

Re-Vision and  
Re-Form in English  
for Academic Purposes  
Contexts after the  
Pandemic



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Edited by

Hande Işıl Işık, Elif Kantarcıoğlu,  
Ayça Üner and Carole Thomas

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## FOREWORD

The world was wholly unprepared for the COVID-19 pandemic. Within a relatively short period of time, massive adjustments had to be made in all areas of our lives and this was especially true in the field of education. Throughout 2020 and 2021, the pandemic required those involved in education to rethink traditional practice and adjust to the "new normal", namely the online teaching and learning environment. Although prior to the pandemic, a number of organizations were already incorporating online teaching, learning and assessment into their curriculum or examination provision, for the majority of those in education, the initial challenges were, at times, overwhelming. However, these challenges were addressed through a rethinking of normal practice and creative solutions were, in many cases, used to overcome or at least limit the negative and stressful impacts of the pandemic. Although initially, there was little time to reflect on the changes, as the pandemic stretched endlessly into yet another year, lessons were learnt and adjustments were made. Challenging times call for difficult decisions. Although not all new practices were met with enthusiasm, there were many positive lessons learnt. Now the time has come for all educational managers, teachers, teacher educators, curriculum specialists and assessment providers to reflect on their experience and build on the positives to inform future practice.

This book aims to bring together the reflections of the many different stakeholders involved in the provision of education and assessment at the tertiary level, mainly in EAP contexts and beyond. It provides an insight into the different ways that the challenges brought by the pandemic were addressed and shows the creativity and determination of those who have a crucial role to play in the educational sector.

Quality educational management is key to the success of any new instructional policy. The opening section of the book is by Elif Kantarcioğlu, who reflects on the transition process from face-to-face education to online education from the perspective of an educational leader during the pandemic. She discusses her experiences and observations with regard to leadership characteristics that make for successful change management in an educational setting.

David Little advocates an approach to teaching, learning and assessment that was already central to the Council of Europe's adult education project of the 1970s, namely learner autonomy, aiming to give future directions for EAP in the post-pandemic period. Focusing on curricular practices during the pandemic, Ayça Üner reflects on three distinct theories of learning (i.e., behaviorism, cognitivism and constructivism) and proposes a framework displaying the validity of these theories in post-pandemic practices. In his chapter, Joshua Jodoin introduces the Language Education for Sustainable Development (LESD) framework with a view to enhancing current EAP practices and discusses its implications in an EAP context with potential benefits.

In the area of assessment, Nick Saville discusses the changes that educational assessment has undergone during the pandemic, with a particular focus on opportunities and risks in the area of educational technology. The move to online assessment raised some serious issues regarding the validity of the exams. Carole Thomas reflects on the reality and the challenges faced by the assessment providers in an English language preparatory program during the pandemic, describing some of the steps taken to address these concerns. Focusing on academic misconduct, Peter Davidson and Christine Coombe talk about how to mitigate against this, outlining strategies to maintain the integrity of assessment and ensure academic integrity.

In his chapter, Barry O'Sullivan presents the challenges experienced during the transition stage of the APTIS system into APTIS Remote by introducing a remote proctoring solution. He discusses the lessons learned from a project in Bangladesh while suggesting areas for further exploration. Similarly, Richard Spiby and Tony Clark review the role of consequences in test validity through reflections on the administration of IELTS Indicator within the framework of the socio-cognitive model of language assessment and its impact during the pandemic.

In the area of teacher education, Hande Işıl Işık presents the challenges posed by the pandemic in regard to the design and delivery of in-service training courses and reflects on the interplay of the concepts: career adaptability, coping mechanisms, and resilience in shaping the professional response of the trainers. Sharing experiences and reflections of teacher educators working at an English-medium foundation university in Türkiye, Bahar Gün focuses mainly on "affect", its importance in teacher education, and explores the disconcerting experiences of teacher educators during the pandemic.



In their chapter, Marion Engin and Doris Dippold present the results of an online survey in which EAP teachers described their experience of teaching speaking in an online environment. They explore how teacher educators can build on these perceptions and provide support for teachers who are teaching online. Lulu Zhang, Ying Zheng, Barry O’Sullivan and Graham Stanley also report on a research study conducted with the teachers of the British Council in four global regions. The study investigates teacher perceptions of the transition to online teaching and learning at the start of the pandemic.



