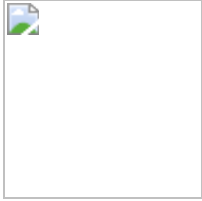


# 'Hybrid Teaching Is Multitasking to the Umpteenth Degree'

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, Education Week

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The question-of-the-week is:

***What are the do's and don'ts of hybrid (also called concurrent) teaching?***

, Christina Diaz, Christina E. Cox, Erin R. Scholes, and Matt Carlstrom shared their recommendations.

Today, Xiomara Nygren, Virginia Lowe, Traci Vermilion, M.Ed., and Shelly Cihak, Ed.D. contribute their thoughts.

## **Flexibility**

*Xiomara Nygren is an ESL teacher that has taught kindergarten through college. Currently, she teaches ESL at an urban high school:*

Earning an M.A. in urban education specializing in English as a second language and acquiring nine years of teaching experience did not prepare me for pandemic teaching in a high school. I work in a district that has gone from completely remote to hybrid with intermittent remote learning whenever enough COVID cases warrant closing school buildings or snowstorms disrupt travel. Hybrid teaching is multitasking to the umpteenth degree. There are do's and don'ts to having students virtual and in person at the same time.

For the students who enter my classroom, I have them join our video meets. One reason for this is to have them interact with their peers learning online. When my in-class students answer questions, I either have them unmute themselves, and I mute my microphone to avoid echo, or I repeat how they responded to the virtual students. Another reason to have students in the classroom join the video meets is to help them stay engaged with the lesson. With me wearing a mask and having table shields, my voice does not carry well. With them on the video meet, they can hear me better, helping them participate more. Finally, most of my students prefer not to speak out loud and feel more comfortable typing in the video chat. Although I can project the video meet for the students in the class, I want them to participate in the written discussion with their peers.

All of my students have access to the same materials, which is an important aspect when teaching hybrid learners. Although this would benefit students in the class, I do not write on the board, as the virtual students would have trouble seeing. Some of my son's teachers do this, and he gets lost. He complains, "Mom, I can't see what he's writing." It becomes more of a distraction than anything else, and the lesson loses its effect. My district uses GSuite, so I create materials and post them in Google Classroom. However, if you do have to write on the board, take a picture and post it so that students can clearly see what you wrote.

Moving on to behavior situations that may occur in class, I find it is essential to remember that parents at home, who may be listening, can hear you redirecting a student or stopping unwanted behavior. I mute myself when the situation arises for the student's privacy. While I was speaking to one of my son's friend's mom, she pointed out an individual student in class who misbehaved frequently. She commented on how annoying it was. As a mother, I would not want other parents knowing this about my children. With the remote students, I usually address situations privately through messaging for the same reason. Students will act out or need to be redirected from time to time. Their reputation should not be affected by these actions.

Lastly, technical difficulties will happen, and you need to prepare for them. As I write this, I had Google Meets and Google Drive fail to work during an interactive reading assignment. I projected the story on the big monitor for my in-class and virtual students. I connected to the video meeting through both devices I use. The video meeting on the desktop computer failed, and Google Drive would not function on the Chromebook. I needed a backup! Continuing with the lesson would be unfair to the virtual students. Since we discussed the one question extensively before the technical malfunction, I had them respond independently in writing.

Always remember that with remote, hybrid, or in-person teaching, flexibility is vital. Some days, one thing works well, and the other not so much. Students are very understanding and appreciate the camaraderie of working through this together.

## **‘Don’t be an Island’**

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*Virginia Lowe is a veteran bilingual elementary teacher and a three-time recipient of Teacher of the Year Award. She has served as a campus instructional coach, district world-language specialist, and is currently serving as an instructional facilitator for the Arlington ISD school improvement team in Arlington, Texas:*

Responding with a list of “Dos and Don’ts” implies that there already exists a proven system or framework by which to measure our success. Although there are well-researched and successful models for blended learning and flipped classrooms, those models were not designed as a response to a universal crisis. There’s no sugarcoating it—it’s hard work physically, emotionally, and psychologically. My first “Do” is: Do let go of the illusions of perfection and fear of failure. As educators, we often take on the burden of saving the day. Don’t be afraid to ask for help and to admit that our current reality is hard for everyone. *Stop, breathe, and focus* on what is within your realm of control. Everything you already know about good teaching and best practices still applies. Use it.

