

from their hearts of how this project instilled a love of poetry in them and strengthened their English. They thanked Charmian for the opportunity she offered them.

Michele Ben presented her reading project. Michelle took a classic reader, Magic School House and used the materials already available. She then explained how she added more activities that not only kept her students interested and engaged but also required them to use all four skills in English.

Taliah Nathanson shared the program Narrative 4 – echoing the PBL learning approach as well as making a personal connection. “We change the world one story at a time.” Micki Zaristky allowed her participants to participate in a Nearpod lesson, which is exactly what Marjorie suggested, Step 1 - push ourselves to learn something different new. Step 2 – do something different.

Dr. Ophir Natan presented the basics of how to facilitate PBL – something we can do at all levels, elementary through college. This type of activity is a great way to sum up today’s focus – empowering our students.

We ended the day with an uplifting and motivating talk by Beatrix Price. She reminded us of the importance of connecting not only with our students, but with ourselves as professionals and as people. She spoke about how important it is for us to nurture ourselves so that we will have the inner strength and stamina in order to do our work and be there for our students. She left us with many ideas and food for thought.

We said goodbye at the end of the day, inspired and ready to move forward with a medley of new ideas and formats that can be used in physical or virtual classrooms.

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Challenges and Solutions

SMART PLATFORMS FOR DISTANT TEACHING KIDS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

by Julia Koifman (jkoifman@yandex.ru)

Abstract

Covid-19 pandemic has caused a real revolution in education. In spring 2020 everything moved onto online communication, for instance work meetings, lectures and regular lessons. Besides, remedial teachers had to teach kids with learning disabilities (LD) online. Some of the most common LDs include dyslexia, expressive language disorder, reading processing disability, and attention deficit disorder. Thus, teachers had to find all the possible solutions to convert their teaching to remote online options. According to research, distant learning with the help of online boards, such as Zoom, Miro, Wakelet, Socrative and others, is supposed to catch students’ attention and make them interested and motivated (Newton 2020). They provide teachers and their students with a wide range of eye-catching materials, such as highlighted pieces of text, pictures, and videos which enhance their spelling, general understanding of the material and enlarge their passive and active vocabulary. Besides, online lessons can enhance the process of learning English and develop such important skills as collaboration and leadership.

Key words: online teaching, learning disabilities, motivation, collaboration.

Why don’t LD students want to study online?

“Teaching an online course requires different methods from the traditional classroom, so it’s important that teachers adapt or develop their skills to the online learning environment” (Cooper 2016). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic schools in many countries of the world had to conduct lessons online. Many kids and their parents do not accept this idea and complain that it does not work well. There are some reasons why school children refuse to study online.

One of the most widespread beliefs about teaching students online is lack of concentration. Parents think that children, especially the LD ones, often get bored because they are very distractible and cannot focus on front of the screen. Many students have missed a lot of lessons just because they “have forgotten” or just “don’t have enough strength” to

study. Besides, they often complain that poor internet connection does not enable them to focus on the lesson. Sadly, all the forenamed circumstances are often true.

No doubt that even in the regular classrooms LD students often misunderstand tasks, make a lot of mistakes, give irrelevant or inappropriate answers or refuse to answer in order to avoid mistakes. Moreover, they often miss deadlines and submit their works, such as book reports and projects too late. Nevertheless, in the right hands, the process of teaching online can be a great opportunity to learn how to cooperate with their peers and teachers. "Instructors can raise concerns about a student's performance and recommend that the student talk with his or her advisor, at which point the student may make his or her learning" (Kelly 2020). Thus, teachers should provide their students individual consultations during their individual tutorial sessions in their regular timetable, so that they will discuss what disturbs them to study better and find the solution.

If you see that the instructional materials present a barrier to student learning, you must adapt the materials to allow students greater access to the online information to be taught. According to Lenz and Shumaker, these adaptations may involve changing the content of the materials (the nature or amount of information to be learned) or changing the format of the materials (the way information is presented to the learner). Thus, in the first case, if you still use traditional textbooks and exercise books, you can reduce the quantity of exercises to give during the lesson and devote more time for demonstration the material with the help of visual tools on the smart boards, such as Miro and Wakelet. Since LD students have a right for some extra time, they can do two exercises instead of three or four. In the second case, changing the format of the materials can be done in accordance to the level of the learners and the difficulties they face. You can create your own materials using smart boards, so that they will do the tasks online rather than in their textbooks or exercise books.

