vibe

The Future of Learning

Adapting to the Modern Hybrid Classroom

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INTRODUCTION

Adapting to the age of the hybrid classrooms is a new frontier for educators, administrators and students alike. With tons of new technology offering untold potential to the modern learning space, it's important to understand not only what tools are available to teachers today, but how they might be used to improve educational experiences for a rising generation of students.

Here's our team's look at the future of hybrid learning, including how we got here, what's working now and where things might be headed. With the right tools in hand, Vibe aims to help teachers, students and parents adapt to an engaging new style of learning.

HYBRID LEARNING MODELS: A BRIEF HISTORY

Non-traditional learning models have existed in various forms for longer than you might think. In fact, methods of distance learning predate the era of smartphones and Zoom conferences by a few hundred years.

The first known example of distance learning courses, termed "correspondence courses" at the time, dates back to 1728. Caleb Phillips, a shorthand teacher, placed an advertisement in the Boston Gazette seeking students looking willing to learn through weekly mailed lessons. Though sparse, additional correspondence courses conducted via mail sprung up at both American and British universities for the next two centuries.

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

Standard learning models endured a radical shift at the start of 2020, as the Covid-19 pandemic and its associated safety measures forced educators to quickly adapt to new challenges. Remote education, facilitated by dozens of widely-available tools and platforms to create a learning atmosphere students could access from the comfort of their homes, became the norm for both K-12 and higher education.

College courses have become especially attuned to remote needs since Covid's initial wave. While it was already fairly common for postsecondary students to enroll in at least one distance education course in 2019, the pandemic transformed college courses almost overnight. In spring 2020, 87% of undergraduate students experienced enrollment disruption or a change at their postsecondary institution due to COVID-19, with 84% of students experiencing some or all in-person classes moved exclusively to remote-only offerings.

The pandemic may have provided the initial shock to the educational status quo, but some institutions are now making a push towards a more permanent approach to hybrid and remote learning. After two years of dedicated development to online courses and resources, many staff and students are expressing a strong desire to remain permanently remote.

THE FIVE MAIN APPROACHES TO HYBRID TEACHING

Imagine teaching a class split between in-person attendees and at-home learners for the first time. How will you approach questions from your remote students? What material can you cover that doesn't require any hands-on component? How can you check both groups for understanding?

These are just a handful of the challenges educators face when tasked with curating an effective hybrid curriculum. As the modern hybrid classroom continues to take shape, several models have emerged as useful approaches that appeal to students of all kinds.

1. The Differentiated Model

Differentiated teaching models rely on synchronous student attendance (live and remote students tuning in to the lesson in real-time) but provide alternate activities for each group. It's a simple solution to keep a classroom on the same page, but it does risk dividing the class socially by providing one group with tasks that are more engaging or challenging than the other's. Balancing two sets of tasks is a difficult prospect, but teachers using the differentiated model can enjoy providing instruction in real time with the option for all students to ask questions and guide discussions.

2. The Multi-Track Model

Sometimes it makes more sense to approach remote learners as an entirely separate unit from in-person learners. In a multi-track model, students learn the same lessons and achieve the same objectives, but face-to-face students operate as a traditional classroom while virtual students might take in the material through asynchronous remote learning.

This is a common approach in postsecondary courses, where online modules are completed by remote students on their own time while in-person instruction follows a more traditional path.

3. The Split A/B Model

This approach offers a solution to a classroom of in-person students still required to observe social distancing safety precautions, or for classrooms where smaller-group instruction can prove advantageous. The model works by dividing a single class into A and B groups, set to meet on alternating schedules (Monday and Wednesday vs. Tuesday and Thursday). On in-person days students can receive detailed instruction in small groups, while "off" days can be spent working through modules at home.

An A/B schedule gives teachers a chance to increase individual student interaction in the classroom between at-home learning days, making use of both synchronous and asynchronous learning techniques.

4. The Virtual Accommodation Model

There are several reasons a student may need to attend a class remotely — travel, special needs, illness and injury being among the most common. In these unique scenarios, providing virtual accommodations (video links, emailed presentations or lesson outlines, modules detailing reading and other assignments) can keep these students from falling behind.

With video-conferencing tools as intuitive and available as they are today, sending a link just before class is about as simple as it gets. Though this is not always the most engaging method, virtual accommodation is a simple solution that makes a world of difference to students forced to tune in remotely due to unforeseen circumstances.

5. The Independent Project Model

When existing face-to-face curriculums and activities fail to account for remote learners, the situation might call for an independent-study project. Teachers can ensure a valuable learning experience for remote students by assigning projects unique to them, designed to teach the same principles received by face-to-face students.

