

The Do's & Don'ts of Hybrid Teaching

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The new question-of-the-week is:

What are the do's and don'ts of hybrid teaching?


The odds are that, at one point or another, all of us teachers are going to end up teaching in some version of a “hybrid” environment this school year.

That could mean teaching some groups of students two days each week in the classroom, while they spend the rest of the time doing asynchronous online work. Worst of all, it could mean teaching students simultaneously online and face to face.

This series will share the experiences of educators who have already begun teaching in this kind of situation.

Who would be better people to learn from?

Today, Amber Chandler, Tara C. Dale, and Holly Spinelli offer their hard-won experiences...

You might also be interested in [School Closures & the Coronavirus Crisis](#), which lists over 60 previous posts. However, it does not include columns that have appeared over the past six weeks... 

Making connections is key

Amber Chandler is the author of The Flexible SEL Classroom and a contributor to many education blogs. She teaches 8th grade ELA in Hamburg, N.Y. Amber is the president of her union of 400 teachers. Follow her @MsAmberChandler and check out [her website](#):

Let me preface this post by saying this: If you ask me next week what the Do's and Don'ts of Hybrid Teaching are, the answer very well may have changed. My middle school has adopted a hybrid model where I see Cohort A on Monday and Thursday, Cohort B on Tuesday and Friday, and everyone is virtual on Wednesday. Wednesdays are for asynchronous work, and teachers hold office hours for students

who need additional support or just to check in. While students are at home, they are completing activities that are extensions of the work we did together, but new content is being pushed out via videos, projects, and assignments. As I said, these Do's and Don'ts are a very preliminary look at the hybrid model, but I will share what I've learned so far.



DON'Ts

I wouldn't typically start with the negative, but in times such as these, warnings are at least as important as the "what works." The number one piece of advice that I have is counterintuitive, at least for me. **Plan one, maybe two, weeks out at a time.** I created digital notebooks for my students that take us through the first quarter. If I could do it again, I would definitely not. Why? Somehow, while planning for the looming "new normal," I completely forgot just how many disruptions to best-laid plans happen during a regular school year, never considering just how many changes would be happening during a pandemic. So far, Chromebook distribution, school pictures, and just this week two days of benchmark testing have thrown me off my well-laid plans.

The second big Don't that I'm going to suggest is also a bit counterintuitive. As an ELA teacher, I wanted to jump right into a novel to kind of "get us on our way" toward normal and routine. Not the best idea I've ever had, to be honest. I really hadn't imagined that there was so much time in between seeing students in person, but when you think about it, Thursday to Tuesday is an entire mini-vacation, and no matter what, students are not accustomed to outside of school time being a school day! We're doing well, and getting things established, and I'm pretty sure that any first unit would be bumpy, but if I were to advise, **I'd say maybe this year we take things in smaller chunks.**

DO's

Even though it is going to take longer, and even though we feel we are already running behind, **get to know your students.** It's a nearly impossible task, frankly. In my district, kiddos are six feet apart, wearing a mask. I'm having a hard time trying to even know names and their half-visible faces. I use a survey to find out their perceived strengths and weaknesses, their likes and dislikes, and provide a section where they can tell me anything I might not have asked but need to know. This year,

so many answers broke my heart, but I need to know this information! For example, “I don’t feel like I fit in anywhere” and “My parents are very worried about COVID, so I haven’t been allowed to do anything with friends since this all started.”

The other tip is to help kiddos make connections. In my district, the hybrid model is by last name. I’ve had a number of students tell me that their friends aren’t in school with them, and they are nervous. They’ve been out of school a long time, and though we’ve been dying to start teaching, they just want to reconnect. My co-teacher and I had students create digital lockers and share them with the class. Then, after everyone shared them, we would ask, “Tell us about Jeremy” and have the class remember what was in his virtual locker. It was heartwarming to see kiddos connect over Harry Potter, sports, and in one class, two girls who were obsessed with mermaids.

Now, more than ever, we need to help students with the social and emotional while also slowly wading into the shallow end with academics. Once we are in a better groove, we can all push students out to swim, but for me at least, the key to a successful hybrid model is going to be the same as any other year: relationships and flexibility!

