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## “COVID-19 Challenged Me to Re-Create My Teaching Entirely”: Adaptation Challenges of Four Novice EFL Teachers of Moving from ‘Face-to-Face’ To ‘Face-to-Screen’ Teaching

Thomas S.C. Farrell <sup>a,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *Brock University, Canada*

### ABSTRACT

Language teaching is noted to be a stressful profession at the best of times, but in 2020 it became even more difficult for all teachers because of the spread of COVID-19 pandemic worldwide. Teachers were required to switch suddenly to deliver their lessons on online platforms, with many having little or no prior training. This has certainly been the case for language teachers, language students and language schools because most language courses, initially designed for face-to-face instruction, were suddenly ‘forced’ to move to online platforms. This sudden move meant that language schools, language teachers and their students needed to adapt fast to a new virtual world that for many was an unknown teaching world. For language teachers the main challenge was how to adapt their courses and lessons to make them suitable for this new online delivery mode. This paper reports on the reflections of the adaptation challenges of four English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers at a prominent English language institution in Costa Rica, Central America, as they suddenly had to shift to online lesson delivery due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Keywords:** teacher emotion; reflection; COVID-19; face-to-face teaching; online Teaching

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\* Corresponding author: Brock University, Canada

Email address: [tfarrell@brocku.ca](mailto:tfarrell@brocku.ca)

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## Introduction

Language teaching is noted to be a stressful profession at the best of times (MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2020), but in 2020 it became even more demanding because of the spread of COVID-19 pandemic worldwide. Language teachers were suddenly required to move online to deliver their lessons, with many having little or no prior training. This has been a difficult transition for many language teachers, and indeed language students as well because most language courses have been initially designed for face-to-face instruction. In addition, language teacher education and development programs have traditionally been built around the assumption that language teachers will be delivering their lessons in face-to-face lessons only, and hence the methods courses as well as the practicum have been built around this assumption. The result of this training has led to language teachers developing their own tried and trusted instructional approaches throughout their careers on this same assumption of face-to-face instruction. Most language teachers have thus developed ways of providing prompt feedback because they can easily read their students' paralinguistic cues as they deliver their classroom lessons. In addition, in such face-to-face learning environments students interact in real time with each other because they have their classmates next to them to motivate, encourage, and/or clarify any questions they may have about the content being delivered live by the teacher. Each teacher and student had developed their classroom expectations over years of socialization and were probably very comfortable with the routine of going to a language class to improve their L2 abilities. Then it all ended suddenly in March of 2020 when the pandemic struck and all language schools, teachers and students were forced to pivot to online teaching where everyone was required to adapt fast to a new virtual world that for many, was an unknown teaching world. Yes, online teaching and learning is not new, but before the pandemic, it was presented as a supplement or complement to, rather than an all-embracing replacement of, face-to-face teaching and learning. Teachers, students and language schools, without much time to prepare, had to scramble to adapt their traditional face-to-face instruction and learning to make them suitable for this new 'face-to-screen' online delivery mode. This paper reports on the reflections of the adaptation challenges of four English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers at an English language school in Costa Rica, Central America, as they made this sudden shift to online lesson delivery due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Reflecting on Emotions in Teaching

For traditional approaches to teaching, most educators agree that a teacher's day begins before the teacher enters the classroom and ends well after the teacher leaves the classroom with endless planning and grading before and after actual classroom lessons. In fact, teaching often is listed as one of the most stressful professions as teachers must endure a severe hectic pace throughout each day of each term (York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie, 2006). York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, and Montie (2006, p. 2) refer to this context and hectic pace as "hot action" and maintain that in such circumstances "it is not unusual for teachers to put aside carefully constructed lessons because of unanticipated events, circumstances, or responses." It is not surprising given such a hectic pace where teachers must juggle various multiple tasks while making thousands of different on-the-spot decisions each day, that the risk of burnout because of emotional and physical exhaustion is very real (Byrne, 1999). In such a hectic environment then, as Eraut (1985, p. 128) explains, "educators must develop habits and routines in order to cope; and [that] self-awareness is difficult as there is little opportunity to notice or think about what one is doing."

