



THE SOCIALLY-DISTANCED CLASSROOM

Summary Report | Part 2

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Eaquals | Community of Practice

Summary Report: The Socially distanced Classroom (PART 2)

Meeting Dates: 18.01.2021, 19.01.2021 & 20.01.2021

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We would like to thank those Eaquals member representatives who were involved in the second part of discussions on the Socially-distanced classrooms, bringing their own experience and knowledge to bear on the topic. Those who contributed to the discussion form and are part of this report are as follows:

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Background to Socially-Distanced Classroom (SDC) summary reports

Given the sudden move to online delivery of language classes in response to the pandemic and then the return to a new socially-distanced classroom there was a need to provide a platform to discuss the impact of this.

Eaquals brought members together to build a community of practice to share experiences, knowledge and insights in relation to their own experience of returning to the SDC.

For our purposes, the socially-distanced classroom is understood as the classroom situation where both teachers and students need to abide by new restrictions imposed as a response to the Covid19 pandemic. These restrictions include required distance between those present, requirements around mask-wearing and reduction/removal of hard copy materials.

The first meeting and discussion forum took place on 25th and 26th November 2020 and led to a summary report which informed on current teaching contexts in different countries within the membership. This section focused on the set up, procedures and protocols that had been put in place to facilitate face-to-face teaching to take place again once restrictions had been lifted and highlighted three core areas for further reflection. This report can be accessed online [here](#).

The second set of meetings, on which this current summary report is based, took place as outlined on 18th, 19th and 20th January 2021. It built on the previous discussion by focusing on the three core areas which had been identified as needing attention in the new teaching context. They were as follows:

- Classroom Management
- Use of Technology
- Lesson Planning

From these meetings, a set of considerations that teachers could review prior when returning to the SDC were formulated. These considerations are meant as a starting point for teachers to provide guidance in terms of areas to look at when planning and potential ideas for dealing with the challenges that those working in the SDC context face.

1 | Classroom Management in the Socially-Distanced Classroom Context

The following are key areas for consideration for teachers as they begin working in the context of the socially distanced classroom.

1. What does the physical setting look like?

- Classroom furniture and board placement are paramount and the institution must ensure that the appropriate legal guidelines are followed. These physical restrictions mean that student behaviour is much improved, but interaction is severely impacted. The set up does mean that with younger learners' behaviour is much more controlled.
- Class numbers are generally much smaller and this means that it can feel quite limited in terms of what can be done from an activities point of view.

2. How is the role of the teacher impacted?

- There is some reconsideration necessary in how the teacher carries out some key roles such as monitoring and assessing success in the lessons.
- In terms of practicalities, more gesturing is often necessary to get your point across as teachers are wearing a mask.
- Often, the focus is quite teacher centred as the majority of interaction is now directed by teacher.

3. How do students interact with each other?

- There is considerable difference between the socially distanced classroom and the non-socially distanced classroom in terms of planning for interaction with the onus very much being on how we can effectively do group and pair work.
- Engagement is an issue with no immediate work arounds aside from starting to turn to tech issues. Students are at their own desk with, in some cases, perspex between each desk. This has impeded interaction between students and has led to the need for greater involvement from the teacher to control and to monitor all activities and all students.
- Higher groups are able to incorporate some pair work, but this is from a distance and depends on the space available in the classroom.
- Class dynamic is important and was helped when students were able to work together more but suffers at the minute in the current set-up.
- Even when students are using devices, there must be no sharing of these devices so this is a consideration as it impacts on activities and interaction.
- It has been noted that the lack of variety in interaction can be demotivating for learners as they can get bored working with the same partners. Even if teachers allow some minor movement in class, they must make sure that they then wipe all surfaces down as appropriate.
- There is an added difficulty as there are students beginning semesters and not knowing each other which means there isn't the same sense of a cohesive group. They are not able to meet up outside of the school either which leads to the same problems. This ultimately impact on class dynamic as mentioned above.

