

On April 19 during the IATEFL Global Get-together, four SIGs (Andy Hockley from LAMSIG, Lawrie Moore from LASIG, Sophia Mavridi from LTSIG, and Cecilia Lemos from TDSIG) came together to discuss *Sustainable online teaching & learning* in a panel discussion: As a profession with varying degrees of online teaching and learning familiarity, we have needed to adapt quickly over the past several weeks. For some, it's been a formidable transition; for others, it's been trying to stay afloat; for all of us, it's a move that has highlighted both insights and challenges. Now that this initial phase has happened, our focus can shift towards sustainability. This moderated panel brought together advice and collaborative discussion from the perspectives of digital learning pedagogy, management, teacher development, and learner autonomy.

During the panel, we focussed on the following questions:

- Q1: The move to online teaching and learning for most people happened urgently and reactively. What is our current situation? What can we learn from this experience?
- Q2: What are the next steps in transforming this emergency response to more sustainable action?
- Q3: How can we best support our teachers and learners to build communities of learning, especially over longer periods of time?

During the panel discussion, a few community questions arose that we couldn't address at the time. Our panelists have kindly replied where appropriate:

1. Chris Cattaneo: Not all teachers I know are at all comfortable with technology. What happens there?

**Andy:** Managers need to be mindful of this fact. It may be that some teachers are enthusiastic about various tools, apps, platforms and software, but for others, dealing with technology is daunting. I would say that the requirements for technology should involve no more than two tools (for example a live class tool such as Zoom, and some form of asynchronous platform for longer form discussions/homework delivery). It could only be one (just the live tool and email). If the techphiles want to use lots of other tools to supplement this, obviously that's fine, but it shouldn't be an expectation. In fact, managers should make it clear to teachers what the expectations are in terms of tech, so that teachers - especially those that are uncomfortable - are clear what the limits are and that they are not expected to go beyond them if they don't want. Having said that, they will, in most contexts, have to learn how to use technology which is unfamiliar. Managers need to encourage, support but also push a bit.

**Sophia:** That's very true and this is exactly why teacher training is essential especially for the less tech savvy ones. I'm currently carrying out research into teachers' experiences moving online and unsurprisingly, the 80% of those who took the survey (800 in total so far) had not taught online before. What is interesting is that, according to what they report, only 8% of them received substantial training via their institution while around 52% received self-organised training via freely available webinars and publications. It is fantastic to see the support that the broader teacher community provided so generously over the first stages of the crisis but to move on to a more sustainable phase, teachers will need more specialised and systematic training and this is where the institutions should step in.

**Cecilia:** To me, the most evident thing in what is happening is that teachers (as well as many other professions, but I believe it to be especially true for teachers) that do not feel comfortable with technology will have to at least become somewhat familiarized and skilled with some kind of technology. In some parts of the world it seems it will take some time for face-to-face lessons to happen again, so remote teaching seems to be the only way to get around that. My advice for the ones who are not comfortable with technology is to start "small". Choose A tool that enables you to teach remotely, read about it, watch tutorials, webinars, take a course, have someone who knows it well teach you how to use it, use the tool (real hands on and experimenting). I am not saying to do all of these. The point is to learn how to use the one tool well, so that you can deliver your lessons.

2. Ola: How do you help teachers who seem tired of online teaching? They don't want to meet ONLINE again for CPD or support groups!

**Lawrie:** I agree. We are facing online fatigue right now. I've started WhatsApp/Messenger/Slack groups with colleagues. These work well for quick communication and for checking in with colleagues. Yes, they are still tech, but switching off the computer and using a mobile device instead can provide a bit of relief.

**Cecilia:** Some online CPD seems inevitable to me, but there are other forms too. Guided study, reading. Most of us are tired of being online at the moment, but CPD has proven more necessary than ever before, in my opinion.

3. Peyman: One of the problems is that there wasn't any kind of contingency plans. Nobody learned how to teach online unless that was what they were doing all the time. For the most part, based on my observation and some recent surveys, teachers are basically going back to their first-year teaching mode. To try to get everyone to teach online in a short time such as this, damages not only students but perhaps even the teachers themselves. So

how do we get around the negative aspects of this period?