# CHAPTER 1

## EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO FIGHT THE CHALLENGES?

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### **Abstract**

While many people in our country felt they were observing the pandemic from a distance, an announcement introducing the lockdown as of 16 March 2020 was made, followed by a second announcement a couple of days later stating that universities would start online teaching on 23 March 2020. At such a time, when seeing the end of the tunnel was almost impossible for a number of institutions, the tunnel actually turned out to be a very short one for us. Transferring the whole system of teaching and learning onto an online platform within a few days definitely necessitated resources, but turning this into a success required much more than that. In this chapter, I will reflect on how an English Language Preparatory Program in Türkiye overcame the challenge of such a transition from a managerial perspective. While knowing the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of the context was the key, it was the team effort of a group of people who were proactive and responsive, established open communication channels, maintained trust and provided support in a timely manner that helped the program to rise to the challenge of online teaching, learning and assessment. I will explain the role of each one of these features in the transition to online education, making recommendations, based on my experience, to other educational leaders about building a learning organization and establishing a team culture to

help them deal with challenges such as the ones they might have experienced at the beginning of the pandemic.

**Keywords:** Educational leadership, learning organization, managing challenges and expectations, COVID-19, online education

## Introduction

While all effective organizations have their unique qualities leading them to success, they also have some commonalities, which could be considered as key characteristics of successful institutions. These characteristics would also apply to institutions in higher education. When the pandemic started, institutions had to operate in a completely different way, drastically changing their practice, and they were expected to continue delivering courses online, a totally new territory for most of them. Even today, months after the pandemic broke out, new challenges are arising despite the expertise built up to fight the initial hardships. However, when the pandemic first broke out, the institutions able to cope with the challenges of online education in the best possible way were the ones that resorted to their existing institutional know-how, specialist knowledge and talent.

In Türkiye, the lockdown started on 16 March 2020, followed by an announcement that universities would start online education on 23 March 2020. Some universities like ours managed to start providing education online while some others needed more time to prepare for it. Similarly, while some reduced the number of contact hours, our university started online education, keeping the contact hours intact. Needless to say, in such extraordinary times, though the amount of instruction students needed was of crucial importance, it was not the contact hours that determined the success of the transition to online education but the quality and effectiveness of the instruction.

This chapter of reflection, mainly aiming to share real-life experiences, purports to share with the readers how the educational leaders of a foundation university in Türkiye managed the challenges and expectations of the transition to online education in the midst of the pandemic while keeping the quality of learning and teaching at its previous level before the pandemic.

## **Context**

This chapter will reflect on the experiences in the English Language Preparatory Program of a foundation university in Türkiye where the medium of instruction is English. The program aims to take students up to the CEFR B2 level and equip them with the academic skills deemed to be necessary in their respective departments. To reach this goal, it offers weekly face-to-face instruction of 25 hours.

With its approximately 2000 students distributed into slightly more than 100 classes, taught by 135 instructors, and supported by 10 administrative staff, managing the English Language Preparatory Program online presented endless challenges.

## **Challenges and Priorities**

Making a transition to online teaching was in fact asking students and teachers to continue education in unknown territory. In a language learning context where interaction is of utmost importance as opposed to a lecture type of course delivery, the biggest challenge was to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning was sustained. This meant there was a need to upskill all teachers in a very short time frame in areas such as effective technology use, student engagement, feedback methods and online interaction. We observed that the best teachers in the classroom could not perform so well online and vice versa.

As regards online assessment, all parties had concerns about the integrity of exams. Across the university, all teachers were concerned about conducting secure exams while students were expecting fair assessment given under the same exam conditions for all students in regard to the administration of exams.

The delivery of both lessons and assessment necessitated a technological infrastructure not only on the part of the university, but also the students. The university provided all the tools required for effective teaching including Wacom tablets and Zoom accounts for all teachers and for all courses offered. However, it was a challenge to cater for the needs of the students who had to attend classes and exams in places that had poor internet connections and lacked equipment such as cameras and microphones. The need for such equipment also meant that we needed to support students from low-income families. For instance, we made arrangements for them to use

the campus facilities if they lived on campus or provided laptops to some who were in need.

