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Implementing a Station Rotation Blended Learning Model in Correctional Education: Strategies for Increasing Student Engagement and Differentiated Instruction

Introduction

Technology should enhance learning rather than become the focus of instruction. In correctional education settings, educators face unique challenges that often limit access to technology while simultaneously increasing the need for differentiated instruction. Adult learners enter correctional classrooms with diverse academic backgrounds, varying levels of educational attainment, and different learning needs. These factors create significant challenges for educators seeking to provide meaningful and individualized learning experiences.

Many blended learning models assume access to one-to-one devices and reliable internet connectivity. However, correctional education environments often operate under security

restrictions that limit technology access. As a result, educators must identify innovative instructional strategies that prioritize learning while maximizing available resources.

One approach that addresses these challenges is the Station Rotation Blended Learning Model. This instructional framework combines teacher-led instruction, peer-supported learning, and technology-enhanced learning opportunities to create a student-centered learning environment. When implemented effectively, station rotation supports differentiated instruction, increases student engagement, and allows technology to become a catalyst for learning rather than the center of attention.

Research suggests that thoughtfully designed blended learning environments can increase student engagement, improve learning outcomes, and foster greater learner autonomy. Studies further indicate that purposeful instructional design supports differentiation and personalized learning experiences (Horn & Staker, 2015; Ahmed, 2025). These findings are particularly relevant in correctional education settings where educators must balance diverse learner needs with limited technology access.

The Problem of Practice

Throughout my work as an Academic and Instructional Technology Specialist supporting correctional education programs, I have observed a recurring challenge. Teachers frequently work with students who represent multiple educational levels within the same classroom. A single class may include learners preparing for the GED, students earning high school credits, adult literacy learners working toward foundational reading and mathematics skills, and younger students under the age of 22 who often require additional engagement and classroom management supports.

Teachers consistently report two primary concerns: maintaining student engagement throughout a three-hour instructional block and differentiating instruction for learners with significantly different academic needs. When instruction relies primarily on whole-group teaching, it becomes difficult to provide targeted support while keeping all learners actively engaged.

The challenge is not a lack of teacher commitment or instructional expertise. Rather, it is the need for a classroom structure that allows educators to provide individualized support while maintaining engagement for all learners. Research on correctional education suggests that learner motivation, self-efficacy, and persistence play important roles in educational success. Self-efficacy has been identified as an important predictor of educational accomplishment and can influence how learners respond to academic challenges. Studies examining prison-based learning environments found that incarcerated learners often demonstrate increases in self-efficacy through participation in educational programs. Similarly, research grounded in self-determination theory indicates that both intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation influence educational participation and persistence among incarcerated learners. These findings reinforce the need for instructional models that actively engage learners while providing differentiated pathways for success (Allred et al., 2013; Manger et al., 2020).

A Real-World Example from Correctional Education

The idea for implementing a Station Rotation Blended Learning Model emerged from recurring challenges observed across correctional education classrooms. During campus visits and conversations with teachers, several common concerns surfaced. Educators frequently described difficulties maintaining student engagement, particularly among learners under the age of 22. Teachers reported that classroom management challenges often increased when students were

disengaged, making it difficult to sustain productive learning environments throughout a three-hour instructional block.

At the same time, differentiation remained a persistent challenge. Many correctional education classrooms serve students with a wide range of academic needs. Teachers are often responsible for supporting adult literacy learners, students working toward high school credit recovery, and GED preparation students within the same instructional setting.

One example can be found at Holliday Unit, where a teacher serves students ranging from TABE Level E through GED preparation in the same classroom. Class sizes may include more than twenty students with varying academic needs until testing and placement processes can occur. Although instructional resources such as Kaplan, Steck-Vaughn, Aztec, and Study Buddies are available, effectively utilizing those resources while meeting the needs of every learner remains a challenge. Consider a newly enrolled student entering a correctional education classroom at TABE Level E while sitting alongside students preparing for the GED. In a traditional whole-group instructional model, the student may struggle to access grade-level content while more advanced learners receive insufficient challenge. Through a station rotation model, the student can receive targeted teacher intervention, collaborate with peers on foundational skills, and engage in independent practice using technology-enhanced resources. At the same time, GED-level students can work on higher-level tasks aligned to their learning goals. This structure allows all learners to participate in meaningful instruction without requiring separate classrooms or extensive additional resources.