This takes some extra effort to plan and implement, but the efforts are rewarded by a classroom where everyone feels included and challenged according to their appropriate skill level.
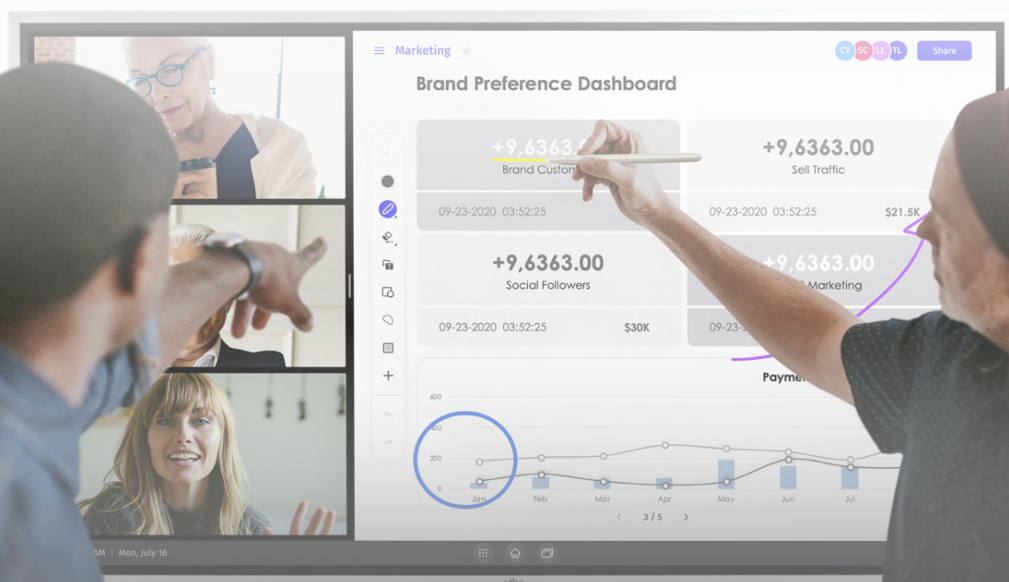
BENEFITS OF HYBRID LEARNING

School districts open to adopting hybrid learning models have experienced several benefits since the early days of the pandemic. As teachers refine their hybrid curriculums and learn to use more interactive teaching tools, education becomes more flexible, accessible and instructive for every type of student. Here are a few of the positive changes education systems have experienced since incorporating hybrid teaching techniques:

Increased Student Engagement

Many advantages of the hybrid classroom stem from new tools and technologies capable of stirring engagement and interest from students that might otherwise remain passive in their learning. Interactive classroom tools such as digital polls, quizzes, games and timed activities give students some much-needed variety in their schooling while driving more active learning in the process. Teachers have been looking for ways to engage students in their traditional lesson plans for a long time — hybrid lessons have opened the floodgates for entirely new approaches.

Improved Accessibility and Flexibility

The ability to offer the best of both synchronous and asynchronous learning means students can now take part in their own education more than ever before. Students who may feel drawn toward face-to-face education and in-class projects will still have the opportunity to do so, and the segment of learners who thrive remotely, including those who find a live, physical classroom difficult to access, can rely on learning modules, videos and assignments that better fit their needs.

Safer Environments

While the seismic shift toward hybrid learning may have been borne out of necessity, there is something to be said for safer learning environments for both students and teachers. One report found 99% of teachers listing a "safe and healthy school" as their top priority. Sickness, inclement weather and other potential disruptions are more easily mitigated with hybrid curriculums.

Clearer Communication Between Teachers, Parents and Students

The vast majority of teachers are pro-hybrid learning — so long as they are afforded the support and resources they need to teach their lesson plans effectively. One of the biggest advantages these resources can offer is an open line of communication with parents and the students themselves. Identifying "blind spots" through online learning tools makes it easy for educators to address problem areas, communicate these sticking points to parents and quickly aid students in their progress so they aren't "left behind" as the curriculum advances.

Having a reliable channel to communicate with parents and caregivers also facilitates a better understanding of potential home-life challenges or language barriers that may be holding students back.

THE TOOLS TEACHERS NEED FOR HYBRID LEARNING

A more permanent hybrid learning approach requires a deeper understanding of the tools and technologies available to educators, and ways to maximize their effectiveness in the era of the hybrid classroom. Here are a few of the tools teachers will probably want to familiarize themselves with:

Video Conferencing

The first real step toward any hybrid classroom is the mode by which you connect to your remote students. There are dozens of video-conferencing apps and platforms (you can read more about six of the very best for 2022 right here), but whichever app you choose to run with should be reliable and able to handle the basic functions of a classroom setting.

Generally, you'll need your video-conferencing solution to be able to host a full classroom's worth of participants in a group meeting, record lessons for later viewing, share screens, host breakout rooms and offer some variation of hand-raising or chat functionality so your remote students can provide instant feedback.