Our Arlington district has the advantage of having a highly skilled and creative Technology Integration and Innovation department or **TI<sup>2</sup>** as it’s affectionately known. This department has provided invaluable guidance and support districtwide as we have embraced hybrid learning. With their guidance and expertise, we have learned a great deal, yet we have still had many struggles. Some lessons I have learned are:

**Do make relationships your priority.** Everything we know about successful student engagement and learning identifies positive classroom community and relationships as the most decisive factor in student success. This includes *student to teacher* and *student to student*. Time invested in establishing routines and procedures for both face-to-face and online environments is essential. Allowing students, a voice, vote, and choice is empowering and respectful. Especially when it involves controversial issues such as camera on, camera off, use of chat features, and other online environmental peccadillos.

Making connections with students requires a daily intentional plan. A major downside to hybrid learning, not originally anticipated, is the constant potential instability and fluctuation in student attendance. Absences due to the erratic spread

of the virus, mandated quarantines, family loss of connectivity, and other family emergencies often mean students who may attend in person one week are suddenly attending remotely or disappear the next. When students have a voice in establishing the expectations and routines, it provides some continuity and stability for them regardless of their geography or situation.

**Do put forth your best effort to contact students who are No Shows but know when to release the task to others.** Whether it be to the vice principal, principal, counselor, or other district- or campus-designated support, know who to turn to next. There are many reasons students are not showing up—most we cannot control. Every student is important, and there are many demands on your time. Don't sacrifice precious time that could be devoted to those students who attend when other team members can support you with focused attention to this important task.

**Don't be an Island.** Collaboration, partnerships, and shared planning make the load a little lighter and provide the social-emotional support we need. In our district, we have had numerous cases of teachers being quarantined. Sometimes they are quarantined with their class, and in other instances, it's just the teacher. Because we are in almost daily contact with one another through PLCs, when unexpected interruptions have occurred, transitions have been smooth because we knew the plan and the goal for the affected group of students.

**Do realize that you won't be able to teach everything. Prioritize the content and skills students need to know.** *What are the essential skills and knowledge students need to be successful in the next grade level? Which standards need direct, explicit instruction? Which concepts are spiraling and need practice?* These are not questions that are meant to be answered in isolation. Prioritizing standards means recognizing the need to make intentional choices about what is essential for all students. This also implies you may move at a slower pace than in years past and your scope and sequence may need an overhaul. Our goal is grade-level content mastery of enduring, essential skills and knowledge.

**Don't forfeit read aloud.** Choral reading, echo reading, and readers theater using content-rich texts provide opportunities to model fluency, engage students, and promote the joy of reading. Engaging students in reading and rereading grade-level texts scaffolds comprehension and builds vocabulary. Dust off the poetry, songs, and rhymes that provide opportunity for movement and gamification. With a little extra planning, text selection that integrates content-specific vocabulary becomes a

springboard for text-dependent student discourse and writing. ELL strategies like *Question, Signal, Stem, Share, Answer* (QSSSA) and *Talk, Read, Talk, Write* are easily adapted for hybrid learning.

## **We Were ‘Thrown a Curveball’**

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*Traci Vermilion, M.Ed., is an English-language-learner teacher at a large urban high school in Indianapolis. She is the co-founder of Indiana Refugee Network and the recording secretary of Indiana TESOL. You may follow her on Twitter @mrsvenlclass:*

Just when I thought I had teaching online down, I was thrown a curveball: hybrid teaching. I was teaching classes daily on Zoom for nine weeks when our district adopted the hybrid model. Students in the first half of the alphabet would come two days, the last half would come another two days, and everyone would be virtual on Day 5. There was also a large group of students that decided to stay virtual, and they would still Zoom into my classes each day. Here are some of the DO’s and DON’Ts that I discovered during this journey.

DON’T try to go back to your old way of teaching. Yes, you have students back in your classroom, but you still have students online at the same time. Keep using all those new skills you’ve mastered the past nine months; they transfer well in the hybrid setting.

DO practice with your technology, display, & volume before your first day. I quickly learned that if students were speaking in class, it was difficult for the students online to see and hear them, making it difficult to participate in a whole-class discussion. This was resolved by placing a doc cam with a microphone in the center of the room that hooked up to my laptop so the students online could hear and see everything happening in the classroom.

DON’T start teaching on mute. This may seem like a no brainer, but when you have students in your classroom and online, it happens all the time. I once went three minutes of explaining something to the class only to find out none of the students online could hear me because I was on mute. I start all of my classes with my mute OFF so I don’t make that mistake again.

DO keep everything digital. When students first came back into the classroom, I thought they would want paper copies of things. Some did, but most didn’t. I found that keeping everything digital was easier for the students because they were already used to it and it was easier for me to keep track of grading and organization.

