



## HYBRID LEARNING:

# Timely and Timeless

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By Pat Fontana

Emma Pass literally wrote the book on hybrid learning. *The Hybrid Teacher Survival Guide* is scheduled to be published in the spring of 2021. Given the current COVID-19 environment, however, she has released an abridged version for teachers who need it now, to help them survive their ever-shifting classroom situation.

Hybrid learning is a timely topic in the midst of the pandemic but is nothing new to Pass or to many educators throughout the country. She has taught in a hybrid learning environment for several years and, as an educational technology consultant, helps other schools make the transition for their staff and students. Although admittedly not a “tech person,” Pass believes that technology makes a huge difference in any classroom and makes hybrid learning possible for both the student and the teacher.

**A TRADITIONAL START**

Pass has landed in Fort Collins, Colorado, by way of Las Vegas and England. She began her teaching career in a traditional brick and mortar school. Her sixth-grade English classes in Las Vegas were “incredibly large” and “incredibly diverse.” As soon as her teaching career began, though, so did her journey into remote learning.

The school received a grant for Chromebooks and her administration “decided to go with technology.” Given the challenges of her class makeup, Pass was very excited about the new opportunities. She was in a position with “almost impossible teaching tasks without the technology.” With the Chromebooks in her students’ hands, she was able to differentiate for her students to meet their specific needs and to keep them engaged.

**THE LAUNCH OF EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY CONSULTING**

The move from Las Vegas to England, to accommodate her husband’s new job, opened up some interesting new areas for Pass to explore. She began work as a “supply teacher,” which is essentially a substitute teacher and, while learning about their school system, noticed a lack of technology in their educational model.

Pass then connected with a consulting company, Canopy, that is focused on enhancing learning with digital technology. She became an educational technology consultant, using her experience and learning about new tools and new technology along the way. The job involved traveling “all around the UK teaching teachers how to use technology and computers in their classroom.”

Consulting was the perfect culmination of the excitement Pass first felt when her students received those Chromebooks back in Las Vegas, combined with the possibilities that technology held in store for teachers going forward. Educational technology, she says, “encompasses a lot. It could be anywhere from learning how to use physical devices — computers,

iPads, any virtual reality you might have access to in your classroom.” Software, including apps and learning management systems, is a significant factor as well.

With a degree in English, Pass says she can empathize with those teachers who tell her they are also “not really a tech person.” She says, though, that you “don’t need any special knowledge” to make technology work well in the classroom.

**INNOVATIVE LEARNING MODEL WITH A HISTORY**

When Pass returned to the states, she accepted a position with a school in Fort Collins, Colorado. That school, the Poudre School District Global Academy (PGA), was using the hybrid model when she arrived. In fact, they launched as an online school in 2009 and then transitioned to hybrid learning about three years later. So, even though hybrid learning is truly an innovative model, it has actually been in use for many years at some schools.

Clarifying the terms “blended learning” and “hybrid learning,” Pass explains that “a lot of these terms are still evolving as we go,” as we are still entering new territory. She adds that the “general consensus is that blended learning refers to the

tools you are using. It’s a blend between traditional tools such as paper and books, combined with technology such as computers, apps, and educational websites.

Blended learning can take place in a traditional brick and mortar classroom.

Hybrid learning “refers to the place where the student is physically learning — in the school building and remote online.” Hybrid learning typically involves staggered schedules, depending on their grade and learning needs. The elementary school student may be in the physical classroom on



Tuesdays and Thursdays, for example, but learning remotely on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. At PGA, which is K-12, there are different schedules for the elementary, middle, and high school students.

**BEST OF BOTH WORLDS**

When Pass first started teaching, her story was similar to many others across the country. She says she “worked like a maniac,” putting in ten hours a day and working on the weekends. Now she says, she absolutely loves her job. “Personally, the best of both worlds. I love teaching with technology and love the remote and online teaching aspect.”

