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Re-imagining Spaces and Materials in the English for Academic Purposes Foundation Classroom

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The return to in-person teaching has triggered this reflective account based on lessons learned during the Covid-19 pandemic. In this practitioners' article, we reflect on our own approach to incorporating an online platform to present learners' materials. We move away from the typical PowerPoint and handout combination and explore a different way to engage our learners. We start by introducing our content followed by the pedagogical underpinnings informing our materials design. We then move on to analyse how this pedagogical innovation transformed our classroom space. This reflective piece concludes with recommendations for practice to rethink our learning and teaching spaces in the English for Academic Purposes Classroom.

Introduction

Before the Covid-19 crisis forced all teaching to be moved online (Zawacki-Richter, 2020) technology had already been incorporated into various aspects of education, attracting researchers' interest in how it can successfully be used to enhance teaching and learning (Facer & Sandford, 2010). The use of technology had also impacted on course delivery in higher education (Means *et al*., 2014). Crucially, Means *et al*. (2014) understand a course to be blended when at least 21% of the whole course is delivered in person, whereas a course with 80% of the sessions taking place online would be considered to be a fully online course. However, these boundaries became blurred for higher education institutions in the UK with the sudden move to online learning (OL) triggered by the Covid-19 outbreak. This shift is known as 'emergency remote teaching' (ERT) (Hodges *et al*., 2020). This recently coined term aims to establish a clear difference between the extensive research and practice tradition of OL and the teaching and learning experience triggered by the pandemic (Hodges *et al*., 2020). Kerres (2020, as cited in Zawacki-Richter, 2020, p.1), explains how this transition took place having 'no managerial strategies, no teacher training, no debates on technological design or politics, no arguments about the pros and cons – we just do it.' These circumstances may be familiar to other practitioners in the move to ERT. As institutions, practitioners, and learners navigate the return to the

classroom, modes of delivery are shifting within HE institutions, including those in the UK, embracing more blended or fully online provision.

In addition, current publications are offering an insight into the type of teaching and learning that took place during the pandemic while simultaneously moving the conversation forward, inviting researchers and practitioners to reflect and act on the lessons learned during the ERT period (see, for instance, JAAAP's (2021) special issue 'Transitions to Remote and Blended Learning'). Therefore, this topical article aims to contribute to the current conversation by analysing how two EAP practitioners reimagined the handout in the foundation classroom space to meet the learners' and course's needs while reclaiming the physical classroom space and harnessing the power of OL. Specifically, it aims to show how to integrate OL tools in order to bring high order thinking skills tasks into our classroom while maintaining constructive alignment (Biggs, 2003), thus creating the space for students and teachers to co-construct knowledge and further engage in complex tasks (Vygotsky, 1978) while developing the necessary skills to succeed in their assignments. This practitioners' reflective piece starts by introducing our context, along with the challenges that the uncertain classroom return created. It then moves to present our approach to integrating OL tools into the classroom space, maintaining constructive alignment. It concludes with a reflection on our experience while suggesting specific guidance for re-imagining the spaces and materials in the foundation classroom space.

Understanding Our Challenges in Context

As Windsor and Park (2014) explain the goal of foundation programmes is to prepare learners for the academic language and information management demands of HE (Windsor & Park, 2014). Our Foundation Programme is broadly divided by subject specialism, in practical terms, this results in a diverse classroom with students aiming to enrol in future degrees classified as Science and Medicine. Our learners mostly come from East Asia and Eastern Europe, and we also have learners from Latin America. Learners in the Science and Medicine Programmes study their foundation courses for one academic year, whereas learners in the Extended Medicine Programme study for two academic years or three semesters depending on their previous qualifications. For the module presented in this paper, they attend three hours of EAP sessions a week to enhance their academic reading, writing and research skills. They also have EAP modules covering speaking and listening communicative skills in academic environments, and critical thinking. Depending on their pathway, learners take two or three academic modules related to their discipline.

