

The future of language education in the light of Covid - lessons learned and ways forward

Case study on experiences of foreign language teaching during the Covid pandemic by Luljeta Malaj, Albania

- ***Please write briefly about a memorable language teaching experience, either particularly challenging or especially successful as an example of your practice during the pandemic:***

Since the first days of pandemic, we switched to Google classroom, then to Academy. AI or Zoom meetings. It was a real challenge for teachers, and students too, to overcome the harmful effects of the pandemic and truly care for the wellbeing of the students.

A way to encourage students was a slogan "Together we can": telling them that even from home we can collaborate with each other and offer support.

An unexpected successful experience was about a session I called "Problem solving", which I thought I might use as a warm-up activity.

Who were the learners? Please write a brief description – the ‘story’ - of what you did/what happened that made this an especially memorable experience:

As a teacher in a high school, I teach students from grade 10 to 12. So, I asked the 10th grade students which were the problems they faced during the first days of pandemic. In this way it was much easier for them to "open up" and talk, or, better, say a way to "to break the ice" and start a conversation.

I told students to write a problem on a piece of paper, and then they chose one of their peers/classmates to be their "psychologist". They were given 5 minutes to discuss their problem(s) with each other. Each pair came up with a solution. During the rest of the lesson period, each "psychologist" reported on the problem(s)/ solution(s) to the class.

I was surprised by the fluency of students' talk.

What were the aims of the session/lesson?

The activity relieved students' stress, boosted their self-esteem, and showed them that they were not alone: we/teachers care about their physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing.

What lessons might there be in your experience for language teaching in general beyond the pandemic?

The pandemic taught all of us a very useful life lesson: It is of primary importance to show students that we/ teachers are always there for somebody, offering them emotional support, showing them that we do care for their health (physical and mental) as well as for their academic progress, so teaching is a human mission, not just a profession.

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- ***In your context, how have teachers and other colleagues supported each other's professional practice during the pandemic?***

We learned how to work as a team even apart from each other. It was the IT teachers that were the first to offer their digital professional assistance to all members of staff. We organized online training via Zoom meeting.

Another useful way of sharing our teaching experiences, best techniques and strategies has been Professional Networks where foreign language teachers got together and discussed their experiences and the problems they have been through during online teaching.

Of great help/support to foreign language teachers have been different videos, websites, links such as teachingenglish.org.uk, Edutopia, Teaching English (British Council), BBC Learning English, American English for Educators, etc.

- ***What especially important thoughts, experiences or insights have you had about language education during the Covid pandemic?***

The challenges brought by COVID 19 safety protocols also provided opportunities for both in-class and after school support. COVID 19 has affected learners' language and literacy learning in different ways, so teachers have identified several strategies that work well under the new conditions to ensure that academic language is accessible to all. The latter, although realized with strategic methods such as breakout rooms or games & quizzes, were quite productive, and I think they should be used even outside the emergency situation.

During the pandemic period we learned that embracing technology-oriented pedagogies is necessary for the emotional and academic integration of students and teachers in the process of learning. We, as teachers, learned how to use technology intentionally and purposefully in order to meet our expectations and objectives.