Rethinking Learning Through the Enriched Virtual Model

A Review of the Literature

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Introduction

Lately, there's been a real shift in how we think about school. A lot of people are starting to ask-do students really need to be in a classroom for eight hours a day, five days a week? More and more school districts are starting to experiment with shorter weeks or blending in some at home learning to better meet students' needs. Let's be honest, things like student behavior, engagement, learning differences, and even mental health aren't exactly improving with the old school approach.

That's what got me interested in the Enriched Virtual Model, a type of blended learning that gives students more flexibility and a more personalized learning experience. In this model, students do the majority of their work online and only come to school on certain days. It gives them more control over their learning, lets them move at their own pace, and creates space for more focused support when they do come in. I really believe this model has serious potential, especially in fast-growing districts like Mansfield ISD. My action research is all about exploring how we can bring this model to life and measure what kind of import it has. As I dived into the research, a few big ideas kept coming up: the needs of students today are not being met in traditional school settings, blending learning is a personalized approach for the modern student, and the Enriched Virtual Model pops as a flexible and effective way to support learning inside and outside the classroom.

Review of the Literature

Definition of the Enriched Virtual Model

The Enriched Virtual Model is a type of blended learning that blends online instruction with occasional in-person sessions. According to White (2019), students can learn anywhere,

anytime, often at their own pace. Students complete the majority of their coursework remotely and only come to campus for specific learning experiences, such as assessments, discussions, and hands-on projects. Unlike other blended learning options like Flipped Classroom or Station Rotation models that require daily in-person attendance, the Enriched Virtual Model removes the daily physical classroom seat time while still incorporating face-to-face support. Augusta University (2024) highlights that this model allows for "anytime, anywhere" learning while maintaining a structured connection to the school environment.

Types of Blended Learning

There are three different types of blended learning that are similar yet very different: Station Rotation, Flipped Classroom, and Enriched Virtual Model. These models offer a variety of ways for today's modern students to utilize technology in the classroom to the fullest extent imaginable.

Station Rotation

The Station Rotation model is most commonly used in the elementary school setting and offers a way to personalize learning while remaining in the traditional classroom structure. Students have the ability to rotate through different learning stations while maintaining a fixed schedule. Some of the most common stations include the online learning station, a collaborative activity station, and a teacher-led station. This option brings a more flexible approach to the traditional classroom.

Flipped Classroom

In a flipped classroom, the concept of learning at home is introduced. Students engage with instructional lessons through videos or readings at home while class time is used for

discussions, collaborations, and practice. The model shifts the teacher role from lecturer to facilitator which allows for an interactive classroom experience to show what you know regarding the material. This model is mostly used for high school students but middle schools are starting to adapt the concept as well.

Enriched Virtual Model

The Enriched Virtual Model builds on both of these approaches but adds its own unique spin with personalization of learning and flexibility. This model is perfect for students who can work independently in a self-paced learning environment. Students spend a few days a week at home learning while using the classroom for academic support and community-building. While this model has gained a lot of ground at the high school level, it's been adapted for younger grade levels for students who can manage independent learning schedules.

Advantages of Using the Enriched Virtual Model

The Enriched Virtual Model comes with many perks, the biggest is the flexibility it offers to students. Students are no longer bound by a strict schedule nor are they stuck sitting in a classroom all day. This has become a massive game changer for kids who don't thrive in a traditional classroom setting. Lathan (2022) points out that this approach lets students move at their own pace. They're not rushed or held back, which helps reduce anxiety and keeps them more engaged. It makes learning feel more personal and humane.

The model also supports personalized instruction that caters to each student's unique learning styles. The National Education Association (2021) both argue that personalized, tech-enabled learning helps fill in gaps and better matches each student's unique style. Thanks to digital tools, teachers can see real-time data on how students are doing and adjust their support to

fit each learner's needs. Carleton (2020) emphasizes how this allows for more targeted teaching, and Gonzalez-Gomez et al. (2016) found that students in blended learning environments actually performed better and felt more satisfied, probably because they had more autonomy and could learn in ways that suited them best.

Overall families benefit greatly from this model not just students and teachers. Coble (2016) notes that virtual learning can better match the rhythm of modern family life, especially for parents who work from home. Some school districts in North Texas have even moved to four-day weeks, and early reports show boosts in well-being for both students and teachers (Lowak, 2024). With all of these great benefits no wonder the Enriched Virtual Model is a smart educational choice, but it reflects the changing needs of today's families and communities.

