**Being in two places at the same time: Identifying opportunities and challenges in simultaneous hybrid learning spaces**

Have you ever delivered a presentation to a hybrid event (it can be a class or a conference) where some attendees are in the same room and others are joining online? How was the experience for you? Did it feel like being in two places at the same time?

This presentation will be covering early results on our investigation of the challenges and potentials of hybrid learning.

One of the things that needs to be clarified when we’re evaluating something is to be clear what exactly it is that we’re evaluating.

When we say online learning, it’s a word that comes in many forms. Thurman and Singh did a systematic review of terminologies associated with online learning and these are the words they have identified. Sometimes, the literature would refer to this as elearning, sometimes distance education or sometimes blended learning. But then pandemic happened, so new associated words were added to the list so now we also have, hybrid learning, remote learning, synchronous hybrid or hyflex.

I’m not saying in anyway that these terminologies were created during the pandemic but what’s certain is that these terminologies became more popular since the great migration to online learning.

What’s common with most of these terminologies/definitions is the intersection of technology and time.

So let’s simplify this a bit, for our study when we say online learning, we mean, students and lecturers are all joining the sessions online from their own homes/workplaces, there can be a synchronous aspect of it, in that case lessons are done via videoconferencing. Or it could all be asynchronous, in that case it’s a recorded video or learning materials delivered online and students work on these materials on their own time.

Blended learning is when you have a mixture of synchronous or asynchronous sessions. This can be a mixture of face-to-face and online sessions or mostly online. The important aspect is the blend of synchronous and asynchronous sessions. An example of its implementation in universities is having all lecture sessions delivered online, and tutorial sessions as a face-to-face element.

Synchronous hybrid is when the learning space is distributed, where there are those who join the classes online and at the same time, there are other groups who join the same lesson face-to-face.

Our goal is to understand the practice involved in a hybrid learning environment.

We conducted a multi-method study to look at the challenges and potentials of hybrid learning environment as well as gain end-user insights about this form of delivery.

We observed computing classes from one university, interviewed and surveyed students as well as spoke with lecturers who have experience of hybrid delivery. What I’ll be sharing with you is a work in progress so these are just initial findings from the study.

One of the questions we had in the survey was to ask students to identify which mode of delivery the statements best apply. This includes questions on the preferred delivery, aspects of engagement, and understanding of the course. What’s clear is that there’s no preferred one mode of delivery. The idea that face-to-face is better isn’t shared by all the students we’ve surveyed.

We can split this data by focusing on what mode of attendance the students were normally attending. The online students would prefer hybrid or online. The face-to-face students would go with any mode except fully online, and those that are attending either hybrid or blended prefer to attend hybrid.

Across all modes of attendance, the face-to-face option was a popular vote when it comes to “feeling more engaged”

But if it’s a question of managing their learning, the online students like online, the face-to-face students like face-to-face and those that attend a mixture of both prefer hybrid.

We also asked the lecturers what they think about hybrid delivery and one of the things that came up in the interview is the aspect of compromise. One of the lecturers we interviewed mentioned that it wasn’t their first choice but between just online learning, then hybrid is the compromise.

It is also the compromise as opposed to having to deliver the lecture twice. One for an online cohort, and another for the face-to-face students.

And in this compromise, some opportunities were identified.

For those students who aren’t able to travel for a variety of reasons such as commitment, travel time, cost of travel, then the flexibility of being able to join remotely can be democratising and this is a sentiment that has been repeated in the student interviews that we did.

Another opportunity is that because the lecture is already using a platform that facilitates recording as they deliver the lesson to the online cohort, then recording is just another extra step and actually in the student interviews, some of the students identify this as the advantage of doing hybrid. That lecture recording is something that many students appreciate.

However, delivering hybrid comes with challenges. It is essentially delivering to two groups of people and keeping an eye out on the screen and at the same time trying to deliver to students in class can be challenging. For new lecturers (with limited experience of delivering to a face-to-face cohort and online, this becomes an extra challenge.

There’s also the aspect of classroom management that could potentially divide the cohorts further. It becomes an us vs them. One example that the lecturer gave was when there’s a technical issue online, students in class would sit back, as if saying, “oh what’s happening now isn’t for us” and that can potentially be for the online group as well (although there’s no visual cue of that happening). If the microphone isn’t picking up properly the audio of the student talking in the room, then students online are likely not to pay attention during that time.

And speaking of technical issues, there are quite a few but mainly that’s due to the quality of the connection. For example, if a slide freezes for the online group, the lecturer wont know unless someone informs them. There is the issue with audio, the question of what should be on the frame, the slides or the lecturer, etc.

I’ll end this short presentation with questions which I’m hoping we could all discuss further during the conference.

When we do hybrid delivery, who’s benefiting and what is the benefit to students, lecturers and organisations?

What resources do we need to be able to run this delivery.

How can we scale it up

And how do we create an inclusive and equitable environment for our students.