

Hybrid Teaching Increases Understanding

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In only fifteen years, the 21st century has welcomed to the world inventions and innovations that have completely changed the lives we live. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and other forms of social media sites allow people to connect with others from all around the world. Skype and Apple's Facetime allow for people to have face-to-face conversations with individuals thousands of miles away. Blogs, YouTube and Wikis have made it possible for anyone to have a voice and lastly Smart Phones, Tablets and high speed internet have made it possible to reach all of these things, in the palm of your hand. It is due to all of these advancements that hybrid teaching is possible and it is inevitable that hybrid teaching will change the world. Blended learning, or often referred to as hybrid learning, is a teaching method that combines the traditional face-to-face learning with non-traditional techniques and tools. In this type of setting, 30% to 79% of the program is delivered online (Musawi, 2011, pg.4). A traditional face-to-face learning environment is your typical classroom setting where a teacher is in the front of the class, teaching to the students. In addition, if less than 29.9% of the classroom content is delivered online, it would be considered a traditional classroom. When done correctly, hybrid and blended learning will increase students' knowledge and understanding compared to a traditional face-to-face class.

In the simplest form knowledge is when a person uses data, numbers, information and facts to create an informed decision (Dhamdhare, 2015, pg. 166). The more knowledge one has the better informed he or she is when making their decision. When done correctly, hybrid learning will increase a person's knowledge, which in result will allow for them to create better decisions. If hybrid learning is done on a large scale, it would result in a smarter, more knowledgeable society, which will allow for people to make change on a global scale.

One way hybrid learning increases knowledge is through its high student engagement. The University of Kosovska Mitrovica recently piloted a blended learning course for 76 second-year undergraduate students from the Faculty of Sport and Physical Education. Out of these 76 students, none of them had any prior experience in the blended learning environment (Vitošević, Janković & Vitošević, 2014, pg. 107). At the end of the year the students took a questionnaire asking them about their experiences taking a blended course. The results were overwhelmingly positive for blended and hybrid learning. Approximately 84% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I was more active during this course compared to other course[s] I have attended this semester” with only approximately 2% of the students disagreeing. (Vitošević, Janković & Vitošević, 2014, pg. 112). In addition, the study went on to state that the “average student became more motivated by [blended learning] because the blended learning helped them to upgrade their knowledge and to improve their understanding of key concepts. (Vitošević, Janković & Vitošević, 2014, pg. 113).”

Engagement also is evident in the youngest of learners as well. Cumberland Trace Elementary school in Bowling Green, Kentucky has started to incorporate the hybrid learning modeling in their school as well. The teachers at Cumberland Trace have reported that “when student are able to use technology, they are more focused and eager to perform learning tasks.” In addition, behavior problems have been reduced due to the increased engagement of the students. (Evans, Hawkins & McCrary, 2014, pg. 29.) This results in better use of class time for both the student and the teacher. The students are spending more time learning, and with the decrease of negative behaviors the teacher can spend his or her time focusing on the academics of the class.

Hybrid learning also increases student knowledge since it can be personalized for each individual student. Personalized learning means the “student learning experience – what they learn, and how, when, and where they learn it – are tailored to their individual needs, skills and interests, and that their school enables them to take ownership of their learning” (Childress & Benson, 2014, pg. 34). With personalized learning, the curriculum adapts around the student, rather than the student trying to adapt to the curriculum. In this type of setting, teachers are seen more as guides who provide students with daily, weekly or bi-weekly material based on the students pace and understanding. Educators know that each student learns at different paces. Personalized learning allows for students to learn at different paces and take different pathways towards mastery (Horn, 2015, pg. 9). In a traditional classroom, this style of teaching would be very difficult to incorporate. Personalized learning requires constant data intake from each student to track where each student is. Personalized learning is very possible however in a hybrid model. Going back to Cumberland Trace, the elementary school uses computer-adaptive diagnostic assessments to determine where each student is when it comes to early literacy skills. Cumberland Trace uses the STAR Early Literacy system to determine where each one of its students are when it comes to reading and literacy (Evans, Hawkins & McCrary, 2014, pg. 28.). After a 20 to 30 minute test, which adapts to the students skills, the teacher is provided with a report that breaks down what standards the students have mastered, are proficient in or struggling in. This information can then be used to provide each student with assignments tailored towards them. Spring City Elementary School, located outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania has found great success with the hybrid approach. Under the new hybrid model, students would rotate between stations, allowing for more individualized learning time. After the first year of

switching to this model they saw great gains. The schools math scores went up 24%, while gaining 20 points in reading and 27 points in science (Boccella, 2015).

Since many aspects of hybrid courses are online, this also allows for the learning to continue outside of the classroom. In a traditional classroom teachers only see their students for a set number of minutes during the week. Although a teacher can hand out homework, the majority of the learning is occurring during those set times. Hybrid learning however, allows for learning to continue even out of the set classroom time. Students will have access to majority, if not all, of the class content through the classroom webpage or the classes LMS (Learning Management System) page. In addition, through message boards, e-mail and other communication devices, the student and teacher can be in constant communications. For example, Nancy Frey, Douglas Fisher, and Ian Pumpian noticed that when it came to providing feedback for drafts on student essays, the hybrid approach allowed for the learning to occur outside of the classroom. In the past, these three would write notes on a first draft of a student's paper. The next class they would hand the paper back, with their notes, and the following class the student would hand the paper back with the corrections. Essentially though, all the student was doing was taking the teachers changes, adding them to the paper and turning it back in. Now that this process is done online using the comment feature, the student has a chance to discuss the revisions with the teacher before making the changes. It also allows for the teacher to ask questions, rather than flat out telling the student what to change, since the student has time to communicate back and forth with the teacher before the next class. "I'm not doing the thinking for them...I'm thinking with them" (Frey, Fisher & Pumpian, 2013, pg. 63).

There is a great deal of controversy though when it comes to hybrid teaching. Many teacher and educators don't see the value, or perhaps have tried a hybrid model and reverted

back to a more traditional style because it did not work. As stated before, hybrid learning will increase knowledge and understanding compared to a traditional face-to-face classroom, only when it is done correctly. The key point here is done correctly. Just like the chalkboard, textbooks and the pencil, the hybrid model is a tool that can be used to teach, but it isn't the teacher. If a teacher did not know how to use a chalkboard, a textbook or pencil in their class, those tools would be ineffective as well. There are certainly differences in quality of face-to-face instructors throughout a classroom, the same will be true with hybrid teachers (Frey, Fisher & Pumpian, 2013, pg. 63). This though should not be a deterrent from switching to the hybrid model. It simply means teachers need to be retrained to teach in a hybrid setting.

In conclusion, by keeping students engaged, creating individualized plans and allowing them to learn outside of the classroom, the hybrid or blended learning model increases students' knowledge and understanding compared to the traditional face-to-face classroom settings of the past. This is not to say that by switching to a hybrid model the students will automatically make significant gains. Just like other teaching tools, hybrid learning is only as effective as the instruction leading the class. What is most exciting about hybrid learning though, is how new it is. We are at the start of what will be a complete revolution in how we learn and teach. As more teachers, administrators and districts switch to this model of teaching, the more hybrid learning will change to we will discover even more ways to make it more effective.

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