Also, as mentioned by Garcia and Weiss (2020) and Bielinski et al. (2020) in their studies, the needs of the students and teachers were not only technological, but also emotional and psychological. Every day a new type of need was emerging at the beginning of the transition to online education. Student identity being one of the major areas that needed to be addressed during the pandemic as also mentioned by Dace and Charity (2020), one of the greatest challenges was helping students feel they were university students. Although this might seem trivial to most people in the middle of the pandemic, it was the most important aspect of our students' lives and could not be ignored. In accordance with the mission statement of our program, we are committed to whole-person learning and helping students to "adapt to university life" and supporting them "in coping with the demands of academic study". However, we realized that this mission was a challenge when students were not in an academic environment but in their own homes. The students reflected on their experience and expressed that they still felt like high school students as they could not benefit from the facilities of the university and interact with their friends face to face. In addition, the speed of response to these emerging needs presented another challenge. We were expected to be highly responsive in a very short period of time. For instance, a student whose neighbor started construction work in the middle of an online exam expected us to find an immediate solution to her problem that was out of her control and we had to comfort her there and then. The teacher of the same student also wanted to know immediately how she should proceed with the exam and inform the relevant student. Similar challenges were shared in relation to feedback. An academic supervisor was approached by the teacher and sought to find a solution as to how she could give feedback to writing sent by her student, just before the exam, in JPEG (picture) format. Apparently, the lack of printing facilities at home was an issue and the teacher was seeking help to be able to respond to the student in a timely manner. Responding to such needs as leaders in a short time frame, i.e., in a time-sensitive way during the crisis (Jahagirdar, Chatterjee, Behera & Mohapatra, 2020) enabled teaching and learning to continue effectively and in an uninterrupted way. Such challenges continued later in the pandemic when we could do hybrid teaching at the beginning of the following academic year but the nature of these challenges changed. For instance, all stakeholders were expecting us to ensure their health and safety when they were physically in class. In attempts to explain the measures taken, words were never enough. We had to show everyone concrete examples of the measures taken to protect their health.

This list of challenges can be extended as the pandemic and online education presented unprecedented issues. While dealing with these issues, we had to prioritize them based on the impact and their implications. The quality of learning and teaching, and the integrity of exams have always been the priorities of our program and the university at large. However, the health of individuals had never necessitated as much attention from educational managers (Liu et al., 2022). Similarly, the emotional and psychological wellbeing of students and teachers had never required so much effort and cautious planning.

Teacher training, curriculum and assessment related issues and how they have been tackled are extensively explored by my colleagues in this book. Therefore, the next section will reflect on the challenges and how they were overcome from the viewpoint of educational leadership.

### **Educational Leadership in the midst of the pandemic**

The transition to online education and establishing a system that is both high quality and sustainable required effective change management (Amis & Royston, 2022; Burke, 2013). In such a period of change, knowing the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of my context, the preparatory program and the university in general, was the key for me as this facilitated identification of the priorities, addressing the expectations of the senior management and other stakeholders. While this required proposing realistic solutions to the issues experienced, it was the team effort of a group of people who were proactive and responsive, established open communication channels, maintained trust and provided support in a timely manner that helped the program to rise to the challenge of online teaching, learning and assessment and addressed the issues presented above.

Successful change management can be realized through successful leadership. In his paper “Change management – or change leadership?”, Gill (2003) argues that in order to reach the desired goal of change, effective leadership is a prerequisite. In our case, how did the leaders at all levels of the preparatory program manage the change from face-to-face learning and teaching to online education within a period as short as one week?

Figure 1 below presents the main features of the leaders in the program who made the transition to online learning and teaching not just possible but also successful.

