

Article

Reviewing a Performance in Education Activity in a Time of Emergency Remote Teaching

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ABSTRACT

In 2018, I described an Oral Communication course activity at Chukyo University in Chukyo English Linguistics, vol 2. In the 2020 academic year, taught the same activity in the same course, but with one big difference: since 2020 was the year of the COVID-19, the course and the activity were taught online. This paper describes the differences and similarities in the different iterations of the activity. The conclusion is that the Emergency Remote Teaching version of the activity was not so much worse than the face-to-face version (in fact there were some advantages) but was a much slower-paced activity.

2018年、中京大学でのオーラルコミュニケーションコースの活動について、『中京英語学』第2巻で説明しました。2020年度は同じコースで同じ活動を教えました。大きな違いが1つあります。2020年はCOVID-19の年だったため、コースとアクティビティはオンラインで行われました。本論文では、アクティビティのさまざまな反復における相違点と類似点について説明します。結論として、緊急リモートティーチングバージョンのアクティビティは、対面バージョンよりもそれほど悪くはありませんでしたが（実際にはいくつかの利点がありました）、ペースがはるかに遅いアクティビティでした。

Introduction

In 2018, I described an Oral Communication course activity involving media-supported presentations at Chukyo University in Chukyo English Linguistics, vol. 2. In the 2020 academic year I taught the same activity in the same course, but with one big difference: since 2020 was the year of the COVID-19, the course and the activity were taught online. This paper describes the differences and similarities in the different iterations of the activity. It first reviews the 2018 course activity, describes the 2020 course activity, discusses the differences between the two activities, gives background and research findings on Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) during the COVID-19 pandemic, and discusses the impact of the pandemic on the teaching of the activity.

In Previous Years, Specifically 2018

Description of Class and Activity

In the years before and including 2018, I taught the second semester of Chukyo University World Englishes Oral Communication course to two classes of second-year students, the first class having six students and the second class having five students. The course had as two of its goals to promote creativity and to include performance as one of the key activities, as can be seen in the course syllabus. (See Figure 1.)

<p>Course Description David Kluge email: xx@gmail.com Description: This is a course that uses readings, listening passages, and student-created sketchbook pages to improve oral communication. Goals: The student will . . .</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. understand what culture is.2. learn more on how to discuss a topic.3. learn more on how to give a presentation.4. Learn about their language and presentation progress. <p>Activities: The student will . . .</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. read and answer questions on a culture topic.2. listen to a passage and answer questions on a culture topic.3. discuss the culture topic.4. create a sketchbook page for the culture topic.5. give a presentation on the culture topic.6. watch a movie.7. answer questions on the movie.8. discuss the movie.9. take language progress tests10. give presentations at the beginning, middle, and ending of the course to evaluate their presentation skills. <p>Textbook: Identity, Joseph Shaules, Hiroko Tsujioka, and Miyuki Iida, Oxford University Press, 0-19-438574-4</p> <p>Examinations: There will be an oral Midterm and Final Exam based on the sketchbooks.</p> <p>Grades: The grades will be based on Participation 10%, Homework (textbook and movie worksheets) 10%, Sketchbook 30%, Exams 40% (2 X 20%), and Report 10%.</p>
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Figure 1. Syllabus for 2018 second-year university course.

The basis of the course is the textbook, *Identity* (Shaules, Tsujioka, & Iida, 2003). All units in the textbook are four pages long and are constructed in the same way. Figure 2 is a description of Unit 1 on identity (Shaules, Tsujioka, & Iida, pp. 2-5):

Section 1 Find Out:
Activity 1 Read and listen to a short passage (usually a personal narrative).
Activity 2 Answer five content questions.
Activity 3 Speak Out (pair or group work) Asking each other several questions as a discussion.

Section 2 Focus In:
Activity 1 Answer a survey and determine the score for the answers.
Activity 2 Speak Out (pair or group work) Discuss each person's score.
Activity 3 Speak Out (pair or group work) Discuss each person's answers.

Section 3: Listen In
Activity 1 Listening 1: Listen to a short passage.
Activity 2 Answer five content questions (T-F questions).
Activity 3 Listening 2: Listen again to the short passage.
Activity 4 Answer two content questions (short answer questions).
Activity 5 Speak Out (solo work) Answer several questions about yourself.
Activity 6 Speak Out (pair or group work) Ask each other several questions in a discussion.