Therefore, although our medicine cohort is relatively self-contained, the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) sessions are shared with these Science students whose target degrees range from Psychology to Computer Science. This means that the nature of our sessions focuses on transferable skills and general academic practice, in line with a more English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) approach to teaching and learning. As the tension between EGAP and English for Specific Purposes (ESAP) provision is beyond the scope of this reflection, we will simply state that the reality of our classroom dictates the general academic nature of our materials and assessments while aligning with the EAP principles of authenticity, non-triviality, reality control, and tolerance of error (Philips (1981, cited in Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p.183). Balancing these requirements while putting the learners' at the centre of our pedagogical approach requires careful planning and scope for differentiation – a situation that may resonate with colleagues involved in foundation programmes.

Creating an Effective Classroom Space: Underpinning Pedagogical Principles

As highlighted, foundation programmes are the stepping stone into learners' higher education journeys, aiming to help them navigate their HE studies (Windsor & Park, 2014). An important element to achieve this aim lies in the student's ability to both understand and create through their target community of practice discourse. Thus, EAP sessions play a major role in allowing students to engage in their prospective disciplinary discourse. The key theoretical principles underpinning our course's design are EAP's eclectic nature (Watson Todd, 2003) and the student-centred nature of EAP. Therefore, designing a course that responded to our students' needs, context, and reality while benefiting from strong pedagogical theories related to teaching and learning allowed us to revise the classroom space, seamlessly integrating the virtual and physical realms. To achieve this, constructive alignment (Biggs, 2003) constituted the foundation of our course. A close relationship linking course learning outcomes, activities and assessments was essential to ensure a coherent and cohesive approach to the course design.

To translate constructive alignment into practice, we also referred to the revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson *et al*., 2001) which allowed us to effectively distribute these tasks and prepare the students for their assessments while meeting the course aims. Specifically, the revised Bloom's taxonomy facilitated identifying low order thinking skills tasks (LOTs) to be used primarily as self-study materials and the high order thinking skills tasks (HOTs) to be mostly completed in the classroom. However, we kept a mixture of LOTs and HOTs in the sessions to allow students to complete both types of tasks with the support of their peers and teachers. By allowing learners the opportunity to complete the tasks with the support of their peers and guidance of tutors, our practice aligns with social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978). One way in which this co-construction of knowledge was explicitly made visible to students was by encouraging them to share linguistic characteristics they had noticed while engaging with their own disciplinary texts. By doing so, we maximised the heterogeneous nature of our student cohort while allowing them to engage with authentic texts from their disciplines. Students taking different content subjects within the broader field of science can help fill in gaps in one another's knowledge. It has been argued that having 'a guide on the side' may result in the knowledge itself being invisible, inspiring the term 'meddler in the middle' (Kirk and King 2022, p.3). This role combines an effective use of direct and indirect instruction. Arguably, this may simply refer to a perceived dichotomy where 'sage on the stage' and 'guide on the side' (King, 1993, p.33) are presented at opposite ends of the teaching spectrum. Considering the new developments in understanding how learning occurs (Oakley *et al*., 2021), we adopted a constructivist approach with specific direct instruction when needed while allowing students to share their own expertise as budding academics (King and Kirk, 2022).

To promote engagement with the task, self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2002) served as the guiding theoretical framework to inform the development of materials. SDT advocates for a conversational method where personality integration and psychological development are viewed as constantly evolving potentials that depend on specific external circumstances (Ryan and Deci, 2002). Essentially, SDT strives to merge fundamental perspectives in psychology by presenting a conception of the self that is both intrinsic and dynamic. SDT is divided into four sub-theories addressing various motivational aspects. We specifically applied cognitive evaluation theory (CET) (Ryan and Deci, 2002) to determine the design principles. This is because CET focuses specifically on contextual elements and how they relate to motivation. CET postulates that three essential psychological needs must be addressed in order to foster intrinsic motivation:

- Competence, linked to the need to feel that successful engagement with tasks is possible.
- Autonomy, stating the need to engage with a task out of the student's own will.
- Relatedness, relating to the need to communicate and collaborate with others when completing tasks.

Crucially for our contexts, these needs are presented as 'universal' (Ryan and Deci, 2002). In fact studies such as Sørebø *et al*. (2009), Noels *et al*. (2000) or Lou *et al*. (2017, p. 211) show how SDT has informed educational research in a wide range of contexts. Thus this motivational framework seems suitable for our international cohort. In educational settings, intrinsic motivation is believed to foster learning, whereas extrinsic motivation may hinder it (Ryan and Deci, 2002). As not all tasks, or modules, will be intrinsically motivating for all our students during their formal educational journey, CET (Ryan & Deci, 2002) offers practitioners a guiding framework to enhance intrinsic motivation, thus having a positive impact on learners.