In a hybrid learning model, she is able to do the “fun, in-person school activities but also spend time working on the technology aspects” when the students are home and learning remotely. She says the hybrid model has “afforded me a work-life balance that I didn’t know was possible in education. It has given me a way to be a teacher and have a life.”

**PREPARATION FOR A SUDDEN TRANSITION**

Her years of experience teaching in the hybrid learning environment prepared Pass, as well as her fellow teachers at PGA, for the sudden transition that occurred in most schools across the country in March 2020. She remembers the exact day, March 16, when she and her colleagues were having lunch and discussing what they had heard from their administration about the possibility that students would not come back to the physical classroom after that weekend.



That day ended up being the last time anyone was in the school building, including the teachers, for a very long time. Pass says, “The plan we made in that ten minutes of lunch would carry us through remote learning in the spring and fall of 2020 with nearly 100 percent student retention, and virtually no instruction time lost.” PGA is a school of choice, so retention is important to its success as well as to the success of its students.

Pass adds that the smooth transition “was possible due to our nature as a hybrid school and our staff, students’, and parents’ familiarity with the tools and technology, and our systems and organization for delivering instruction work remotely.” She says she doesn’t share this story simply to boast, as she understands the challenges so many schools have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, she wants to emphasize “the benefit of a hybrid model, that can easily transition into emergency remote learning due to disease, weather, or any other number of reasons, as well as a model that meets the needs of students, families, for whom traditional education is not working.”

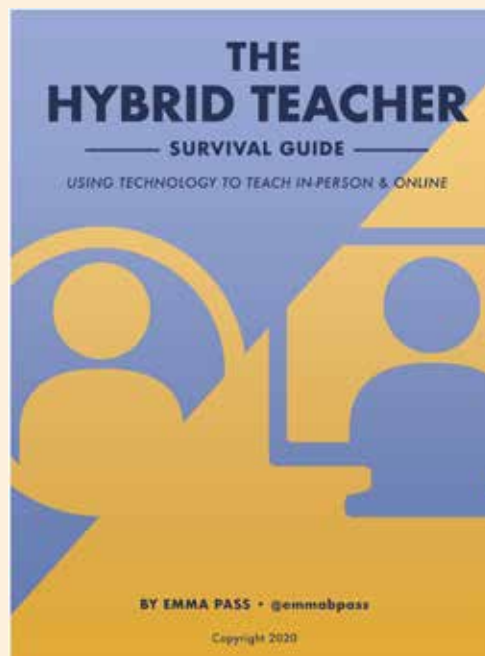
**PATIENCE, FAILURES, AND ULTIMATE SUCCESS**

When asked about her advice for the teacher who is suddenly thrust into the world of hybrid learning or remote learning, Pass immediately responded by saying, “Be very patient with yourself as you learn.” She added that it “does take time to learn all of these new tools and methodologies” and she recognizes that teachers are having to learn “an entirely new way to teach as well as doing an already difficult job.”

Second, she advises teachers to expect a lot of failure. However, they should “fail forward. Celebrate failures as an indication that you are trying.” Sometimes technology just doesn’t work. That’s when it’s time to say, “All right, we’ll just have to try this another day.” As Pass explains, “Freaking out when the technology is not working doesn’t help anybody.”

Finally, she urges teachers to “seek out those resources to help you learn about those tools that will benefit you

**Emma  
Pass**



Emma Pass offers the abridged version of her book now **for FREE**, to assist fellow educators with navigating

through the challenges of our current times. The full book will be available in the spring of 2021. *The Hybrid Teacher: Survival Guide* is available online at <https://www.edtechemma.com/the-hybrid-teacher-book>.

**In addition, Pass offers virtual professional development via videos on her website – <https://www.edtechemma.com/shop> and on YouTube – <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOrPCmsxq4DT2P3pazTApNA/videos>.**

Emma Pass can be contacted through her website <https://www.edtechemma.com> and via Twitter <https://twitter.com/emmapass>.



