

The switch from onsite to online teaching during Covid-19 pandemic – lessons learned

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My presentation deals with the way the French Specialized aeronautic language center located in Tours Air force base had to switch from onsite to online teaching during Covid-19 pandemic.

Throughout the different lockdowns in France, traditional onsite English training courses had to be implemented online. The center did not have neither specific digital tools nor a dedicated teaching platform to deliver its training courses online.

In order to ensure continuity in our teaching, we were forced to teach online with the free digital tools we could find on the internet. We realized that we had to combine a digital tool for videoconferencing with a tool for file sharing. Here are some digital tools that have proven to be successful for our online teaching: Zoom, Big Blue Button, Discord, Skype, Whatsapp, Padlet, Google Docs.

We understood that we could not replicate what we do in a real-life situation classroom and had to split our courses into micro-lessons. A 2-hour session in the morning and a 2-hour session in the afternoon were acceptable but not more. We could then give the rest of the materials for self-directed work to our trainees as homework.

We received a lot of positive feedback from our trainees who appreciated having self-directed work after the online session. They also mentioned that the tools that were used were good tools for online learning even if sometimes, some files were impossible to open.

However, my teachers pointed out the fact that they faced a lot of connectivity issues and regretted that they had to switch from a video call to a voice call in order to be able to carry on with the lesson. They also mentioned that switching from onsite to online teaching from one day to another without no specific training was quite challenging for them.

There is definitely a value to host live classes but what was most important was to promote participation from the trainees. We should not forget that during lockdown, some of our trainees also had to deal with their personal life. Some of them had small children around too...

We have today moved back to our physical classrooms. The one lesson to be learned for us, as teachers, is that we have to work more on digital classes in the future and, why not, include blended learning in the training courses that we offer.