This is also the case for language teachers as MacIntyre, Gregersen and Mercer (2020, p. 1) note, as they must also deal with many challenges related to “heavy workloads, time pressures, and difficulties juggling roles.” In fact, MacIntyre, Ross, Talbot, Mercer, Gregersen, and Banga (2019, p. 26) maintain that the “risk of burnout may be even more severe for language teachers as they suffer from additional unique stressors such as language anxiety, frequently unstable job contracts, and insecure working conditions.” For teachers, the result of such stress is that they face even more emotional challenges to their sense of self-worth both as a person and as a teacher. Researchers in different fields acknowledge that emotions constitute a fundamental dimension of teaching and of being a teacher (Kelchtermans & Dektelaere, 2016). In fact, Teng (2017, p. 118) maintains that “emotions are part of the very fabric that constitutes the teacher’s self”, and thus at the ‘epicenter’ of teaching (Agudo, 2019) in terms of their personal and emotional investment into their practice (MacIntyre, Ross, Talbot, Mercer, Gregersen, & Banga, 2019).

Research suggests that it is important to pay attention to teachers’ emotional investment because, as Callahan (1988, p. 12) suggests, they “constitute reflexive personal signals, or ‘vital signs’ informing us of inner processes or of interactions with the environment.” In agreement, Zembylas (2014, p. 211) discusses the concept of “critical emotional reflexivity” and maintain that such reflexive processes can help to “legitimize or delegitimize certain teaching practices.” Emotions are “core” (Holmes, 2010, p. 147) to reflection in the context of teaching, and thus paying attention to emotions triggers reflection. As Hargraves (2000, p. 412) suggests, “reflection can help us guide and moderate our emotions and sometimes even willfully move us into another emotional state by deciding to brood or cheer ourselves.” For language teachers such reflection helps them as Gkonou, and Miller (2020, p. 6) point out, to “compare their emotions about practice with colleagues and take action to improve current conditions.”

So far, the literature review on teaching, emotions and reflection is related to traditional face-to-face instruction and learning, but with the move to online ‘face-to-screen’ instruction and learning all of the above issues become even more prominent. What teachers took for granted in traditional instruction such as teaching methods, lesson activities, time spent on tasks, student responses, feedback, student paralinguistic cues, assignment, and assessment all become more demanding for both teachers and students. Other issues appear related to technology such as computers, internet platforms, programs, student presence on/off camera, preparation time, time at sitting at screen, to name but a few. As mentioned above, the onset of Covid-19 has greatly increased language teachers’ stress and heightened levels of emotions because of their sudden conversion to online platforms that have shattered all the usual classroom teaching boundaries: physically, temporally, and psychologically (MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2020). Thus, there is an even greater need for teachers and administrators to engage in reflective practice so that all stakeholders can better examine and reflect on and evaluate the real experiences and emotions of this sudden upheaval related to teaching language in the age of Covid-19. The present study is one such attempt to outline the reflections of four EFL teachers in Costa Rica as they experienced a sudden transition into online teaching because of the onset of COVID-19.

## **The Study**

### *Methodology*

Qualitative research procedures were used in the collection and analysis of the data in the study outlined in this paper (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982). A case study approach was the chosen research method due to the consistency with the descriptive and heuristic nature of reflective practice (Maxwell, 1992) as well as the ability to shed light on complexities of teacher reflections due to

the rich contextualization within a specific population and setting. Although generalizability of case study research to the general population can be difficult, I have used this approach successfully while investigating reflective practice (e.g., Farrell, 2021; Farrell & Vos, 2018; Farrell & Guz, 2019; Farrell & Yang, 2019; Farrell & Kennedy, 2020). Indeed, as VanLier (2005) points out, rigorous analysis of a case study can provide in-depth insights into intricate pedagogical and contextual issues that, "cannot be done adequately in any other common research practice" (p. 195).