**THE ADVANTAGES OF FLEXIBILITY**

Pass urges administrators to “take advantage of the increased flexibility in schedule” when moving into a hybrid model. She suggests giving teachers a half day when they are “not responsible for any instruction so they have more time to learn about the new method of teaching.” For example, at her school, students are on campus for a half day on Wednesdays. During the

second half of that day the teachers have the opportunity to collaborate with each other.

In addition, a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning can benefit everyone in a hybrid learning environment. Older students, in particular, need that asynchronous learning model so they can develop executive management skills that will prove beneficial to them as they move on into adulthood.

Administrators should support professional development, Pass says. It is also helpful for administrators to hear from teachers about their challenges, needs, and successes, in the remote and hybrid learning spaces.

### ONE MODEL DOESN'T WORK FOR EVERYONE

The hybrid learning model does not work for every student or every family, and they figure that out very quickly, Pass notes. She adds that “every student has different learning needs. We’ve been trying to do one model of education for a long time and that doesn’t work for every student.”

She has seen tremendous benefit for the students participating in hybrid learning at her school. Some students have social anxiety and they are “physically sick and cry, being anxious about going to school every day.” In the traditional model, they might simply not attend school on days when they feel overly stressed and anxious. Students in the hybrid model, though, “have a day at home between coming into the school building” and that helps those students thrive.

In the hybrid model and now, in the remote environment, there is “a lot of teaching on organization, time management, and motivation.” There is also a great sense of school community and socialization, which helps students and teachers. However, there are still challenges, especially for parents.

For the younger students, especially, families may not be able to provide learning support for students on remote days, either because of work schedules or other factors. There are options for cohorts or small groups of students to study together during

remote or online days, but that can also be a challenge, especially during COVID-19.

Students as well as teachers who are highly extroverted may prefer in-person contact and may even struggle with remote learning and teaching. However, most hybrid models are set up so that remote learning alternates with in-class instruction, so students and teachers do not have more than one day without that in-person contact.

### HYBRID LEARNING AND THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

Pass says that she can imagine a “school where students’ schedules are need-based.” She adds that “if we had a model where you have a class of students that you see regularly and that are working independently, the students who need more support would have tutoring or small group sessions. The students who need more support would have regular interventions.”

In her consulting work, she provides hands-on learning with the tools that teachers and administrators are using to help them be more successful in the hybrid learning environment. She gets a lot of positive feedback. In one school where she consulted specifically on the hybrid model, she says that “everybody feels really excited about what they’re doing.”

Pass thinks there will be many more hybrid schools across the country going forward, as well as online schools. She says, “Technology is advancing to the point where it’s feeling a lot more practical and possible for students to be learning online.” In addition, given the challenges presented by COVID-19, “we’ll be seeing a lot more options for flexible learning.”

The pandemic and its related issues have “shined a light on the digital divide in our country, including the lack of access, devices, and technical skills.” Pass and others like her are working on bridging that divide. She says her “great hope is that this does impact education.”

She is seeing more of an emphasis on social and emotional learning now, as the pandemic has made everyone

realize that some things, like testing, are less important. She would like to see more technology for teachers and more hybrid school models in the U.S. going forward.

The challenges that teachers are currently facing made Pass realize that they need the information and guidance she provides now, even though her book was not scheduled to be published until the spring of 2021. So she worked out an agreement with her publisher and now offers the abridged version of the survival guide, along with other bits of advice, to help teachers and administrators work through this new world of educational technology.

### THE SWEET SPOT

Having started as an online school, transitioning to hybrid learning three years later, PGA in Fort Collins had to transition back to online learning only during COVID-19. Learning was 100 percent remote during the height of the pandemic but returned to the hybrid model in October. Students and teachers have been eager to get back in the classroom for at least part of the week but are well equipped to handle the remote portion of their learning schedule based on their extensive history with the hybrid learning model.

Emma Pass is excited about what the future holds for her students and for hybrid learning. The hybrid model of 50 percent in person and 50 percent online, she says, is the “sweet spot for students and parents in terms of education, community, and social support.”

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