
RESEARCH BRIEF

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Innovative Models

INNOVATIVE HIGH SCHOOL MODELS

Reynolds Flexible Studies Program, British Columbia

For her thesis work, Ewing (2017) spent time as a guest community mentor and researcher with Reynolds Flexible Studies Program in Saanich, BC on Vancouver Island (p. 15). This program is a school within a school – a small mixed-grade program of 40-50 students from Grades 9 and 10. There are three teachers who work collaboratively with these students to plan curriculum in flexible ways that are organized around student inquiry, community happenings, and overarching predetermined themes. Students go to conventional classes in the mornings for their math and extracurricular credits and then join the three Flexible Studies teachers in the afternoon for some combination of the humanities and sciences, sometimes discipline-specific, but often integrated around events or inquiry projects, often co-taught.

Ewing identified time and space (p. 60) as the two most important resources supporting the Flexible Studies program. She identified several things that are working well (pp. 60-95)—in relation to community, risk taking, student voice and choice, collaboration, real-world relevance, and transformative learning—and she described some cautions (pp. 97-129)—the importance of clear expectations, structure, guidelines, and timely feedback, as well as the challenges of grades and collaboration. Ewing finished her thesis recommending that, for such an approach to support student engagement effectively, students need to receive training/preparation for their significant consultant-like role within the flexible/interdisciplinary classroom (pp. 136-7). Ewing proposed that this could be achieved through workshops (p. 137) or by creating a classroom charter (p. 135).

REYNOLDS SOURCES

Ewing, N. (2017). Learning to find a sustainable balance: a case study of the Reynolds flexible studies program (Doctoral dissertation, University of Victoria).

Reynolds Secondary School (n.d.). The flexible studies program. Greater Victoria School District. Retrieved from <https://reynolds.sd61.bc.ca/programs-courses/flexible-studies/>

D. TECH HIGH SOURCES

Design Tech High School (2020). About. Retrieved from <https://www.designtechhighschool.org/>

Tran, N. (n.d.). Design thinking playbook. Stanford d.school. Retrieved from <https://dschool.stanford.edu/resources/design-thinking-playbook-from-design-tech-high-school>

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Design Tech High School (d.tech), California

Design Tech High School, or “d.tech,” is a free, charter school in California that uses personalized scheduling and design thinking to facilitate a student-directed approach to learning. According to their website, the school’s program helps students master academic content and collaborative problem solving strategies, both in and out of the classroom (d.tech, n.d.). Partnered with the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design (or “d.school”) at Stanford and the tech company Oracle, d.tech often invites experts and guest speakers to provide students with real-world feedback on projects. These partnerships also relate to d.tech’s focus on design thinking and digital technology.

Design Tech High School’s playbook for change management describes design thinking as “a creative problem solving process that focuses on understanding the needs of others, rapid testing and iterating, and bringing out [students’] inner creative genius” (Tran, n.d., p. 2). Looking specifically at how d.tech engages with design thinking, their playbook explains that they consider it “as a process...[for] solving all kinds of school challenges including programs, spaces, services, and systems” (Tran, n.d., p. 2). For teachers this involves using a design thinking process to empathize with students or other staff and design iterative, personalized prototypes for “curriculum, space, rituals, assessment, etc.” (Tran, n.d., p. 3). Due to its innovative approach, d.tech has become quite popular and there are more applicants than space at the school. They therefore use a lottery system to determine which students are admitted.

Ottawa Catholic School Board, Ontario

The Ottawa Catholic School Board consists of over 80 schools that are all engaged in what educational theorist, Michael Fullan, describes as Deep Learning (Fullan, Quinn, & McEachen, 2018). In a deep learning environment, students “exercis[e] their agency as learners” (Fullan, Gardner, & Drummy, 2019, p. 4). This involves many opportunities to “develop leadership” (Fullan, Gardner, & Drummy, 2019, p. 4) as students collaborate “in small groups across schools to research real-life problems and propose solutions” (Fullan, Gardner, & Drummy, 2019, p. 4). Some of the main features that typify Ottawa Catholic’s personalized and collaborative, deep-learning approach include: “students working with their own devices; using space purposefully for collaborating and moving; providing green walls for producing videos; students taking responsibility for their learning [and]...teachers meeting in teams by grade or cross levels” (Loose, 2019, p. 127). Deep learning involves a commitment from both students and teachers to collaborate and personalize their understanding of education.