### *Participants & Context*

The participants in this study were four EFL teachers in Costa Rica, Central America, one female and three males. The first participant was a female teacher (Ruby, a pseudonym) who has been teaching for two years and is currently working on her Masters of English teaching. The second participant was a male teacher (Frank, a pseudonym) who has been teaching for three years and completed a bachelor's degree in English teaching. The third participant was a male teacher (Peter, a pseudonym) who has been teaching for four years and holds a bachelor's degree in English Teaching as a Foreign Language (ETFL). The fourth participant was a male teacher (James, a pseudonym) who has been teaching for five years and holds a bachelor's degree in English Teaching as a Second Language (ETSL). All four teach EFL to local students at a prominent English teaching institution in Costa Rica.

The institution prioritizes speaking skills and encourages teachers to employ a constructivist approach to learning as reported by the participants. A typical teaching day begins at 9 a.m., teaching in 3-hour blocks with breaks in between until 9 p.m. at night. The study commenced in 2020 shortly after the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Upon receiving this news, the participants and their colleagues transitioned all instruction to synchronous online learning from their home computers using a video conference platform (Zoom) for the remainder of the academic term.

### *Data Collection*

The data collection period for this study was approximately two months long and the main source of data for the present study was six open-ended interviews and three non-participatory classroom observations. The purpose of interview data was to "enter into the other person's perspective" (Patton, 2015, p. 426) where each participant reflected on their practices. The reason for these interview discussions was the idea that the teachers' adaptation challenges associated with their move to online teaching would emerge from the opportunities for sustained discussions over this period. A total of six interviews were conducted (Merriam, 2009): one pre-interview to clarify basic information and five follow-up interviews following each stage of reflective practice framework (Farrell, 2015; 2018) that explored their philosophy, principles, theory, and critical reflections beyond practice. All interviews were conducted and recorded via zoom technology and lasted between 30 to 45 minutes and then transcribed. In addition, three different classes were observed online in real time. Prior to the observations, the teachers informed their students that the purpose of the study was to observe the teacher's actions, and it was not concerned with the students' behavior. All observations were conducted via video conference calls, recorded, and later transcribed.

### *Data Analysis*

Data were analyzed using a procedure of data reduction, and confirmation of findings. The transcribed text from each of the interviews and classroom observations were carefully read and coded, by inductive analysis procedures for accurate interpretation of emergent patterns and

themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and the results were presented to the participants for their comments. Specifically, and following the work of Cohen (2008) and Farrell (2011), all transcripts were scanned, coded and analyzed for explicit and implicit references to issues related to their adaptation challenges when moving to online teaching. The transcripts were coded for both explicit and implicit references to these challenges where explicit references include statements a speaker makes that refer directly to these challenges, while implicit references were coded when speakers made indirect comments without stating or naming them directly. The adaptation challenges were then tabulated for the number of occurrences but those claims that appeared infrequently (less than three occurrences and only with a passing comment) were not considered (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Member checking was used as a means of confirming the validity of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Three major categories or themes related to teaching impact emerged from the coding stage: methods, approaches, activities and planning, interaction, and classroom management (see below).

In addition, in order to explore the emotional impact of the participants' adjustment challenges. Richards' (2020) classification of positive and negative emotions was used as an initial guide for coding: Positive emotions included feelings such as: *confident, curious, engaged, enjoyment, enthusiastic, interested, happy, joyful, passionate*. Negative emotions included: *angry, annoyed, anxious, depressed, dissatisfied, exhausted, frustrated, sad, stressed, tense, uneasy, worried*. As Richards' (2020, p. 3) notes, language teachers express their emotions (both positive and negative) in terms of the different feelings they "have about themselves, their colleagues, their learners, classroom activities, their teaching context and teaching resources."

### **'Face-to-Screen' Adaptation Challenges**

I present a summary of the impact of the adaptation challenges related to teaching first, and this is followed by a presentation of the emotional reactions to these adaptation challenges as expressed by all four teachers.