**Sophia:** I know what you mean. Teachers may indeed feel that they are back to their beginner selves because moving online may have been a steep learning curve for them; however, just because they are less tech savvy, doesn't mean that they are not experienced and good teachers. Teachers should not be expected to become technology experts. They should remain language experts who teach with technology. It is also a matter of inadequate preparation and training that this crisis has exposed teachers to (see my earlier answer above). If we agree that this is a long term crisis, then we need to shift from continuity to sustainability and for this to happen, the teachers you are referring to, need to be supported with professional development and systematic training.

**Cecilia:** Being aware of the emotional strain is essential. Being careful about working hours, breaks, eating well - and healthy, doing something that allows you to (emotionally) escape from the pressure and the stress (exercise, yoga, meditation, reading something for pleasure, cooking - it works differently for everyone. Take small, achievable steps, give yourself achievable goals for each day. Plan.

4. Harry Kuchah Kuchah: Is anyone thinking like me that we, teachers, need to take the blame for encouraging a pedagogy of dependence on the teacher? If, as Sophia says, we embed learning to learn and the development of learner autonomy, then the situation might be better with or without internet?

**Lawrie:** self-directed, autonomous learning can be done either way. Students can use resources from the internet to conduct tasks, develop learning skills, and interact with peer learning groups. But there's no reason that learners can't use offline, low-tech resources, e.g. extensive reading tasks, meeting cohorts f2f, or good old-fashioned printed ELT/authentic materials. As far as the dependence on the teacher is concerned, learners need training in working more autonomously. Most students think they need more help and support than they do; they need to learn how to learn. The teacher's role is to scaffold learning and differentiate support based on individual learners. One thing to be clear about is that independent learning is not learning alone. The teacher needs to provide support in the form of pointing students towards resources for tasks, checking in on learners, and being available (even if it is just to say hi). LASIG is currently exploring different perspectives on how much direction self-directed learners need; we'll be keeping you up-to-date at [lasig.iatefl.org](http://lasig.iatefl.org)

5. Ola: How do you deal with your place of work requirements? Lots of language schools won't allow asynchronous teaching!

**Andy:** There may be good reasons for this (in fact one good reason could be to lighten teachers' workloads). However it is worth asking what the policy is and why. We are all in uncharted territory and it is worth seeing what can be done and what you (as a teacher) believe you could do more successfully if policies were more flexible. Present this to those who make the policies. Most managers would probably welcome well thought out suggestions that would improve student learning and teacher feelings of effectiveness.

**Sophia:** Indeed, and I would add that there are a number of misconceptions of what asynchronous teaching is like; a common one is that it only involves lecture recordings or homework exercises that students complete and send back to the teacher to give feedback on. This is not what asynchronous teaching should be like. There should be social presence via forums and chats, scaffolding by the teacher and the classmates and an element of interactivity in all our materials. If we record a long lecture and upload it online for students to watch asynchronously, chances are they will struggle to stay focused on the concepts to be learnt. If, however, we record short chunks and include questions that help students to reflect and consolidate on what they just heard, they are more likely to process this information, engage with the materials and learn new concepts. Asynchronous learning is more student-centred than a live class and can be more inclusive as it requires lower bandwidth than a live class. It can be very effective if designed properly and can beautifully complement live classes. So, to answer your question, school policies are school policies but this doesn't mean that they cannot change. After all, most managers are also new to online teaching and they may as well need time to adjust, reflect and reconsider.

6. **sinem:** We all talk about the teachers and the learners.. What about the managers?? It's high time they know about time and change management.

**Andy:** I agree that they are key and need to be thinking about how best to manage this. I think for a few weeks everyone (students, teachers, managers) was in survival mode, but now maybe is a good time to take a step back and think about what is next, and how to make this reactive emergency response into something more effective for all.