This section has unpicked the pedagogical principles that informed the design of our course. A wide range of theories and principles informed our approach. Crucially, we aim to foster a motivating learning environment that allows students to engage with content in a meaningful and scaffolded manner while benefitting from working with peers and practitioners. This is to allow learners to develop the foundational transferable and specific linguistic and academic skills to embark on their undergraduate studies.

Transforming the Classroom Space: Enacting Pedagogical Principles.

As the materials were originally designed to be student-centred and meet the course aims, the activities needed to be translated into the OL environment while maintaining their educational objectives. The commercial platform Articulate 360, specifically Rise, was identified as the optimal vehicle with which to accomplish this. This is because Rise had already shown its efficacy for OL self-study tasks, and our approach aimed to bring the advantages of OL into the classroom space. The use of Rise as a platform for delivery allowed for a further re-imagining of the materials with more emphasis on the use of technology in the classroom. By digitising the classroom, students are developing their technological skills, which will foster the development of transferable skills, beneficial for their future studies and careers. Rise also allows for smoothly integrating flipped tasks within our sessions, in line with Brinks-Lockwood's (2014) guidance, for implementing flipped learning (FL) in the ESL classroom. The use of Rise also helped create a more flexible classroom environment. This has led to a module that focuses much more on group and pair work, further embedding the development of transferrable skills required for academic study and beyond. Figure 1 shows an example of an in-class collaborative task which allows students to compare their answers in preparation for the formative assignment. This task builds on students' preparation before the class. In line with the principles of FL, this homework activity is a LOTS task. Crucially, students are also presented with a model. This allows students to evaluate their production against the standard that they are expected to meet in their assessment, ensuring that the collaborative work clearly aligns with the assignment in line with the principles of constructive alignment (Biggs, 2003).

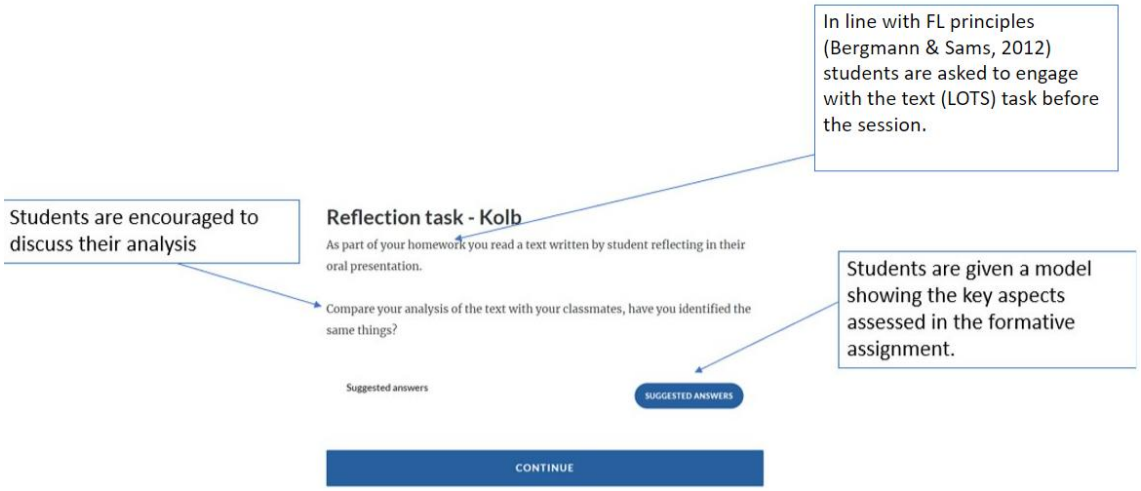

Figure 1. In-class task showing how collaborative discussion was fostered along with the implementation of FL and presentation of model answers.