#### *Teaching Adaptation Challenges*

The three main categories of adaptation challenges in order of frequency were methods, approaches, activities and planning (130 direct and indirect comments), interaction (61 direct and indirect comments), and issues related to adapting classroom management (58 direct and indirect comments).

#### *Method, Approaches, Activities and Planning*

Method, approaches, activities and planning, the highest frequency count, concerns when the teachers discuss the different approaches and how they had to adapt various activities, and materials and plan for all this in an online setting. Indeed, as Peter put it succinctly: "Some activities had to be adapted, but some others had to be eliminated." James said, "We understand that teaching online has to be different so we cannot just bring what was used in class and virtualize it."

In terms of adapting materials and activities, all four teachers said that they tried to gauge how their students would feel about a specific activity online, as they realized quickly that the students can choose not to engage by turning off their cameras. Ruby said that she not only tries to visualize how her students feel about various activities, but also how they fit into her lesson objectives; she said, "In terms of adapting, I usually consider how students would feel while doing

this or that activity, and also if those adaptations are going to be meaningful and helpful when considering the objective of the unit/lesson." Frank said that he realized his students can easily not engage in a particular activity; he remarked: "I know that students have a huge possibility to avoid lessons because they are at home, they can just say I am going to turn off the camera: 'I'm going to do whatever else I want, I'm going to tell the teacher I had an inconvenience at home.'" So, he said he tries to mitigate this by providing variety in his lessons; he said, "If you give them some variety, some reason to come to class then they say okay I am eager or I want to be in the class because I want to see what is next. That is engaging in my opinion." The teachers suggested that the virtual setting makes it more difficult to conduct activities with different type of physical interactions that were possible in a face-to-face setting, and so they had to eliminate some of these. As James noted: "I eliminated some activities because virtuality makes it impossible for students to sit one in front of the other, or for teachers to take students to the hallway to interact with other teachers or to describe activities happening around the classroom."

In order to put their methods, approaches and activities into action, the teachers also noticed they would have to adjust and adapt their original lesson plans from original face-to-face lessons. Then as their lessons progressed, all four teachers said that they had to make further adjustments, especially related to time and medium concerns. For example, Peter noted that he could not do role-plays, a staple of his face-to-face teaching activities, so he eliminated this from all his future plans. Time also became a challenge to adapt methods as one teacher said, "online, I have to administer the time more efficiently, so I skip some activities I planned for as I go along. Or if we couldn't finish an activity last class, we start the next class by finishing it." As James put it, "communication is slower when we are like in online classes so we can't set very complicated tasks."

All four teachers also realized that there would be a transformation of some kind in their assessment of students from their routine face-to-face modes to online formats and when it actually occurred, they found it challenging. For example, all assessments were now centralized by the administration whereas before, each teacher had some input to design some of their own assessments. The teachers know the expectations of the test but do not actually see the test (that is developed by curriculum dept) until 24 hours before the test is administered. The online assessments included an oral component that consisted of role plays for lower proficiency level students and presentations for higher proficiency students. Each teacher grades this oral component based on pre-determined rubrics designed by the administration. Each oral test is timed, and the time starts as soon as they enter the platform and counts down. The test terminates when the time has expired and so they are not able to go back once they are done certain parts. The teachers reflected on all the new assessment measures that the school adopted and questioned the credibility of the tests as well as questioning why these assessments account for 75% of their grade. Students need 80 percent or above to pass! The teachers also wondered about their students' possibility to cheat on the tests but said that they always try to do their best to monitor them.

### *Interaction*

The category interaction, second in frequency count, concerns when the teachers discuss changes in interaction between students and teachers. The teachers discussed that interactions in online platforms are very different because as Frank noted, "they cannot see each other all the time." Ruby noted the difference in time students get to speak; she said,

*In the classroom, I try to apply an 80% of student-talk. In online lessons I think it has been reduced to a 60% because students need to feel some language authority listening and paying attention to them. Also, I've seen they get distracted more easily now than in face-to-face classes.*

As a result, they said that their students reported that they missed this feature of face-to-face classroom interactions as James said: “They have mentioned that they miss having the teacher in front of them explaining, walking around, moving from desk to desk and having the class of being listened to all the time.”

