Emergency Remote Teaching in Hanoi: Reflections and Opportunities for Growth

Kendal Rolley

Vietnam was one of the first countries to lock down in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the institution I worked for quickly realized that we would need to begin our second semester teaching online. As I witnessed more and more institutions facing the challenges of emergency remote teaching (ERT), I was able to take time to reflect upon how we as an institution had progressed, and how successfully (or not) I had been in applying my core principle as a teacher - creating a student-centered environment with fun and engaging activities, careful staging and one-on-one attention in this new environment.

I am the Professional Development and Quality Assurance Coordinator for a K-12 Bilingual School in Hanoi, Vietnam. That means part of my role is evaluating the methods we use and supporting teachers to develop their practice. Luckily for the teachers at our institution, our students generally have access to both devices and a stable internet connection at home (with the exception of some pesky sharks biting undersea cables).

Ultimately, while I don't feel our three months or so of online teaching had quite the same value as face-to-face instruction, I wasn't quite as ready to discount it entirely as others I saw were doing. While we all struggled to cope with this changed paradigm, there were also opportunities, not just in 'dealing' with ERT but finding new methods to engage students, especially those who may otherwise not thrive in a 'typical' classroom environment.

Objectives

- To investigate Synchronous vs. Asynchronous learning, and the potential benefit of a hybrid model for younger learners to allow for more socialization.
- To consider the importance of balancing tools used, with trade-offs between time spent learning how to use tools vs. student engagement.

Practical Implications

In Vietnam, at the time of writing, we have just commenced another stage of social distancing, and are back teaching online. There are a number of key principles that I have to manage, based on my previous experiences.

1. Lesson planning and 'stepping back':

   I have found Google Apps for Education extremely useful in organizing my lessons. I plan out the stages of my lessons, usually into 6 or 7 stages in a document. Once I am done, I schedule my stages as posts on Google Classroom, grouped together using the 'topic' function (setting the topic as the lesson date). My first task, usually a "random" attendance question scheduled to post slightly before the lesson start time, allows me to sometimes start a debate / conversation on Google Chat, where I have a room set up for my class, and separate rooms if necessary to act in the same way group chats would work in a classroom.

   Students work their way through the lesson stages, and estimated completion times are provided for each stage to allow students to manage their own time (our school policy is that they have until midnight the same day to complete tasks).

   It can feel strange to teach asynchronously, as it often doesn't mirror our experiences in the classroom. Teachers can feel uncomfortable, or a sense of guilt that they are not really "teaching". However, I believe allowing for more independent learning is essential in remote teaching, and even provides opportunities for this that aren't generally present in a classroom environment.

2. Principles of assessing student work:

   One element that caused a great deal of stress for many teachers in my institution during the previous period of ERT was attempting to mark and provide written feedback on every piece of work created by each student. With students submitting work late at times, this became extremely messy and demanding for

teachers. With lines already blurred between work and home life, this led to many late nights of marking. This time, we have decided to select one stage of a lesson, be it a response to a Google Form, Quizizz result, contribution in Google Chat or similar, to mark and provide feedback on. This helps to make it manageable for teachers and ensure we are able to look after our own workload, despite lessons sometimes taking longer to plan.

Setting clear deadlines for students and sticking to them is more important than ever. If students need an extension for work, there can always be allowances made. But if knowing a specific time you are going to be able to sit down and look at student work and gauge assessment, that will also help with time management from a teacher's perspective.

3. Sharing

Online learning can be frustrating, and also have a lot of genuinely funny moments. Our teachers like to screenshot and share funny moments that have happened, which helps lift everyone's spirits. We also still ensure we schedule time for regular departmental meetings so everyone feels a sense of social connection.

Reflective Conclusion

Despite the constant influx of new ideas and tools that can be used in remote teaching, these should be viewed with a skeptical eye and only adopted if the teacher really, genuinely feels they can enhance what is being taught compared with time taken by learners to adapt. In addition, the need for a clear organizational system for lesson planning and delivery is key to reduce stress and time spent. I hope that teachers can use my story to reflect on the benefits of asynchronous learning, despite how alien it can feel to us personally.

About the Author

Kendal Rolley is the Head of Secondary and High School for a K-12 Bilingual School in Hanoi, Vietnam and enjoys reading and writing about student-centered learning, teacher development, and in particular how motivation affects language acquisition. He has a Masters of Applied Linguistics from Monash University and has published in a variety of publications.

Link to presentation on YouTube:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRPE8oWUFS4