

Developing Teaching Skills through Teaching University Students: Creating a Deep Bond among Students under Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT)

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Teaching remotely under Japan's COVID-19 state of emergency was different and much more challenging than normal face-to-face classes. The beginning of the academic year in spring is usually amazing and makes teachers and students have butterflies in their stomachs because it is their first time meeting each other. However, it was also the first time for me, and for many other educators, to meet with students through a camera. There have been various struggles felt by both teachers and students in online classes, which will be described in the following sections.

Teachers' struggles

During the COVID-19 outbreak, teaching online was challenging as only a few of my colleagues had experience of doing this before. In particular, it was difficult to evaluate students since this required a large amount of time and was tough for many teachers. When attempting to grade students fairly and accurately, there were several obstacles in various cases - specifically, students' technological situations in addition to the possible physical and mental support they required. Therefore, grading seemed to be infeasible or unrealistic because students' attendance and performance was considerably more complicated to evaluate.

Students' struggles

Meanwhile, students were also facing their own struggles regarding technology, with some students being surprisingly unfamiliar with computers. Although university students are generally comfortable with the use of smartphones and apps, when it comes to the use of computers, some did not spend enough time learning how to use them before classes began. For instance, in my case students seemed not to know how to use the Google Drive system and shared folders, and appeared unfamiliar with how to upload files.

Objectives

- To realize appropriate perspectives for overcoming unprecedented hardships as educators.
- To develop online teaching skills through the pandemic.

Practical Implications

In order to achieve the two objectives, two aspects are highlighted as follows. The first aspect is maximizing pair and group talking time and minimizing teacher explanations. The second aspect is developing the relationship between the teacher and students by sharing files in Google Drive.

1. Maximize pair and group talking time and minimize teacher explanations.
 - The main point of this is to provide the students with a safe-zone where they can relax and have a chance to talk with other students comfortably.
 - It is important to allow students to release their potentially accumulated stress from having to be homebound, and not being able to relax sufficiently or meet their friends.
 - To increase pair and group talking time, utilizing breakout sessions and dividing the class into pairs and groups is effective. Two points to implement breakout sessions are described as follows.
 - a. Ideally, more than two-thirds of class time should be assigned to breakout sessions and students should complete a task or have a conversation in English.
 - b. Check whether the opportunity for breakout sessions was sufficient at the end of the semester by administering a course survey or by other means.
2. Develop the relationship between the teacher and students by sharing files in Google Drive.
 - Fundamentally, the fact that a good relationship between the teacher and

students is more important than any other element in education should be upheld by all educators.

- Even under ERT, providing teacher feedback on students' daily reflection sheets is an effective way to develop teacher-student relationships. The procedure is shown as follows.
 - a. Create a daily reflection sheet that helps students reflect on themselves and their learning. The sheet consists of several items such as "What were the important things you learned in this class?", and students are asked to take approximately 20 minutes after every class to complete the reflection.
 - b. Set up an online environment where the teacher and students can share the same folder. For example, creating a shared folder for each student in Google Drive and sharing the reflection sheets with them so that the files in the folder can be edited by both the teacher and students.
 - c. Explain the significance and the rationale of reflecting to the students.
 - d. Have students write their reflection after every class. Then provide sufficient feedback to each student. Preferably, use the same file for the entire semester for efficiency and make the feedback visible for the student to read.
 - e. It might be time-consuming to read students' comments and write feedback to each student as feedback should be made specific and suitable for each of them. In order to make the task slightly more efficient, it is better to keep some comments and recycle them for similar statements that some students write. Although this task may look daunting, it can help educators build a strong relationship with their students.

Reflective Conclusion

This pandemic helped me develop online teaching skills dramatically and more importantly, helped me to once again realize that forming good rapport with students is highly essential in education. This paper is a reminder of the significance of maintaining a strong relationship between the teacher and

students. In addition, it is a reminder that we as educators should believe that we have unlimited potential for self-development under any circumstances.

The frequent use of breakout sessions during online classes is extremely helpful for students to release their stress and feel relieved as they have more opportunities to meet and talk with their peers. When students take classes, it is important that they are both physically and mentally healthy. Having the students write a reflection sheet and providing teacher feedback is effective in online classes to build a good relationship between the teacher and students. Furthermore, it is important that teachers do not limit themselves to the conventional ways of teaching when using new technology and applications. If we as teachers are flexible in our environment and have a positive attitude to keep learning with students, no matter the situation, we can survive, foster student learning, and finally elevate their motivation to higher levels.

About the Author

Omura Takanori is currently teaching English at Soka University in Tokyo, Japan. He has been teaching English for more than ten years. He studied TESOL in International Linguistic Education at Soka University and earned a master's degree. His current research areas are self-esteem, self-affirmation, European Language Portfolio (ELP) and learner autonomy.

Link to presentation on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9FjRFQX5HI>