According to O'Hanlon, one of the main secrets of teaching LD students online is using "combined components of direct instruction (teacher directed lecture, discussion, learning from books) with components of strategy instruction (teaching ways to learn and study skills)". The main components of this instructional model include:

- Sequencing
- Drill-repetition-practice
- Segmentation
- Directed questioning and responses
- Control of task difficulty
- Use of technology
- Teacher-modeled problem solving
- Small-group instruction
- Strategy cues

The research claims that instructions and questions should be short and clear, so that you will not lose your students. Moreover, many LD students "have strengths in spatial or visual modes of conceptualization and that visual displays of information, such as graphic organizers, may help these students to organize and recall verbal information, enhancing their reading comprehension" (Kim et al. 2004, 106). I have also noticed a substantial effect of illustrations and other audio-visual online materials on reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities. In order to make non-readers read and develop their cognitive skills I download such materials on Oxford Owl Reading Books and Free eBook Library which are suitable for Zoom, Miro and Google Classroom.

Problem solving for LD students in the online classroom

No child left behind! Education leaders are tackling the unexpected challenge of providing distance learning. According to C. Seale, "Distance learning has the strategic advantage of making it easier in some cases for teachers to pinpoint specific academic struggles." Therefore, due to the modern smart boards, teachers can make their lessons effective and help their students to complete the school program in accordance to the national curriculum. In Israel and many other countries, the national curriculum requires developing students' listening skills, enlarging their vocabulary, improving their spelling and grammar, developing their writing skills and developing critical thinking. For successful online learning teachers need to provide students with a task that should be interesting, success-orientating and require

students to interact with each other. By sharing the same screen content, such as a virtual textbook, picture, video or chart, enable your students to see exactly what they are supposed to do. Avoid too complicated online instructions that might cause confusion, misunderstanding and leaving the virtual classroom. Besides, the lesson must be built on the previous material they have learnt recently and now they are ready to learn something new.

In order to prevent difficult situations, you need to be creative. As Einstein once said, “Creativity is intelligence having fun”, it is an important aspect of teaching. Being a creative teacher means that you need to be an actor, a singer or an artist in order to entertain your students. It means that you need to “solve problems, think up new ideas and have insightful “eureka” moments” (Brann 2017). For instance, if your students get bored you should offer them a game, a song or a film that contain vocabulary, grammar or a topic that your students are learning currently. Therefore, you should have 2-3 lesson plans in store. Besides, you can play a piece of background music to catch their attention, to help them focus while working in pairs or groups or as a sign that it is time to start or stop the activity.

If you teach in elementary school, you can play a “switch on – switch off” game which has become very popular on Zoom. Thus, you can offer them to switch off their cameras and ask questions, such as: “Who has a cat or a dog at home? Switch on your cameras if you have a dog. Great! Now I want you to switch on your cameras if you have a cat”. Then ask them to comment, for example, “Dan has a cat and Jane has a dog. But Mary doesn’t have any pets”. For junior high and high school students you can prepare the similar game based on more complicated questions, including English Literature. Creative teaching is also important because in this way we can help our students to believe in themselves and to be more confident in learning. (Smith 2017).

Studying and developing important skills

No doubt that teachers who work to help students achieve their goals may struggle in the distance learning environment. But there are countless apps that can help educators gather the necessary information in a distance learning environment. “To define success, presume that every single student has the necessary support to participate in distance learning.” (Seale 2020). Online teaching supposes not only academic achievement but learning all the necessary skills of the 21st century, such as:

- active learning and learning strategies
- creativity
- critical thinking and analysis
- collaboration
- leadership and social influence
- debate and negotiation

Schools today provide a lot of material that can be found online and might be necessary for their projects and homework. Step by step the ability to choose and analyze leads to academic achievement. So, students can set their own academic goals for distance learning and follow them in their own pace. At the first glance it seems difficult to learn such skills online but educators can help them with clear instructions and giving them tasks that must be submitted before the deadline.

As it was mentioned above, creativity is very important not only for teaching, but for studying as well. In the online classroom it increases motivation, empowers learners and helps them to develop a sense of excitement and self-esteem. You can encourage your students to create their own activities and share them on such smart boards as Miro, Google Classroom or Socrative, depending on what you choose for them. Teaching is much less important than focusing on whether and how students are learning and creating tasks themselves (Seale 2020). Making their own activities based on the material that has been learning currently is not only a great way for students to create innovative products using technology but also a powerful tool to increase their motivation, creativity and autonomy. Many students are good at technology and may be interested in preparing their own materials and sharing them with their classmates. In this way, they will get an opportunity to express themselves.