Barriers to Implementing the Enriched Virtual Model

Of course, not everything comes without its challenges and the Enriched Virtual Model has its fair share. The biggest concern the model is facing is equality. As Walker and colleagues (2018) highlight, students from low-income backgrounds often don't have reliable internet, the right devices, or even a quiet place to study. For these students, online learning is becoming a stressful alternative to the traditional classroom instead of a helpful solution. However, there are ways of making this model work for everyone if implemented proficiently.

Another issue is that many teachers don't have the proper training or support needed when it comes to teaching online or in a blended environment. Schwahn and McGarvey (2020) point out that our schools are still operating under an outdated, one-size-fits-all system that was designed for a totally different era. Boyce (2019) pointed out that our schools still rely heavily on repetition and memorization, rooted in a factory-style model of education. Making the shift

to blended learning isn't just about adding tech, it's about rethinking how we teach and how students learn. That kind of change takes time, training, and a lot of support.

The issue of school structure also plays a disadvantage to the model. Strict attendance rules, fixed schedules, and high-stakes testing don't always align with the flexibility of the Enriched Virtual Model. Schmitt (2022) brings up a powerful point: in Texas, students with disabilities are still dropping out at high rates. This clearly shows that the current system in place does not meets their needs in the classroom. If schools want to have a successful future, they need to be serious about adopting new strategies and models. They need to be willing to rethink how the entire education system works, how to measure success, and how to support every learner.

Implementation in Mansfield ISD

Within Mansfield ISD, learning challenges are happening every day. The district's growth in the past ten years has made it difficult for both learners and teachers. Students come with learning gaps, behavioral challenges, or a history of disconnection from school. But something interesting happened during the COVID-19 pandemic: when Mansfield shifted to hybrid learning, a lot of students actually thrived in these more flexible, non-traditional environments. Since then, the district has started using several personalized learning platforms that tailor instruction based on assessment data. The foundation for the Enriched Virtual Model has been laid within the district and it can move forward in an intentional way. Since the elementary level has smaller class sizes and strong relationships between teachers and students this will be the best place to start. It's an opportunity to create a supportive space where real innovation can begin to grow: from roots to blossoms.

Summary

The research makes one thing clear: the traditional way of doing school just isn't cutting it for today's learners. Students need more flexibility, more choice, and more personalized support, and that's exactly what blended learning brings to the table. Out of all the blended models out there, the Enriched Virtual Model really stands out. It gives students the structure they need, but also the freedom to learn in ways that work best for them. It's a thoughtful response to some of the biggest challenges schools are facing right now with equity gaps, student disengagement, and teacher burnout. More than anything, it offers a path forward that feels aligned with the future of education (Horn & Staker, 2012).

This Review and the Field of Education

This review relates to the connection in education by showing how modern approaches such as the Enriched Virtual Model, can help solve the issue with traditional schooling. As more and more districts realize the limitations of a one-size-fits-all system, there's a need for models that provide students with choice, offer personalized support, and create flexibility for families. The research in this review offers a solid foundation for districts like Mansfield ISD to explore these changes in a thoughtful, student-centered way.

What This Body of Research Does Well and Where It Falls Short

One of the best things about this research is how clearly it keeps students at the center. Whether it's talking about flexible schedules, personalized learning paths, or using technology in thoughtful ways, the message is the same: education needs to meet students were they are. Another big plus is that a lot of the studies include real-world examples and case studies, which help bring the ideas to life and show how they work in actual classrooms. Norberg et al. (2011)

calls it the “new normal,” pointing to its ability to combine the best of online and face-to-face instruction.

But there’s also a pretty clear gap. Most of the research focuses on older students. From middle school, high school, or even college. There’s not much out there about how the Enriched Virtual Model plays out in elementary schools. We still have a lot to learn about how younger kids interact with online or blended learning, and what kind of support teachers need to make it work. That opens the door for more research in this area, and it’s a chance to explore what this model could look like for our youngest learners.

Focus of the Current Study

My action research will take this existing body of work a step further by looking specifically at how the Enriched Virtual Model can be used in K-4 classrooms in Mansfield ISD. I’ll be exploring how things like student engagement, academic growth, and teacher feedback change as the model is put into practice. I’m planning to look at both the numbers and the stories behind them to get a full picture of what’s working and what’s not. The goal is to help fill a real gap in the current research and give other districts some practical, real-world insight if they’re thinking about trying something similar.

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