Moving Online: Using Multimedia in ELT Preservice Teacher Training

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The English Language Teacher (ELT) Training program offered through Oxford Seminars results in a 120-hour course certification for teachers who will teach English language learners (Oxford Seminars, n.d.-b). Typically, the first 60 hours of the course are face-to-face, with an additional 60-hour self-study component that follows. Since the start of the pandemic, the face-to-face component has been delivered synchronously online via Zoom. Upon completion of the course, teachers are equipped to teach English to learners at various language levels, ages, cultural backgrounds, and who will be learning in various contexts.

Preservice teacher training with Oxford Seminars focuses on developing "practical techniques and [] confidence" (n.d.-b). This involves learning the fundamentals of language teaching, including how methodologies and approaches have evolved from audiolingualism and grammar-translation into task- and project-based learning and pluralistic approaches, or "principled eclecticism" (Mellow, 2002). The course also covers principles of second language acquisition (SLA), lesson planning and materials design for homogenous and heterogenous groups, classroom management, linguistic skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening), and preparing teachers for living and teaching abroad, among many other topics designed with preservice English language teachers in mind.

What is notably absent from the curriculum is any intentional focus on teaching online language learners, which is surprising because the face-to-face component has moved to an online synchronous component. Course instructors with Oxford Seminars have historically been selected based on their ELT and/or teacher training experience, but they have not necessarily been vetted based on experience teaching online. Course instructors and preservice teachers alike would benefit from a module dedicated to teaching online. This addition could help spur a new

generation of confident and successful online language educators, "providing *all teachers* [emphasis added] with effective professional development so that they can confidently establish teacher presence online" (Anderson et al., 2001; Murphy, Smith & Stacey, 2002, as cited in Wilson & Stacey, 2004, p. 34).

Design Concept

Moving the existing face-to-face component of the Oxford Seminars certification course to Zoom was a good start; after all, technology in 2020 afforded contingency plans that may have been more difficult to successfully implement ten or even five years earlier. That being said, a common misconception about online teaching—even pre- pandemic—has centered on the perceived lack of interaction in lessons. Even if the plan is to continue delivering the face-to-face component of Oxford Seminars through Zoom, "[n]ew technologies have changed the nature of open and distance education in the last decades by providing a way for communities of learners and their teachers to interact with one another" (Wilson & Stacey, 2004, p. 33). This does not mean an online course should be overwrought with technology, applications, and installs. Multimedia tools can be used to supplement the course to make long, synchronous classes more interactive and meaningful while still adhering to the simplicity of Mayer's multimedia principles, which are grounded in moving away from simply "words alone" (2009, p. 3).

In addition to making classes more interactive, the synchronous component of Oxford Seminars can benefit from thoughtful use of multimedia that takes into account the needs of preservice teachers and acts as a model for ultimate use in a classroom of language learners. As Plass et al. (1998) explain, "one of the most important functions of instructional materials (e.g., multimedia software) is to help students construct referential connections between two forms of mental representation" (p. 26). Fortunately, the four linguistic skills—reading and listening

(receptive) and speaking and writing (productive)—overlap quite a bit. After all, it is difficult to practice speaking without listening, either listening as a model for pronunciation or listening in order to engage in conversational turn-taking. In a teacher training course, while using loop input, or "an alignment of the process and content of learning" (Woodward, 2003, p. 301), when course instructors teach preservice teachers how to teach language learners speaking and listening skills, this should be done through speaking and listening tasks; the same goes for all linguistic skills and subskills.

Using appropriately leveled English dialogues that have been created and edited through an audio tool like GarageBand can help preservice teachers have different models of the kind of English turn-taking and language nuances among different bands of the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, n.d.). Similarly, using a transcription tool like TEMI (Myers, 2017) with Zoom-recorded classes can help preservice teachers monitor their language and tweak their online personas to better fit the needs of their learners. Specific details about multimedia are included later in this proposal.

Accommodating Learner Needs

Preservice teachers in the Oxford Seminars certification program are a diverse group: some already have long careers under their belts—in education or otherwise—and are looking for a change of pace; others are recent college graduates eager to explore the world and earn income at the same time; others are interested in missionary work overseas. In a world impacted by Covid-19, however, a new group of preservice teachers are likely to seek certification: people eager to teach English to online learners. This creates a new opportunity as well, for teachers who have physical situations that may not be accommodated in a way that allows them to teach overseas. Now they have the chance to teach online. The challenge, then, is accommodating a

diverse group of preservice teachers in a way that uses loop input (Woodward, 2003) to demonstrate how to accommodate their own groups of future diverse learners.

While we know that "student motivation and performance improves when instruction is adapted to the learning preferences of students" and that "educators have a responsibility to understand the diversity of their students and to present information in a variety of ways in order to accommodate all learners' preferences" (Miller, 2001, p. 8), it is important to be reasonable and realistic. It may seem impossible to accommodate every learner in every activity with every type of multimedia, but it is possible to demonstrate a variety of approaches to give preservice teachers an arsenal of ideas to take into their own classrooms, online or otherwise.

