

Educator Role Diagnostic

October 2014

Any district or school seeking to implement a blended learning program will need to think critically about what role the teachers and other educators will be asked to play in promoting student learning and development. The following pages ask a series of questions to help schools define the roles that educators will need to play. The answers may point clearly toward one type of educator role, or they may indicate that more than one role should be established. In that case, the roles may be played by one or more people according to the opportunities and constraints noted in the district context and according to the model or framework for selecting models that the district has identified. TNTP recommends that districts consider each of these questions, along with any others that it deems relevant, to establish what roles it will need to fill to give its blended learning program the greatest chance for success. For districts or schools that have already implemented a blended learning program, it is important to revisit these questions periodically to determine whether conditions have changed to a degree that a different combination or ratio of roles may be appropriate.

CATEGORY 1: Program Management

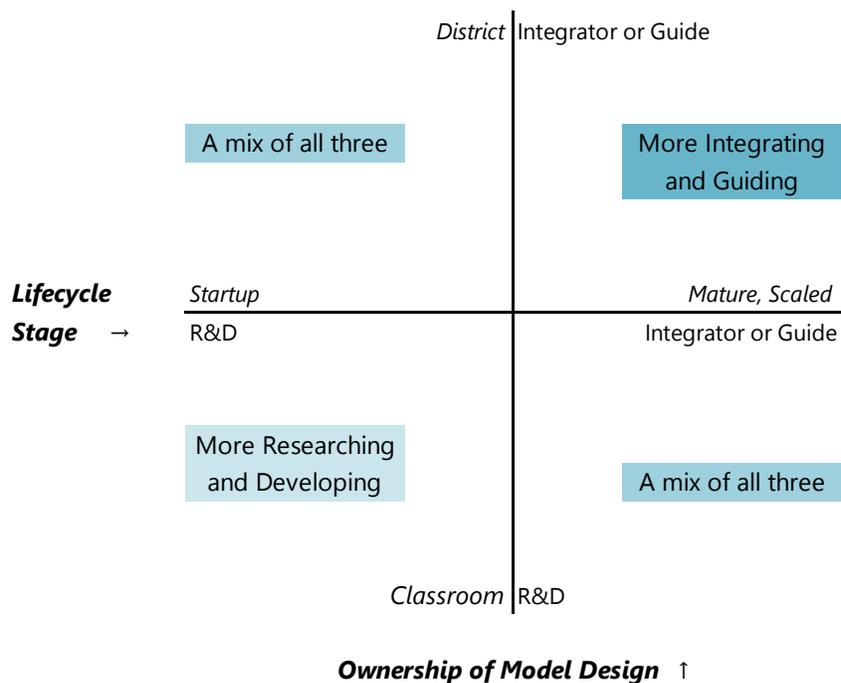
1. **Lifecycle Stage:** How far along is the district or school in the lifecycle of its blended learning program? Is it incubating or piloting a new program, or has that program matured and scaled? Intrinsic Schools, which recently completed its first year in operation, uses educators who are primarily Researchers & Developers as well as Guides. Aspire Public Schools is scaling its blended learning model, piloted at Aspire ERES Academy, across its elementary schools. To date, it has introduced blended learning to 12 of its schools. Aspire uses educators primarily as Integrators with some Guide characteristics.



2. **Ownership of Model Design:** Will primary ownership of blended learning model selection and implementation structures and processes sit with educators at the classroom level, with leaders at the school level, or with leaders and managers at the district level? A school that places ownership of model selection and implementation in the classroom is Elmhurst Community Prep, which uses educators as Researcher and Developers, with some also playing a Guide role and others also playing an Integrator role. Flex Public Schools, a charter management organization that places model selection and implementation ownership primarily at the network level, uses educators who are primarily Integrators.