The real-world relevancy of students’ learning is a key feature of Ottawa Catholic’s innovative learning approach. As one administrator for the school board noted, “[u]nderstanding what we can do to implement change in our community [- t]hat’s something that writing a test won’t solve. We’re learning how to do these things first hand” (Ottawa Catholic School Board, 2018). In relation to

the Covid-19 Pandemic, Ottawa Catholic demonstrated the value of flexible approaches to learning; they found themselves “more prepared [for the pandemic health measures] and acted quickly to support home learning by building relationships with individual students and by addressing student engagement in flexible ways” (Hargreaves, & Fullan, 2020, p. 329).

OTTAWA CATHOLIC SOURCES

Fullan, M., Gardner, M., & Drummy, M. (2019). Going deeper. *Education Leadership*, 76(8), 64-68.

Fullan, M., Quinn, J., & McEachen, J. (2018). *Deep learning. Engage the World Change the World*. London/Ontario: Corwin/Principals’ Council.

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Ormiston Junior College (OJC), Auckland

Ormiston Junior College (OJC) is a public high school in Auckland, New Zealand with a clear mission: “Guarantee every learner engages in innovative, personalised world-class learning” (Ormiston Junior College, 2022). Spearheaded by principal Luke Sumich, the administrators and teachers had a year before OJC opened during which they planned and designed the pedagogical and spatial elements of the school. The resulting approach features personal goals for students; transdisciplinary, authentic inquiry projects; learning coaches; literacy/numeracy lessons; a focus on social emotional learning; and a program to support students’ physical wellbeing (Ormiston Junior College, 2022).

Discussing his school, Sumich explained that his team “look[ed] at the research and particularly research about what makes a successful learner...and what it really comes back to: relationships are key to children’s learning” (Sumich, 2019, p. 40). In order to ensure that students all have meaningful relationships with at least one teacher, “each teacher in the school has a group of 12 to 14 students. They are known not as their teacher but as their ‘MAC,’ MAC meaning mentor, advisor, coach” (Sumich, 2019, p. 40). This MAC stays with the same students for their whole time at OJC, developing supportive, long-term relationships. Another innovative practice at the school is their “badge” system of assessment (Sumich, 2019, pp. 41-2). Students can achieve curricular objectives in diverse, flexible ways, as long as they provide evidence to demonstrate their learning and its relevance.

OJC SOURCES

Ormiston Junior College. (2022). Ormiston Junior College. Retrieved from <http://www.ojc.school.nz>

Sumich, L. (2019). The Ormiston Philosophy: A Changing Education Paradigm. *LEARNing Landscapes*, 12(1), 39-45.

