

A professional development course to face the current challenges  
An online asynchronous course  
Un curso de desarrollo profesional para afrontar los retos actuales  
Un curso asincrónico en línea  
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**Abstract:**

The context of English language teaching has undergone significant changes in recent years, impacting all elements involved, including students, teachers, materials, methodologies, challenges, and outcomes. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone was forced to continue teaching and learning to the best of their abilities. Although classes have largely returned to their pre-pandemic format, the lessons learned from remote and online teaching cannot be disregarded as the experience also revealed the futility of some former live classroom activities. To address this issue, a teacher development course has been created to assist educators in evaluating their current practices and enhancing them by drawing on the knowledge gained and resources employed during the pandemic. This online and asynchronous course provides educators with an opportunity to embrace change to better learning outcomes for students.

**Keywords:**

*Change, Online, Asynchronous, Development, Course.*

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**Resumen:**

La enseñanza de los idiomas y en especial del inglés ha sufrido demasiados cambios en tiempos recientes, impactando a todos los involucrados: estudiantes, profesores, materiales, metodologías, retos y resultados. Como resultado de la pandemia de COVID-19, nos vimos forzados a continuar enseñando y aprendiendo de la mejor manera posible. A pesar de que las clases han regresado mayormente al formato pre-pandemia, en el proceso hubo grandes aprendizajes del trabajo en línea y remoto, al igual que se evidenció la futilidad de algunas actividades en el aula. Para abordar este tema, se ha creado un curso de desarrollo para profesores cuyo objetivo principal es evaluar su práctica actual, mejorándola con las experiencias adquiridas y los recursos utilizados durante la pandemia. El curso es asíncrono y provee a los educadores la oportunidad de abrazar el cambio y lograr mejores resultados para sus estudiantes.

**Palabras Clave:**

*Cambio, En-línea, Asíncrono, Desarrollo, Curso*

**Introduction**

The COVID-19 epidemic, which commenced in March 2020, had a profound and far-reaching global impact on the lives of individuals and society as a whole. It necessitated significant adaptations in the educational realm, particularly in the way students were taught. Recognizing that a return to traditional classrooms, with the potential risk of exposing students and teachers to the virus, was untenable, authorities urged everyone to

address the situation to the best of their abilities. In response, teachers around the world had to draw upon their expertise, personal resources, and, above all, unwavering determination to continue delivering education despite the challenges they faced.

Even as classroom instruction gradually resumed and returned to a semblance of normalcy, it is crucial not to overlook or forget the valuable experiences gained from the period of what had, at first, seemed to be, "unconventional" teaching methods. Furthermore, the transition to remote work and online education brought to light the

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inherent futility of certain activities that had previously been regularly carried out, within the confines of the physical classroom.

Therefore, the objective of this paper is to report on an experience with the design and delivery of an innovative teacher development course designed to assist educators in reflecting upon their current teaching practices and exploring how these practices can be enhanced by leveraging the tools and lessons derived from the crisis brought about by the pandemic. The course aims to facilitate a thoughtful examination of instructional approaches, encouraging teachers to incorporate newfound insights and innovative strategies into their pedagogical repertoire.

### **Target audience**

Despite the fact that this course was created with a specific target audience in mind, many other teachers with similar profiles and experience may find it to be relevant.

The target audience so far is a total of 150 of the author's co-workers from the English Department at the Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí, UASLP, who are distributed throughout San Luis Potosí State. Most of them have been working as professional instructors for more than ten years. They had all successfully passed the ICELTE/COTE course, and they frequently attend update conferences hosted by the department. These teachers have developed their own methods over the years, and they are aware of what works best for them in the classroom. They experienced a great deal of adaptation and innovation during the pandemic crisis as well, but it seems that, for many, going back to face to face classes meant reverting to old routines and disregarding much of what they had recently learned, fostered also by the syllabus and teaching structure (that has not changed since before the pandemic) in our working environment. Therefore, this professional development course was designed with the following objectives:

### **Objectives**

To work together with teachers and empower them:

- To acknowledge the new reality.
- To become familiar with the most pertinent teaching theories that are relevant in this situation.
- To give a concrete illustration of how an online course might be structured, delivered, and utilized.
- To examine different tools and resources that are currently available.
- To make well-informed choices about what to modify or adopt in your teaching situation based

on what is practical, suitable, and pertinent to learners.

- To consider a range of methodologies and their respective justifications.

### **Modality**

Participants on this course are encouraged to approach it with an open and receptive mindset, embracing the opportunity to explore novel ideas and techniques while eagerly sharing their own experiences. It is crucial that individuals are willing to step outside their comfort zones, actively engage in the learning process, and contribute to the collaborative environment fostered within the course. Dedication and commitment are vital for a meaningful learning experience. Participants are expected to allocate approximately 30 hours of their time to fully engage with the course materials and activities. It is recommended that teachers set aside three to five hours per week to effectively delve into the readings, practice exercises, and reflection tasks, as well as to watch the recommended videos provided within each section of the course. This time commitment ensures a comprehensive engagement with the course content and facilitates a deeper understanding of the concepts being explored. It is recommended that teachers do the course over a full semester, to have the opportunity to deeply reflect on the content, although it could be done in less time (about two and a half months).