4. What impact does mask wearing have?

- Masks prevent the teacher and the students from lip reading and can also hide who is actually speaking. This is a limitation which needs to be compensated for in some additional way.
- Students wearing masks at all times leads to difficult in understanding more nuanced reactions e.g. facial expressions. There is also an increased level of difficulty with hearing what has been said and understanding lower level students in particular.

5. Any significant changes in the school outside the classroom?

- There are monitors in the halls and when students go outside to ensure that they are all socially distanced. This prevents any sense of community developing and makes it harder to build any type of rapport.
- Staggered breaks have also meant that there isn't always a natural flow to the class and something which needs to be considered in the planning stage.

6. What is the impact on the use of resources and material?

- The impact on physical resources means there is now a lot of focus on the use of tech for this. Physical copies are no longer given out and things are projected onto blackboard / emailing copies of worksheets for students to download. Students are bringing their own devices but many did this already. However, not all students have access to a tablet and may be reduced to using their phone as their mobile device.
- Young learners - have two sets of books and materials – one for schools and one for home. This makes it easier for the teacher and ensures that they are not sharing materials.
- If the teacher is using slides to present the lesson, it is important to share these slides with the learners electronically in case they cannot see the board.

7. How does the teacher monitor the lesson?

- Monitoring is one aspect of classroom management which is severely hampered by the socially distanced classroom. The teacher can monitor certain tasks from a distance and set up tasks which focus on peer-to-peer monitoring in a number of different contexts.
- With things like presentations, these can still be done in open class contexts.
- Writing can be done within a sharable document (such as Google Docs) which can be shared among peers as well.
- There is a need to ingrate aspects of Visible Learning more and more.
- In terms of the assessment of success in the lesson, there is certain tests which can be used from course books, or tests can easily be made and distributed on Google Forms.

8. Are there any tech solutions readily available?

- Google classroom can be used for collaboration between students. It can also be a really useful way for teacher to monitor success at certain stages.
- Padlet is also recommended for collaboration, polls, and for facilitating brainstorming
- There are a number of social media apps that can be used in project work, e.g., learners can collaborate on creating an Instagram page and use their own devices to create content.

Crucial follow up questions for further research and development:

1. *How do you monitor effectively in SDC?*
2. *How do you encourage engagement in SDC?*

2 | Lesson Planning in the Socially-Distanced Classroom Context

The following are key areas for consideration for teachers as they begin working in the context of the socially distanced classroom.

1. How can I transfer between the contexts of teaching online and teaching in a SDC?

- Important to remember that you can bring what you've been doing online back into the classroom again and these things will work in the SDC to some extent. We have to remember that not everything will transfer easily and we have to consider how the learners will engage with the content in each context.

2. Are the Learning Outcomes similar in the SDC?

- The outcomes for each level should be exactly the same but you may achieve them and assess them in a different way.
- Begin by "Planning Backwards". Have a very clear focus on the learning outcomes and make sure that these are realistic. Look at how you are going to get there and make sure that the lessons and language points are all pared down to reflect slower pace.

3. Is the lesson pace and the stage timings the same?

- The pace of the lesson (both in the socially distanced classroom and in online delivery) is much slower and therefore much less material can be covered.
- Activities have become shorter and much more student based with additional online tools within the SDC to keep interaction flowing.

4. Is the role of the learners the same?

- The context will be as new to the learners as to you and they will be learning about how they can best achieve the learning outcomes in each lesson.
- It is important to share the objectives with the students so that the lessons themselves are clearly sign posted and they can track development.
- There is scope to engage the learners in tasks before the class by using asynchronous tasks in a flipped classroom model.
- Project work is something that should be utilised to ensure that the learners are able to collaborate and use language naturally in order to complete a task.