PROGRAM MANAGEMENT



CATEGORY 2: Educator Talent Pool

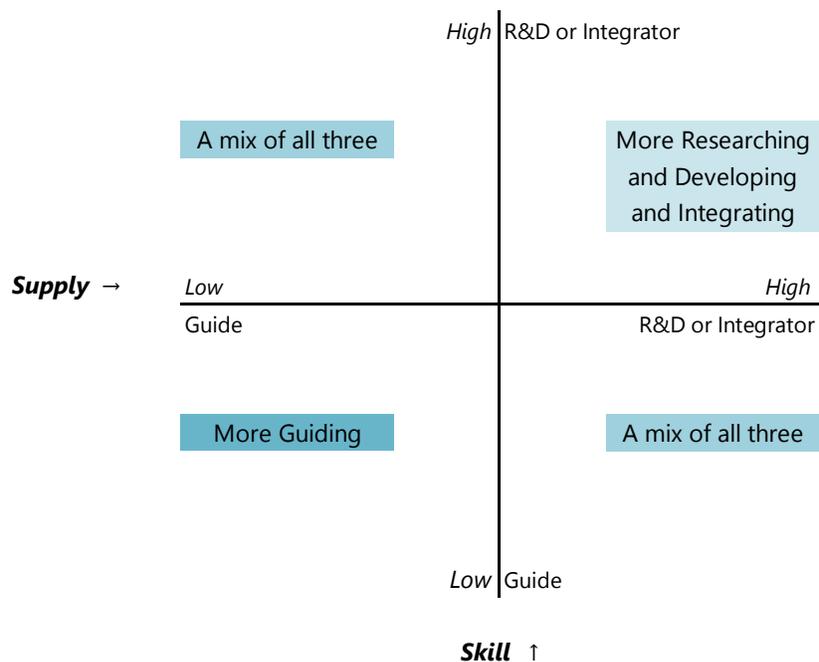
3. **Talent Pool – Supply:** How large is the pool of potential candidates (either new hires or existing staff) available to participate in your blended learning program? Acton Academy uses educators almost exclusively as Guides. It has been far more successful with more non-traditional educators to establish the classroom culture it seeks, drawing from a narrow pool of Montessori, Socratic teachers, parents and outdoor programs like Outward Bound and NOLs. Barrington Public Schools, a district in suburban Rhode Island, is a high-demand school system with a robust talent supply from more traditional circles. It uses a combination of educators as Researcher and Developers and educators as Integrators.



4. **Talent Pool – Skill Match:** How well matched are the skillsets of your candidate pool to your blended learning program needs? Da Vinci Innovation Academy, which uses educators as Integrators who also have some Research and Developer and Guide components, has encountered a limited skills match in its available talent pool due to the specialized skillset demanded of its teachers. DVIA primarily relies on word of mouth in its recruitment efforts. Milpitas Unified School District, which has encountered a much higher skills match, uses educators as Researcher and Developers, with Integrator and Guide components woven into the role.



TALENT POOL



CATEGORY 3: Model Structure & Schedule

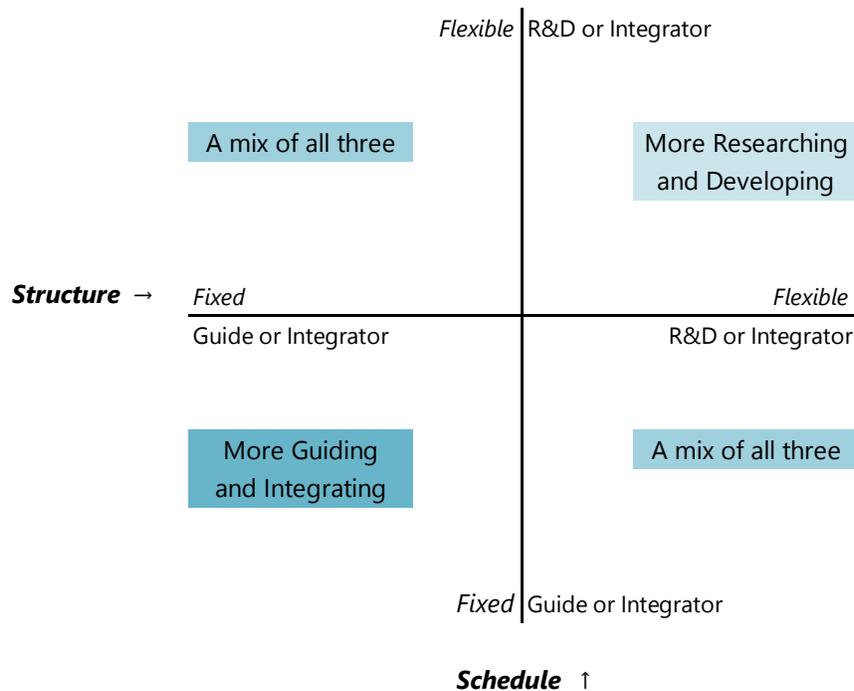
- Model Structure:** Are the activities in which students are engaged fixed or flexible? At Aspire ERES, students engage in a station-rotation model that features large-group instruction, individual online learning and a small-group activity that shifts according to content and student need. Aspire ERES uses educators primarily as Integrators, with some Guide characteristics. At USC Hybrid High, students engage in more consistently open-ended academic pursuits, with extensive teacher autonomy to structure classroom activities. All of their educators function primarily as Research and Developers, while also playing both Integrator and Guide roles to varying degrees based on their classroom structures.



