

TALON: hybrid education

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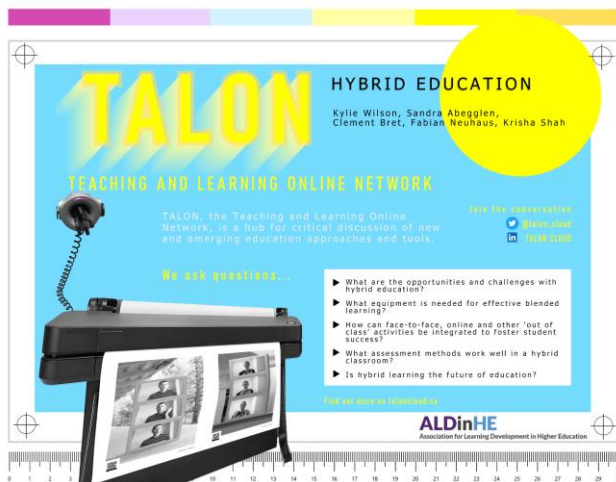
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Figure 1. The TALON poster presented at ALDCon22



Presentation abstract

TALON – the Teaching and Learning Online Network – is a University of Calgary project made possible by the Richard Parker Initiative (RPI).

TALON is a hub for critical discussion of new and emerging education approaches and tools. Born in the early stages of the pandemic, shortly following the shutdown of in-person classes across the globe, we seek to document the ongoing changes within higher education and share thoughts, ideas, and experiences about online, blended and hybrid

education. TALON's initiatives include A-Z resources, monthly newsletters, interviews with academic professionals and students, in-person activations and various publications. Combined, the projects serve as an interactive lexicon for remote teaching and learning. We keep the academic community informed about current developments in the virtual classroom and connected through discussion.

Questions such as: What are the opportunities and challenges with hybrid education? What equipment is needed for effective blended learning? How can face-to-face, online, and other 'out of class' activities be integrated to foster student success? What assessment methods work well in a hybrid classroom? Is hybrid learning the future of education? – are addressed and discussed.

Find out more on taloncloud.ca

Community response

Poster sessions at conferences can often be overlooked, fitted in among the presentations and workshops which take priority for many delegates. Yet a lively and engaged poster session can be a real enhancement to the programme, offering nugget after concentrated nugget of knowledge and experience. This session offered a broad range of subjects to engage with. For example, we discussed the value of how rephrasing apps, such as wordtune.com, paraphrasing-tool.com and quillbot.com, can positively support especially non-English speakers to overcome linguistic barriers, within a Learning Development framework that constantly reminds students how to use such digital tools effectively whilst maintaining academic integrity. We also saw the outcomes of research into reading strategies on reading behaviour and comprehension, with the message that exploring knowledge in HE requires time to digest and sink in. This is comparable in a way to Susan Cain's (2013) *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*. Reading strategies such as skimming, scanning and deep reading each have their value, and could be applied by students at different stages of approaching a text – we just have to help them understand how to use them.

Sharing ideas, resources and experience is at the heart of TALON, and this poster presentation showed us the power of community and networks. The need to be linked somehow to others was made evident by the isolation and disconnection wrought by the successive lockdowns of the Covid-19 pandemic, and to have had such a response as this network is incredible. TALON is valuable not just for the resources it brings together but for the concept of a hybrid community it presents, one in which not just the teaching and learning but also the people are located in blended spaces. How to do this meaningfully and effectively will be an on-going conversation, as it seems that we will never return to pre-Covid modes of being together. We have learnt too much to disregard some of the innovations that emerged, and experienced too much to want to lose some of the developments we have collectively made in building connections. To have all of this not only documented but also actively curated and pursued is hugely valuable, and it will be exciting to see this develop in the future.

Author reflection

Hybrid (or blended) learning has gained momentum through the Covid-19 pandemic, with many higher education institutions being forced to deliver their sessions flexibly. TALON aims to better understand what supports (and hinders) learning in these 'mixed' spaces. ALDCon22 provided an opportunity for us to reflect on our current and past work in this area. The poster created represents this with a digital reference to the physical world using everyday tools to translate the digital to the physical. Included is also a link to our recent pop-up intervention: [Hybrid CommUNITY](#). The aim of the pop-up was to understand, engage with and activate the Calgary (CA) community and its highly diverse fabric by creating a hybrid space for conversation. TALON used a series of word games to engage the (local) community both online and offline. The team further experimented with blended installations that linked the digital and physical. One involved Twitter data projected on a wall in the partnering pay-what-you-can thrift store with visitors being invited to respond on site to the projection. Another one involved a drawing robot that brought pre-programmed words and patterns from the virtual world to 'live' with visitors being able to take pieces of those drawings away as postcards, with the encouragement to 'send a message' to family and friends. Together with other interventions, the hybridity of the pop-up allowed us to reach beyond the local neighbourhood into the virtually networked communities of the city.

Our takeaway from this project - and our work in general - is that opportunities for collaboration, co-creation and connectivity are needed, especially in this challenging post-pandemic time, and that we need to urgently explore how to best bring together online and offline experiences for healthier (learning) communities.

Next steps

Moving forward, TALON would like to highlight the importance of considering what happens in the in-between spaces, the places where the physical and virtual collide, especially for the students. Blended learning is often considered as mixed-mode instruction, an approach to education that combines online educational materials and opportunities for interaction online with physical place-based classroom methods. However, with the advancement of educational technologies and software, and in particular the emergence of artificial intelligence, there is a need to develop a more comprehensive understanding of what it means to teach and learn in hybrid environments, settings where the 'real' and 'virtual' are merged. Technology is no longer an add-on, but a dominating part of education. A possible starting point could be to define what a hybrid classroom might mean, for both students and faculty. Key to this is the application of ethical thinking to the practical concerns of technology. What we urgently need are principles to guide new advances in educational technology – and technology more generally - to account for the social dimension of technological systems and practices. Developing a technological pedagogy means moving beyond the discussion of what technology can and cannot do - and rather to consider what we want technology for in learning and teaching, and why.

We encourage faculty and students to join the discussion – to voice their hopes and concerns – for an inclusive, co-created educational future: @talon_cloud #EducationHYP

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References

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Author details

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