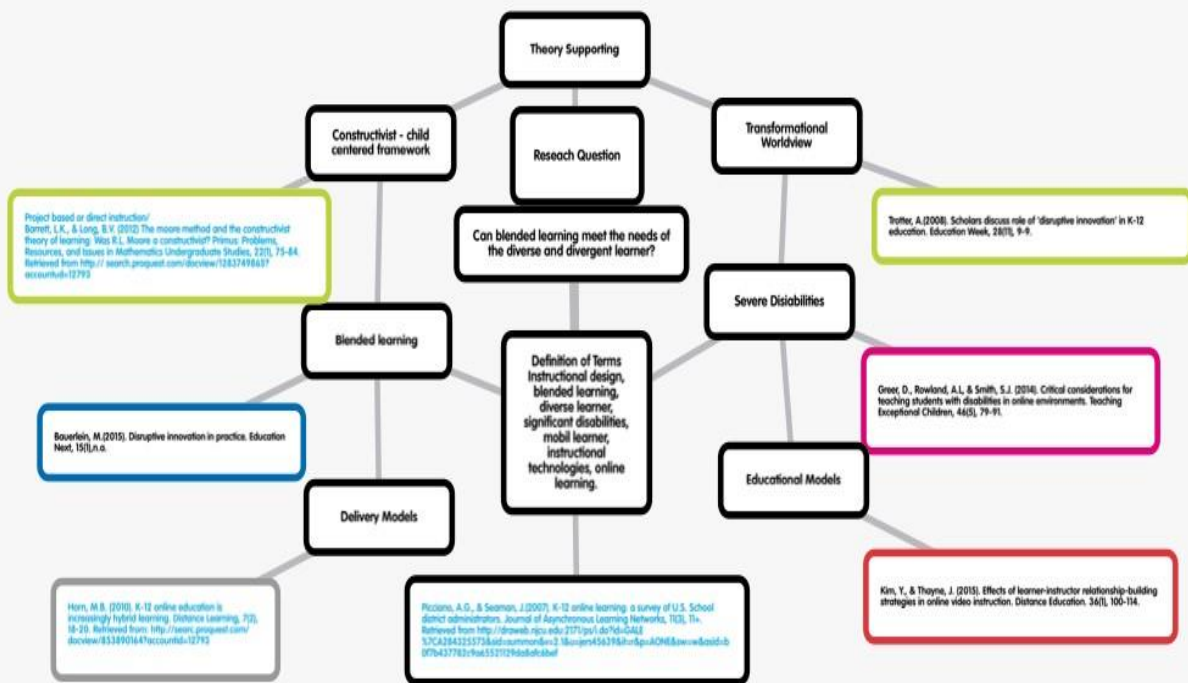


Figure 1. Literature review map. This map demonstrates the headings, and subheadings with supporting references.

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