Frank noticed the difference in face-to-face interactions when he could use kinesthetic activities but not in online lessons which forced him to rethink everything. He continued: “I was forced to rethink my interaction to adapt them to a platform that was not designed to allow much physical movement.” The teachers noted that in reaction they now try to explicitly acknowledge their students’ presence in all their interactions. Peter said that he tries to “Show that you care for you students: acknowledge their presence, greet them at the beginning of each session and say goodbye to them.” Ruby said that she decided to let all her students know that she has noticed their presence in interactions; she continued: “I want them to know that I notice they’re here. ‘Yeah, I know that you’re here’. Cause that’s something that I would do in a physical classroom, right?”

A common feature of many language lessons is group work which is relatively easy to set up physical in face-to-face classroom lessons, but as all four teachers noted, less so in an online environment. The school they worked at, and the teachers attempted to overcome this limitation by using the ‘breakout rooms’ feature from the Zoom platform to create small groups. The teachers reported some success but also some challenges using these ‘breakout rooms’ with much of the success depending on the language proficiency levels of their students. They also noted limitations with being able to monitor such groups in real time online.

For example, the teachers discovered that their advanced students were better able to learn in such modes but with beginners as James noted, “it is very difficult to address all questions in the same time you would do in a regular class.” Related to the issue of monitoring such groups online as one teacher noted, the “students tend to waste time when working without supervision.” They noted that it is nearly impossible for them to monitor each group as easy as it was in regular classroom lessons where they can all see each other and as James put it, “they see that I am busy, and I cannot help them in the moment.” However, in online breakout groups, James said that “sometimes people call me while I’m helping another group and they get desperate, and they call me and call me and call me and they feel like I’m not doing anything like I’m just ignoring them.” James remarked that this is frustrating for him because he cannot always monitor this group work; he continued: “It is so difficult because sometimes there’s delays or they just don’t ask for the monitoring or the help and I don’t get to see what they’re doing. Then I’m not sure who is working.” Indeed, for Ruby, such breakout groups are “something that I personally find really boring. As a teacher I like to have classes that are interactive, students give their opinions, they are participating.”

### *Classroom Management*

Classroom management, the third frequency count, concerns when a teacher discusses classroom management strategies they used in the online environment. The main issues the teachers said they had to deal with were lesson attendance, lesson interruptions, and use of inappropriate language. The first issue that arose was concerned with lesson attendance and trying to literally see who is present or not during each lesson. As Peter noted: “In a traditional classroom I can see who goes in and out. Online, I look at boxes of people and while I’m teaching, I cannot see ‘oh I have 12 now, I have 11, what happened who’s lost? But instead in a face-to-face classroom I see a desk, I know who was there.” The physical reality of the classroom in the more traditional face-to-face setting gave the teacher more possibilities to observe what their students were doing during each lesson, but online this was less so. Ruby noted that during face-to-face lessons she could see what was happening all the time in her lessons; she remarked: “You can see who’s

using, their cellphones, if they turn off the cameras, they could be doing anything. But in class I walk around, I stand next to them so they can see I'm watching or even if they're doing anything else." In addition, Ruby said that online she does not know if her students are paying full attention to her lessons in the virtual space expressing this example: "I have had incidents where they forget to turn off their mic's and I hear them hey mom can you order a hamburger and of course they're not paying attention, but this wouldn't happen in a class."

Connected with the above issue of classroom presence are the closely linked lesson interruptions that can occur in online lessons. The teachers expressed that online platforms provided them with different challenges such as how to react to interruptions from other students during a lesson. Ruby said that she mutes the students' microphones and mentions this at the start of each class. She said, "When somebody interrupts the class with conversations with a third person, I usually mute their microphone and send a message explaining why I did so."