- Model Schedule:** Is the timing of student learning activities fixed or flexible? A program that places students on a largely fixed schedule is FirstLine Schools, whose classroom teachers primarily serve as Integrators with some Research and Developer tendencies. Village Green, a school with a flexible schedule, uses educators as both Research and Developers and Guides.



Model Structure & Schedule



CATEGORY 4: Personalization

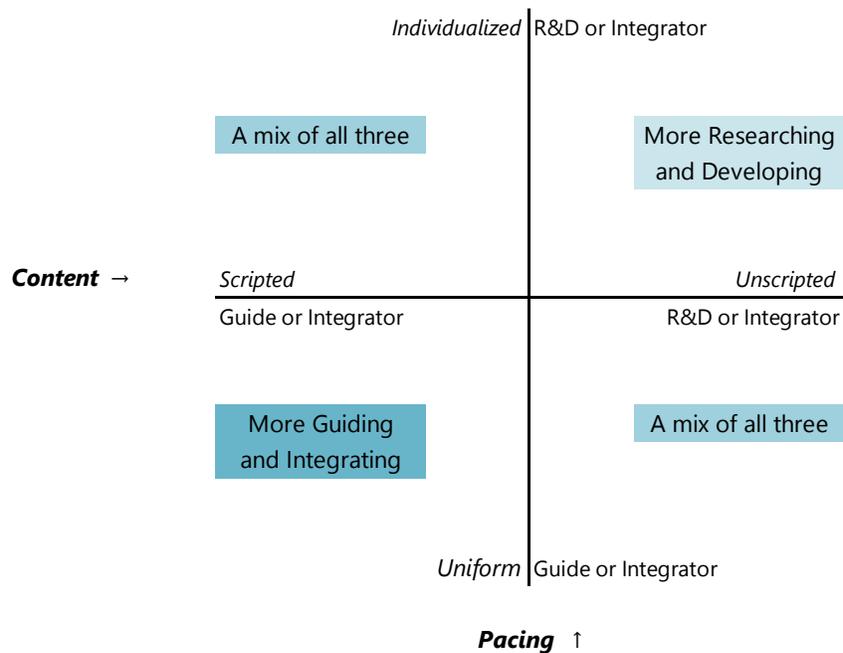
7. **Content:** Is the course content and its delivery completely undifferentiated among students or is it fully personalized to meet every student’s individual needs and abilities? Leadership Public Schools, whose educators are Integrators and Research and Developers, features a classroom dynamic that is not yet significantly more differentiated than the traditional classroom. At Summit Denali, students receive a personalized playlist of potential learning activities that they guide while working in heterogeneous groups on projects that emphasize cross-content work. Summit faculty are Research and Developers, Integrators and Guides in both content knowledge and skills development.



8. **Pacing/Progression:** Is the pace of learning and student progression through course content uniform for each class or fully individualized? Among the schools observed for this report, Alliance College Ready Public Schools follows more uniform pacing, and uses educators as Integrators, with some Research and Developer components. Cornerstone Health High, which has replaced grade levels with mastery-based progression, uses educators primarily as Research and Developers with some components of Integrators.