Many kids like making their own videos and sharing them with their classmates. They can do it individually or in groups. Other groups can create their own materials, for example, quizzes, crosswords, word games and other appropriate materials for the class smart board. Such online activities make lessons different from the traditional

ones in the real classroom and with textbooks and notebooks. During the lesson you can divide the class into virtual groups and they can exchange their materials with other groups. Later they can give classroom presentations and evaluate each other's materials and performance. In this way they develop the skills of critical thinking and analysis. "Asking students to analyze and interpret primary materials and timely content can boost their critical thinking and engagement" (Ralph 2020)

Also, in this way they learn the skill of collaboration. While in a real classroom, students meet in-person, during online classes, teachers and students need additional resources to collaborate virtually. M. Hart claims that for the virtual classroom teachers need to use the following tools in order to build a collaborative online learning environment:

- Video Conferencing
- Lesson Recording and Video Creation Tools
- Learning Management System (LMS)
- Cloud-Storage Tools
- Exam and Assessment Software
- Scheduling Platform
- Library Resources

In many countries, there is a strong tradition of the authoritarian role of the teacher and the transmission of information from the teacher to the student and most of the lessons are teacher-centered. Nevertheless, nowadays in Israel EFL lessons are student-centered and it is acceptable to challenge or criticize the views of teachers. Israeli culture has a strong oral tradition, based on story-telling, rather than on direct instruction. Moreover, Israeli EFL teachers started teaching the subject of debate and diplomacy some years ago and their students learn the skills of leadership which enables them to conduct negotiations.

Conclusion

To sum up, we can teach schoolchildren of all ages and levels online. We can make the process of teaching and learning effective if we keep a good connection with our class and teach them the skills of collaboration and self-discipline. Some teachers claim that there is no or very little difference between online collaborative learning and well-conducted traditional classroom. Others think that it is still challenging to catch their attention and to keep them in front of the screens for 45 minutes, especially when you teach kids in elementary school or LD ones in junior high and high school.

According to the research, very weak students need drills when you teach them pronunciation, vocabulary and spelling, which can be taught both in the regular classroom and online. They also need eye-catching materials and games on virtual smart boards in order to keep them interested and motivated.

If LD students need more time to complete the tasks, you can reduce the amount of material, so that they will understand it better and do the rest of the tasks later, for instance, as homework. Therefore, you should give them tasks with self-checking options and enable them to work in pairs or small groups on Zoom. Teamwork has traditionally played a critical role in traditional schools. During this time, while many teachers and students find themselves physically isolated, their collaborative work with one another may be more important now than ever and it really motivates them to study together.

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NOW I KNOW WHAT'S WRONG! THERE'S NO BODY IN THE ZOOM ROOM

by Michelle (Weiner) Kinsbursky (kins@ohalo.ac.il)

Pre-Corona, you may have been the kind of teacher who walked around the room as you taught, stopping occasionally at a student's desk so you could look directly into his or her eyes, or you were a teacher who stood enthusiastically at the board or sat alert at the desk carefully choosing your words, gaining their attention from your clear and direct manner. You may be one who used your voice to accentuate certain points or flailed your arms about to get across the meaning of a word. You were a body in motion. Your students (back in the classroom) were also bodies in motion who may have liked leaning forward in their chair to listen carefully or slouched back comfortably while attending in that daydreaming student-sort-of-way. They even enjoyed the getting up, the moving around, while participating in some group activity. Munro argues, "To be human implies to be a continuous and constant bodied being situated within an environment" (2018, p. 5). We are not only minds when teaching-learning, we bring our bodies into the classroom.

It was Descartes whose philosophy in 17th century set in motion a perception of learning as a separation of mind and body, ultimately leading to the debate over how one gains knowledge. Rationalism is knowledge, which is acquired through reason, a purely cognitive endeavor; while empiricism describes knowledge as experienced through our bodily senses (Macedonia, 2019). We see this division played out even more recently with linguist, Noam Chomsky, who saw the working of language as operating in the mind separated from the body (Macedonia, 2019). Yet as teachers, we are well aware of how embodied learning and especially second language learning involves using our bodies as a tool to transmit knowledge.

One of the earliest second language learning approaches to take the body into consideration was the TPR approach (Total Physical Response). In fact, learners were not even expected to speak when first learning, it was all about using the body. When engaging language learners today, it is a given that we use our own body and encourage our students to use theirs to understand the language. The most obvious picture that comes to mind is a classroom full of young learners enthusiastically moving about, but not only at this level: "The body – via action and gesture – is a powerful tool to understand and to learn" (Macedonia, 2019, p. 6).