

Chapter 50

Using Multimodal Pedagogy to Teach Languages Online: Reimagining Language Teaching With Elementary School Children

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ABSTRACT

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 immediately exposed inequities among students and teachers in terms of technological access and pedagogical skill. Educators responded to this new reality by modifying their teaching and interactions with learners and by seeking opportunities for introspection, reflection, and transformation. The field of teacher education was also affected by the pandemic. This chapter presents the transformation of an in-school face-to-face pre-clinical language teaching and learning experience at the elementary school level into an innovative virtual hands-on online one-on-one language pre-clinical teaching and learning experience. It also includes how teacher candidates (TCs) participating in this program designed and taught highly engaging multimodal virtual lessons, the pros and cons of teaching in this type of setting, and the lessons learned through this experience.

INTRODUCTION

Before fall 2020 began, education settings had to make some important decisions regarding the direction the school year was going to take. Some school districts chose a 100% virtual format from the beginning while others selected hybrid/hyflex/blended programs or face-to-face (FTF) back to school plans. In the past, the concepts of hybrid and blended courses implied that these courses would have a virtual component and a face-to-face element and that interactions between educators and learners took place in both spaces at different times (i.e., not synchronously). These terms were also often connected with the concept of the flipped classroom where the students would learn a concept at home and apply it, with the guidance of peers and instructors, in school. Hybrid and blended classes were construed as “taking

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-7540-9.ch050

full advantage of the benefits of each platform [face-to-face and virtual learning] in order to provide an educational opportunity that can promote student learning better than either platform alone” (Arikan, 2014, p. 1). In hybrid/blended teaching and learning the face-to-face and virtual components were not seen as replacing each other but supporting each other “to create new and more effective learning spaces” (p. 1).

The use of the terms hybrid and blended have now taken a new meaning and together with the term hyflex (hybrid flexible) have become synonymous, at least in the state of Georgia, with simultaneous classroom (FTF) and virtual teaching and learning experiences. In these conflated spaces, educational interactions happen simultaneously between masked teachers and learners (who may also wear face shields) in the physical classroom and online peers (who most of the time opt to have their cameras and microphones turned off). Studies on the impact of hyflex teaching and learning point to benefits and challenges with it (Liu & Rodriguez, 2019; Miller, Sellnow, & Strawser, 2021; Palazzo, 2020). Anecdotal data from in-service and pre-service teachers indicate that for teachers the constant toggling back and forth between the physical classroom and the online environment is exhausting. For learners, especially those connecting virtually, the challenge is that it becomes overwhelming and hard to follow what is happening in class, many times due to technical difficulties with sound and connectivity.

Faced with this situation and based on school and county plans, all educators, from veteran teachers to newly certified teachers and teacher candidates in teacher preparation programs, were challenged to exhibit and practice flexibility and patience with themselves and others. In a very short span of time, they were also tested on their ability to innovate, rethink, and reimagine what they knew about education and how they would handle teaching in a pandemic. The pre-pandemic experience that pre-service teachers counted on for their development and growth was also challenged especially when counties, due to health reasons and protocols, had to close their doors to university students.

The innovative program presented in this chapter came about as a response to the new needs dictated by the global pandemic and was created to be conducted 100% online. These constraints and opportunities led a TESOL and World Language Education professor of a P-5 methods course to need to revise said course, which formerly included a face-to-face, elementary school-based pre-clinical practicum experience. The chapter that follows outlines the ways in which this experience was moved online, affording opportunities for teacher candidates (TCs) to design and implement multimodal, virtual one-on-one language instruction with elementary-aged children between the ages of 7 and 10. With this goal in mind, TCs in the TESOL and World Language teacher preparation program not only participated as learners in online university course instruction where multimodal pedagogy was implemented but they also created, prepared, planned, and delivered virtual one-on-one language instruction to elementary school children between the ages of 7 and 10.

This chapter will add to the current literature of ESOL and World Language teaching by presenting experiences and knowledge gathered by TCs and their instructor in teaching elementary school children in a one-on-one virtual setting.

BACKGROUND

Virtual ESOL and World Language teaching and learning, especially hybrid and flipped classroom experiences with adult learners have been studied and documented widely (Arslan, 2020; Ko & Rossen, 2017; Meskill & Anthony, 2010 & 2015; Prodoehl, 2015; Russell & Murphy-Judy, 2020; Wells & Holland, 2017; Wu, Hsieh, & Yang, 2017). However, the literature is scant in virtual, hybrid and flipped

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