District 11 (D11) Schools, Colorado

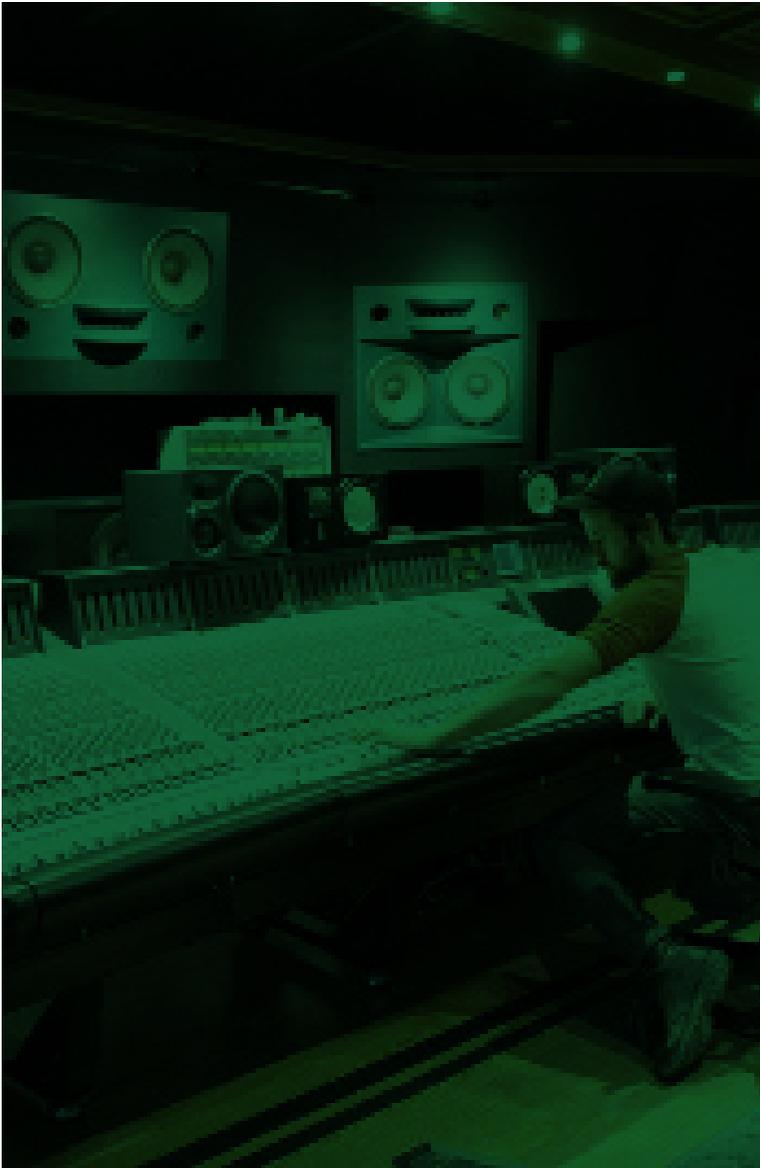
District 11 Schools in Colorado Springs have a long history of innovation, pioneering experiential learning programs in the 1960’s and 1970’s (Nold, 1975). Today, D11 schools are known for providing distinctive educational experiences for diverse students. Unlike conventional models where students attend schools in their neighbourhoods, D11 schools specialize based on student interests and the district partners with transportation services to ensure that students can attend whichever school fits their passions and career path (D11, 2022).

D11 SOURCES

D11. (n.d.). District 11 Colorado Springs. Retrieved from <https://www.d11.org/>

Nold, J. J. (1975). *The Schools Discover OUTWARD BOUND*. Colorado Springs School District 11 Experiential Education Program 1968-1975.

High School for (HSRA), Minnesota



Recording Arts

The High School for Recording Arts (HSRA), or “Hip-Hop High” is a free, charter school near Minneapolis, Minnesota that engages traditionally under-supported students (low-income and racialized populations) in culturally sensitive and personalized project-based learning. Mixing conventional literacy and numeracy classes with music-based interdisciplinary projects, HSRA helps students who were not set to graduate high school succeed in earning a high school diploma and continue onto post-secondary educational opportunities. The two professional recording studios provide students with hands-on opportunities to engage meaningfully in projects about which they’re passionate – both creatively and as entrepreneurs. Most students enrol at HSRA towards the end of high school and are supported to complete a flexible, portfolio showcasing their learning in ways that reflect their interests while satisfying institutional requirements for graduating high school and applying to post-secondary schools (High School for Recording Arts, n.d.; Wikipedia contributors, 2022). One of the notable features of HSRA that allows them to personalize education for an eclectic group of students is their team-based approach to facilitating learning. “Traditional certified teachers

serv[e] as content advisers who manage student learning and other team members (many of whom have similar backgrounds as the students) address[] students’ personal needs” (Lipset & Nathan, 2021, n.p.). Although all faculty are seen as learning facilitators, some are involved with supporting students in ways that are not always seen as directly relevant to learning– concerns like “housing, food, and employment” (Lipset & Nathan, 2021, p. 40). By taking a holistic approach to supporting students, HSRA shows that teaching and learning cannot be standardized; supporting a diverse group of students requires a similarly diverse team of staff and teachers. Compared to many other schools, HSRA experienced a “smoother transition to pandemic learning” (Lipset & Nathan, 2021, p. 42) because the teachers and other personnel were already using blended or remote approaches to learning and supporting students.

HSRA SOURCES

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