Smart Whiteboards

The smart whiteboard is a do-it-all tool for educators aiming to engage hybrid classrooms, using both synchronous and asynchronous teaching methods. Smart whiteboards allow teachers to integrate videos, interactive games and highlighted information into their daily lessons while giving students the opportunity to markup and engage with presentations from their own screen.

These interactive elements not only aid in holding students' attention — they can also help information "stick." Research shows drawing information to be a particularly effective way to facilitate comprehension and retention, nearly doubling the amount retained after a presentation. A smart whiteboard's interactive components don't just provide a nice bit of visual flair; they enable teachers to present new information in a more retainable fashion and provide remote students with more hands-on experience throughout their curriculum.

Between its infinite Canvas, integrations with other useful learning apps and increased accessibility for hybrid learners to engage with learning materials, Vibe Boards are an excellent fit for any classroom, from kindergarten to higher education.

Educational Apps

While we're on the topic of smart whiteboards, there are tons of app-based resources out there for teachers that work in concert with interactive displays like the Vibe Board to create better hybrid classrooms.

Many of these apps have refined the learning-as-a-game formula, from fun foreign language apps to apps that recognize and provide walkthroughs for advanced calculus. Flashcards, quiz reviews, brain teasers and other useful education apps have added another tool to the belt of educators looking to keep lesson plans fresh and engaging for all student types.

Online Course Repositories

Video-conferencing platforms allow students to tune into their lessons from home, and smart whiteboards and learning apps give those lesson plans the necessary flavor to keep coursework interesting, but where does it all live?

An online course repository is a hub for all remote course information. The right platform will facilitate communication between teachers, students and parents, make it easy to see past grades and current assignments and keep track of upcoming due dates through an easy-to-use online portal. It should also simplify connecting with students about missed assignments or sick days and allow teachers to post lecture recordings for students catching up on missed material.

Online programs such as Blackboard and Canvas have become something of a mainstay in higher education, but K-12 educators can see similar benefits in incorporating organizational platforms such as Google Classroom into their hybrid courses.

Discussion forums

Often hosted together with your chosen online teaching hub is the class discussion board — a critical piece of a hybrid classroom designed to better connect in-person students with their remote peers. A discussion board serves two main functions: improving classroom socialization and allowing students opportunities to further engage with the material they find most interesting.

Discussion boards are a great resource for educators to stoke discussion and provide links to TED talks, visual aids and other online materials. They also tend to expose gaps in understanding, giving instructors direction for their follow-up lessons and assignments.

Helping students understand and appreciate technology's awesome potential as a classroom tool is a process still under refinement, but in the right hands these tools can improve the educational experience for this new hybrid era of learners.

HOW VIBE AIDS HYBRID LEARNING

There's a reason our team loves discussing new tools for educators adapting to the modern classroom. Vibe Boards are an ideal component of every hybrid classroom, with dozens of features designed specifically with educators in mind:

- The traditional whiteboard has clear limits — for starters, it's only accessible to in-person students, can be erased on accident by the next class or instructor, and is confined to a set amount of surface area. Vibe's Infinite Canvas never runs out of room and automatically saves information to the cloud so as to avoid the whole "do not erase" problem. Nice, right?

- The Vibe Canvas is accessible from any device simultaneously, giving instructors the ability to lecture and lead discussions as if on a typical whiteboard, but broadcasted to all remote students in real time.

- Vibe Boards offer seamless annotation capabilities, allowing users to annotate over Canvas, notes or web pages.

- We built Vibe to play well with all the common collaboration apps you'll find in the app store, with nearly endless integration options with apps like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Slack, Google Chrome, and many more.

- At just $3,299, Vibe comes in at a fraction of the cost of some of our competitors.

Presenting material in a more accessible, engaging way doesn't just benefit students — it helps instructors, too. We are always adding new functionalities and useful integrations to our smartboards that advance the hybrid classroom. That means you'll have plenty of plug-ins at your fingertips each time you present a new lecture. Circling important passages with a swipe of a finger, grabbing objects and tossing them to your students' screens and incorporating interactive elements will make your own smartboard experience as a presenter worthwhile.

