Access and Opportunity: Technology Tools for Transitioning Online

MAUREEN GASSERT LAMB
THE KINGSWOOD OXFORD SCHOOL

ABSTRACT

As many Latin and ancient Greek teachers are transitioning into the world of online and hybrid learning, they are searching for the most effective strategies they can use to engage their students and enhance their learning experience online. The discussion will examine several strategies to create an effective online experience for ourselves and our students.

Organization

As we return to uncertainty, it is important to be able to switch quickly between in-person learning and virtual learning. One of the most important tenets of online education is staying organized. Organization can take many forms, but one of the easiest ways to stay organized is to have everything in one place. A central hub website or learning management system is a great way to stay organized and include all the materials necessary for both virtual and in-person instruction. As a hub is created, it must be a place that students can visit again and again for due dates, assignments, resources, and even assessments. The hub should be organized in a way that is clear and works well for both the instructor and the students. The hub should not be a static website. It should be updated regularly to reflect any changes or additions to classroom plans. Additionally, it should follow the best practices in website accessibility, which would include contrasting colors to make items stand out, clear, simple formatting, additional resources for students who need them, such as directions or texts read aloud and provide students with clear expectations for their work and their participation in the class.

Instruction

Instruction in an online environment often involves a combination of asynchronous and synchronous work. Group activities and office hours should be offered synchronously, while individual work and even assessments can often be done asynchronously. As texts and materials are considered for a course, looking for materials that are readily available online can be very helpful.

A powerful tool for online instruction can also be talking head videos. Based on best practices, these videos should show the instructor (since students engage more when they see another human's face), 5 minutes maximum, and should focus on one topic at a time. Some popular screencasting apps include Screencastify (which offers 5 minute videos free to educators), Screencast-o-matic, Loom, or Quicktime for Macs. FlipGrid also offers a new screencasting feature. These videos can use PowerPoint or Google slides as the background, and those resources can also be shared with students to go through at their own pace. Instructors could also upload their videos onto a private or public YouTube channel for students to view or upload them to their LMS hub. Additionally, instructors could upload their videos onto EdPuzzle or Playposit so that they can ask questions to check for student understanding during the video.

Additionally, as mentioned above, video conferencing is a great option for group work and office hours. Some popular video conferencing services include Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, and Skype.

Assessment

Assessment can look different in an online environment. Assessment that includes questions that can researched easily may not be the ideal choice with students that can easily look up answers. Instead, questions that demonstrate comprehension, projects, collaborative work, and individual asynchronous questions can help determine where students are and what they need to work on to meet the goals of the course.

Google forms is a free tool to create assessments with multiple-choice questions, short answer questions, paragraph answer questions, and many more types of questions. If the form is set up as a quiz, it can be graded and returned easily to the students. Go Formative and Peardeck are additional assessment tools, with the advantage of giving students real-time feedback on their work as they complete the assessment.

Another method of assessment may be to create more project assessments with the goal being to create a product (paper, activity, website, etc.) and then to present that product to the class. This type of assessment can be rigorous, authentic, and require asynchronous work, but then be a way to engage the class as each student presents their product and gets feedback from their classmates.

Latin/Greek Specific Resources

As teachers consider creating their own materials for online learning, they should also look at the following resources.

Videos in the Target Language

Legonium (http://www.legonium.com/)

Legonium videos and posters a great way to engage students by combining their learning of Latin and ancient Greek with Lego scenes.

Magister Craft (https://www.magistercraft.com/)

This video series brilliantly combines spoken Latin (often with subtitles to support all learners), Minecraft, and stories from Roman and Greek mythology, history, and culture.

Online Review Apps

Magistrula (https://www.magistrula.com/)

Magistrula is a great resource for students to review different grammar concepts, especially in the context of sentences. Teachers can set up class assignments based on what grammar they would like students to review. Students can also play games, such as Zombie games, to review these concepts.

Online Commentaries

Practomine Tiered Readings (https://lapis.practomime.com/index.php/operation-caesar-reading-list)

These are tiered reaching for the AP Vergil and Caesar syllabus and more. Generally, these tiered readings are used first to introduce the students to the material, and then students work through each tier until they are ready to read the original Latin text.

They are useful in providing context and confidence to students. In the fourth tier, there are

Dickinson College Commentaries (http://dcc.dickinson.edu/)

These are freely available commentaries, complete with notes, vocabulary, and even pictures, essays, and media. It includes the AP Vergil and Caesar Syllabus, but it also contains many more gems of Latin and Greek that are perfect for classroom use.

