

HyFlex Learning

Making a Virtue of Necessity

In 2020, when COVID-19 first disrupted education worldwide, there was much debate about the impacts on students and teachers being forced to move schooling online. As the COVID years have rolled by, learning has become hybrid at best. There have been unpredictable switches between face-to-face and online learning.

Of course, the idea of flexibly blending online and face-to-face learning was well-known many years before the arrival of COVID-19. The Christensen Institute says blended learning is when students learn, “At least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path and/or pace.” Teachers, no doubt, have been experiencing exactly this, albeit perhaps in a very unplanned way. We have had to acknowledge student agency over their time and their preferred ways of working as well as acknowledging the lack of agency they may have over access to devices or connectivity.

The only way we can help students to be their best in this situation is to give them the necessary control over the time, place, path and pace of their learning. Some use the term *HyFlex* (hybrid-flexible) to mean not only online and face-to-face learning, but flexibility, where students choose whether or not to attend face-to-face sessions. Many teachers will feel that their students are already de facto using this model, whether it was intended or not.

What began as a crisis can be turned into an opportunity to rethink the nature of teaching and learning. We might think “half the class is missing,” or we might take the view that “this is already a HyFlex classroom. How can it be made to work for everyone?” We need to avoid losing our engagement with students who, for whatever reason, are not in face-to-face classes. To make them feel fully included, and not assumed to be in a deficit model of learning, it may be necessary to be more flexible around the timetable, to have students learning collaboratively together in groups that combine both in-class and online students, and for online students to have their own communities of learning, supported by their teachers. If learners feel they can move seamlessly between different modes of learning to suit their circumstances, without being disadvantaged, we will have made a significant step forward. 



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