“It.Is.Possible”

Tara C. Dale is a national-board-certified high school science teacher in Gilbert, Ariz. She is the co-author of The Science Teacher’s Toolbox. Tara was a finalist for Arizona State Teacher of the Year in 2014 and has since traveled the country

advocating critical thinking, creative problem solving, and effective communication to be taught in every classroom:

It's possible. I had to teach in a hybrid setting for two weeks. It. Is. Possible. It's possible to be successful as a teacher and a learner.

For the first five weeks of school, we were online full time. Teachers were strongly encouraged to report to the building, but students were not on campus. Then for two weeks, we followed a hybrid model. Half of my students attended school except on Wednesdays, when everyone was online.

If we return to a hybrid model, there are some things I will do the same and other things I will do differently.

DO THE SAME

I flipped my classroom. Students were expected to read an article or watch a video on the day they remained home so that they could complete an activity when they returned to the classroom the following day.

At first, I was nervous about a flipped classroom because I know not every student will arrive having read the article or watched the video. But I quickly realized that it was OK because those students who did the preparation work were happy and willing to help those who did not. And because there were so few students in my classroom, I could easily support those students who didn't have the necessary background knowledge.

Flipping my classroom allowed me to spend more time interacting with my students in a meaningful way. I was able to check in on each student personally to ensure they were learning. It's the greatest benefit of a smaller class size! Not one student fell through the cracks because I was there to fill those cracks. And because of the social-distancing requirements, students could work in small groups, collaboratively solving problems and analyzing data.

DO DIFFERENTLY

I attempted to give each class its own due date. This was a logistical nightmare! It was difficult for me to effectively communicate to parents and students when work was due and then it was difficult to track whose work was turned in on time and whose work was late. If we return to hybrid learning, I will assign everyone the same due date for the same work.

DO THE SAME

I spent a lot of my planning time differentiating. Students were coming to school in very small groups (I had only nine in one of my classes!). This meant that during the class period, I differentiated for students who needed extra support, such as those who are learning English or have a disability. The work for each student was personalized, and I immediately noticed they were more engaged and their grades steadily improved from when we were online full time.

DO DIFFERENTLY

I found that not many students attended the mandatory online Wednesday classes. For various reasons, only 3-5 students in each of my classes attended online after the hybrid model was initiated. Knowing this now, if we return to a hybrid model, I will not plan to teach new material on Wednesdays but instead will use it as a study hall and tutoring time. This time is better spent in intervention than in enrichment.

DO THE SAME

I was hesitant to have students work in small groups. When I spoke with my administration, they approved collaborative work as long as my students were wearing their masks and not sharing materials. I had students perform labs, solve problems, and participate in engineering challenges (can you build the strongest boat?). There were times I had to get creative with the materials. For example, I had gloves available when students were working together and I was sure to have a CLEAN materials section and a DIRTY materials section on opposite sides of my room so that students only interacted with materials that I had sanitized.

Reflecting on my hybrid teaching experience, I rather enjoyed it. It was great to get to know my students on a personal level since that was a difficult endeavor when we were online. I reveled in the opportunity to provide immediate feedback to my students as they worked and in the ability to give them the chance to correct their work on the spot. It was fun doing activities instead of lecturing, which unfortunately had been the majority of what online learning looked like. I felt like a teacher again. I felt like a successful teacher again.

It. Is. Possible. It is possible to teach in a hybrid model and to learn in a hybrid model. My students reported that they enjoyed the collaborative time with their peers and the deeper learning they experienced while performing classroom activities. It was fun and it was meaningful, for both of us!

”... the most difficult circumstances under which I have ever taught ...”

Holly Spinelli is a students’ rights activist with specific focuses in alternative, strengths-based pedagogies where students’ voices are the catalyst for their education. She is a New York public high school teacher, an adjunct instructor at SUNY Orange County Community College, and an active member of the NCTE’s Committee Against Racism and Bias in the Teaching of English:

School districts across the country are navigating their buildings’ reopening since the COVID crisis shutdown in March. The hybrid teaching model—a compromise that attempts to find middle ground among groups who want in-person instruction and those who want remote instruction—is a popular reopening strategy. As an educator whose daily schedule includes both hybrid and fully remote course sections, I can unequivocally say that the hybrid model does, at times, present some of the most difficult circumstances under which I have ever taught, but I continue to learn and I remain hopeful as each day passes.

