HyFlex Practice Case Study

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This is a case study about my practices of teaching students online and F2F at the same time during March 2020. I feel that I have adopted some teaching practices which are very similar to what is suggested in the HyFlex teaching approach, so this is my reflection about my experiences of what went well and what can be improved. This reflection is designed around Gibb’s reflection cycle to help me focus on my experiences.

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| Description | At the start of March 2020, most of my BUS1004 (Introduction to Management) students did not want to come to the F2F class. Some of them were worried about COVID-19 and the rest may have personal reasons that might be related to COVID-19. It was nearly the assessment submission deadline, and I have finished most of the module content with assessment support sessions left to do. Some students would like to engage with me during the class hour but unable to come, and some have managed to come to the class.  Therefore, considering the students’ needs and the special environment we were in around that time. I started teaching online and F2F at the same time for several weeks until 25/03/2020 via Virtual Classroom and supported by WhatsApp audio calls. |
| Feeling | (1) The new delivery format has satisfied the needs of a certain kind of students:  I feel what I have provided for students allows some of them to continue their studies through synchronised online & F2F sessions without too much disruption. If these online students engaged with me by answering questions and asking questions, it made me feel the session might be useful for them, and they were willing to do it again for the other sessions if it can be online.  I started to use this kind of approach from 2017 in another university with students at Level 3 & 7. Some students were unable to come on campus due to weather conditions or bus/train strike. Students who attended the online session appreciated the opportunities that I offered for them, as they know would miss the whole session.  (2) I felt students got excited when they interact with students online:  Most students in my 2019/20 class refused to share their camera during the online session. However, their peers appear to be quite excited when they realised the person who was speaking via Virtual Classroom is someone they know;  Students who were in my class in 2017 also felt excited to see their friends on the display screen in the classroom and interacted with students who were on the screen by asking how they were doing and it made me feel there was a close relationship among them.  (3) I feel extremely exhausted after the session:  I did not use this kind of teaching approach regularly in the past but only occasionally (maybe 2 or 3 times) due to special circumstances so it took both myself and the students a while to get familiar with the technology. Some students had issues with microphones or sound, so either they cannot hear me, or I cannot hear them. After I tried to give all the tips that I know from LearnTech team, problems still prevalent. So I used WhatsApp with them at the same time to allow them to have interactions with me. With the use of WhatsApp & Virtual Classroom the interactions with students in the class became a little confusingas I had to monitor the Virtual Classroom, WhatsApp and interact with students in the classroom at the same time. However, this improved after a couple of sessions.  (4) I felt the teaching quality was not my best level for F2F students in the class:  I prefer to walk around the classroom and ask my students questions. I tried to carry my laptop and my mobile phone at the same time to walk around the room, but it did not work, as I cannot use them at the same time while I am holding them with both of my hands. Even if I use my laptop only without WhatsApp from my mobile phone, this was still the case. So I have to sit on a seat at the very front of the room without moving towards any student. It made me felt difficult to engage with students who were sitting at the very back. |
| Evaluation | I asked students feedback after each session through discussion and 1-1 chat, and their general opinions were:  (1) Online students cannot hear their peers from the classroom very well through the virtual classroom, and they can only hear me;  (2) My voices and screen have been cut off sometimes for the online students due to wifi connection issues;  (3) Students who were in the class, did not feel much difference, but they felt it was a bit rude if the online students did not give me any responses based on the questions that I sked; |
| Conclusion | Even thought it was extremely difficult to teach students F2F and online at the same time, I still feel it is something that I would do again just to satisfy the needs from different types of students. Moreover, this kind of approach probably will only be able to work if the student number is very small, such as 2-12.  I also tried to improve myself after each session, for example, I was not sure how to control Virtual Classroom, WhatsApp & F2F at the same time, as there were beeping sounds from Virtual Classroom and WhatsApp at the same time while I was speaking to all the students. However, I developed my strategy at the end by:    (1) Making sure I finish each slide first before checking messages from Virtual Classroom or WhatsApp;  (2) Answering questions from F2F students first before asking online students if they are OK; |
| Action Plan | Based on this experience  (1) I feel the student community & social belonging are even more important for online students because they might need more peer support when they did not get all the information they may need from the session for whatever reason. Therefore, for 2020/21 new students who have just started their studies, I started communication with them from 28/08/2020, and helped them to set their teams, groups, and network at programme level, subject level, & module level;  (2) To allow me to engage with students via multiple channels and improve the quality of my synchronised teaching, I feel I also require better equipment, such as a portable camera, microphone, selfie sticks. So I have purchased several selfie sticks for me to use on multiple mobile phones via multiple communication channels. |