Furthermore, it is important to note that the course is designed to be asynchronous and delivered entirely online. This means that participants have the flexibility to access the materials and engage in the course activities at their own convenience, within the designated timeframe. This asynchronous format allows for greater flexibility in scheduling, accommodating the diverse needs and responsibilities of the participants, while still maintaining a structured and coherent learning experience.

By entering the course with an open mind, a willingness to embrace new approaches, and an eagerness to share their experiences, participants can make the most of the course's asynchronous and online nature, dedicating the recommended hours per week to gain valuable insights, engage in meaningful discussions, and foster their professional growth.

The colleague teachers at the UASLP have not already completed the course, as it will be offered in the next training period planned at the University which is in December 2023.

### **Microsoft Teams – OneNote**

The target audience for this course is the entire teaching staff at the UASLP English Department, as mentioned before. In response to the shift towards remote work, the university decided to provide the entire community with

access to Microsoft Teams as a platform for online collaboration. This decision offered teachers numerous advantages, including the ability to connect with language students and involve them in the learning process directly within the platform.

Utilizing OneNote as the platform for this professional development course serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it demonstrates how OneNote can be effectively used to organize and structure a course, showcasing its capabilities as a versatile educational tool. Secondly, it provides teachers with an opportunity to experience the platform from the perspective of a learner, enabling them to empathize with their students and understand the potential challenges they may encounter.

By immersing themselves in the learning environment created within OneNote, teachers can gain valuable insights into the user experience and explore strategies to overcome any difficulties. This first-hand experience equips them with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively support and guide their language students through the learning process.

The integration of Microsoft Teams and OneNote not only facilitates remote teaching and learning but also empowers teachers to adapt to the changing educational landscape. By embracing these technologies and understanding their potential, faculty members can enhance their teaching practices, promote student engagement, and navigate the challenges of remote instruction more effectively.

Through this course, teachers are encouraged to explore the platforms as learners themselves, enabling them to better serve their students and create engaging and supportive virtual learning environments.

## Organization of the Course

The structure of the course is displayed in the next screenshot (Figure 1: Course Overview). The course objectives and dynamics are covered in the first folder, which begins with a Welcome message. Additionally, it describes how the course will be assessed and how participants will be given feedback. A video on the website instructs teachers on how to add a folder to which they may upload the results of their reflections and other activities (Figure 2: Creating your working space).

Following the overview, the figure shows the four components. Each one comprises folders with activities, tools, and resources that are arranged and connected to lead users through the learning process. Following the completion of the course, a folder called Comments was made available to the teachers so they could share their views and opinions.

Teachers are asked to write their comments freely rather than being given an assessment form in order to provide qualitative data to interpret and use to improve future

versions of the course. The evidence of participants' work was kept in the next folder, which is followed by the bibliography used in the course.

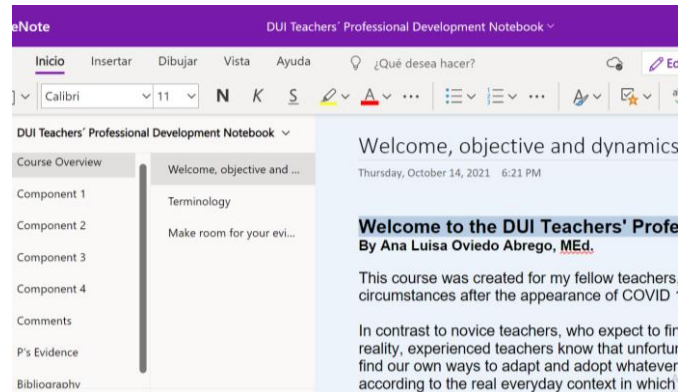


Figure 1: Course Overview

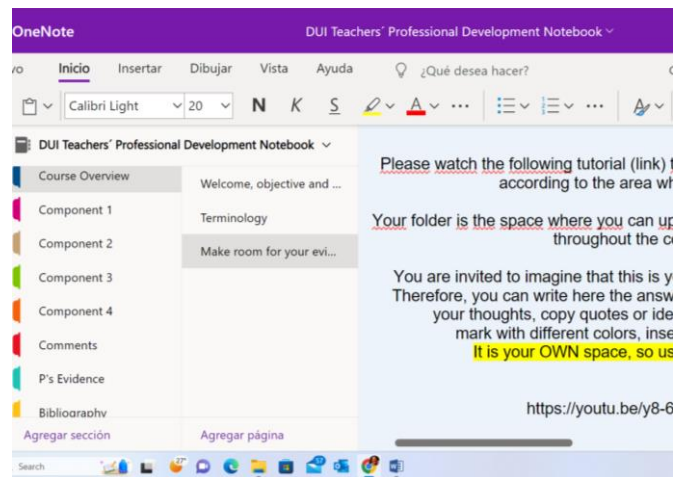


Figure 2: Creating your own working space

There are four main phases to the course. The philosophy guiding the creation of this course is depicted in the diagram (Figure 3: Experiential Learning an adaption). The experiential learning theory was selected as the guiding principle for this course, as the participant starts reflecting in his/her own experience (beliefs and attitudes) during the pandemic. This is the basis for considering adapting other models, technologies, etc.