Hexameter.co (https://hexameter.co/)

This site allows students to practice scansion and keep track of their progress. They choose their meter, author, and keep track of their progress. This can be great as an asynchronous assignment where students can try to get a certain number correct in a row or a tool where students can work at their own pace.

Online Textbooks

When class meets virtually, it is good to know which of the textbooks for Latin and Greek have online options for purchase. The *Cambridge Latin Course* offers an etextbook option and supplementary materials. *Suburani* also offers online options. *Ecce Romani* also offers online options. *Latin for the New Millennium* offers ebooks and online resources for teachers.

For Greek, on https://thepatrologist.com/ Seamus Macdonald offers *Lingua Graeca Per Se Illustrata* freely available online.

Online novellas

There are also online novellas, such as *Cloelia* by Ellie Arnold on the Latin Teacher Toolbox, Peter Sipes' *Sisyphus: Rex Improbus,* which are freely available online and on Amazon.

There are also subscription services available for novellas by Lance Piantaggini and Andrew Olimpi and options to purchase PDFs of novellas from Rachel Beth Canning.

Maintaining Community

As teachers and students meet in a virtual setting, it is important to create community engagement. Some ways to do this might be to set up a daily question that students answer and share what they are comfortable sharing either in person or through a FlipGrid. Another fun idea is to have themed days, such as wear a hat to the video conference day or bring your pet to school day. Another might be to create a backchannel discussion board using a tool like Padlet, where students can share their highs and lows of the week or share ideas, links, or images based on a theme. Review games such as Kahoot, Flippity Quiz Show, and Quizlet Live in teams can create camaraderie among groups of students. Peer feedback can also help students to stay connected to each other. Students can be assigned to work together (through the +add feature for email addresses) on Google Slides while the teacher gives feedback on each group in the Slide deck. Asynchronous discussion questions using Google Classroom Questions, Piazza, Padlet, or FlipGrid are other ways to engage students in virtual discussions and give each other feedback.

Tools for Feedback

Whether in the classroom socially distanced or learning from home, students still will need to have frequent instructor feedback for their work. Feedback should be timely, specific, and actionable. The feedback should ultimately outline actions that will help the student to reach their goals. This feedback could take the form of written feedback, such as comments in documents, emails, or text messages, video feedback, such as quick talking head video, interpersonal feedback, such as having a phone call or video conference with each individual student, or presentational feedback, which may include modeling expectations of student work either in a video or in a synchronous video conference. However, when teachers give feedback, it is important to keep the loop going. Teachers should assign work, students then submit work, then the teacher gives feedback on the work, the student reworks and resubmits the work, and so on until the student reaches their proficiency goals. Online tools such as Peardeck, Magistrula, Google forms, and Quizlet are great for helping students and teachers keep track of student progress.

Support for Exceptional Students

There are many exceptional students who need additional support during virtual instruction. The biggest issue with online instruction can be unreliable access to reliable internet and equipment necessary to participate in online learning. Some options to support these students include access to school equipment, seeking funding for grants (some COVID relief grants for schools can support equipment purchases) , reaching out to internet providers for low or no cost internet service or increases, and finding local libraries or other community organizations willing to provide internet services to patrons (even from the parking lot). There are also options for sharing materials with students who cannot regularly access a hub. Even if they have unreliable internet access, many students have access to a cell phone with texting and data. Services such as Remind, WhatsApp, and Arist can be used to share videos, documents, and text messages communications with students using their cell phones. In fact, it can be useful to contact students via text message in lieu of email for reminders since many students are more likely to check their text messages more often than their email messages.

As instructional design is considered, keep in mind exceptional students who need support. As videos are created, add captions for students who need additional auditory support. Use large, contrasting text, especially when highlighting directions or differentiating lines in poetry or texts, for students who need additional auditory support. Take advantage of read-aloud features for texts, such as searching for read-aloud texts in YouTube or creating teacher read audio in videos or Quizlet flashcards to support students who need reading accessibility support. While color coding can be an effective way to demonstrate distinctions within the text, it is important to be mindful of creating materials that can be seen by students who cannot see certain colors.

There are many ways that exceptional students can be supported, and one of the best ways to find out if student needs are being met is to survey students, both formally with apps such as Google forms and informally during class discussions and office hours to see if the materials that are being provided fit the needs of the students.