It has been highlighted how elements of FL allow for an effective distribution of the tasks; however, our approach would not be considered entirely flipped as LOTS were not entirely relegated out of the classroom space and HOTS were not entirely embraced within the classroom (Villegas, 2022). Our proposed mixing of class work and self-study elements using Rise was undertaken to appear more engaging to the students, giving the materials a more varied presence and moving away from what was done previously on many of the International Foundation Programmes on offer at our institution. It also allowed us to monitor engagement and completion of both homework and in-class activities. By creating all our handouts through interactive software, we could easily monitor who was completing the activities in class, when the revision was taking place, and which students were failing to engage with the materials. Figure 2 shows the anonymised information generated by the software accessible to both practitioners.

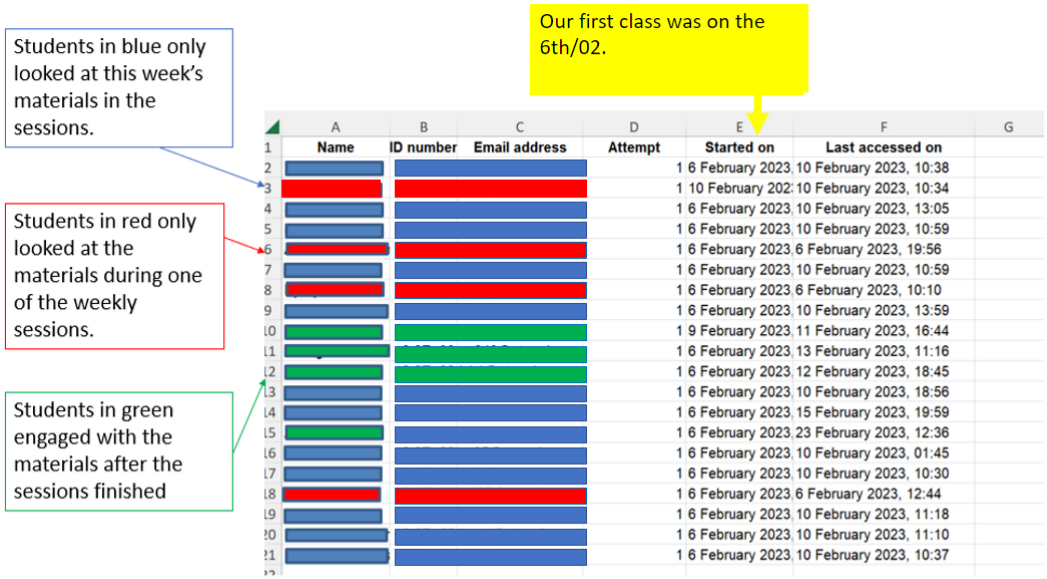

Figure 2. Procedural Engagement Information Generated by the Software.

These changes also allowed for the utilisation of the skills and experiences learnt by teachers and developed during Covid-19. The assessment was revised to reflect the new post-pandemic reality while including the necessary reflective skills for the medical and scientific career development of the students. Similarly, we incorporated elements of FL and instructional design which were developed to help us better navigate the ERT period. We sought to maintain interactive and engaging tasks through the online medium. To foster intrinsic motivation, CET was adopted (Ryan & Deci, 2002).

In terms of competence, the tasks were accessible to students from a cognitive level as they had been carefully designed to ensure the LOs were met while suitably preparing students to successfully engage with the formative and summative assessment. The move to digitised materials respected the constructive alignment (Biggs, 2003) underpinning the tasks proposed. Students were also guided on the technical aspects of navigating the software. One of the perceptions related to the use of technology in HE is the idea that learners intuitively know how to use technology and software, but this is not necessarily the case. This is particularly crucial in our diverse contexts, as students have had very different learning trajectories and experiences. Ensuring equal understanding of the technology implemented in the classroom is at the heart of inclusivity and of the successful implementation of our hybrid approach to materials. This was facilitated by the fact that the OL platform hosting the materials was used both in and outside the session, thus allowing students to raise issues and queries. It also contributed to monitoring technological competence as we could see students navigating the tasks.

To foster autonomy, we explicitly addressed the aims of each session as well as how the activities fed into their constructively aligned assessment (Biggs, 2003). Figures 3 and 4 show how the relationship connecting learning aims, tasks, and assessments was openly addressed in the classroom, helping students understand the connections underpinning this course. In line with good online design practice, the materials are personalised, and the tutor's presence is reinforced with the use of images and friendly language thus fostering relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2002).