As technology resources gradually began entering classrooms, I recognized an opportunity to rethink instructional delivery. Rather than viewing technology as an additional requirement, I saw the Station Rotation Model as a practical way to maximize existing resources while making

better use of the three-hour instructional block. Tucker (2021) notes that station rotation can be successfully implemented in low-tech environments and provides opportunities for small-group instruction, differentiated support, collaboration, and student agency.

In addition to observing these challenges during campus visits, I have introduced the station rotation concept during new-hire teacher training sessions. Many of these educators are transitioning from traditional public school settings and immediately recognize the challenge of maintaining student engagement during a three-hour instructional block. When presented with the station rotation framework, teachers were generally receptive because it provided a practical solution to a problem they had already identified. Rather than viewing the three-hour class period as a limitation, they began to see it as an opportunity to incorporate teacher-led instruction, independent practice, peer collaboration, and technology-enhanced learning experiences.

When discussing station rotation with educators, several concerns emerged. Some teachers expressed that they did not have enough technology to support a blended learning environment. Others worried that their students would struggle to manage rotations or that planning multiple learning stations would require additional time. These concerns closely mirror challenges identified in current blended learning research. Ahmed (2025) found that teachers frequently cite limited technology access, training needs, and increased planning requirements as barriers to implementation.

Theoretical Foundations

The Station Rotation Blended Learning Model aligns with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes active, student-centered learning experiences and the construction of knowledge

through interaction, collaboration, and experience. Ahmed (2025) identifies constructivism as a foundational framework for blended learning.

Dewey (1938) emphasized that learning occurs through experience and active participation. Vygotsky (1978) argued that learning is inherently social and develops through interaction with others. The peer collaboration component of station rotation directly supports this perspective.

Bruner (1960) advocated for scaffolding and discovery learning, both of which occur naturally within teacher-led intervention stations. Likewise, Piaget (1952) emphasized the importance of learners actively constructing knowledge through experiences. Papert (1980) extended these ideas by viewing technology as a tool that supports meaningful learning rather than serving as the primary focus of instruction.

Schank (2011) further argued that authentic learning occurs when learners actively engage in meaningful experiences rather than passively receive information. This philosophy closely aligns with the station rotation approach.

What Station Rotation Looks Like in Correctional Education

A Station Rotation Model organizes instruction into multiple learning stations that students rotate through during a class period.

Teacher-Led Intervention Station

The teacher works directly with small groups to provide targeted instruction, reteach concepts, address misconceptions, and monitor progress. The targeted support provided in this station reflects Bruner's (1960) concept of scaffolding, where instruction is adjusted to help learners progress beyond their current level of understanding.

Peer Collaboration Station

Students engage in structured learning activities that encourage discussion, problem-solving, and peer support. This collaborative learning structure aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) belief that learning develops through social interaction and the support of more knowledgeable peers.

Technology-Enhanced Learning Station

Students use available resources such as Aztec, Kolibri, Study Buddies, CK-12, Khan Academy content, and GED preparation tools to reinforce skills and practice independently.

Tucker (2018) suggests that grouping should be based on instructional goals and may include mixed-skill groups, needs-based groups, or assessment-driven groups. This flexibility is especially beneficial in correctional education classrooms where student readiness levels vary significantly. This station reflects Papert's (1980) view that technology should serve as a tool for constructing knowledge rather than simply delivering information. Table 1 illustrates how the Station Rotation Model can be structured to maximize engagement, differentiation, and the effective use of instructional resources within correctional education classrooms.

Table 1

Example of a Station Rotation Model in a Correctional Education Classroom

Rotation Station	Teacher Role	Student Role	Sample Resources
Teacher-Led Intervention	Provide small-group instruction, intervention, and progress monitoring	Receive targeted instruction and guided practice	TABE lessons, GED skill instruction, teacher-created materials
Peer Collaboration	Facilitate and monitor student discussions and activities	Collaborate, problem-solve, and practice skills with peers	Discussion prompts, vocabulary activities, problem-solving tasks
Technology-Enhanced	Monitor progress and	Complete independent	Aztec, Kolibri, Study

Learning	provide support as needed	practice and skill reinforcement activities	Buddies, CK-12, GED preparation tools

Note. This table illustrates how station rotation can be structured within a correctional education classroom to maximize engagement, differentiation, and the effective use of available instructional resources.