In addition to the diversity of preservice teachers with regard to their careers or intentions with a TESOL/TESL/TEFL certification, they may have different levels of comfort navigating the use of educational tools and deciding how and when to use multimedia appropriately. In a preservice teacher classroom comprised of both "digital natives" and "digital immigrants" (Prensky, 2001), it is important to make all preservice teachers feel comfortable interacting with multimedia as much or as little as they need to in their future language classrooms (full of learners of different ages and levels). The synchronous component of the Oxford Seminars certification course, then, will rely on the integration of simple multimedia tools to help build preservice teachers' confidence in future use of tools.

Incorporating Multimedia

Pear Deck is a multimedia tool that can tackle the perceived challenge of engagement in an online environment. The synchronous component of the Oxford Seminars course lasts for 60 hours and takes place over the course of three consecutive weekends. This was already a challenging endeavor in a face-to-face environment, but keeping preservice teachers engaged for

the same time period through a webcam presents challenges in keeping everyone on task and interested. Something as familiar as a PowerPoint presentation can be made significantly more dynamic with Pear Deck, a Google Slides add-on that bills itself as "[t]he fastest way to transform presentations into classroom conversations" (Pear Deck, n.d.). Oxford Seminars instructors should use Pear Deck to add polling and real-time quizzing to their presentations, which can be done through preservice teachers' own devices. Pear Deck is a good option to make static presentations seem gamified, and materials can be adapted or further explored in real-time based on how preservice teachers interact with the content. Even if preservice teachers do not use Pear Deck in their ultimate teaching assignments, regularly interacting with a tool like Pear Deck will hopefully make them more willing to explore other tools and applications that may help their own future learners interact with content.

One of the most useful multimedia tools to incorporate into the course is the use of the TEMI transcription tool, which offers speech-to-text technology and promises to be more efficient than other—human—transcription services, thanks to "sophisticated speech recognition algorithms" (Myers, 2017). A critical element of teaching preservice teachers is demonstrating how to both give instructions that include the use of appropriately graded and leveled language, and how to self-audit and adapt teacher talk time (TTT) and teacher talk quality (TTQ) (Liu et al., 2020). TEMI should be used to record good and bad examples of instructor TTT and TTQ. This will help preservice teachers notice filler words, above-grade language, and use of inappropriate or incidental language. TEMI should also be used in the last days of the course when preservice teachers role play and teach their peers. Oxford Seminars instructors can use the playback and transcripts from these role plays to help them evaluate and grade performance, and

preservice teachers can use them to self-audit their online persona as presented through Zoom, but also areas where preservice teachers may need to adapt their language.

Plan Overview

Oxford Seminars is a certification course that relies on the expertise and experience of its instructors as they deliver lessons. The basic course outline is provided, along with a feedback rubric for the final course project: pre-service teachers leading a lesson for a prospective group of learners (the student-teacher role play involving classmates). Instructors, then, fill in the details using the provided Oxford Seminars course books and any other materials they have relied on during their ELT careers. In this sense, the development of the face-to-face component relies more on a "lone ranger" approach to development than a systems approach, as course instructors have quite a bit of autonomy over the materials used (Hawkes & Coldeway, 2002, p. 435).

In order to add a new module related to teaching language learners online, some element of the face-to-face course needs to be scaled back. On the fifth day of the course—the last Saturday—there is currently a significant amount of time dedicated to finding a job, writing cover letters and resumes, and job interviews (Oxford Seminars, n.d.-b). Oxford Seminars already has a lifetime guarantee for job placement services, and these services cover the same material as the face-to-face component (Oxford Seminars, n.d.-a); it makes sense to cut this section of the face-to-face course and focus on the new modality of online learning.

It is recommended that Oxford Seminars solicit sample modules from teachers who have experience teaching online and/or experience training teachers to teach online. This project proposal is the first of what could be many solid suggestions. If Oxford Seminars provides instructors time from the information session to the start of the course (usually one month), they

can then pilot this new format in upcoming courses they teach that regularly have high

enrollment. See Table 1. Because these courses take place several times a year in different

cities—courses are usually available monthly—it will be relatively quick to see how receptive

audiences and instructors may be. The existing course feedback survey that students submit upon

course completion can be adapted to account for the new module, and, along with feedback from

more senior instructors based on watching recordings of these modules, can steer development in

the right direction. At the very least, adding a focus on online teaching addresses the elephant in

the room: in many cites the face-to-face component of Oxford Seminars is still being delivered

via Zoom.

Table 1

Suggested Oxford Seminars Pilot Timeline

Course Location	Date of Information Session	Online Module Development	Course Dates	Feedback Time frame
Washington, D.C.	April 6	~ one month between information session and course start	May 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, 23	May 30
San Francisco, CA	April 6		May 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, 23	May 30
New York, NY	June 12		July 10, 11, 17, 18, 24, 25	August 1
Atlanta, GA	June 12		July 10, 11, 17, 18, 24, 25	August 1
Chicago, IL	June 12		July 10, 11, 17, 18, 24, 25	August 1

Note. Adapted from information provided at https://oxfordseminars.com/tesol-tesl-tefl-

course/locations-dates/ (Oxford Seminars, n.d.-c).

Project Summary

As more companies look to capitalize on the growth "of online and blended modalities"

by developing entirely new online programs for language learners (Cengage, 2021), it makes

sense to have this new reality reflected in the Oxford Seminars course. By folding in the

thoughtful use of multimedia and slightly tweaking some of the course outline, Oxford Seminars can make sure that preservice teachers receive a certification that more accurately reflects the new normal of online language learning in a post-Covid-19 world. [81]

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