

Hybrid Learning – a Means to an End

A FutureMakers Thought Piece

Derek Wenmoth
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Hybrid learning has become a popular buzz word in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown of schools and the subsequent disruption caused by ongoing absences of staff and students.

FutureMakers has previously published a number of thought pieces that provide frameworks and models for consideration when designing and implementing hybrid learning approaches – these can be found at <https://futuremakers.nz/hybrid-learning>

This paper suggests that while this current focus on hybrid learning is useful and needed, it mustn't be considered an end in itself, rather, it is a means to an end. This thinking is represented in the table below:

<p>Current focus</p> 	<h3>Hybrid Learning</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An educational model that operates independently of location, where students and teachers are able to attend class in-person, while others join the class virtually from home (or other locations) – and to transition seamlessly between locations.• Combining the best parts of face-to-face and online learning to create the ideal learning experience for each learner.• Emphasis on using online environment and digital tools to share learning content and teaching to be accessed on-site or remotely.
<p>Transformation goal</p> 	<h3>Resilient schools and a resilient system</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is about designing schools and a system with greater agility and ability to respond quickly to disruptive events, and to the increasingly diverse needs of learners.• Requires deep understanding the drivers for change¹.• Building an ecological model based on principles of working as a network, with high levels of system trust, collaboration and coherence.
<p>What this will involve</p> 	<h3>Transformational approach</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rethinking and redeveloping the systems, structures, processes and pedagogical approaches that are used to support what we do and how we do it, including:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Redefining teacher roles and shifts in pedagogical approach○ Shifting the ownership of learning, increasing learner agency○ Developing distributed models of provision and shifts in leadership models○ Enabling enrolment with multiple organisations, and different levels○ Providing a portable record of learning belonging to the learner• Addressing the legislative and policy environments to enable this.

¹ <https://futuremakers.nz/education-environment-scan>

Why is it important to think beyond Hybrid Learning?

As the table attempts to illustrate, while the focus on hybrid learning provides a way of addressing the immediate concerns around the ability of schools to provide continuity of learning in the post-lockdown period, the practicalities of making this happen require a deeper engagement with current pedagogical practices and the systems and structures that support these.

The COVID-19 research² into the education responses during lockdown clearly identified a range of areas in our current approach that are not meeting the mark, and many are indeed exacerbating the problems of **inequity** and lack of **inclusion**.

While a considerable amount of the current attention on hybrid learning involves shifting the activity of schools online and learning the skills of online teaching and use of digital tools for sharing content, this alone will not achieve the level of change required to address some of the more endemic and systemic issues we face as a system.

*Hybrid learning is not simply another delivery mode,
it is a means to a transformed state for education.*

To truly achieve the transformational shifts that are required we must also address some of the other areas identified in the research where our current system and pedagogical approaches must be reimaged in order to ensure all learners are provided with high quality learning experiences. These include...

- **Engagement** - *strategies leading to successful engagement across all areas of learning, and interventions where appropriate for learners who aren't engaged*
- **Measuring success** – *approaches to providing greater transparency to the process of measuring success/assessment*
- **Agency** – *school-wide strategies for achieving greater levels of student self-management and self-direction*
- **Parent/whānau relationships** – *increasing capability of parents/whānau to support learners, improving communications, increasing engagement*
- **Curriculum** – *focus on specific areas of activity – (e.g. literacy/numeracy focus, themes/topics, events etc.) – school-wide themes, collaborative planning*
- **Wellbeing** - *support for learners social and emotional health and development*

These issues and concerns provide a good starting point for individual schools to use as they build their capacity for hybrid learning, and in doing so, begin their journey towards a transformed state of education.

² <https://futuremakers.nz/covid-19-research>

What are the benefits of a resilient system?

The table below compares characteristics of the current system with the benefits of a resilient system:

	 Current System	 Resilient System
Response to disruption & change 	<p>Many structures not fit for purpose and bureaucratic systems slow to change.</p> <p>Systems and processes designed to serve existing ways of working.</p> <p>Reactive response to disruption – strong ‘pull’ to ‘return to normal’</p>	<p>Able to withstand the impact of disruptive events, and respond quickly to provide continuity of quality teaching and learning for all learners.</p> <p>Open and responsive to change – innovation a mainstream capability.</p>
Equity and Inclusion 	<p>Increasing levels of inequity exposed during lockdown, some areas actually perpetuated by current systems and processes.</p> <p>Many learners remain alienated and not catered for.</p> <p>Some parents actively seeking alternatives to the current modes of delivery to better address their child’s needs.</p>	<p>Delivering on equity and inclusion, addressing the demands of increasing diversity in our learning population and the communities we serve.</p> <p>All learning experiences are deep, responsive, authentic, engaging and personalised.</p>
Engagement and impact 	<p>High variability in terms of depth and quality of teaching approaches.</p> <p>Increasing lack of engagement – both in terms of attendance (absences) and in-class through distraction and boredom.</p> <p>Declining achievement in key areas (literacy, numeracy, science, technology).</p> <p>This is amplified for Māori and Pacific learners.</p> <p>Schools operating independently and serving own communities.</p>	<p>Ensuring the provision of high quality learning opportunities for every learner.</p> <p>High degree of learner engagement and learner agency at all levels.</p> <p>Focus on developing learners as future citizens, confident in their own identity and ability, and equipped to thrive into the future.</p> <p>Growing a stronger community of learning and education ecosystem</p>

Conclusion

1. The experiences of the COVID-19 lockdowns revealed a number of issues that need to be addressed in our approach to providing quality teaching and learning experiences for all learners.
2. The current drive to embracing hybrid approaches by education institutions provides a much needed opportunity to seriously engage with and examine many of these practices, and to work to find solutions that address the issues identified.
3. The hybrid approach is not a short-term solution to the current disruption. Education leaders must maintain a longer view to a transformed state of education in order to achieve the change required to design and create resilient schools and a resilient education system.

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