Online lessons also saw an increase in the use of inappropriate language in class by students in all four teachers' lessons. Sometimes they noted this occurred because the students forgot to mute their microphones and they later apologized. In one such incident Peter said that inappropriate language was used in the chat; he said, "one student wrote a vulgar word in a written activity where everyone was collaborating. I reacted quickly and I ended the activity. I also referred to the incident explaining why I had stopped the activity. It was a reaction in shock. I think it was not the best nor the worst reaction." Frank noted that "All interventions (interactions) should be respectful. I believe that if you have your camera on, you should not have your underwear hanging somewhere around the background, right?"

#### *Teaching Emotion Challenges*

In addition to the above more observable adaptation challenges that directly impacted their instructional activities, was the less observable emotional impact all these had on the four teachers. The language these four EFL teachers used throughout the interviews to convey their emotions when talking about online teaching was mostly in terms of their negative emotions. These negative emotions included most frequently used words as *exhausting*, *frustrating*, *angry*, *struggle*, *uncertainty*, *worry*.

The word most used in all the interviews by all the teachers was *exhausting*. This was used to express the tiredness they felt when having to work with a computer all day as Ruby noted when she said that "online teaching is more *exhausting* helping students with their equipment and internet connection, and you get twice as many emails". Peter pointed out work-life balance issues of teaching online when he noted: "when it comes to work/life balance, I do have to say that this schedule has negatively affected me, indeed working until 9pm is *exhausting*." James noted his reasons for the mental exhaustion as a lack of control; he said, "I would say online teaching is *more exhausting* because not having students in front of me reduces the control I can have on the lesson." Ruby explained her mental exhaustion because of all the different roles she has to play; she said: "I believe it is more mentally exhausting for the teacher since many roles have to be covered such as IT expert, teacher, "secretary" answering emails of people who have disconnected." Frank noted that "it has begun to feel *exhausting* to be in front of a computer all day"; with James noting that the physical exhaustion of it all makes him "very tired of sitting down for the three hours of class."

The exhaustion mentioned above by the teachers may have led to other negative emotions such as the words *frustration* and *anger* also expressed throughout the transcripts. For example, Frank expressed his frustrations with the online platform ZOOM when trying to build student rapport; he said that it was "frustrating because it is more difficult to build rapport through ZOOM

because the students are not as talkative as they used to be considering as well that in online classes only one person can speak at a time.” James expressed similar frustrations when he noted that for him it was “very frustrating because it is awfully hard to read body language, especially if students have the camera off.” Peter summed up his frustrations with the amount of personal energy he invests in his attempts to provide quality online lessons, yet he is not getting outcomes he desired; he said, “it can be *frustrating* because I give a lot of myself to a lesson and try to take the best out of my students’ performance and the outcome is not the desired.”

Indeed, the exhaustion and frustrations expressed above could have led the teachers to express their *anger* at the difficulties they faced when moving to online teaching. This occurred especially when their students did not do what they wanted them to do as expressed by Frank when he was relaying an example of how his students did not follow his instructions when using the microphones and cameras during the online lessons; he said,

*I have two students that never ever speak. They always have their microphones off and their cameras off. I guess that I felt a little angry telling them come on guys, you should participate or else you're wasting your time.*

In addition, some of the frustrations expressed led to expressions of anger by James when he said, “I have struggled with finding activities and then how to incorporate these activities in classes, with Zoom”, and as a result, he said he felt “angry at how we were not prepared for this move.” Ruby noted that she was feeling frustrated too because she said, “online teaching, with minimum training, has been like starting all over again.” Perhaps these expressions of anger may have enabled the teachers to develop some coping habits to help them make some adjustments (I return to this issue in the discussion below).