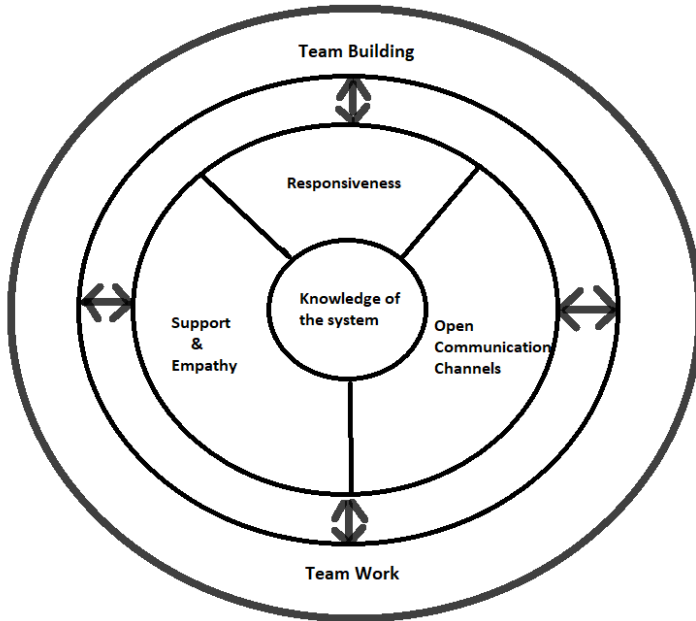


Figure 1: Characteristics of successful change leaders during the pandemic

The key to effective change management for me was how well I know the system as the director of the preparatory program. In my case, this involves having a solid understanding of the expectations, standards, vision and priorities of the university; the weaknesses and strengths of teachers and other academic supervisors and leaders; how they compensate and complement one another; the student body; and other technical or financial resources. This knowledge eased my life as a leader in planning and work allocation at the time of the transition into online learning and teaching and helped me and other academic leaders in my program to adopt an adaptive leadership style. In adaptive leadership, managers should “be prepared to abort and modify plans with immediacy if required. They must be willing to embrace unpredictability and have the foresight to pre-empt issues before they arise and be prepared to implement contingency plans if required” (Marshall, J. et al., 2020, p. 34). Times of hardship such as the pandemic require an adaptive approach, which also helped me and the other academic leaders in the program to better guide the teachers and students.

Effective change management can also be realized by leaders being highly responsive, which required empathy and support (De Groot, 2015). Addressing



all stakeholders' needs as much as the circumstances allowed, including emotional ones, was a significant role of mine and my academic leader colleagues during the pandemic. The senior management also presented a highly responsive leadership. For example, while I talked to about 20 students and parents every single day trying to understand their concerns, answering their questions, and comforting them, the supervisors in the program gave training sessions or prepared booklets including tools that could be used in teaching. Similarly, the senior management of the university also created teaching- and technology-related guidelines and provided instructors with tablets that helped them to write on the screen in the way they wanted. These are only a few examples.

At the time, as mentioned earlier, this responsiveness required urgency and we all tried hard not to delay any questions, issues or concerns and addressed them immediately. Empathy, again mentioned above, was perhaps one of the essential characteristics of a leader as even the most capable and practical teachers had mental blocks or blackouts when they had to teach using an online platform in such a short time. In our context, we received some impractical and unreasonable demands and comments; however, it was crucial to understand the fear and the cognitive load of dealing with ambiguity and uncertainty, rather than reacting negatively to such demands.

Responsiveness concurs with communication; in that, being highly responsive calls for establishing open communication channels. The early days of the pandemic were full of concerns, anxiety, unknowns, and questions. In an educational setting, it becomes even more significant that students, teachers, and middle managers can openly express their opinions, concerns, and feelings. Effective and sustainable solutions can be generated if managers listen to others wholeheartedly and take all into consideration while making decisions (Lewis, 2011). Marshall et al. (2020, p. 34) advocate that "during turbulent times, communication must be clear and timely. This approach garners respect and support for leaders and fosters a sense of comfort among stakeholders that every effort is being made to manage the situation effectively."

On a similar note, leaders should serve as a communication bridge between all stakeholders. Conveying the concerns and suggestions of students and teachers to the senior management clearly and openly proves to be as vital as listening to people with full attention before making decisions (Lewis, 2011). During the pandemic, decisions were taken at every level of the university, not based on past experience but on anticipating future issues

and examining issues from all angles. A few months into the pandemic, at a time when we could work from our offices, a meeting was held to reconsider the way that exams were administered across the university. The senior management and deans, having talked to their instructors, came to the meeting with similar suggestions, which could not be applied in the Preparatory Program. It was my responsibility to clearly explain why this would not work in the Preparatory Program context and also show them why it was a must that the Preparatory Program and the rest of the university carried out exams in the same manner giving all students the same opportunities. More time was requested to think and they met again the next day to make university-wide decisions that prevented students from comparing different practices. The deans also agreed that all faculty members would actively take part in the proctoring of the Preparatory Program exams, which also shows the importance of teamwork. The university senior management displayed a similar approach in acting like a communication bridge and invited the student representative to all meetings where decisions impacting on learners' lives in general were made.

