

Towards a Guide to Language Education in pandemic times and beyond



Lessons to be learned from the pandemic

The challenges of the pandemic, of coping with remote learning and teaching, and with social distancing have led schools and teachers to develop new skills and resources. A positive outcome of the experience is that language educators are rethinking their practice and applying some of the lessons learned to “normal” practice.

Supporting learners and favouring their autonomy

- * promoting “educational literacy”
- * encouraging teamwork
- * leaving no-one behind

Providing technology and using it equitably

- * access for all
- * reliability, visibility
- * digital literacy training
- * coping with fatigue

Supporting teachers

- * developing strategies for coping with new challenges
- * targeted training
- * caring for teachers’ wellbeing

How can language education meet present and future challenges?

Adapting assessment

- * more formative, continuous assessment
- * online testing
- * self & peer assessment
- * more individualised feedback

Choosing methods which fit new challenges

- * masks
- * distanced interaction
- * pronunciation
- * attendance

Exploiting the advantages of online materials

- * flexibility
- * variety and individualisation
- * choice and availability



Rethinking our approach to teaching

Basic principles stay the same

- Making language teaching learner-centred, not teacher-centred
- Prioritising action-orientated language along with formal and informal language learning
- Assuring the key role of affect when selecting topics and learning activities for language learning, and tailoring these to the age of learners.

But they need to be adapted

How can we cope with the differences (and similarities) between managing online and managing face-to-face learning (elicitation, wait time, student-student interaction, monitoring learning etc.)? By:

- orientating learners on how to learn in a changed environment, with new approaches, methods, resources etc.
- using 'new' teaching techniques to encourage creativity and flexibility in language teaching.
- finding novel ways of engaging learners in interaction, including written interaction, focusing on peer-to-peer learning and 'socialisation' among learners.
- creating communities of practice for learners as 'social agents' working towards a specific common purpose in a digital space, e.g. through project work
- mitigating the challenges of mask-wearing and social distancing in class.



Finding new resources for learning – how technology can help

The challenges of remote, socially distanced and hybrid teaching have led to the exploration of a wealth of new resources for learning. The teacher's task is to use technology to contribute to successful learning by:

- selecting and adapting these resources for online language learning
- devising activities and selecting resources for task- and project-based language learning
- using the internet and relevant apps as resources for face-to-face and hybrid as well as online language learning
- ensuring that online resources are used in ways that are coherent with the syllabus.

"I think that I have discovered a whole new world of ideas, of potential platforms, of gamification and other ways to motivate students. I could get instant feedback and use the tools to discover my students' creative work."

Assessment is a challenge

Fair and reliable assessment, especially in remote learning, poses a number of challenges.

- If examinations are replaced by teacher evaluation, how can this be effectively standardised?
- What ethical issues related to privacy and equity are posed by distance evaluation and how can they be addressed?
- What are the possible roles of the CEFR, self-assessment and language portfolios in meeting these challenges?
- How can we ensure coherence between curricula, pedagogy and assessment?

For teachers, effective assessment involves:

- careful planning of teaching that encompasses assessment in various forms as additional opportunities for interaction
- achieving an appropriate balance between formative and summative assessment, and identifying suitable means of doing both
- defining the role of continuous assessment/assessment for learning in a given context and how to do it effectively.

"Tools such as Google Docs have enhanced my ability to retrieve, rework, and focus on learner output. This in turn has improved the quality of my feedback and is certainly something I will keep in my teaching toolkit. It has helped me to prioritise learner language over coursebooks."

"Continuous assessment has made it easier for teachers to get regular feedback on students' development and difficulties. These small tests were the foundation for individual feedback and helped interpret results of the final exam."

It's important to develop digital literacy

The pandemic has prompted teacher and learners to develop their digital literacy. In the future, these skills must become an integral part of all language teaching and learning. The key aspects are:

- dealing with disparity of access and unsuitable conditions for online learning and teaching
- choosing appropriate digital resources (platforms, apps, software etc.)
- finding the right balance between what can best be done digitally and what absolutely requires face-to-face contact
- developing strategies for online learning, and knowing when to use technology and when not
- choosing online work appropriate to the learner's age and level.

"Online teaching can be far more effective than I had previously imagined. As mentioned earlier, I have been struck by the potential it allows to focus on the learners' output. There has been an increase in the amount of "little and often" writing."

"I've learned (1) that teachers can adapt to any environment when needed (2) that technology is an integral part of our daily lives and education as well (3) when we learn to use new methods of e-teaching we have a great tool in our hands. Teaching can be motivating, interesting, pleasant, free of stress."

Support for learners

For many learners, especially those who may for a variety of reasons be at risk, the Covid pandemic has been a difficult time. How can we support learners, maintain their motivation and help them to catch up on lost learning?

We need to

- find ways of making sure all learners are included in lessons
- propose activities which encourage social contact among learners
- identify means of compensating for loss of learning, especially for young learners and disadvantaged learners
- develop approaches and resources for supporting marginalised groups (e.g migrants)
- ensure that more well-developed resources for such groups are available in a range of different languages
- create a social environment online that brings together students who haven't met each other personally, thus helping socialize online
- include students in decision-making: they are sometimes faster with technology and can provide ideas for using it effectively.

A major challenge

"I believe that we haven't started to touch the surface of the long-term effects this pandemic will have. Language learning is also about communication and this has been lost. All the important learning that comes from playing with peers has gone. There are children that no longer speak, children with parents that no longer have jobs, children suffering more abuse than they ever did before as parents are at home. I feel strongly that these issues need to be addressed."



Teachers need support, too

Teachers have had to cope with many difficulties – learning new skills, rethinking their teaching, working long hours at the computer...

What can be done to help in the short and long term?

- Focus on the further development of teacher competences in using relevant technology
- Provide training and support for teachers in the task of catching up on lost learning because of the pandemic
- Provide support systems for change in language teaching through teacher communities of practice and peer-learning networks
- Enhance formal teacher education (pre-service, in-service and CPD) to include training in remote and socially distanced teaching.

Address the problems of teacher well-being due to the pandemic (and in general):

- encourage cross pollination between language departments and between language teachers and teachers of other subjects
- provide guidance on how to teach flexibly, adjust to changing situations and maintain the focus of the class
- provide development and training in devising activities that work independently of whether the teaching environment is online, offline or hybrid
- make individual counselling easily available.



“Never back down. I have learned to adapt and have discovered a great number of resources for online teaching that I wouldn't have used if we hadn't been in lockdown. I have started to take part in social media groups of language teachers that give help, advice and exchange materials.”

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European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe

Promoting excellence
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A - 8020 Graz, Nikolaiplatz 4
+43 316 323554, information@ecml.at
www.ecml.at



Initiative: The future of language education
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