

RIDING OUT THE STORM

Growing through Online Teaching



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The March holidays finally kicked in and we were all thrilled for the much-needed break. Although the news of the COVID-19 was a hot topic across the globe, we didn't think it would hit us yet. Alas, just four days into the break, we were notified of the sudden move to home-based online learning. We were all overwhelmed, confused and truly scared, not sure of what to expect or how we were going to accomplish this.

TREADING UNKNOWN WATERS, TOGETHER

Using technological tools in our classrooms was not new to us at all, but making the switch from face-to-face classes to live online lessons is a different ball game altogether. The nature of our remediation is so highly personalised, interactive and multi-sensory that doing it via a screen was unheard of.

Thankfully, preparations had started earlier in the middle of Term 1 as Educational Therapists (EdTs) began learning how to navigate Google Meet and other useful tools like Google documents and slides. It was a lot of trial and error with one another and with our students - nobody had a clear picture of how it would be. Teachers, students, and parents alike. We would only know when our first online lesson rolled out... on the day itself.

With all the knowledge we had, we began our first week of Term 2 with apprehension, but we were determined to make this work for our students. Regardless of this heightened state of affairs, it was critical that work at the DAS continued to support our students with their learning, especially for students who were taking their national examinations. We mentally prepared ourselves to face hiccups like technical glitches and actively sought support from each other to troubleshoot.

The unity and support that rose from this was amazing. Everyone contributed ideas on how to make our work more manageable and how to keep our classes fun, engaging and multi-sensory. Educational Therapists in their learning centres were creating a bank of shared resources on Google drive and everybody, from the educational advisors to the curriculum team to Edtech and IT, provided valuable support, training and materials. We worked equally hard to prepare take-home learning packs (THLPs) and recorded video lessons for

ONLINE LEARNING WITH THE MAIN LITERACY PROGRAMME

students with no access to devices to ensure that they too, did not miss out. This meant burning the midnight oil almost daily for most of us. It felt like we were all beginner teachers once again, as the preparation and planning for online classes is significantly more tedious and time-consuming than usual.

GROWING THROUGH ONLINE TEACHING

After two weeks of online learning at the DAS, stricter measures from the government were announced. We were thrown yet another curveball; having to now work and conduct all our online classes from home, away from the physical companionship we had from our colleagues at the centre. Like our students, not all of us may have a conducive environment at home for teaching. Accommodations were made to create an optimal working space for ourselves. We also made alternative arrangements where possible; contacting schools and parents to see how interventions or Take-Home-Lesson-Packs (THLPs) could be given to students with no devices since online learning is now extended to the entire term.

Though we are now physically distant, our support networks prevail. We remain connected with our colleagues through Google Meet or Zoom meetings, training as well as lunch sessions to check on how everybody else is holding up. We share funny anecdotes of our students' amusing antics in our online classes, hear out each other's moments of exasperation and through these that we are reminded that we are riding out this storm together. There are days we feel highly accomplished and at the top of our game, yet on some days we feel exhausted and overwhelmed. Things have not been ideal but we try our best every day.

We are almost eight weeks in now and we continue to grow in ways we otherwise might not have (no, not talking about our weight!). The numerous adjustments we had to make made us adapt quickly and creatively to unpredictable circumstances, not to mention we are now familiar with using a wide variety of tech tools in our teaching. Our students have been just as resilient and receptive to the changes. They show enthusiasm towards our online classes and their parents too have been truly supportive in working with us to help their child learn.

This positive outcome and encouraging words from students and parents have kept us going, to keep doing what we do despite the circumstances. It is undeniably tough to cope with the strenuous demands of online teaching and without a doubt, some of us are still learning to get by, but the knowledge that this is benefiting the students gives us the motivation. As educators, we have learnt much from this pandemic.

Technology has helped us adapt and evolve along with the ever-changing landscape of interaction and has shown that learning is still feasible beyond the four walls of a physical classroom. This could, possibly, be the blueprint for education in the future perhaps?

