7.9 How HyFlex Can Help Out-of-School (Opportunity) Youth

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About the Program

Based in Phoenix and serving the surrounding communities, Arizona Center for Youth Resources (ACYR) provides High School Equivalency (HSE) and English Language Acquisition for Adults (ELAA) services to students both on its main campus and in satellite locations. While specializing in the "opportunity youth" (young adults who lack education, training or work opportunity) sector, ACYR provides both day and evening classes to all ages. In ACYR's HyFlex model, learners choose and move fluidly among in-person, synchronous online, and asynchronous online instruction, although in Spring 2022, the asynchronous mode was not ready yet for learners.

Learners had High School Equivalency exam preparation/adult secondary education classes four days a week for 90 minutes and they had one hour of remote proxy time learning. Each learner could pick what days/times they wanted to attend class.

Recruitment and Orientation

Recruitment was not differentiated for HyFlex learners. After learners had filled out an interest form, there was an in-person or online enrollment and orientation. Learners determined what kind of class they would like to attend and which mode. Then they got login information. However, staff found that using online enrollment and orientation took too long to get students into the classroom, so they made an effort to do this in person. Teachers met with learners for 30 minutes before the first class, either in person or online.

HyFlex in Action: Course and Instruction

Planning

Teacher David Howden shifted to planning for in-person and synchronous online instruction with the goal of making the online experience as close to the same experience in-person learners would have. For example, an online learner became the record taker, and online learners filled out forms online so they had to pay attention and participate in experiencing the lesson.

Delivering Instruction

ACYR provides HyFlex classes out of two classrooms on its main campus in Phoenix, with one room devoted to HSE classes and one devoted to English Language Acquisition for Adults (ESL) classes. With students in the classroom and online simultaneously, instructors use interactive televisions to provide lessons to online students with students who are able to see their peers through the use of video conference cameras and microphones. In-classroom students have access to laptops for interactive work. Instructors also use online breakout rooms to cluster students for group work.

Technologies

The program used [Canvas](#) (which learners did not like) and [Odysseyware](#), but was not yet assigning it asynchronously. New tracking cameras were ordered for the main campus after teachers found that just using a laptop camera or webcam was not adequate to the task. In the program's co-location site, teachers used an interactive projector and camera, a microphone, and speaker system.

Technical Support and Training for Teachers and Learners

Most teachers were familiar with videoconferencing, although they occasionally participated in training on that. Some training was provided on using Canvas and on students' automated data on proxy hours so teachers could see student progress. In the classroom however, teachers were on their own. Administrators wanted to provide emergency support from David or a new digital technology person, but this wasn't needed for everyone. Some teachers found tools on their own, for example, [Remind](#), [WhatsApp](#), and game-based learning such as [Kahoot](#). In professional learning circle meetings, teachers shared what they had found.

Learners also sometimes provided peer support, with in-person learners often willing to help online learners with digital technology issues.

Professional Development

A key professional development need identified was how to run a HyFlex classroom, specifically how to structure lessons. Teachers were required to complete the Arizona Department of Education's distance learning course before taking over a class. David wanted all teachers to complete the EdTech Center @ World Education's [EdTech Strategy Sessions](#). He wanted specialists in assessment, HyFlex classroom management, and other topics to share their expertise with staff. After becoming the program's new manager, David planned to have one-on-one meetings with staff and to identify other professional development opportunities for them, including sessions on Canvas, game-based learning activities, and writing, especially writing an extended response for the GED exam. The program planned to hire a new digital technology specialist to take over his role providing tech support to teachers.

Implementation: Lessons Learned

Data Collected for Program Improvement

The program collected learner participation hours and used data from TABE assessments and GED practice tests to show learner progress. Administrators will be building into the program a better way to do assessment using Canvas data. There was a lapse in assessing where students were before the second TABE test, which was given after 40 hours. Data were collected from learners in the HyFlex model and those in conventional classes. The program did learner satisfaction surveys every six months, believing that it was Important to know if the HyFlex model was working better than only in-person instruction. Because enrollment was low at the time of the interview, however, comparisons were difficult. Staff were hoping to be more data-driven in the future.

Benefits

Learners liked being able to choose in what mode they wanted to participate. Learners who had child care or adult care issues, who were in foster care or independent living systems, or those with COVID concerns especially benefited from the HyFlex model. The program's particular learners' lives could be chaotic. For example, some were homeless, so providing them with every opportunity to participate in a class was important. David characterized removing organizational attendance, retention, and learning gain barriers as an equity issue.

The HyFlex model helped learners develop workplace skills — meeting online or in person; expressing themselves professionally, both in-person and online; thinking on their feet; answering questions; reporting; and being able to operate remotely. .

David noted that through digital instruction, teachers had various ways to improve their teaching. With a HyFlex model, they had to think on their feet; what they had planned may not have worked. Improvisation was needed. The in-person part was important, however, to get to know students. One teacher, for example, offered dominoes and chatting before the in-person class in order to get to know learners. For people who had taught for a long time, new challenges could be a struggle, but they were also a benefit, whatever teaching model they might use.

Challenges

While learners were excited to use a HyFlex model, they were reluctant to use the Canvas LMS. Digital technology was difficult for some teachers. Selecting an online platform or curriculum was difficult. But the biggest challenge, David felt, was changing teachers' mindsets. At first, he said, there was resistance. The teachers didn't understand the point or that this new model was both online *and* in-person *and* integrating in-person and online. Some teachers wondered if learners would ever want to come in-person, though they did come around. Still, there was a need for teacher professional development and training in areas specific to HyFlex models — for example, engaging both in-person and online learners during a synchronous class. Teachers needed to see ways to do something online and in-person synchronously, and how to use the hardware and software they had to do it. They needed to see examples, and to find for themselves the best ways to do in all three HyFlex modes what may have been successful for them in the traditional classroom.