Academic event report
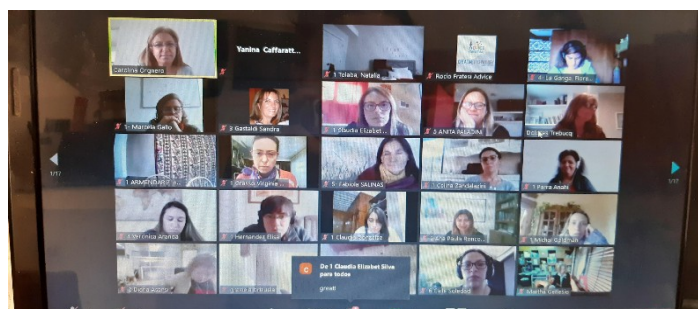
ACPI Symposium: On Challenges and Opportunities: Emergency Remote Teaching

The ACPI Symposium was held online via Zoom on August 8, 2020 and organized by Cordoba´s Professional Teacher Association (ACPI). Participants were teachers and administrators from different provinces in Argentina, neighboring countries and some countries overseas. The association brought together key speakers for an exploration of the current conditions in which English is taught during the pandemic. The symposium combined four different structured presentations and Q&A sessions on the challenges and opportunities emergency remote teaching has created for English foreign language teachers in Argentina.

The objective of this symposium was twofold:
a) Provide teachers with a platform to share their experiences and learn new strategies to navigate the current situation as successfully as possible in their own contexts.
b) Foster a sense of community among teachers during these challenging times.

Luciana Fernández was in charge of the opening session with the topic *The Power of Visual Literacy to Enhance Language and Thinking Skills*. During her presentation, she discussed the importance of teaching visual literacy in the foreing language classroom, mainly during emergency remote teaching sessions, when students are heavily exposed to visual material. She explored the concept of visual literacy as a staple of 21st century skills and defined it as the ability to interpret, recognize, appreciate and understand information presented through visual semiotic resources (Serafini, 2014). To make this concept more meaningful to the context of foreing languages, she also defined language as the ability to use the target language with structural accuracy and vocabulary in order to be able to express ideas, thoughts, needs, feelings and more in formal and informal settings on a variety of topics. Her Deep consideration of these concepts was valuable to understand how the use of visuals in the language classroom could enhance language communication, meaningful use of structures and vocabulary and thinking skills. According to Fernández, the speaker, visuals can trigger the meaningful use of the four macroskills, motivate foreign language

learners, and provide opportunities for students to practice and apply language forms and thinking strategies learnt in the classroom. In this session, teachers explored practical and high quality visual literacy activities to enhance language acquisition. By the end of the first talk, the strategic use of visuals in the classroom became more relevant than ever as teachers were guided to choose rich audiovisual materials to exploit during their online sessions or stimulate their students´ independent learning at home.

In the second session of the morning, *Pronunciation, the Cinderella of Language Teaching,* Florencia Giménez and Maria Garay reflected on the role of pronunciation during these challenging times. They emphasized the importance of teaching pronunciation even during these challenging times. Even in the brick-and-mortar classes, pronunciation may not be taught as thoroughly as other language aspects. During the workshop, the speakers discussed some of the reasons why pronunciation finds itself in a relegated state and offered alternatives to incorporate pronunciation instruction into online sessions and into tasks students solve at home. The workshop tackled some common "myths" around pronunciation and explored current beliefs about its teaching. A brief overview of segmental and suprasegmental features was first introduced to set the basis to analyse the new descriptors for oral skills presented by the CEFR in the Companion Volume (2018) at B1 and B2 levels. Notions connected with phonological control were operationalized to help the audience understand the importance of pronunciation as a central tool to achieve successful communication. The participants were presented with practical tips to integrate pronunciation to the language class, both systematically and incidentally. Besides and most relevant in these current sanitary conditions, the audience got an overview on how to use several online resources to enrich the teaching and learning experience during online sessions and promote autonomous learning in the field.

In the second half of the day, Carolina Orgnero and Dolores Trebucq devoted their session to reflect on the current state of affairs in education. During their presentation, *Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT): what have we learned so far?*, the speakers explained that ERT (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020) emerged from the teachers' commitment to continue teaching in these unprecedented circumstances. The Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on all the spheres of our lives. In the field of education, most teachers and students were forced to start classes in an unfamiliar setting that challenged them out of their comfort zones, and with little or no training in digital environments. Undoubtedly, teachers have done wonders with the resources they had by working around the clock in the belief that the pandemic was going to last 15 days… In this workshop, the speakers invited us to reflect upon the emergency remote teaching carried out so far and to socialize the insights gained over this particular period. With this aim in mind, the speakers shared the theoretical framework underlying the implementation of virtual classrooms in the Facultad de Lenguas, Universidad de Córdoba, during the pandemic. At the practical level, they engaged participants in collaborative activities to illustrate the key elements of the

framework of Community of Inquiry (Garrison, 2009): social presence, cognitive presence and teacher presence. The presence of these elements could be an indicator of success. Attendees were asked to participate sharing their ideas through apps such as Menti.com or using pen and paper to draw and share their views through the chat embedded in the video conferencing software. At the end of this workshop, teachers were empowered with tools to plan and design the second semester based on informed decisions that would not only enhance their teaching practices in their own teaching context but also contribute to consolidate virtual education, an option that might become *the new normal.*

To close this symposium, Alastair Grant presented his view of what returning to school after the coronavirus pandemic could imply. In his presentation *Where do we go from here? From response pedagogy to post-pandemic education*, he reflected on the responsive and adaptive role of the teachers as they learned to teach remotely in a new setting in a short time. Then, he posed the question how "response pedagogy" would be transformed to adapt itself to the need of a *new normal.* During his collaborative meeting, he invited the audience to examine how teachers had responded to Covid-19 by successfully working together. Then, he shared a range of strategies and activities that could be deployed in the classroom as well as online to cater for both contexts during these circumstances and in the world that the future may hold for both teachers and students. In his closing words, he emphasized the importance of resorting to collaborative work with fellow colleagues during these challenging times to support and learn from one another.

There are no rules or playbook to teach during a lockdown, so these speakers emphasized the importance of reflecting on what we have learned during the first semester to make wise pedagogical decisions during the second semester. Some of the aspects addressed during the symposium were the need to communicate honestly with other members of the educational community, to prioritize students´ needs while remaining flexible, to establish new routines and to foster collaborative tasks to create a sense of community in a virtual environment. The coronavirus pandemic came to challenge not only our way of living but also our conceptions of what teaching and learning means.

The main aim of this symposium was to provide teachers with a moment to reflect on the decisions taken during the first semester. To this end, each session engaged the audience in the reflection of what emergency remote teaching is and in the discussion of different teaching alternatives to take the best informed pedagogical decisions during these unprecedented times. This emergent type of teaching was conceived to provide students with easy access to education from home. Its design has required creative problem solving to meet the needs of specific learning communities in our local context. ERT has challenged teachers to learn about technology and to work out solutions to problems that previously tech support would have solved for them. This symposium celebrated the flexibility that most teachers have exhibited to adapt to these circumstances. Now, it is up to each of us to

consider, When the time comes and we all return to our classrooms, what teachings from ERT will we take with us to the regular brick-and-mortar class?

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