All characteristics of leaders presented in Figure 1 and explained above translate into a learning organization and a team culture, increasing institutional ownership (Wang and Ahmed, 2003). Change leaders should get all stakeholders on board by listening to them, getting their opinions and sharing other stakeholders' views and the vision of the university in general, which eventually mean involving all stakeholders in the decision-making process, thus resulting in greater ownership.

## **Conclusion**

Netolicky states that “the COVID-19 global pandemic has led to education reform at a rapid rate but reform out of necessity rather than deliberate and thoughtful planning” (2020, p. 394). However, even when the circumstances called for immediate action, careful planning was perhaps more prominent than ever when it was education put under the spotlight. Students are allowed to spend a maximum of two years in the university preparatory programs by law in Türkiye, which, for some students, meant that the whole duration of their education in our program took place online and was prone to the implications of the decisions taken during this time frame. Educational leaders acting at their best was a requisite for the wellbeing of the students.

Many characteristics could be listed under good leadership, including educational leadership. Based on their research, Olanrewaju and Okerie

concluded that there were thirteen key qualities of a good leader, which are “1) accessibility and dedication, 2) neutrality and modesty, 3) aspiration and attentiveness, 4) belief and aptitude, 5) dignity and amiability, 6) insight and confidence, 7) vitality and concentration, 8) originality and honesty, 9) responsibility and team spirit, 10) decency and self-assurance, 11) charitability, 12) comical and maintenance culture, and 13) reliability” (2019, p. 148). While these are valuable qualities in any leadership context, Marshall and his colleagues suggest that providing clear direction, communicating effectively, working collaboratively, and engaging in adaptive leadership were the eminent features of educational leaders during the pandemic.

In my own experience and observations of other leaders in our program and the wider university, the characteristics displayed in Figure 1 have been prominent. Having a full grasp of the system – educational context lies at the heart of leadership. Educational leaders have to be contextually literate as Brauckmann et al. (2020) put it. “Successful and effective school leaders are aware of the broader context in the internal and external environment in which they operate” (Pashiardis and Johansson, 2020, p. 701). Together with being contextually literate, responsiveness and establishing open communication channels, including acting as a bridge between different stakeholders, facilitating team building and teamwork form the cornerstone of effective change management during any crisis, as was the case in the pandemic.

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## CHAPTER 2

# TWO CHALLENGES, ONE SOLUTION: LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSING EAP AFTER THE PANDEMIC

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### Abstract

EAP takes many different forms and the pandemic has created many different problems for EAP practitioners. It's unlikely that we shall ever have a comprehensive account of COVID-19's impact, but anecdotal evidence suggests that most educational sectors have faced two challenges in particular: students' limited capacity for autonomous learning and the difficulty (in many cases, the impossibility) of moving high-stakes institutional exams online. Those are the two challenges of my title. The one solution I propose rests on the argument that the CEFR's "can do" descriptors allow us to "constructively align" curriculum, teaching/learning and assessment in a way that supports reflective learning and fosters the development of learner autonomy. There is nothing new about the elements of my argument. I shall advocate an approach to teaching and learning that was already central to the Council of Europe's adult education project of the 1970s; and the European Language Portfolio was conceived in the 1990s partly as a way of making learners partners in the assessment process. To date, however, the argument has failed to gain widespread traction. I make it again in the hope that it can contribute to post-pandemic reflection on future directions for EAP.

**Keywords:** English for academic purposes, learner autonomy, teaching, learning, assessment

## Introduction

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed two serious weaknesses in most educational sectors: students' limited capacity for autonomous learning and the lack of a satisfactory replacement for high-stakes national and institutional exams. Those are the two challenges of my title. The single response I propose rests on the argument that the “can do” descriptors of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001) and its *Companion Volume* (CEFR-CV; Council of Europe, 2020) allow us to “constructively align” curriculum, teaching/learning and assessment in a way that supports reflective learning, fosters the development of learner autonomy, and in an emergency like a pandemic, allows us to get by without traditional exams. There is nothing new about the essentials of my argument. I shall advocate an approach to teaching and learning that was already central to the Council of Europe's adult education project of the 1970s; and one of the purposes of the European Language Portfolio (conceived in the 1990s, piloted from 1998 to 2000, and launched in 2001) was to make learners partners in the assessment process. I have already elaborated the argument more than once in relation to the pedagogical and assessment practices of university language centres (Little, 2011, 2012, 2016, 2021). I make it again here as a contribution to post-pandemic reflection on future directions for EAP.