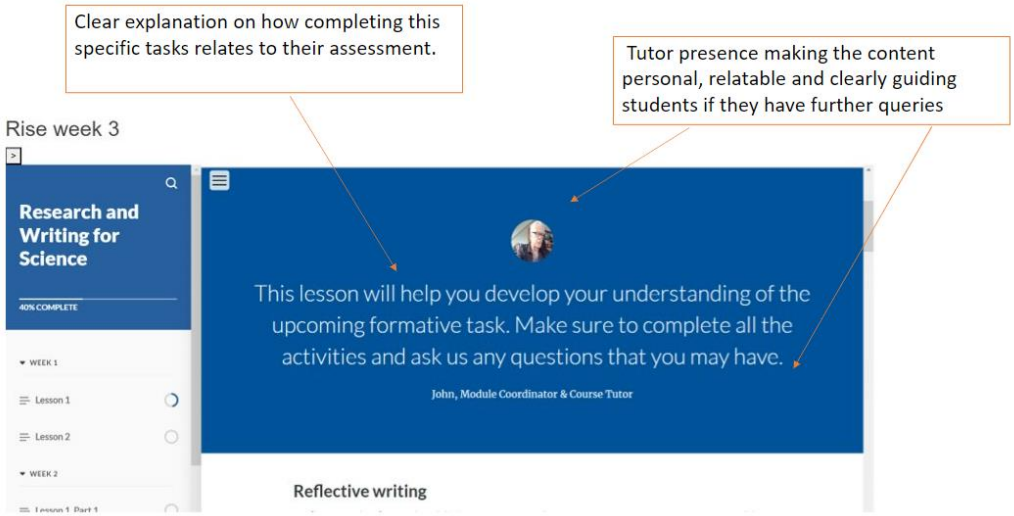

Figure 3. Screenshot shows the explicit relation between these tasks and the assessment.

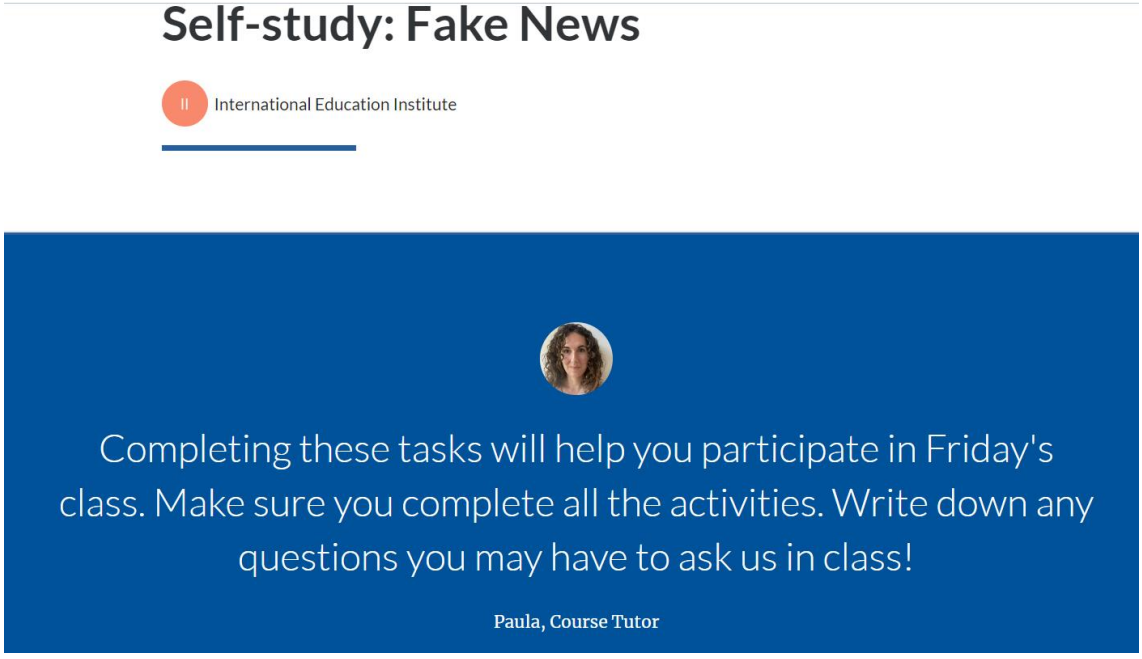

Figure 4. Screenshot shows the explicit relation between these tasks and the live in-person sessions.

