

How the Coronavirus Helped Me Become More Involved at School

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It was early 2020, and it was becoming clearer that the coronavirus was likely to force us out of the classroom and into online classes. A senior faculty member asked if I wouldn't mind conducting some online training sessions to help familiarize our English teaching faculty with both Google Meet and Google Classroom. It made sense - in my efforts over several years to create a paperless classroom, I was already getting familiar with the Google Classroom learning management system and other educational technology. The cancellation of face-to-face classes was going to push everyone towards paperless classrooms one way or another. Which is how I found myself leading our teacher training for online classes.

A few pieces of background information seem useful in understanding the story fully. When all of this began, I was just starting my second year of teaching at my current institution. So I was very much learning my way around the school, both in a figurative sense and a literal one. When I had applied for the job, one thing that I included on my CV and talked about in my interview was my effort to establish a paperless classroom, as well the knowledge of the technology needed to make that happen. As such, the more senior members of the full-time English teaching faculty were all aware of my interest and knowledge in the area. In fact, just a month or two before the full extent of the pandemic started to become clear, I had had a conversation with two of my colleagues about using Google Classroom in the coming school year, albeit for use in face-to-face classes. Since I have made the decision to move towards paperless classes, my students have always gotten more than just English lessons - they have gotten technology lessons in the process. For my classes, students need some computer literacy to complete assignments. I believe that this is something very useful for students. In the 21st century, technology plays such a central role in so many facets of life that being able to navigate an online, computerized environment is something that is beneficial to students. Even if they don't become experts in computing from my English classes, they

will at least be made more aware of what some of the possibilities are. Maybe they will take it further on their own, or maybe my class will simply provide them with the technological savvy required to navigate similar classes. However, I know that this technological knowledge is definitely something useful for them.

Thus, the use of technology in the classroom was already a topic of discussion among myself and my colleagues before the cancellation of face-to-face classes. The training sessions were, in many ways, an extension of my work with creating paperless classes. The pandemic was forcing all teachers to adopt such classrooms, and I was uniquely qualified to aid other teachers at my institution with this shift.

One other point worth noting is that I am not a gregarious, outgoing person. I do not enjoy talking to people very much unless I have a clear purpose for doing so. I have always felt envious of those teachers who have a very easy-going, easy-to-talk-to attitude with both students and other faculty members. I have never been that type of person. These two factors - my newness and my quiet nature - meant that I was not familiar with most of the part-time teaching staff. However, the pandemic forced our school into online classes and thrust me into the position of leading teacher training on how to use online tools, which helped me get to know my part-time colleagues much better. While I'm still unlikely to ever be an outgoing, talkative teacher, the experience with leading the training sessions helped me realize something about the usefulness of my skills.

Objectives

- To find one's strengths as a teacher and utilize them for the benefit of students and colleagues.
- To recognize that while no teacher will be exceptional at every aspect of teaching, every teacher has at least one area where they can take a lead role.

Practical Implications

For educators, it is important to acknowledge their weaknesses as well as their strengths. Teachers can certainly improve in their weaker areas, up to a point, but it is also important to accept that they might never meet the high standards they hold themselves to. Perhaps more important is for teachers to recognize and emphasize their strengths. Once they recognize their strengths, teachers should work to emphasize these and find the best ways to use them to improve their schools.

Reflective Conclusion

Everyone has different strengths and weaknesses. That applies not only to our personal lives, but also to our professional lives. Do I wish I were more gregarious with both colleagues and students? Absolutely. Can I work to improve these aspects of my persona as a teacher? Of course. However, I know that I have other skills that are extremely useful to both students and colleagues. It is likely that all teachers have some sense of how they bring important unique strengths to their work, but this is often easy to overlook. For instance, while I know this about myself, the pandemic brought certain aspects of my persona as a teacher to the forefront and made me appreciate this fact.

It was through this entire experience that I realized that I can offer my colleagues support in their efforts to be more technologically savvy, just as I can also offer the same thing to my students. Through the feedback I have received, it is clear that the training that I led did, in fact, help teachers adapt to the new reality of the pandemic. My skills and knowledge of educational technology proved invaluable for my colleagues. Every educator has something similar. It might not seem obvious at first, but no matter who we are or what our strengths are, maximizing those strengths is important to be the best teacher possible, for both our colleagues and our students.

About the Author

Jonathan Isaacson has been teaching at various levels in Japan for over 15 years. He is interested in technology in the classroom, as well as the use of teacher created podcasts as an extensive listening resource.

Link to presentation on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LN0-GhcYWeA>