When all this began, change management theory didn't really fit, since the vast majority of schools had no time to plan. But increasingly I think we are at the stage where we can benefit from looking at those ideas and working out what comes next. Time management too - it's important for managers and also maybe more important than it ever was for teachers.

I've started writing a series of blog posts on change management and crisis

management to connect to these ideas - the first is here  
<https://adhockley.wordpress.com/2020/04/09/crisis-and-change-1/>

7. Ramesh Paudel Kathmandu Nepal: How does online education focus on inclusive education? Rather it has created bias among the people.

**Andy:** Are you referring to access issues Ramesh? Some students, schools, teachers have access to devices, internet and data, while others don't and issues connected to this? I would agree that this is a major problem and one that needs to be addressed. How can we ensure that the right to education for all is matched by access? It's very important

8. Ceri: can buddy systems work with YLs? wondering about privacy and internet safety issues?

**Lawrie:** yes, I think they can work very well. Of course, each context has different child protection regulations/guidelines, so those would have to be followed. The buddy system encourages peer learning and peer support (and as a bonus, takes some of the onus off of the teacher). Whether with YLs or adult learners, a few things need to be established: 1) The teacher should help the learners find a partner or partners. These could be assigned, or the students could choose (with some guidance). 2) A platform would have to be chosen: it could be through the VLE or even just on the phone. Using a VLE would possibly be more prudent regarding privacy and internet safety because the teacher could monitor interaction. 3) Tasks and learning goals for the buddy work need to be established, e.g. will they meet to discuss specific classwork? Only meet when they have problems? Check in with each other on a regular basis? 4) Documentation is helpful - even to just have students briefly reflect on their meeting with their buddy and what they learned from it.

And then there were a few general comments we'd like to highlight:

- Bonnie Nicholas: Even though we are living through extraordinary and challenging times, I think we cannot lose sight of our personal boundaries and workload, not to mention privacy laws in our contexts.

**Andy:** Very much so. Workload is a huge problem. From a management perspective it's crucial to be clear about limits and expectations. And not to go beyond that. Maybe one idea for a manager would be to sit down with the teachers (via video of course!) and think about how much time they are devoting to their jobs nowadays and how much time they should be devoting! I think we may find that teachers are doing an awful lot more work than they previously were. If that is true, we need to work out how to make that workload fair and reasonable again. It's also key for teachers and managers to set boundaries with each other and with students. Just

because you have a mobile phone does not mean you are available 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Tell your students “I’m not free after 7pm each evening or at weekends”. Managers advise/tell the teachers to set these kind of limits (and also don’t break them yourself)

- Marisa: Among other things we have learnt that teachers are expected to perform miracles without warning, training, and that most people have risen to the challenge.

**Lawrie:** yes! We’ve proven to be resilient and adaptable. It’s wonderful to see how we have grown as teachers - there’s been a lot of learning by doing, but I think we can be proud of how much we’ve accomplished in a short period of time.

**Andy:** Absolutely. It has been incredible to see. Everyone needs to be congratulated for what they have managed to achieve (students too)

**Cecilia:** I agree 100% with you, Marisa. Little to no time was given and yet teachers are finding their ways to meet the challenge, reinvent themselves and not abandon their students, supporting them and their learning process as well as they can.

- Chris Cattaneo: There has been a lot of support for all teachers around the world, from colleagues in the real and online world, IATEFL and other organisations and also publishers. The whole profession has really come alive!

**Lawrie:** we’ve shown a lot of solidarity with each other, too. Think about the first few weeks of the lockdowns and how many memes about online teaching were going around. This was our coping mechanism and way of bonding with others in a shared reality.

**Andy:** I agree. And we need to keep up this spirit of cooperation and mutual support. Anyone who has any management responsibility might be interested in LAMSIG’s free discussion group for all to share ideas, best practices and stories. It’s generated a lot of enthusiasm and fantastic collaboration <https://www.facebook.com/groups/schoolmanagementcovid/>

Greatest thanks to all who attended and contributed to the discussions among our community. We hope you take care of yourselves first, so you can take care of your learners better.