By moving away from traditional paper handouts and slides we were able to include different mediums in our sessions; in terms of students' receptive skills, for instance by embedding relevant videos, and productive skills by embedding online collaborative documents facilitating peer writing. The technology, as the medium of presentation, was used to maximise the student-centred core of the materials.

We provided feedback automatically for the online LOTs tasks. Originally, this was an approach taken for self-study materials during ERT. However, we decided to keep the feedback for our in-class activities that addressed the LOTS tasks (Figure 5).

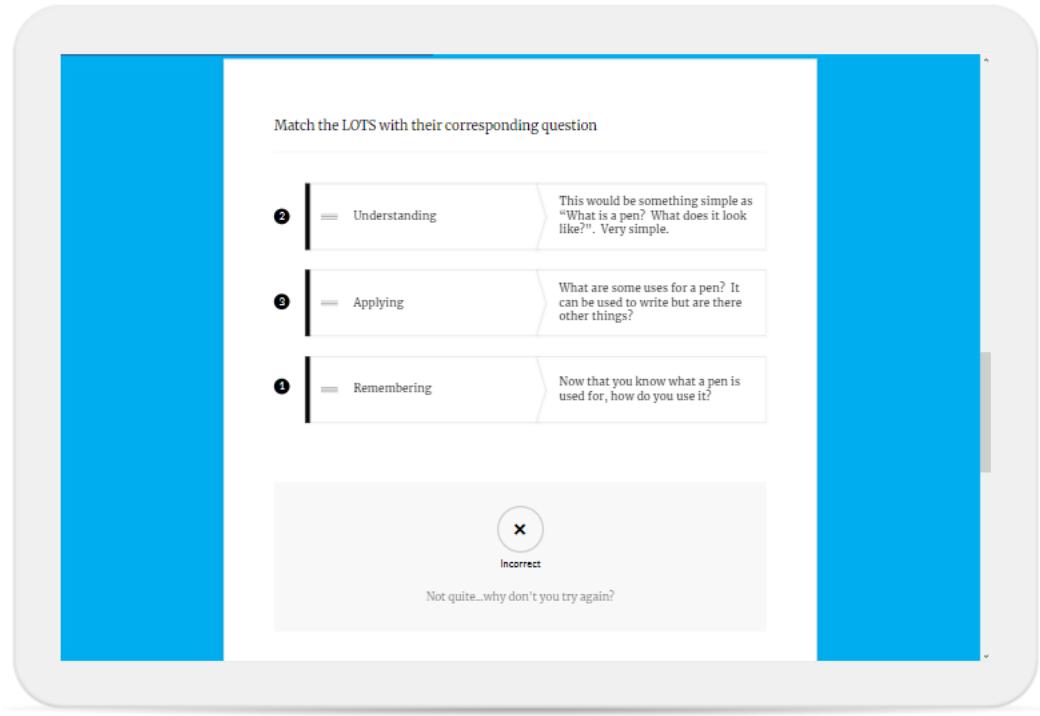

Figure 5. LOTS activity with feedback. In this case, the learner did not complete the task successfully so they are encouraged to try again.

By utilising the LOTS feedback in an environment and manner in which students engaged with each other, as well as with the teachers, students appeared to participate in a positive way. It appeared that students were not threatened by the possibility of making errors. This was facilitated by the fact that students themselves could check the correct answers. This led to engagement where the learners questioned each other as well as the teacher, increasing their sense of autonomy while allowing the teachers to introduce more explicitly the HOTS through elicitation and discussion with and between the class.

