

Maintaining Dialogue in Remote English Classes

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This week, I've been thinking a lot about one of our students who has disclosed to my CT (Cooperating Teacher) that she has been living on her own for the past two semesters and works full time to support herself. Due to her work schedule, she goes through periods of time when she is unable to attend classes, and other periods of time when she can. She asked my CT to reach out to her other teachers about her situation so that they know why her attendance is sporadic. I worked with this student in our afternoon classes, which my CT had decided to reserve for making up work at the end of the marking period. It seems that this semester, a lot of standalone ENL (English as a New Language) periods are being used to support students with content classes – and I think this is actually very smart of my CT, because it's what our students really need the most right now in a practical sense. The student and I worked on completing an essay outline together. The ELA (English Language Arts) teacher had included a graphic organizer with a lot of helpful descriptions and sentence starters.

I shared my screen with my student, and created a new graphic organizer without all of the descriptions, sentence starters, and suggestions. We still had the original to refer to, but we had more blank space to put our ideas. She identified evidence from the text without my prompting, so I copied and pasted the quotes into the organizer and asked her guiding questions for analysis. I typed what she said into the document, sometimes helping her use academic language. I have been doing a lot of typing for students while they tell me their ideas verbally to remove the added cognitive load that putting words on paper can add. This has actually been a really helpful form of differentiation that I may not have utilized had I not been exposed to remote learning in this way. In the half hour or so that I worked with her, we developed a very good outline that would make writing her essay so much more manageable, and I couldn't help but wish that this kind of very structured approach to scaffolding writing assignments could take place more frequently. She was engaged the whole time, and we had a real back and forth about her ideas. At the end of our time together, when my CT re-entered the room from her breakout room, I told my CT that our student had had a lot of good ideas and that we got a lot done. The student replied "You think so?" and I was shocked for a moment hearing the surprise in her voice. I feel like it's strange to say that I look up to some of the students that I work with, but I really admire how hard they work in their day to day lives, whether that be taking responsibility for their younger siblings or family members, or working to support themselves and their families.

I know that just showing up to school for me was difficult when I was their age. And so, when I just gave her simple encouragement, I didn't expect that to make her uncertain. I don't know if this culminates in one theme or idea, and I know every student's remote learning is going differently. I'm also aware that every child has a story that we can't fully know, and none of that is new information. But that afternoon made clear to me that while sometimes I don't

want to come off as insincere or sentimental, it's never going to be overkill when I compliment, encourage, and acknowledge students for what they are capable of.

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