### **Step 1: Using the CEFR-CV to support curriculum development**

As is well known, the CEFR and the CEFR-CV use “can do” descriptors to define six levels of communicative proficiency. This action-oriented approach allows us to bring curriculum, teaching/learning and assessment into closer alignment with one another than has usually been the case. Each “can do” descriptor can be used simultaneously to specify a learning outcome, provide a learning focus, and imply an assessment task. What is more, because “can do” descriptors focus on behaviour, learners themselves can participate in the assessment culture that these considerations imply, engaging in regular peer and self-assessment. The first step in my response to the two COVID-related challenges I have identified is to use the CEFR-CV to define the communicative repertoire that a given curriculum aims to develop. This process begins outside the CEFR-CV, with a detailed description of the body of knowledge and skills that learners are expected to engage with in their studies. Relevant CEFR-CV scales and descriptors can then be used to describe the communicative capacity students should

develop in relation to this content (for practical examples, see the CEFR-CV; Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 38-40). This provides the basis for a detailed course handbook that elaborates on the different components of the curriculum and explains the functions of the different modes of teaching students will encounter – lectures, seminars, tutorials – in relation to the different elements of their target repertoire.

## **Step 2: From content to process**

The second step in my response is to provide students with the means of converting an action-oriented description of curriculum content into action-oriented learning. The Council of Europe designed the European Language Portfolio (ELP; Council of Europe, 2011) to fulfil this function: it contains checklists of “I can” descriptors arranged according to the language activities and proficiency levels of the CEFR, and learners use these to identify learning targets and self-assess learning outcomes. In this way they develop skills of self-management that enable them to be increasingly autonomous. With its combination of a language passport, language biography and dossier, the ELP may be unnecessarily elaborate for our present purposes. But if students are to engage in reflective learning that is rooted in curriculum goals and driven by a recursive cycle of goal setting and self-assessment, they certainly need checklists to plot and monitor their progress and a portfolio of some kind in which to document their learning.

## **Step 3: Closing the loop – constructive alignment**

The third step in my response is to design exams that reflect the action-oriented content of the curriculum and assess the action-oriented learning by which its goals are pursued. The rating criteria applied to student performances in speaking and writing should be made available to students so that they can use them to inform their goal setting and self-assessment. In this way curriculum, teaching/learning and assessment are “constructively aligned”. The concept of constructive alignment was first proposed by John Biggs, who has summarized its two dimensions as follows:

The ‘constructive’ aspect refers to the idea that students *construct meaning* through relevant learning activities. That is, meaning is not something imparted or transmitted from teacher to learner but is something learners have to create for themselves. Teaching is simply a catalyst for learning. The ‘alignment’ aspect refers to what the teacher does, which is to set up a learning environment that supports the learning activities appropriate to achieving the desired learning outcomes. The key is that the components in

the teaching system, especially the teaching methods used and the assessment tasks, are *aligned* with the learning activities assumed in the learning outcomes. The learner is in a sense ‘trapped’, and finds it difficult to escape without learning what he or she is intended to learn. (Biggs, n. d.; italics in original)

Neat though it is, this definition says nothing about the processes by which students should learn how to construct meaning. How exactly should teaching be a “catalyst for learning”, and how should it be aligned with the “learning activities assumed in the learning outcomes” (in our case expressed in CEFR-CV descriptors)? These questions bring me to the fourth step in my argument.