Section 4: Find Out More
Activity 1 Read and listen to a short passage (usually of an expert).
Activity 2 Answer five content questions.
Activity 3 Speak Out (solo work) Answer several questions about the topic.
Activity 4 Speak Out (pair or group work) Compare your answers to Activity 3 as a discussion.

Section 5: Wrap Up Activity
Activity 1 Prepare a report on the topic.

Figure 2. Outline of activities in unit 1 of Identity.

Schedule of Classes

Generally, the course followed the textbook with each four-page unit taught over two consecutive class meetings, using only half the class time on the textbook unit each class meeting. The first class meeting of the unit would start out by ending the previous unit and doing the unit presentation, then starting the new unit by doing the textbook activities and giving the assignment for the unit presentation to be performed in the next class meeting. In the 15-week semester, 10 of the 12 units in the textbook would be covered in one semester.

The Presentation Activity

The textbook would cover one topic of intercultural communication. The activity was for the students to take the topic of the unit and apply it to their lives. Students were asked to be specific and give examples.

On one A3-size sketchbook page, they would create a collage using photos, illustrations, words, design patterns, and colors to create a visual aid to their presentation. They would set their sketchbook on an easel provided atop the teacher's lectern, and with the help of a pointer stick, would point to the elements of their collage as they talked about it in a well-organized presentation, containing a clear beginning, middle, and end, using a few necessary presentation techniques such as eye-contact, facial expressions, gestures, movement, and vocal variety to perform their presentation in front of the whole class. The teacher would evaluate the presentation while watching it being performed.

Before the presentation, the presenter would give his or her smartphone to a member in the audience to video record the presentation. Presenters would look at the video on their own smartphone to evaluate the presentation and submit the written evaluation to the teacher. The teacher at first asked the students to email the video to him, but after too many problems with overlarge video files, this part was suspended so that the teacher did not have a video record of the presentation. Students in the audience were not asked to evaluate the student final presentations as it was difficult for them to do so while preparing for their own presentation, although they were able to give constructive advice during rehearsals.

Discussion of the Activity

The activity was quite satisfactory for the students based on end-of-the semester evaluations. Students indicated that they found the activity useful and interesting. For the teacher, with the exception of not having a video recording to watch repeatedly for grading purpose and the students in the audience not doing peer evaluations, the activity was extremely satisfying; so much so that I chose to spotlight the activity in the Chukyo University in-house publication.

This Same Course and Activity in 2020

The 2020 version of the course used the same textbook, *Identity*, that was sent to the students by the university bookstore, but rather than being taught face-to-face, the course was taught online synchronously (in real time) using the following tools:

1. Gmail for communicating with students
2. Google Sites to create a website indicating the material to be covered with descriptions and links to the homework
3. Google Forms to create quizzes and surveys
4. Flipgrid to provide a trouble-free way to record, upload, view, and comment on video presentations

5. Zoom to interact with students during class time. Zoom was also used to distribute handouts, URLs, and video links, and to screenshare print materials and videos.

Because of the nature of teaching online, with both student and teacher new to the experience, I decided to take much more time to teach the class. Instead of teaching it for one semester, I decided to teach it for an entire year. Each unit was covered over four to five class meetings, meaning that only 3 to 4 units were covered in a semester. The additional class time was used for extra discussion time of the textbook discussion activities and supplemental material on the topic that the teacher introduced. Also, extra time was given on rehearsal and peer review of the presentations. Zoom made it easy for students to share their presentations with other students in Breakout Rooms. It also made it easy for them to video record their PowerPoint presentations and include themselves in the video. Flipgrid made it extremely easy for students to upload the videos, and allowed themselves, other students, and the teacher to view, evaluate, and comment on presentations. Zoom and Flipgrid added value to the original way of presentation.