Smart whiteboards are designed for ease of use and practicality, but they also provide an attention-grabbing flair you just can't get with a traditional whiteboard. Other common functions instructors might find themselves using frequently include handwriting and shape recognition, mark-up and eraser tools, text boxes, "laser" pointer functions, changing backgrounds (including a grid for charts and graphs), zoom in/out and the ever-important undo button.
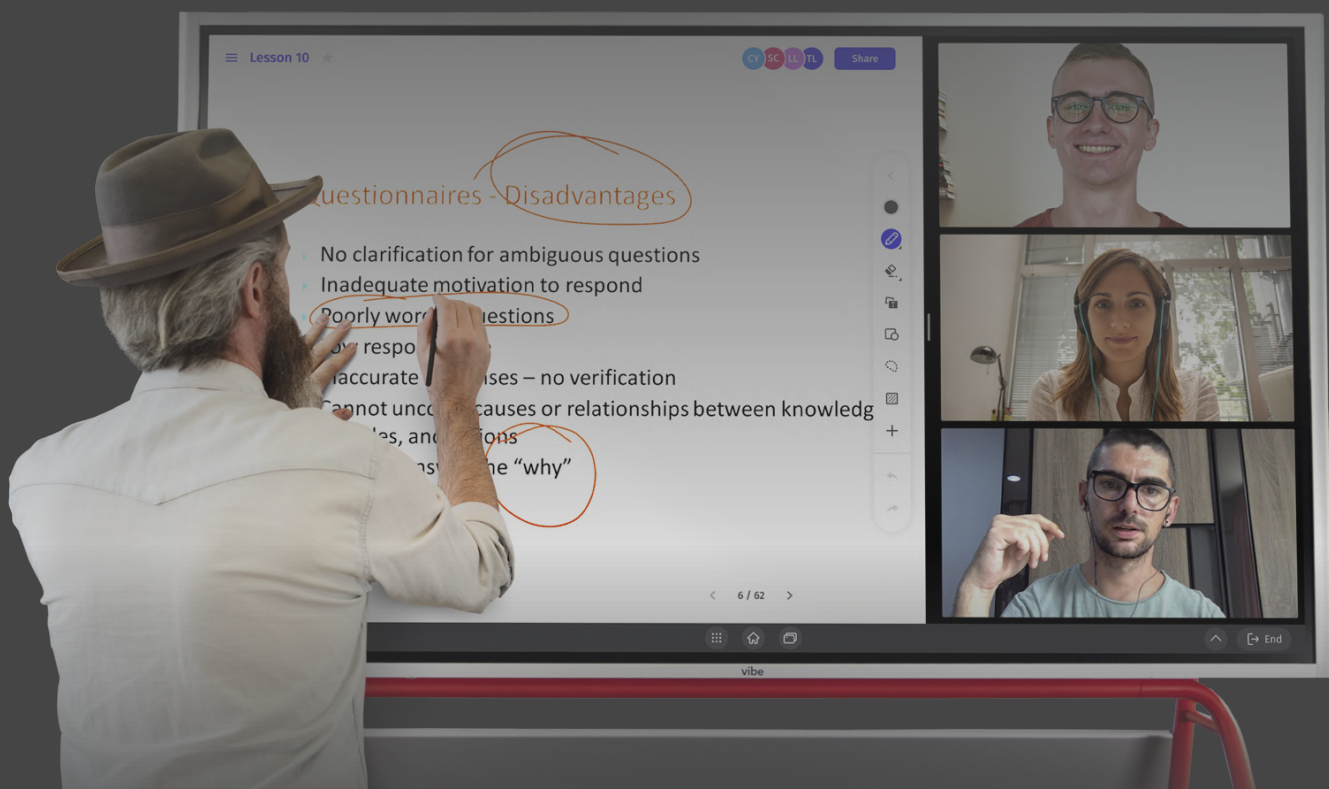
TEACHERS CURRENTLY USING VIBE FOR IN-CLASS AND VIRTUAL INSTRUCTION

We love sharing creative uses of the Vibe board in the classroom. Here are a few examples of how Vibe products have already impacted the future of hybrid learning:

Dissecting Vibe's Impact on Virtual Healthcare Learning: Dr. Austin Alexander, a licensed Physical Therapist and Assistant Professor of Anatomy at Hardin-Simmons University, uses Vibe to bridge the gap between hands-on lab experience and virtual medical software in the midst of a pandemic.

Professor of Medicine Uses Vibe for Virtual Trainings: Dr. Henry Silverman, MD, MA, a Professor of Medicine at the University of Maryland's School of Medicine, teaches graduate students online and leads international training workshops throughout the Middle East and Myanmar. Using Vibe, Dr. Silverman is able to infuse his lectures with the interactive, face-to-face energy typically reserved for the in-person classroom.

Home-school Teacher/Supermom Educates on Vibe: With more than six years of experience home-schooling, Robyn Cooper and her husband use Vibe to provide a fun and engaging curriculum for their four children, as well as other remote learners in their community.

HYBRID CLASSROOMS NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

Hybrid learning is here to stay, affording flexibility and new teaching methodologies to educators at every grade level. With the right technology in place, hybrid lesson plans can continue evolving toward more personalized, engaging experiences for students and more effective curriculums for instructors.

Vibe Boards are an important part of any hybrid learning technology stack. Ready to get started with your own Vibe? Check out our Vibe Board S1 55" and Vibe Board Pro 75" here to see which model will best suit your needs, or contact our team here for a quote.

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