DON'T be hesitant to speak with other teachers and colleagues about the struggles. Everyone wants to act like they have it all together, but they don't. I've built new relationships with colleagues by just having honest conversations with teachers I admire and realizing we are all in the same situation. Building this camaraderie has allowed us to joke about things that went poorly while staying positive and knowing that we will overcome this season together.

DO expect it to feel awkward the first few days. It's great to have kids back in the classroom, but students with masks on and socially distanced are significantly quieter than normal. Address the awkwardness right away, make jokes, set the tone and continue building relationships with the students, and they will begin to talk more both in person and online.

DON'T forget about the smaller group. There are days when I have fewer students in my classroom than online or visa versa. It is easy to neglect the smaller group so you must be aware that you are including every group of students in the conversation and activity so they don't disengage.

DO remember that YOU ARE a GREAT teacher even in this very weird time. Prior to the pandemic, I felt confident in my teaching ability, but this had me questioning everything I thought I was sure about. You are still a great teacher, regardless of the hurdles you've had to jump over the past year. You are a gift to students and are making a difference. DON'T forget that!

## **'Loosen Control'**

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*Shelly Cihak, Ed.D., is the principal at Poquoson High School in Poquoson, Va., and an adjunct professor at the College of William & Mary's School of Education:*

Amidst so much uncertainty, there are a few certainties of hybrid learning: It is not easy. It is not going to be perfect. In fact, it can be messy.

However, there are four simple "do's" of hybrid teaching that may make it easier to push through the pandemic pressures:

- **Prioritize Relationships:** Students and teachers have been isolated for months, with all interactions taking place through a screen. As students slowly return to in-person learning, the most important thing we can do for them is take time to get to know them; to find out how they are doing; to make a connection. Focus less on the curriculum and more on the relationships. Ask questions of students and listen ... really listen ... to the answers. While we must practice *physical* distancing, we do not have to be *socially* distant. We need to provide opportunities for students to connect with each other, and often this entails modeling ways for these interactions to occur. For example, if students are learning both in the classroom and at home simultaneously, students can be paired through an electronic meeting platform. Structure activities so students must ask questions of peers, engage in reciprocal teaching, or make other meaningful connections.
- **Loosen Control:** Let go of the need to control the learning environment. Students have access to extensive resources, assessments are completed at midnight, and virtual learners have technical issues while in-person learners are expecting a full class period of action. Factual knowledge is at students' fingertips, and the more we try to control that access, the more our frustration will increase. Take a breath and let go of the need to control the situation. Focus on performance tasks and creative ways students can apply the learning. Provide opportunities for student voice and choice with tasks. Instead of a test on the parts of a short story, have students craft an original story and share it (virtually) with a community organization. Use this as creative license to get creative.
- **Practice Procedures:** As students transition back to in-person learning, we have to channel Harry Wong and remember "Procedures! Procedures! Procedures!" Treat the return of students like the first day of school. How will students ask to use the restroom? How will students obtain materials? What will students who are learning virtually be expected to do if there is a fire drill for in-person students? We need to provide students with clear procedures, provide time to practice the procedures, and modify as necessary.
- **Practice Self-Care:** As we learn from preflight safety briefings, "You must put the mask on yourself before helping others." The same goes for teaching during a pandemic. As educators, we are conditioned to take care of others. However, if we do not invest in taking care of ourselves, there will be no energy left for taking on the challenges of hybrid teaching. Take a walk, do a five-minute guided meditation on YouTube, or call a friend. The time invested in yourself will pay dividends for your work with students.

Thanks to Xiomara, Virginia, Traci, and Shelly for their contributions!

Please feel free to leave a comment with your reactions to the topic or directly to anything that has been said in this post.

Consider contributing a question to be answered in a future post. You can send one to me at [lferlazzo@epe.org](mailto:lferlazzo@epe.org). When you send it in, let me know if I can use your real name if it's selected or if you'd prefer remaining anonymous and have a pseudonym in mind.

You can also contact me on Twitter at [@Larryferlazzo](https://twitter.com/Larryferlazzo).

Education Week has published a collection of posts from this blog, along with new material, in an e-book form. It's titled [Classroom Management Q&As: Expert Strategies for Teaching](#).

*Just a reminder; you can subscribe and receive updates from this blog via [email](#) (The RSS feed for this blog, and for all Ed Week articles, has been changed by the new redesign—new ones won't be available until February). And if you missed any of the highlights from the first nine years of this blog, you can see a categorized list below.*

***I am also creating a [Twitter list including all contributors to this column](#).***

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