



ONLINE LEARNING WITH THE MAIN LITERACY PROGRAMME

Educational Therapists' experiences with online teaching and learning—how we overcame the struggles!
A peek into a conversation by educational therapists on online teaching!

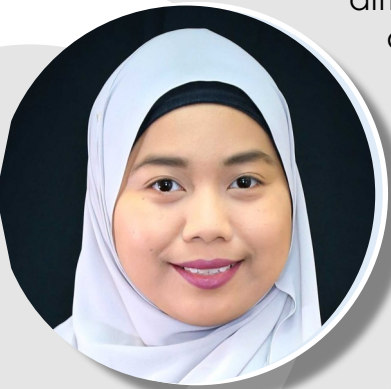
MELCHER: To quote Winnie the Pooh, "Oh bother..." was the first thought that popped into my mind when I heard that we had to conduct online lessons. It was going to be a challenge, not just for myself in the role of an Educational Therapist, but also for my students. The first challenge that presented itself was how to assess their spelling and writing ability while avoiding spell-check and autocorrect on online platforms. The phrase from the meme, 'Improvise, Adapt, Overcome' became my motto. I decided that the easiest way with older students was to send me a picture of their spelling via Whatsapp. For the younger ones, and those averse to sharing their numbers with me, they show me their answers over the web camera. That said, sometimes I have to squint at the screen, and I cannot tell if it is the video quality that is bad, my deteriorating eyesight from staring at the screen all day, or just their usual messy handwriting!



ROSALYN: It is the transition that was challenging, I feel. I became the IT technician and had to help my students connect to their email all the while not seeing what problems they were facing. Some of them were not familiar with using the keyboard or mouse that they resorted to throwing things! Others typed in their password in the blank meant for the login ID. Luckily, talking to them patiently and calmly helped them calm down and we could solve the IT problems together. However, the bigger challenge I faced was maintaining or even enhancing the human connection, especially with kids that really need it. Out of the several classes that I teach, I have three students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). They take longer to adapt to routines and might even be averse to new routines. One of my ASD students actually asked me whether he had to go down to DAS to attend his virtual classes! Thankfully, with time, they settled into their new routines.

EMILYN: I have a couple of students with ASD too! One of them refused to have online lessons on the first day. His mum had set up the computer for him but he hid behind the door and refused to have lessons. I finally figured that it was because of his discomfort of being in front of the camera so I convinced him to have lessons by allowing him to keep his camera turned off. It is honestly difficult at times because I have to engage a blank screen and it almost seems like I'm talking to myself, but when he initiates questions and conversations (sometimes by typing on the chat because he was not comfortable with turning his microphone on at times as well!), I know that at least he's present and showing interest in the topics we cover.





SAFINAH: Having classes on an online platform actually showed me the different sides of my students. My shy students who rarely speak up in class are more vocal online. I guess the comfort of home actually helps them open up more and they are able to contribute better in class. Even the students who require longer processing time and usually take a longer time to write sentences or paragraphs seem to be doing a lot better online. They seemed to be more used to typing and are generating better content and ideas on the online platform. Having said that, online classes are not without its 'facepalm' moments. Once I was giving some instructions but my students were not responding at all. I then realised that my microphone was on mute! No wonder the students were oblivious to my instructions and didn't react to them. From that day on, I checked my settings multiple times during each and every lesson to prevent that from happening again.

JUZAILAH: Yes, teaching online is a whole new world. There are so many new things to get adjusted to, but I am glad to be able to adapt well to the new changes. I am also happy that with the new learning environment, my students feel more comfortable at home. In fact, for some classes, the students seem happy to carry out discussions, and I only need to chime in every once in a while to steer the conversation and make remarks about language use.



SERENA: Challenges that do not break us will certainly make us stronger and more resilient. I found this to be true, especially in the current educational climate. Educators across the globe, including my fellow DAS educators, have to acclimatise swiftly to the present norm of teaching and transition to virtual delivery all in the hope of ensuring learning continues and remains the core of education. Despite the uncertainties and difficulties that come along with online teaching (not just the technological know-how), we are constantly exploring and finding new and creative ways to connect and engage our students, ways we have never imagined before. From learning how

to conduct lessons via Hangouts Meet, to exploring and identifying relevant and suitable educational applications to maintain active participation and engagement from the students, it certainly is no easy feat! Incredulous, no doubt, but it is the spirit of rising to the challenge and the belief that learning can still take place effectively albeit an online platform is what truly makes an educator an effective, adaptive and innovative one. So, to all my DAS comrades, you are an inspiration!

ALIA: Wow! Thank you for sharing your experiences. I'm learning a lot from what you've all gone through. Since I'm the last one, I'm going to keep mine short and sweet. For me, I gave my NA students editing exercises to do via Google Docs and they told me this, "Teacher this is so easy. The computer highlighted all the errors!" That was definitely a facepalm moment! We had a good laugh. I am so glad they were honest. Here's to more enjoyable experiences with students online and hopefully in the near future, teaching them in our classrooms again.

