

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

Who were the learners?

Adult Level B2.2 (annual Cambridge First Preparation course)

What were the aims of the session/lesson?

- To revisit and practice narrative tenses in order to summarise a story
- To relieve “Zoom fatigue” in a light-hearted Christmas lesson

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

Topic: Fairy Stories.

Step 1: Grammar dictation using Dictagloss – a summary of “Snow White”, followed by text reconstruction in pairs using breakout rooms and feedback, with a focus on use of tenses/fairy tale language/discussion of students’ favourite stories

Step 2: Writing a summary of “Little Red Riding Hood” in groups of three using breakout rooms, followed by whole group feedback/peer correction

The lesson was memorable because the learning objectives were achieved and the students were engaged and had fun in what was essentially a traditional face to face lesson format with Zoom features being used as a tool to facilitate learning and communication. Screen sharing was minimal, thus maintaining the group dynamic.

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

The pandemic has been an intense and challenging experience for teachers and learners alike, both inside and outside the “classroom”. The enforced migration of teaching online over an extended period has inevitably contributed to the exploitation of digital materials and exploration of the internet and all its potential uses in language teaching and learning. Perhaps the most important lesson for me has been that of putting the student first, by being sensitive to mood, engaging interest through personalisation, being upbeat and maintaining a positive outlook through difficult times. Technology has been fundamental, but it remains a tool and nothing more. Its over-use in the communicative language teaching environment can be a distraction and alienating for learners, rather than enhancing the learning experience. This is equally true for face-to-face teaching.

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

Within the organisation where I work, support has come in the form of "task force" meetings on Zoom involving teachers from across the region, sharing ideas on exam classes, young learners and so on. In addition, there has been widespread sharing of digital materials, working closely with publishers, as well as participation in webinars offered by publishers and organisations such as EAQUALS, AISLI and Cambridge Assessment and other exam/test providers. Senior academic staff were available on request to observe lessons and support individual teachers. Regular regional staff meetings are held online.

- C. *It is now several months since you responded to the survey. What additional thoughts, experiences or insights have you had about language education during the Covid pandemic?*

No further thoughts other than those expressed above