Personalization



CATEGORY 5: Social/Emotional Support

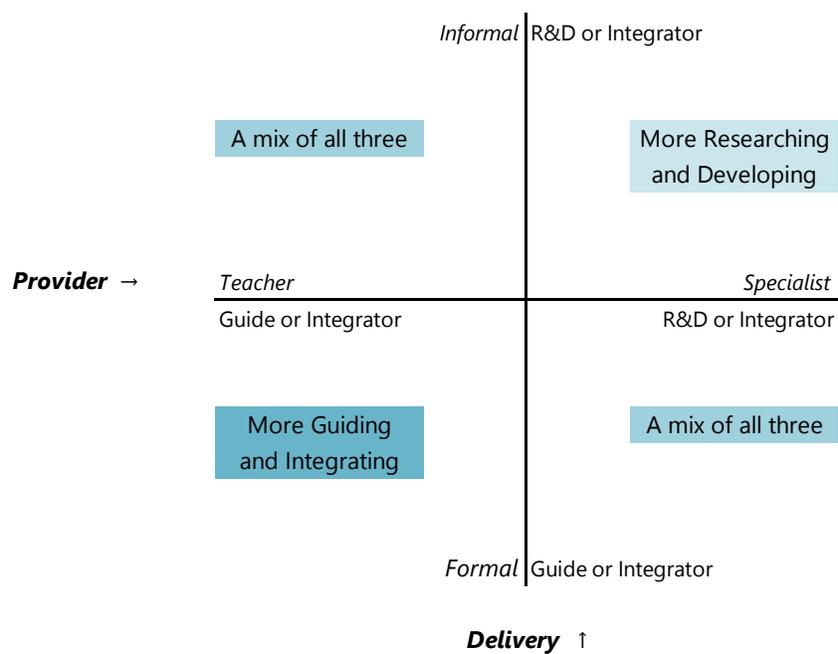
9. **Social/Emotional Support – Provider:** Are the social/emotional supports students receive primarily provided by external specialists or by teachers? Cornerstone Health High School provides social/emotional specialists that work directly with students in the classroom. This frees up their other instructors, whose primary role is Researcher and Developer with some Integrator features, to concentrate on academics. Big Picture Learning’s MET Center, which asks its “Advisors” to form deep personal connections to students so they may serve as mentors and social/emotional supports, uses a hybrid of educators as Integrators and Guides.



10. **Social/Emotional Support – Delivery:** Are the social/emotional supports students receive formalized in classes or meetings, or are they provided informally through relationship-building and daily interactions? Generation Schools sets aside a fixed time during “lunch advisory groups” each day for social/emotional support and skills development. GS uses teachers as a hybrid of all three roles. At FirstLine Schools, lab monitors are academic coaches who also play an informal social/emotional support role, engaging deeply with students to better understand their personal needs and leveraging the knowledge they gain about students to inform how they manage their classrooms. They serve primarily as Guides with some Research and Developer components. This enables educators in their core classrooms to serve as both Integrators and Research and Developers.



Social/Emotional Support



Using the Diagnostic Questions to Identify Your Educator Role(s)

As you ask yourself these questions, you can begin to categorize your answers according to the educator role(s) to which they are most closely aligned. Although the lines may often be grey, each category follows a rough progression from Guide to Integrator to Research and Developer (or vice versa) based on the premise that Guides will function better with more structure and support and more targeted decision-making power, whereas Research and Developers are most comfortable with the highest ratio of flexibility, uncertainty and ownership over decision-making.

What should also be clear is that most blended learning programs would either benefit from leveraging a combination of roles or from finding teachers who have the ability to fulfill more than one role. Schools that use a team-taught model would be best served by introducing a combination of at least two and perhaps all three roles into the classroom. Schools that rely on a single teacher to guide student learning in a subject (or in all subjects) are likely to do a better job of meeting student needs and advancing the instructional model used and classroom practices to support it when teachers are able to assume among at least two of the three roles.