Although relatedness is not reported to be essential to foster intrinsic motivation it still needs to appear to maximise the results (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Ryan and Deci (2002) identify relatedness with a sense of class belonging, but it could be linked to fostering a conducive atmosphere for teaching and learning. Therefore, apart from a conscious effort to make the online materials personal and relatable (Figures 3 and 4), one hour a week was delivered through team-teaching. This allowed the cohort to work together as a group while practitioners could model peer work and collaborative practice. From our perspective, routinely engaging in team-teaching allowed us to continue our professional development by sharing not only expertise but also activities and tips in our sessions. Crucially, we were able to model effective pair work and were also able to work with the students as part of a 'class team'. This team-teaching approach helped facilitate a much more inclusive environment, with teachers and students taking on different roles within class time. By demonstrating to the students that the teachers were working as a team, it could be shown that 'team learning is a beneficial co-production for all classroom participants, students and teachers alike.' (Stewart, *et al*., 2016, cited in Hongyan, 2017, p.232)

Lessons Learned and Implications for Practice

Our experience returning to the classroom while harnessing the lessons learnt during our ERT period was overall positive. Students were actively engaged and exposed to different instructional mediums thus making the lessons more varied and relevant for students' contexts. The wide range of OL tools implemented in the sessions also allowed for more student independence during the classroom sessions while enhancing their experience and fostering inclusion. Crucially, the learner training allowed them to navigate the materials. The routine implementation of online tools enhanced students' digital literacies. This, in turn, may foster students' future employability skills.

By welcoming online tools into the classroom space, we were also able to closely monitor students' engagement. This facilitated identifying students at risk of not meeting the assessment requirements, thus allowing for early intervention. Therefore, it was easier to assess and monitor students' performance. This provided essential information in terms of informal assessments and allowed for a closer tailoring of the sessions.

The nature of these interactive tasks allows for the automatisation of feedback. This provided students with the confidence to engage in discussions related to answers. By completing the activities, students knew the answer, transforming the classroom discussion into the reason why the answer was correct. This sparked sustained discussion and transformed the classroom space into a genuinely collaborative space, in line with Kirk and King's (2022) conceptualisation of an EAP classroom where students are allowed the space to deeply engage with meaningful academic discussions. The careful scaffolding and confidence boost provided by the interactive activities contributed to students' participation in class.

This creative approach also allowed us to prepare for the unexpected, as our module can be easily transformed to fully online, should the circumstances require it. From our perspective as practitioners, we found team teaching and close collaboration a great opportunity to routinely engage on CPD while being able to model peer work, an area that we expect our students to excel in but which can be challenging to demonstrate in a traditional classroom.

In practical terms, our approach allowed foundation students to develop the necessary transferable skills to engage with key language and strategies in an accessible and suitably scaffolded manner. Opening up the space for an integration of virtual handouts has also allowed our learners to develop their digital skills which will be essential when starting their degrees.

Re-imagining the Classroom Space: Implications for Practice

Our approach advocates co-constructing the classroom as a liminal space where OL tools and the traditional and successful EAP procedures and practices meet while maintaining constructive alignment. Therefore, based on our experience we would provide the following recommendations for practice.

- Firstly, we would emphasise the need for teaching and learning to be underpinned by strong methodological principles. As has been explained, materials were originally conceived to be student-centred. Maintaining constructive alignment was essential.
- Secondly, providing automatic feedback to LOTS tasks was essential to be able to move the class into the HOTS domain. Students felt more comfortable providing the rationale for their correct answers or critiquing their initial choices. This allowed the classroom to become a genuinely collaborative space where students co-constructed knowledge with the guidance of the teacher and the support of their peers.

Before concluding this section on implications from practice based on our experience, it is worth highlighting our approach to course development and team-teaching. As has been discussed, team-teaching can be an excellent approach to CPD. However, this type of collaboration requires teachers to approach course design and classroom presence from a collegial and collaborative perspective.

Concluding Thoughts

This practitioners' article has highlighted how teaching experiences during ERT have shaped the return to the classroom space. In this practice-focused account, we have addressed the theoretical underpinnings that inform our classroom practices while illustrating how these frameworks were enacted. We have argued for a classroom space that challenges the traditional PowerPoint and presentation handout medium of delivery and, instead, looks at the developments in technology-enhanced learning and lessons learned from the pandemic to re-imagine a return to the physical classroom space. An exciting return that maximises collaboration, facilitated by the return to the classroom and the advances in technology. This article has concluded with a set of specific recommendations for practice that aim to facilitate the inclusion of OL tools in the EAP foundation classroom. It also calls for pedagogical innovations and practices developed during ERT to be included in discussions exploring the future of higher education. This, in turn, seeks to establish a genuine dialogue between theoretical conceptualisations and practical enactment of pedagogies in Foundation courses.

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