### **Step 4: Teaching for learner autonomy**

Traditional forms of instruction at university – lectures, seminars, tutorials – and traditional approaches to language teaching have not been notably successful in developing autonomous learners. Henri Holec’s 1979 report to the Council of Europe, *Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning* (Holec, 1981), which first introduced the concept of learner autonomy to the world of language teaching and learning, doesn’t offer much help: Holec’s autonomous learner is engaged in solitary self-instruction, working in a self-access centre or language laboratory, perhaps with access to an adviser. A very different view of the learner, however, was central to the Council of Europe’s major project Organisation, Content and Methods of Adult Education, the final report on which was published in 1977. The project argued strongly for learner self-management, which it saw “not only as an educational method but also as a series of enquiries into the educational process” (Janne, 1977, p. 28); it was thus a precursor of Exploratory Practice (Allwright, 2003; Hanks, 2017). The report explains that learner self-management “implies a personal contribution (past experience, previous knowledge) which is pooled in the group”, though it also requires the assistance of a teacher (Janne, 1977, p. 53). As regards the teaching/learning dynamic, self-managed learning “should be based on group work and implies the possibility of a dialogue (in other words, self-learning must be the result of an interpersonal dialectical dialogue)” (ibid.).

The CEFR-CV allows us to constructively align curriculum, teaching/learning and assessment. But if we want our students to learn how to create meaning for themselves, we must adopt pedagogical approaches that are known to support and develop language learner autonomy (for detailed arguments, see Little, Dam & Legenhausen, 2017; Little, 2020). The principles that



underpin such approaches are direct descendants of those elaborated by the Council of Europe's adult education project. They are the same in all contexts of formal learning and at all levels of proficiency, and they may be summarized as follows:

- From the beginning, teachers engage their learners in a learning conversation that is dialogic in the fullest sense of the term: discourse initiatives are shared by all participants and the learning conversation naturally leads to collaboration and group work.
- Also from the beginning, the learning conversation is conducted in the target language, though no attempt is made to suppress the learners' proficiency in other languages.
- Teachers engage their learners' interests and identities in the learning process by requiring them to manage and document their own learning.
- Learning proceeds in clearly articulated cycles – planning, implementing, evaluating – and is framed by reflective evaluation based on self-assessment, so that learners develop a proficiency that is metacognitive as well as communicative.

### **Step 5: Managing without high-stakes examinations**

So far I have argued that we should (i) use the scales and descriptors of the CEFR-CV to define the communicative goals of our curricula, (ii) provide our students with checklists of “I can” descriptors that they can use to manage their own learning, (iii) design examinations that reflect the action-oriented nature of the curriculum and assess action-oriented learning, and (iv) adopt pedagogical procedures that require our students to manage their own learning by engaging in dialogue and group work. In my view this is how we can best respond to the first of my two COVID-related challenges, students' limited capacity for autonomous learning. What about the second challenge, the lack of a satisfactory replacement for high-stakes examinations? I shall answer this question with reference to the impact of COVID on public exams in Ireland.

Schools in Ireland were closed for most of the spring and summer of 2020. After much official hesitation, the school-leaving exams were cancelled and students' results were based on grades submitted by their schools. An international testing agency was commissioned to design an algorithm that was used to adjust teachers' scores. This exercise, however, was widely perceived to be unfair. A public outcry caused the algorithm to be abandoned

and teachers' grades remained unadjusted. Substantial grade inflation ensued, which meant that some university courses had more applicants with top grades than they could accommodate; places were awarded by lottery. Schools were again closed for much of the school year 2020–2021, and they were once more required to submit teachers' grades for the school-leaving cohort. However, students could also sit exams in the usual way if they wished to do so; papers were adjusted to take account of the fact that many students had been unable to complete the syllabus. For each subject in which they sat the exam students had two grades: the one they achieved in the exam and the one submitted by their school. Their final grade was the higher of the two. Predictably, this resulted in further substantial grade inflation, which again created a serious challenge for university admissions officers; as in 2020, places on some over-subscribed university courses have been assigned by lottery.

Amid much excited media coverage of these issues, no one seems to have identified the single most obvious cause of grade inflation: Ireland's school-leaving exams are not criterion-referenced. When a student achieves the highest grade in (say) German, the best one can say is that he or she has performed outstandingly well by comparison with the norm. The scoring procedures are obscure, and it is impossible to say what the student can actually do in the language. By contrast, the type of examination I have argued for in this chapter can claim to provide precise information about the candidate's communicative abilities. When public exams cannot take place, a system of the kind I have sketched offers two protections. First, because teaching and learning are based on a curriculum that provides a detailed description of the target communicative repertoire and include regular self-assessment, teachers and their students should always know where they stand in relation to curriculum goals. Second, if students use "I can" checklists and portfolios to manage their own learning, at any moment they should be able to provide clear evidence of the progress they have made. In these circumstances the award of teachers' grades no longer needs to be a matter of guessing in the dark. Teachers could be supported by clear guidelines from the examining authority, which could monitor grades by calling in a random sample of learner portfolios. If this approach to the problem were shown to work, it might well lead to an irresistible call for the reform of our current school-leaving exams, which depend to a large extent on rote learning and whose scores are essentially meaningless beyond the immediate norm-referenced context of the exam. This argument also applies to much of the assessment carried out by universities.

