

7.5 Low-Tech HyFlex Can Lead to Increased Learner Attendance, Retention, and Level Gains

Township High School District 214, Adult Education and Family Literacy Program

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Township High School District 214, Adult Education and Family Literacy Program, Cook County, Illinois

Description of program and learners

The Township High School District 214 Adult Education and Family Literacy Program provides basic educational services to adults who are learning English as a Second Language and to Adult Basic Education learners in Cook County, Illinois. The program serves adults who live or work in the community and may be undereducated, unemployed, underemployed, and/or low-income.

Recruitment and Orientation

Registration took place online or by phone. District 214 used an in-person pre- and post-testing strategy with all necessary COVID precautions. At registration, learners were offered the HyFlex model as an option, though not all classes offered used this model. Teacher and administrator Laurice Hoffman reported that learners who opted for classes using the HyFlex model understood what they had chosen and that ESL students generally enjoyed the HyFlex model.

HyFlex in Action: Course and Instruction

Planning

Laurice observed that it took additional planning for instructors to manage a multimodal learning environment, ensuring that students were engaged in a single learning community, regardless of their participation mode. District 214 used a web-based version of the [Burlington English](#) (BE) curriculum. Planning essentials, she said, involved watching BE tutorials and onboarding learners with a clear and concise process. Most learners came in person on the first day of class. They were provided with hard-copy instructions and they then practiced how to get on [Zoom](#) and how to use the BE platform. The onboarding process was more difficult for low-level English learners, some of whom lacked digital skills. Volunteers assisted with onboarding of devices and demonstrating how to access the online curriculum.

A common difficulty in onboarding during the pandemic, Laurice reported, was when learners did not come in person to learn the basics and all instruction had to take place over Zoom. Peer support was essential and was stressed to achieve success. Instruction was also administered in learners' home languages. In class, learners accessed BE and Zoom from their cell phones or laptops. To use all the features of the BE curriculum, learners had to download the BE app on their smartphones. District 214 also had a Chromebook lending program which was utilized by some learners. Instructors could use a PowerPoint to onboard learners, including a script with notes and a practice session in which

the instructor “goes live.” This was part of a complete set of BE tutorials that also covered accessing the platform from multiple devices. The tutorials were offered in several languages.

Delivering Instruction

Laurice offered HyFlex classes to District 214 Community Education’s low–intermediate ESL learners. Although she found that it took more time to prepare for a class that had both in-person and online learners, she used a differentiated model where students at home and in person engaged synchronously on the same lesson. The two groups frequently interacted with one another. She sometimes put online learners in breakout rooms, and she would jump into the breakout rooms or circulate in the classroom. She reported that, by the third or fourth class session, doing a HyFlex model was seamless.

When learners entered the classroom, Laurice had already set up the Zoom meeting. In-person and online learners could greet each other. Developing a sense of community was an important goal. They were able to talk informally with one another, asking, for example, “How was your weekend?” They then discussed peer-to-peer issues, such as sending children to school, wearing masks, or Halloween trick-or-treating. Homework review followed, in which they discussed learning and technology challenges, such as accessing the online platform. Students then might share something of interest they had found online. Then they reviewed the instruction from the previous class and previewed the homework assignment. Learners who joined in the asynchronous mode used the same lesson from BE.

Technologies

Hardware included a Macintosh computer connected to an overhead multimedia projector. The classroom was equipped with audio enhancements and a microphone. Laurice walked around the room wearing a lapel microphone. By turning the computer monitor’s camera toward the class, learners on Zoom could see their peers in the classroom. Some in-person learners had laptops on their desks; others went up to the computer monitor to interact with the online learners.

Software included: Burlington English, [Google Workspace](#), [Google Jamboard](#), [Google Slides](#), [Ed Tech Integration Strategy Toolkit](#), [Wakelet](#), quizzes and games such as [Bamboozle](#), all integrated in BE. In-person learners used sticky notes or participated with online tech tools; online learners used [Jamboard](#) (sticky notes in an online format) or a shared Google Document.

Technical Support and Training for Teachers and Learners

Tech Support

BE provided instantaneous support for learners who hadn’t downloaded the app on their phone and had an 800 number that learners could use during class. District 214 IT staff provided technical assistance when there were issues with computers or when teachers needed online help in the classroom. Teachers also provided peer support.

Teacher Training

Laurice found that it was important to include training on resources and activities to support meaningful technology integration and digital skill development, as was providing supplemental digital resources to enhance the scope and sequence of lesson plans.

Professional development trainings were provided remotely through Zoom. Laurice said that teachers needed to understand Zoom and the BE curriculum. HyFlex model support was also provided through a peer-to-peer professional development group. In this Google group, teachers shared what worked and didn’t work. They also shared the teaching and learning activities they were using. In staff meetings, they did demonstrations of [Google Classroom](#). These meetings were primarily in person, but some were online.

Laurice noted that hands-on experience was the best way for teachers to learn how to implement a HyFlex model.

Implementation: Lessons Learned

Data Collected for Program Improvement

Attendance data showed an increase when using the HyFlex model. Retention also increased; more students had the hours needed for post-testing, for example. Laurice believed that the model's flexibility accounted for this. Several learners also made level gains, which was likely because of the platform and increased English language practice using their smartphones.

Benefits

Some learners enjoyed coming to class in person; others benefited by having the flexibility to choose between coming to class in person or online or doing asynchronous learning online; the pandemic did not interrupt their learning. Additionally, online learners and in-person learners developed an understanding of how to communicate together. The HyFlex model gave learners the opportunity to study where they wanted to, based on their own needs, desires, and preferences. Learners could decide how they wanted to attend class each week, which resolved many scheduling conflicts.

Laurice felt she could serve learners best using a HyFlex model. Both in-person and online learners had engaging lessons, the platform was easy to use, and she felt fulfilled as a teacher.

Challenges

When in-person learners were all talking together and other learners were online, it could be difficult for online learners to actively participate in the classroom discussion. When that happened, Laurice sometimes put online learners in a breakout room together. This was, in essence, creating small groups as in a typical classroom model, except one group was online and the other was in-person. She found managing a multimodal classroom difficult at first. (After developing class protocols, however, all learners adhered to the rules established for the classroom. No side discussions were allowed in the classroom during instruction because the noise in the classroom was a problem for online learners. Learners respected the multimodal classroom and regarded the HyFlex model as an opportunity for everyone to have agency in their learning.)



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