Discussion of the Experience

I appreciated using the new Internet apps as a chance to upgrade my teaching abilities. Students and the teacher were generally appreciative of the course activities. However, the pace and the virtual experience brought mixed blessings. The slower pace allowed deeper investigation and discussion of each topic, but also there was more "dead" time in each class meeting because the app did not allow the teacher to easily monitor when students were finished with micro-tasks such as answering listening comprehension questions with a partner or having short discussions. Zoom's monitor layout of the small classes meant that each student "sat" in the front row, but similar to watching a movie created with computer graphics, the experience was almost real, but within the word "almost" lies the essence of human perception of reality and existence. One example of this phenomenon that I experienced was a student was talking about gaining weight, and in his discussion, he casually mentioned he was 185 centimeters tall. This took me aback because subconsciously I was assuming that all the students were my height (167 cm), an illogical conclusion but a human one in that everyone looked to be the same size, especially since they were "standing" next to each other on my monitor and looked to be the same size as me. This is how we view the world in our analog senses through comparison with self and known objects. One other disadvantage to this system was the changeover from original, creative, handmade sketchbook pages to the more professional but generic PowerPoint presentations. These were my thoughts, but what does research on Emergency Remote Teaching during COVID-19 reveal?

Research on the Effect of COVID-19 on ERT

Online education has been around for a long time and has been extensively studied:

Online education, including online teaching and learning, has been studied for decades. Numerous research studies, theories, models, standards, and evaluation criteria focus on quality online learning, online teaching, and online course design. What we know from research is that effective online learning results from careful instructional design and planning, using a systematic model for design and development. (Branch & Dousay, 2015; Hodges et al., 2020)

However, when COVID-19 chased teachers and students out of the classrooms and to seats in front their computer monitors, we all knew this was not ■effective online learning [resulting] from careful instructional design and planning, using a systematic model for design and development■ (Hodges, et al.). Marshall, Shannon, and Love (2020, p. 48) conducted research on the present ERT situation. Out of a total of 328 teachers, 92.4% had never taught online before. For many if not most teachers, this was a mad rush, throwing away most of the activities in our ■bag of tricks■ as well as our well-designed syllabuses. What we were thrown into was not online learning but Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT). ERT, defined as ■a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances■ (Hodges et al., 2020) is putting the case mildly. Marshall, Shannon, and Love (2020) describe the problems due to ERT this way: ■those who are new to it tend to report having to deal with increased workloads and a variety of challenges related to using the technology, communicating with students, organizing synchronous sessions, and measuring student outcomes■ (Choi & Park, 2006; Conceicao, 2006 in Marshall, Shannon, & Love, 2020). How does this description fit with my experience?

- ✓ Having to deal with increased workloads
- ✓ Having to deal with a variety of challenges related to using the technology
- ✓ Communicating with students
- ✓ Organizing synchronous sessions
- ✓ Measuring student outcomes

Jackpot! 100% correlation. Add to the list confused and confusing messages from the institution and it makes a mess. However, after initial panic and working with friendly colleagues, together we navigated the online apps we needed and spent sleepless days and nights putting our whole course online under harsh deadlines. We coped, but not without stress which led to health problems. Milman (2020) gave wise advice on not only how to cope but also how to prepare for the next time we need to use ERT (God forbid!) and here are her words and shortened explanations:

1. Communicate frequently and honestly with teachers, students, and administration.

2. Prioritize needs.
3. Be flexible and creative.
4. Keep it simple.
5. Establish routines and schedules.
6. Collaborate!
7. Engage the whole school community in decision-making.
8. Develop contingency plans.
9. Practice, model, and promote well-being.
10. Pause, listen, reflect, and learn.

This advice will be invaluable when next we have to go through ERT. All of the research also helped me to understand the situation that I have experienced and has ameliorated the pain and regrets.

Conclusion

Generally, although starting in panic, the results of ERT have been somewhat satisfying but came at the expense of much time, effort, and hair-pulling irritation. Class cohesion was a problem that took up a lot of time and effort to address. Because of the difficulties, I felt it was fine to take more time to delve deeper into topics and felt that this year we covered topics deeper than before deeper in terms of exploring the facts of the topic and deeper in exploring the students' attitudes toward the topics. The presentations showed this deeper study in that they were more detailed. The presentations were also improved through increased rehearsal times and feedback from self and peers.

It is easy to see that Milman's words are good advice after the rollercoaster ride of 2020 is over, but at least it is good to know that we have learned how to approach the next bout of ERT. It is good to know that I was not unique in my problems with ERT and that many others shared the frustrations, had to make the same concessions to necessity regarding our professional standards. And it was good to know that through everything, I was still able to provide good education.

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