Learning First, Technology Second

One of the most important lessons I have learned while supporting teachers is that blended learning does not require extensive technology.

Many educators initially believe they must have student devices, internet access, or sophisticated software before implementing blended learning. Horn and Staker (2015) argue that effective blended learning begins with instructional design rather than technology selection. Similarly, Ahmed (2025) emphasizes active learning, collaboration, and purposeful instructional planning. Together, these perspectives reinforce that technology is most effective when it supports intentional instructional design rather than driving it.

The Station Rotation Model demonstrates that meaningful blended learning can occur even when technology is limited. In many correctional education classrooms, teachers use a single laptop, projector, interactive board, Study Buddies device, or limited computer lab access to facilitate learning.

Practical Implementation Example

A mathematics lesson focused on proportional reasoning may begin with a brief whole-group mini lesson. Following direct instruction, students rotate through three stations.

At the teacher-led station, students receive targeted support on ratio and proportion concepts.

At the collaboration station, students work through real-world application problems and discuss solution strategies.

At the technology station, students complete individualized practice activities using approved digital learning resources such as Aztec, Kolibri, or Study Buddies.

Each station reinforces the same learning objective while providing different pathways for mastery.

Benefits for Teachers and Students

Research consistently demonstrates positive outcomes associated with blended learning environments. Ahmed (2025) notes that blended learning can improve student engagement, increase learner autonomy, and support stronger learning outcomes when combined with active learning opportunities and purposeful instructional design.

Increased Differentiation

Teachers can provide instruction tailored to individual student needs rather than relying exclusively on whole-group lessons.

Increased Student Engagement

Students actively participate in learning activities and remain engaged through varied instructional experiences.

Increased Confidence and Persistence

In correctional education settings, student confidence and motivation often influence persistence and long-term educational success. Research has shown that participation in correctional education programs can contribute to increased academic self-efficacy among incarcerated learners. Likewise, studies examining prisoner motivation suggest that both intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation influence educational participation and persistence. By creating opportunities for small successes, individualized support, and meaningful peer interaction, the Station Rotation Model may help learners build confidence in their academic abilities while encouraging continued participation in educational programming (Allred et al., 2013; Manger et al., 2020).

Better Use of Limited Resources

Existing technology resources can be strategically leveraged without requiring additional devices or infrastructure.

Greater Teacher Insight

Small-group interactions allow educators to identify misconceptions and address learning gaps more effectively.

Recommendations for Educational Leaders

Educational leaders who wish to support blended learning initiatives should focus on instructional practices rather than technology acquisition alone.

Professional learning should emphasize:

- Designing effective learning stations
- Differentiating instruction

- Utilizing existing technology resources
- Monitoring implementation fidelity
- Providing coaching and ongoing support

OTAN identifies station rotation as an effective strategy for creating active learning environments that combine teacher guidance, collaborative learning, and independent practice. These principles align closely with the needs of adult learners and correctional education programs.

Connection to Ongoing Action Research

As part of my ongoing action research, I am examining how implementing a station rotation blended learning model influences teacher implementation fidelity and differentiated instructional practices in correctional education classrooms.

Current efforts focus on supporting educators as they transition from traditional whole-group instruction toward more student-centered learning environments. Findings from this work will help determine how station rotation can be scaled across correctional education programs while maintaining instructional quality and improving learning opportunities for diverse adult learners. Ultimately, this research has the potential to inform professional learning, coaching practices, and classroom implementation strategies that support broader adoption of station rotation blended learning models across correctional education programs.

Conclusion

Correctional education requires innovative approaches that acknowledge the realities of the learning environment while maintaining high expectations for student success. Research suggests

that blended learning environments can improve engagement, autonomy, and learning outcomes when instructional design remains the primary focus (Horn & Staker, 2015; Ahmed, 2025).

The Station Rotation Blended Learning Model offers a practical framework for increasing differentiation and student engagement despite limitations in technology access.

The goal is not to increase technology use. The goal is to create instructional structures that increase learning opportunities for every student.

When educators intentionally design learning experiences that combine targeted instruction, peer collaboration, and purposeful technology integration, students gain greater opportunities for success, and teachers gain a powerful structure for meeting diverse learning needs. Ultimately, meaningful innovation is not defined by the amount of technology in a classroom, but by how effectively instructional design creates opportunities for every learner to succeed.

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