Thus, some of the emotional stress the teachers were experiencing was probably associated with issues they felt were beyond their control, or perhaps the institution could have helped them more with. For example, technical issues that they felt they had to try to solve on the spot such as a bad internet connection, and/or computer issues that they felt they were not qualified to fix. Frank said that his “first two months of online teaching were very heavy emotionally since there were many expectations placed on teachers, and we, just like the rest of the world, were facing something entirely new without the necessary training. This leads to increased levels of anxiety and stress.” Ruby remarked that “being in front of the computer the whole day and solving technical issues is part of the stress that has been added to my work.” James suggested that physical exhaustion is the root cause of a lot of stress; he said, “I have never had so much work as I do right now even when I have less classes. Answering emails, I get at least 30 emails a day, teacher can you send me the link because I lost connection, so I have to go back look for the link and send it.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has also led to a lot of uncertainty for their future job prospects that has also created worry and fear. As James noted, “the uncertainty of what is going to happen with my salary, uncertainty of what’s going to happen with my students?” Ruby expressed her uncertainty connected to the following semester enrollments when she said, “I think the uncertainty around enrollment weeks is always very stressing because your workload depends on how many people enroll.” Peter worried about his coworkers; he said, “you also worry about your coworkers who did not get as many hours as they expected.” All of this has led to fear related to the pandemic itself, as he continued, “the pandemic is heavy on the mind I would say because it’s like a recurring thought...something to be afraid of as well.”

## Discussion

These four EFL teachers quickly began to realize that teaching and learning a language is a lot different from doing so face-to-face lesson than online learning environments and as such they understood that they should not try to replicate one mode for the other. They adjusted to a more creative development of their own personal teaching style in an online platform by a process of trial and error and reflection on the outcomes. Engaging in reflective practice allowed each of these teachers to develop their own level of digital competence as they adjusted their methods and approaches and created more opportunities for interaction in these online environments. They also realized that they would have to consider individual student needs as well as trust them to take more responsibility for their learning as they slowly promoted more learner autonomy in their lesson delivery. As they became more resilient throughout these stressful changes, through the mediation of reflective practice they became more flexible and confident in their ability to teach on these online platforms as time progressed during the first few months of the pandemic. As one teacher noted: "Not all in this pandemic is negative. I had the opportunity to explore other teaching methods and to expand my repertoire of activities."

Indeed, it is possible that engaging in reflective practice with a facilitator enabled them to articulate their negative emotions such as anger, and as a result may have better prepared them to take actions to rectify some of the challenges they were facing. As Koenen, Vervoort, Kelchtermans, Verschueren, and Spilt (2019, p. 38) point out, "the influence of discrete negative emotions on teachers' behavior may depend on the *kind* of negative emotions as different kind of emotions can either have an activating or deactivating effect on teachers' arousal." Some of the actions they took included how all four teachers said that they had to gauge how their students would feel about a specific activity online, as they realized quickly that the students can choose not to engage by turning off their cameras. In order to put their methods, approaches and activities into action, the teachers also noticed they would have to adjust and adapt their original lesson plans from original face-to-face lessons. They also noticed the difference in face-to-face interactions when they could use kinesthetic activities but not in online lessons which forced them to rethink everything. The teachers noted that in reaction they now try to explicitly acknowledge their students' presence in all their interactions. In addition, all four teachers reflected on how they needed to react to interruptions from other students during a lesson. Ruby said that she muted the students' microphones and mentioned this at the start of each class.

Thus, activating negative emotions (such as anger) through reflection can prepare teachers to better react and take necessary steps to help manage and learn from negative experiences. For language teachers, as Benesch (2018, p. 61) points out, teachers' emotional struggles, rather than being negative experiences to be overcome, can in fact be "useful signals" about current conditions. Consequently, the results of this case study suggest that encouraging teachers to reflect on their emotions so that they can develop "emotional flexibility" (Mackenzie, 2002, p. 186) so that they will be able to acquire better habits and routines in order to cope. In fact, the four teachers reported on in this paper began to exhibit such emotional flexibility as a result of their reflections.