5. Are there any special considerations regarding material and resources?

- Teachers have much more work regarding content/tasks and ensuring that these are relevant for the students in the current situation (refer to handout from Aoife Tamura for examples).
- Previous materials and course books are quickly becoming dated. Tasks are becoming more reflective of the lockdown situation e.g. videos / tech solutions.
- Teachers are sharing a lot more from their own life and current situation. Works to help with rapport with students – all in this together and going through a similar situation.
- The SDC places much more demands on the teacher and it is important that there is collaboration and sharing of resources to reduce workload where possible.

- There is a widespread use of PowerPoint presentations which can have a lack of flexibility to them and can take a while for the teacher to plan and put together.

6. How do we plan for interaction patterns?

- Patterns of interaction needed looking at within lesson planning. Students were normally focused and energised but more difficult in the SDC classroom although did introduce things e.g. stand up/sit down, go outside to record a conversation in pairs.
- Need to make the most of opportunities to observe each other in the SDC when possible.
- Trying to plan for as many 'heads up, heads down, heads across' interaction patterns as possible in the lesson.

3 | Tech Solutions for the Socially-Distanced Classroom Context

The following are key areas for consideration for teachers as they begin working in the context of the socially distanced classroom.

1. Why is it important to integrate technology into the SDC?

- Effective use of technology means less teacher talking time and more motivated learners.
- The differences between SDC and the normal class mean it is necessary to integrate some technological solutions. Technology has already been proven in some cases to make the SDC more workable.

2. In which areas can technology help in the SDC?

Technology can be used to help with three particular areas:

- Collaboration: students working together in pairs/groups
- Interaction: with class as a whole or with groups/pairs/teacher
- Monitoring: teachers and also students can become involved in giving feedback to each other.

3. What tech was used to collaborate?

- Padlet to share ideas, make a visual representation. It allows you to interact and add comments.
- Whatsapp group used with both teachers and students.
- Vocaroo is useful for voice recording.
- Google Jamboard can be quite useful for sharing ideas and brainstorming.
- Mobile games work well as long as they are collaborative.

4. What new tools have you discovered and would recommend?

- Quizziz: provides lots of opportunities for interaction. It can be used to pre-teach and to review new language.
- GDrive: a good tool that has a good range of APPS (docs, forms, classroom). It can help with introducing more projects and project work into the classroom.
- Microsoft Teams
- Online Breakout Rooms: Useful but importance to give clear instructions in order for students to be able to complete the task. We all agree that we don't think that we could bring the BOR to the classrooms.
- Kahoot.

5. Are there any tools you use for assessment?

- Google forms: easy to use and share results with students.
- Moodle: used to share feedback and test scores.

6. What about platforms?

- Google Classroom is an effective platform.

7. Have you seen any challenges with edtech?

- One of the main challenges is when a school or institution does not have a unified approach. When different teachers use different platforms; i.e. Edmodo, word, google classroom it can hinder CPD within the school. If students are moving classes there is a lack of consistency. If there was a whole school approach to tech tool adoption, there would be greater collaboration and learning.
- While it is a good idea not to overindulge with the different technologies, and to keep things consistent, it is good to add a new game / platform to add some variety and freshness.

8. Any other advice for using technology in the SDC?

- Avoid having and using a variety of platforms, stick with one that works for you.
- Consider what training and support is in place for teachers using the technology.
- Avoid presuming that everyone can use all of the platforms at hand.
- Ensure there is a forum for exchanging ideas and tools that work.
- Look into trying out new tools to help with traditional method of delivery, e.g. Peardeck for Google Slides



Join the community

Eaquals would be very interested in hearing from you if you have ideas to share on any of the above topics or indeed on your own experience of teaching in the socially-distanced classroom.

If you would like to get in touch with an idea or contribution, please email Eaquals Executive Director, Lou McLaughlin, director@eaquals.org

Eaquals would like to extend thanks, once again, to Chris Farrell for the initial project idea and to all of those who contributed throughout the various meetings.