My district is slowly phasing students back into the buildings after a fully remote reopening. The students are divided into four cohorts that can enter the building one day a week for in-person instruction. The other cohorts currently stream into their classes on the days their cohorts are not physically in school, and the fully remote students stream into the classroom for live instruction, too. My mind still spins when I think of the schedule’s rotation.

This is my 14th year as a full-time teacher, and the hybrid model has me feeling like a first-year educator all over again. No matter how upbeat I try to be, I cannot shake the notion that even if the camera is perfectly angled and the streaming-caption function is engaged, I'm not providing either student group—in-person or remote—with the best possible instruction. The first week of hybrid teaching left me physically and emotionally drained. Most days, I felt like I was teaching two classes at once. Thankfully, I have supportive colleagues from near and far with whom I can collaborate and share best practices to minimize the difficulties we face in the hybrid classroom model. We turn to social media and group texts to help one another do our best in our less-than-ideal teaching situations. Here are some of the Do's and Don'ts that may help others who, like me, struggle with trying to balance it all in the hybrid teaching model:

Do: Take the time to get to know your students and to build community. Just like any other classroom experience, the students and the educators deserve to learn together in a space that is welcoming and inviting for all participants. One strategy to try is doing a brief check-in with students in the beginning of class. Taking an interest in their health and well-being goes a long way to open dialogue that creates empathy and builds trust among everyone.

Don't: Assume that students already feel comfortable with one another because they once attended classes together in the same building. No matter how “close” a school community may seem, not all students are comfortable around their peers.

Do: Be honest with your students. If you are trying something new or if you aren't sure how something works, tell them. This is a moment where students can showcase their talents with a tech feature or offer an idea that may work better for their classmates and for you! Trust me, I've had students share alternative ways to approach classroom activities, and the lessons turned out better than I could have ever expected.

Don't: Pretend to know it all. Arrogance has no place in a classroom, especially in a hybrid classroom. Know your limits but don't be afraid to let colleagues or your students know that you don't have all the answers. You may be surprised by the amount of grace and understanding that they will offer to you if they see your sincerity and your vulnerability.

Do: Allow students to show their participation beyond turning on the camera or talking on screen. Offer students alternative means for participating. Using a chat feature, crafting group-discussion questions, or other nonverbal activities can keep students engaged in ways that do not require speaking or appearing on camera.

Don't: Force students to “participate” in ways that suit your preferred style of communication, especially with the “cameras on” rule. Participation can and should be differentiated to help ease students into this new learning environment. If students are streaming into an online platform, they may not feel comfortable sharing their home environments with their classmates or their educators. Furthermore, students may not be in their own homes or they may have to travel elsewhere for reliable internet access, so mandating children to keep their cameras on can cause a student to feel anxious or stressed, which may result in a student choosing not to attend class altogether. Think beyond the typical “classroom” and ask yourself if the camera is on to meet the students’ needs or your own. Students can engage in meaningful learning without appearing on camera.

Do: Ask for student input. They will help you navigate the kinds of activities and strategies that work best for them in the hybrid platform. If we are sincere when we say that students are the center of our classroom communities, then their voices and ideas should be part of their new educational experience.


Don't: Make assumptions about students’ familiarity with technology. Not all students “know” how to use technology for educational purposes. Some students have limited access to technology, and they may be embarrassed to share this information with others. Avoid phrases like, “You know this already,” and “You’re young and you use apps all the time.” Not all technological experiences are equal.

Do: Be patient with yourself and your students. This is new for everyone, and we cannot expect teaching and learning to exist as they did in a pre-COVID setting. Focus on what you can manage and ask for help if you need it.

Don't: Expect everything to go smoothly, because it won't, and that's OK. Learning is part of this hybrid process. Stick with what works best for you and slowly add new things at a pace that makes sense for you and your students.

Thanks to Amber, Tara, and Holly 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. 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).

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I am also creating a Twitter list including all contributors to this column