The COVID-19 pandemic that is still sweeping the world has no doubt disrupted many language teachers lives as they attempted to make difficult transitions from their usual 'face-to-face' teaching to sudden 'face-to-screen' teaching platforms. No language teacher education or development program could have truly prepared any teacher (or student) for this sudden and emotionally stressful transition. Yost (2006, p. 61) has pointed out that "in order for novice teachers to become successful, they require the [reflective] tools necessary for coping with challenges they encounter." Under these demanding COVID-19 conditions, the four novice EFL teachers used the reflective tools of dialogue and classroom observations (with this author acting as a facilitator) to discover more about their own teaching and gain a better understanding of not

only their online adaptation challenges, but also their emotions (especially the negative emotions) so that they could better cope. As Zwozdiak-Myers (2012, p. 3) has pointed out, reflective practice is central to a teacher's development because it helps teachers "to analyse and evaluate what is happening" in their lessons (in this case online lessons) so that they can not only improve the quality of their teaching, but also provide better opportunities for their students to learn.

In addition, if we consider that teacher education and development is an ongoing learning process for language teachers where they must continuously adjust their teaching to the learning needs of their students, then teacher education programs must begin to reconsider the place of online teaching and learning as there is a good chance that online modes of delivery will continue well beyond the current pandemic (now in its fourth wave at the time of writing). Although the recent move to online teacher preparation and development programs has been sudden and unprecedented, where teacher educators and novice teachers alike have had to scramble to adjust in whatever ways they could (as the results of this paper attest to), it becomes clearer that teacher educators will have to plan more formally for inclusion of some online delivery of their programs to reflect this new reality. The results of the case study presented in this paper suggests that when planning online delivery modes, these are and should not be attempts to replicate traditional face-to-face lessons because delivery formats, platforms, and tools available are different in both, in addition to the differences in interaction, assessments and evaluations necessary for online instruction. Therefore, teacher education and development programs should first consider developing language teachers' technological competence because many may feel as unprepared for the transition (as the novice teachers in this case study reported). For example, language teacher education and development programs can help learner teachers develop the skills to better integrate more digital tools into their teaching practice, where they can check non-verbal cues online, gauge their student responses online, set up and monitor breakout groups where students collaborate online, as well as provide effective feedback throughout online lessons. In such a manner, the inclusion of digital competence in language teacher education and development programs, with the addition of more self-reflection skills (see above), can better prepare and empower language teachers when developing a personal teaching style be it face-to-face and/or online.

Although generalization is always difficult from case studies such as the one presented in this paper, and this study has limitations such as the small sample size (four teachers), the short duration of data collection (one-month), and the inability to observe teacher practices in-person, there is every reason to believe that readers may find much of the reflections on their emotions that were outlined and discussed in this paper have relevance for each teacher's own context, practices, and reflections as we continue to endure this pandemic.

## **Conclusion**

Teaching online is very different from face-to-face teaching and as the case study reported in this paper indicates, language teachers will need to adapt their methods, approaches, activities, planning, interactions, and classroom management techniques to an online environment. In addition, because this move happened without warning or preparation and training, heightened emotional stresses were triggered, and teachers had to develop their own coping strategies in order to be able to adapt themselves to online language teaching. Reflective practice offered the four novice EFL teachers an opportunity to articulate and work through their experiences in a constructive manner learning from the positives, while also recognizing the challenges as they attempt to develop (and continue to develop) their own coping strategies in these uncertain times through reflective practice; as one teacher noted: "COVID-19 challenged me to re-create my

teaching entirely.” I believe that engaging in reflective practice with the aid of a facilitator provided them with the chance to work through challenging experiences in a constructive manner. In addition, because online delivery formats may be here to stay, language teacher educators will need to reconsider how they prepare learner language teachers to develop their digital competence in order to better serve the needs of their students.

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**Thomas S.C. Farrell** is Professor of Applied Linguistics at Brock University, Canada. A selection of his work can be found on his webpage: [www.reflectiveinquiry.ca](http://www.reflectiveinquiry.ca).