## But will anything change?

It is one thing to propose a remedy but quite another to have it adopted. At the time of writing (September 2021) a high percentage of the Irish population has been vaccinated (adults but also adolescents of 12 years and over), rates of infection are at last beginning to fall, schools have reopened, the minister for education is confident that the school-leaving exams will be fully restored in 2022, and the teachers' unions have declared their undiminished commitment to those exams. Provided we escape another surge in infections and hospitalizations, the pandemic will soon seem no more than a bad dream, and the chance to undertake serious educational reform will have been missed. Unlike national education systems, however, universities undertake reform on a regular basis, so perhaps some of them will respond to my two COVID-related challenges by adopting the kind of measures I have outlined, at least in their EAP programmes.

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## CHAPTER 3

# POST-PANDEMIC RECALIBRATION: CURRICULAR PRACTICES AND IMPLICATIONS

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### Abstract

As we approach the post COVID-19 period, it seems inevitable to reflect on the curricular practices in education in terms of where we are relative to where we were. The pandemic has forced us to engage in virtual learning within virtual classroom platforms like Zoom, using customizable cloud-based learning management platforms like Moodle and many others. In these virtual classrooms, while there were innately motivated learners, there were also those learners who faced difficulties in adapting and engaging in content. As educators, it was important for us to leverage the existing instructional delivery that worked before the pandemic to fit the needs of the learners. It was also crucial to translate in-person models of learning to remote learning environments. The current chapter examines the roles of three distinct learning theories (i.e., behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism) in times of sudden transition from face-to-face teaching to online platforms in a preparatory program in Türkiye, teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP). More specifically, this chapter attempts to discuss the curricular practices during the pandemic period and reflect on curricular implications for post-pandemic transformations in relation to the three theories of learning. Finally, a suggested framework based on these theories is presented.

**Keywords:** Theories of learning, self-regulated learning, pre- and post-pandemic practices, structured curriculum design, active engagement

## Introduction

As educators, we have a pedagogical repertoire that draws from a variety of learning theories. We have been trying to make sense of a sea of “isms” – behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Each of these learning theories has contributed unique perspectives with focal points in relation to how learning occurs. Skinner (1957) focused on how reinforcement drives behavioural responses and showed that the behaviours are influenced by environmental factors. Emerging as a reaction to behaviourism, the cognitive approach focused on the mental activities that lead to the response (Piaget, 1950). Stemming from the work of Piaget, the 1960s marked the adaptation of constructivism, viewing the individual learning process as an active one. Moving along the behaviourist, cognitivist, and constructivist continuum, learning shifts from the passive transfer of knowledge to active construction.

The current chapter examines these three distinct learning theories from the perspective of teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) within the realm of instruction in a preparatory program in Türkiye. In doing so, it aims to identify whether the principles of these theories have changed after the transition to online learning.

## Context

The preparatory language program compiles its curricula to ensure that all skills, i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking, as well as systems objectives, i.e., grammar and vocabulary, are covered. The aim, with its level system, is to bring individual students up to an adequate (i.e., B2) level in these skills and systems areas, so they can successfully continue their studies in their respective faculties. Students have to prove that they are successful through the standardized end-of-course tests and proficiency examination. The proficiency exam serves as the most important measure of student performance, allowing students to move on in their respective faculties.

Within the preparatory program, the contributions of individual theorists have significantly impacted the way we design and deliver instruction to date. As educators, we are aware that we do not have the “luxury of restricting [ourselves] to only one theoretical position” (Snelbecker, 1983, p. 8) and we always examine each of the theories and select those principles in light of the needs of our students. Now that we had migrated to remote education through Zoom, given the important role of preparatory program