

Yew Chung International School of Beijing

The teacher Anna Zikou

Secondary EAL Teacher

Did you enjoy teaching remotely?

As I had already had the experience of online teaching, it was a familiar process to me so I wasn't anxious about it. I can say that it was enjoyable but most importantly it was an opportunity to be able to support my students academically and emotionally form the safety of their own homes. It created greater feelings of community and lessened feelings of isolation for them which was beneficial to their well-being. Additionally, it was something completely new to the students which probably gave them a sense of intrigue which in turn motivated them to try it out!

How did you prepare for this?

There are many things to consider when you switch from face to face to remote teaching, not least of all the question of how to communicate clearly to students on how they will be expected to interact with your new course materials and/or new modes of communication. Some aspects of my face-to-face course remained unchanged; others, however, had to be adjusted to accommodate the new ways in which students were to interact with me, the course materials, and with each other.

First of all, I reviewed my course materials and re-evaluated the initial teaching plan to determine what the ultimate goal was of the different activities, experiences, and assessments. Doing that helped me better understand what needed to be in a live video class session and what could be experienced during alternate times. Secondly, and as my school chose the online interfaces that were going to be used during remote teaching, I created my online classrooms and added my students. Then I organised my lessons creating different folders and uploading all the materials needed to conduct the lessons online. After that, I prepared a short step-by-step instructional manual and made a video explaining the procedures to be followed by the students when joining in the class. After that, it was more or less straightforward.

Was there anything that you had to do differently?

As there was no 'physical' whiteboard to



help me with my lesson, I needed to find alternative ways to project the notes I wanted to show to my students. I used PowerPoint, Word and the conversation box our interface provided to communicate with the students. Also, as I was not able to have face to face interaction with them during/after class to explain or give/receive feedback, so I held 'pre-class and social chatter and community building' live sessions to help students connect to each other; I also set up 'after-class reflection sessions' where students submitted a super brief response reflection after their live classes to demonstrate they were engaged, where they showed me where they were having gaps in understanding, making themselves accountable to their own learning.

What were some of the unique challenges of remote learning?

I think for me, as for most educators, is student motivation and engagement. It is slightly different when it comes to teaching live and online teaching because when you are physically present in the classroom, it is easier to see whether a student is motivated and engaged or not. With most students refusing to have their cameras switched on during online instruction, it is harder to see if they are engaged in the lesson. The hardest thing

of all though is motivation. E-learning requires strong self-motivation and that is a challenge especially since remote learning can create a feeling of isolation that is quite hard for some students to overcome.

What tips on teaching from remote classes would you now use in class?

As we needed to focus on student engagement, we incorporated a lot of interactive content into our teaching practice. That is something that I will continue using into the classroom as it promotes creativity and active engagement.

I also found that online classes allowed us to foster a more student-paced, independent learning approach. Students were able to show for themselves how they best learned by taking ownership of their learning and ultimately gaining from the opportunities to make decisions about their learning through a flexible learning environment. In a classroom environment, we tend to 'spoon-feed' our students with lectures and directed learning as well as tight deadlines. On reflection, I realise the need in creating a learning environment that fosters independence, choice and student decision-making.

What have you come to appreciate during the period of teaching from home?

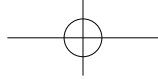
I have come to appreciate my students and how much I gain from their positive energy by interacting with them. I missed the day-to-day communication with my students and the valuable lessons they teach us just by observing them acting and learning in the classroom.

I have also come to appreciate my colleagues whose support and collaboration I learned to value even more. The sense of community is a very important, more so in a school environment. Teamwork promotes better teaching practices and that is something invaluable to me.

If remote teaching was to be activated once again, what would you do differently this time?

I would definitely try to improve on the things I thought I had done well and focus on delivering the lesson with more empathy towards everyone: the students, the parents and my colleagues. I would surely try to 'get into their shoes' and think deeper and harder about what their needs are in order for me to adapt my teaching style to suit their expectations.

Online classes allowed us to foster a more student-paced learning approach



The student

Jennifer Wu

Age 10, Grade 6

Did you like remote learning from home?

Yes and No. Yes, because I had more time to spend with my family. No because we had less time to get in contact with other students and teachers. I missed my friends so much!

What was the hardest thing to adjust to remote learning from home?

The wifi did not work from time to time, so we couldn't hear clearly what teachers said sometimes. It was also difficult for me to concentrate in online classes, and it caused a lot of inefficiencies on my studying. And also, I missed the time playing around with my friends, and I know they missed me too.

Do you feel that you learnt better at home or in the classroom?

I felt pretty much the same. But at school, I learn English better, because both of my parents speaks Chinese at home. Also, at school, I had contact with friends, teachers, and I have a better learning community. But at home, I could be better at math and Chinese, with the help of my parents.

Which would you choose? Learning remotely or going back to the classroom?

I'd want to go back to the classroom. I have all my friends there, and won't feel bored. I seem to concentrate more when it is noisy and crowded in the classroom. But I also love to stay at home with my family.

What was one thing you learnt learning from home that you will use even when you return back to the classroom?

Planning. At home, mom taught me how to better plan my day. I think it is still workable even when I come back to school.

What have you come to appreciate during the period of learning from home?

I appreciate the time my mom and me spent making bread, it was unforgettable. I wish I can plan my time better if the remote learning is active once again.

The parent

Charleen Wu

from China

How was the experience of your child having to remotely attend school?

Actually I was very happy and a bit surprised that YCIS BJ would be able to switch to online class so quickly right after the Chinese New Year. The quality of online lesson were better than we expected, children could see each other online, and continue to study without delay. We felt very safe to stay at home and

even felt 'normal' since we still can have lessons under such extreme circumstances.

What was the hardest thing that you had to adjust to?

Since almost everyone in the family must stay at home, we felt that having the private room for each person was limited. Dad needed to work from home, which means he often needed one quiet conference room; Ziyue needed to have online classes very often; and my second daughter (she's less than a year old) needed a quiet room to sleep.

Another hard thing was too much screen-time (mostly the iPad) made her eyes very tired, but we have no other choice. It was very easy for the children's eyesight to worsen. This was a really sad thing because it is irrevocable.

What is one thing that you feel is an advantage when it comes to learning from home?

Actually learning remotely from home saved more time for Jennifer. She had more flexible time than usual, for example, practicing violin, painting, or reading, even watching a movie with the whole family. Without commuting, it was possible for her to develop more hobbies.

**Not
needing
to
commute
meant
more
time for
hobbies**

New normal

What have you come to appreciate during the period of learning from home?

We had more time to really enjoy spending time with each other as a family than any time before. We appreciated the beautiful spring snow together, as well as the spring booming flower. We went to pick baby bamboos in the garden, and it was so blissful. There were so many rich memories in the first half of 2020 for all the family. Sometimes I feel I am being contradictory. I looked forward to her being back at school as soon as possible, but on the other hand, I also enjoyed so many of those wonderful moments with her.

If remote learning was to be activated once again, what would you do differently this time?

I hope this will not happen again. But if it did, I will definitely shorten her total time length on screen to save her eyesight.

