



One year later: a personal reflection of teaching remotely

Martin Sketchley

Introduction

It was unfathomable that the outbreak of COVID-19, over a year ago, would affect most lives, especially teachers who would now continue to teach remotely. Many teachers and educators were thrust into the uncomfortable position of having to immediately deliver courses remotely, with little guidance on best practice. One year later, we are still affected by the pandemic and now would be a good opportunity to personally review what I had experienced and learned while teaching courses and classes online. It is hoped that this self-reflective article will aid other teachers in similar situations with potential ideas or tips for teaching in a post-pandemic era.

Dedicated Home Office

When I first started teaching online, I was moving from room to room. I would recommend that teachers find a dedicated space to work which is quiet and comfortable. This would allow teachers to have a dedicated workspace which is where all work is undertaken, while other rooms are not a reminder of work. This in itself would offer the teacher the chance to escape from the rather exhausting process of teaching online by going elsewhere within home.

Additional Equipment for Teaching Remotely

If you are teaching remotely, then it makes sense to have the equipment that will help the delivery of online lessons. Personally, I found myself having to look at a small laptop for an extended period of time – not a great option if you are teaching or working online – so I decided to invest in a second larger monitor for my online classes. This new ‘screen space’ provided me with the chance to spread my documents and PowerPoint slides around and I could not consider working solely on a single monitor again. Therefore, I would recommend other teachers and educators to purchase a second monitor whether you have a laptop or desktop.

If you are seeking to improve the quality of your webcam, then there are a few options. The first thing that you could consider getting is an external webcam such as a Logitech C920e, which offers 1080p video resolution. An external webcam would offer greater quality of resolution compared to built-in laptop webcams. If you have a desktop computer without a webcam, then purchasing an external webcam would seem to make sense. The other option, and possibly most expensive route to improve the resolution, is to use a DSLR or digital camera connected to your laptop or desktop and using it as a webcam.

Other than having an improved webcam or external monitor, you could also consider investing in an external microphone such as a Røde NT-USB or Blue Yeti which connects directly into a laptop or desktop. Improved audio will provide a more engaging online experience for students during lessons as well as reducing background noise (such as a computer fans whirring or cars passing outside) which can be quite distracting for learners. Additionally, I cannot stress enough the importance of a comfortable chair for remote teaching. I found myself having to sit down a lot more than I had prepared and having a comfortable office chair will help immensely while sitting in front of your computer or laptop. Perhaps picking up an office chair from Ikea or elsewhere would suffice.

A final piece of equipment that you could consider investing in a pair of Bluetooth headphones rather than using wired headphones. Wired headphones limit the amount of movement possible as it would be usually connected to the computer. However, with Bluetooth headphones, one is able to move around or stretch with their headphones connected while monitoring learner discussions or activities.

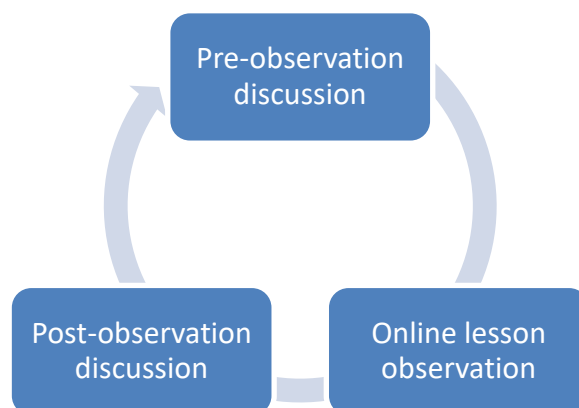
Tips for Teaching Remotely

There are some obvious differences between teaching remotely compared to teaching face-to-face and included below are some suggestions and tips for those continuing to teach remotely. The first point is for teachers is to understand that the delivery of engaging tasks, which would have been organised and delivered in a physical

classroom, is difficult to replicate within an online environment. The more convoluted or complicated an online task is, the more probable that it will not be engaging, despite the main objective of the teacher to make an activity engaging. Therefore, I would suggest that teachers keep tasks as simple as possible: don't incorporate numerous websites or applications as this is a recipe for disaster.

Secondly, observing or offering teachers to observe your lesson(s) will provide a platform for teachers to incorporate the sharing of teaching ideas. Additionally, the observing of teachers could also further confirm the approach or technique that is deployed during the delivery of online lessons. While developing an observation with a teacher, it would be best to incorporate the following:

As with a face-to-face observation, it would be vital to have an opportunity to discuss with the teacher prior to the



online lesson. The teacher being observed could request the observer to highlight any particular areas of concern (instructions, error correction, etc.), and once a lesson has been delivered then both could reconvene to discuss their thoughts, reflections and suggestions going forward.

Conclusions

Finally, from my personal experience, when teaching remotely, it is important to monitor my mental and physical health. Teaching and working from home can be quite convenient but also rather stressful. I would recommend teachers switching off and going for a walk or taking up a hobby. If I am stuck in front of my computer for an extended period of time, replying to emails or planning online lessons or tasks, the day disappears and I feel a sense of regret. Creating a support bubble with other teachers could also help maintain that social interaction while meeting outside if the circumstances are right. With the right support teachers and students will be able to successfully teach and learn in this new remote environment.



Martin Sketchley is a Language Tutor for the University of Sussex and has 14 years teaching experience in South Korea, Romania and the UK. He holds an MA in English Language Teaching and has experience of supporting newly certified teachers to develop the skills necessary to teach Young Learners. Martin has a keen interest in Technology, Remote Learning and Teacher Development. Email: m.sketchley@sussex.ac.uk