NAVIGATING SUCCESSFUL ONLINE PEDAGOGY: REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BASIC TECHNOLOGY USE

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INTRODUCTION

This article reflects on the frustrations and emotions felt in the first month of emergency online teaching that was implemented due to the 2020 pandemic. It also offers some advice and potential solutions to dealing with technological issues when adapting to online teaching. Discussions particularly focus on some of the key events and experiences encountered in teaching a reading and writing course where English as a foreign language was the mode of instruction. The article hopes to bring attention to the importance of appreciating basic computer and tablet technology skills for writing tasks and checking writing feedback. It comments upon the problems encountered with the fundamentals of computer and software use such as attaching files correctly, choosing the correct language keyboard and the basic uses of Google Docs, and it suggests ways in which teachers can better prepare for challenges faced in online pedagogy.

When the decision was made to switch to online teaching, my initial emotion was one of fear. I would describe myself as a more traditional teacher and although I do use technology in the classroom on a regular basis, such things as assignments and homework have almost always been handwritten. Of course, this could not be the case in such a new and unique situation where every student was remote. There were many challenges that faced teachers at such a stressful time and we subsequently *all* had to rely on technology use for every lesson. In the end, this was without doubt a major effect on the success of teaching and learning outcomes.

One of the biggest emotions I felt when teaching was *frustration*, which generally refers to the "low-level negative feelings aroused when individuals are prevented from achieving goals or changing undesirable situations" (Morris & King, 2018, p.435). In the following paragraph, I will unravel this definition in two parts and discuss its relevance to my context and the problems I encountered. Firstly, I will describe my "low-level negative feelings" and secondly, I will explain how I was "prevented from achieving [my] goals".

CAUSES OF FRUSTRATION

My negative feelings of frustration were mainly born out of the feeling of hopelessness. I had shared my screen to talk students through software use processes, but there were regularly a small number of students who could not do certain online writing tasks that were fundamental to the lesson outcomes. A problem that was a common occurrence was attaching the wrong files when submitting assignments. Unfortunately, explaining and communicating potential solutions in English did not alleviate this issue. This was after spending time on lengthy explanations on how to use Google Docs and Google Drive and after conducting one-to-one help sessions for up to ten minutes at a time with students who

still needed assistance. One could argue that help sheets should have been created by myself, but such a task was difficult for me to do as I am not an IT specialist, and I was already feeling overwhelmed from preparing my regular courses. Some frustrations were also further compounded when I realised that students had previously had IT orientations at the start of the semester, but issues may have been due to the fact that most Japanese high schools do not typically teach with any form of technology. In conclusion to this section, I concede that it was very difficult to deal with the transfer to online learning. In such a time, it is challenging for both teachers and students to regulate their frustrations when solutions cannot be found or communication in the target language breaks down. I suggest that the above issues should not be underestimated as key factors in navigating successful learning outcomes.

HOW WERE MY GOALS AS A TEACHER AFFECTED?

In this next paragraph, I shall discuss how some of the examples given above relate to how I felt frustrated in achieving my teaching goals. As with any class I have ever taught, it has been one of my key aims to build good student rapport. I highly value the development of a good professional relationship between myself and students so that indeed, students also do not feel frustrated about their learning. However, I have found developing rapport online to be more difficult. For example, there are many extra-linguistic pedagogical skills a teacher cannot employ as they are simply not available online. Furthermore, the constraints of time and effort being given to explaining technical issues or firefighting technical problems seems to take away the focus of the teacher from teaching language. I suggest that institutions consider to what degree this should be the role of the teacher versus other institutional staff, and consider how they can support teaching staff to support students. The situation made me reevaluate my view of my professional pedagogical responsibilities and it has also made me more aware that teachers *always* have to be responsive to students' needs in the ever-changing face of education. As a positive outcome, dealing with this tumultuous time has made me more confident in assisting students with online learning and more responsive to the technological problems that can occur, thus indirectly improving my professional development.

SOLUTIONS

Possible solutions to the previously mentioned issues could be to appoint online student support troubleshooters and/or links to specific breakout rooms (using the Zoom app), or inviting IT specialists to your main room to explain the IT task to everyone in their first language, not the target language. Further courses and regular IT training is also important through this difficult time, and I suggest that success is more likely if it involves both teachers and students being trained on an *ongoing* basis. Other more independent and practical solutions connected to the above issues could be for students to watch basic YouTube videos on 'how to do' tasks related to technology and software use as they are convenient for students to access.

After my experiences, I argue that teachers need to be responsive and patient with students' technology use and more aware of their software knowledge. Fundamental skills involved in using computer or tablet technology seem simple but should not be underestimated as a crucial factor in successful online teaching. As a main reflection at the end of a whole

semester of online teaching, I am now pleased to say that some students who had technology use problems have now been successfully communicating via email, sending the correct files and submitting good written assignments, so perhaps there is merit in being perseverant for both teachers and students.

CONCLUSION

The use of technology in online teaching acts as the basis of communication and it greatly affects how teachers teach and learners learn effectively. Educators should not underestimate how important basic IT skills and the ability to use software such as Google Docs and Google Drive are. It should also not be assumed that students have these skills readily available and/or that teachers can help students effectively. If students do not have the necessary support in understanding IT fundamentals or the ability to use important software, frustrations will unfortunately be an inevitable outcome in online teaching and learning.

In my case, the reality of the 2020 pandemic had initially created negative emotions to the use of technology at a higher educational institution for writing tasks, yet more positively, now I am better equipped and more responsive to dealing with technological issues. I am sure I am not alone in espousing such frustration as we all deal with the effects of the novel coronavirus on worldwide education, but we may be able to say that we have developed as teachers more in using technology for online teaching and supporting our students.

REFERENCES

Morris, S. & King, J. (2018). Teacher frustration and emotion regulation in university language teaching. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics, 41*(4), 433-452.