Knowledge is created by experience, according to Kolb (1984). As a result, an event might spur learning and growth. The four components were created to assist teachers in remembering and considering their experiences. Additionally, they are driven to explore in order to determine whether a novel idea will benefit their profession. Finally, if it is applicable, they should implement it into their practice after making any necessary adjustments.

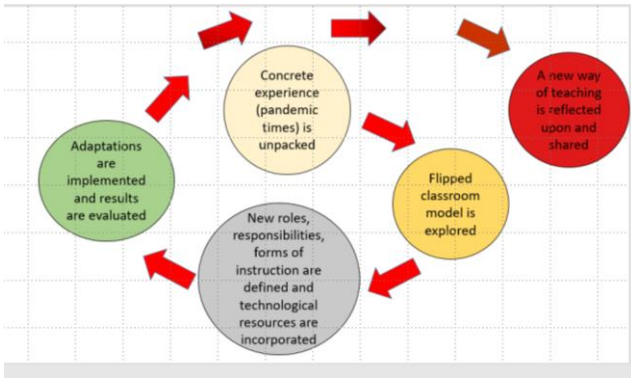


Figure 3: Experiential Learning an adaptation

Additionally, Bolitho (1991) emphasizes the need to start “where they are at,”

We believe that the participants themselves are the preferred starting point in training courses. They come to courses with experience. They also possess a system of beliefs, attitudes, and values about teaching and learning, and about how people relate to each other in a variety of contexts. They also come with expectations. We believe that it is imperative that a course begins with an exploration of all these elements, in any order that seems appropriate to the group in question. (p4)

In the initial segment of the course, teachers are encouraged to engage in open discussions about their experiences during the onset of the epidemic, encompassing both positive and challenging aspects. As Bolitho (1991) says, courses need to start where participants are, in other words, unpacking their beliefs and attitudes towards their actual practices. A crucial objective of this phase is to differentiate between emergency instruction and true online learning, allowing educators to reflect on the shift and its impact on their teaching practices, by thinking about how they faced emergency and how the return to reality is happening.

Additionally, participants explore various instructional approaches, including asynchronous and synchronous activities, both online and offline. This comprehensive exploration equips teachers with the necessary terminology and tools to navigate and effectively utilize these methodologies in their teaching.

Moreover, the course delves into the concepts of blended learning and flipped classroom, critically assessing their applications in the context of modern education. Educators are guided to evaluate a sample lesson that incorporates these models, enabling them to gain a deeper understanding of their functionalities and weigh the associated advantages and disadvantages.

To provide visual clarity and enhance comprehension, Figure 4: Component One, presented as the next screenshot, illustrates the well-organized arrangement of

the topics covered in this initial phase of the course. This visual aid facilitates participants in navigating the course materials with ease, fostering a seamless and enriching learning experience.

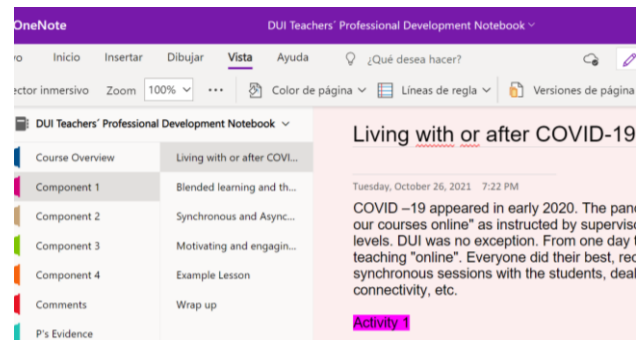


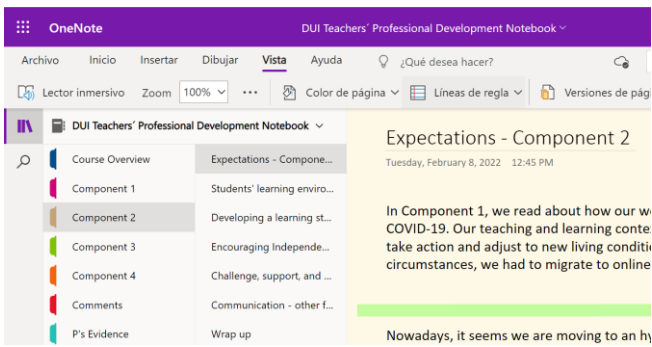
Figure 4: Screenshot Component One

In the current educational global context, there is a noticeable shift towards adopting a hybrid model rather than a complete return to traditional face-to-face lessons. As we delve into the concepts of synchronous and asynchronous sessions and analyse examples, it becomes evident that certain tasks or activities can be just as effectively, if not better, facilitated online and asynchronously. Embracing such an approach offers additional advantages, such as promoting independent learning and optimizing the utilization of resources.

In Component 2 of this course, we will delve into exploring the diverse roles and responsibilities of all individuals engaged in the learning process. Additionally, we will examine various forms of communication and explore the key characteristics of online work. As Zainuddin (2012) mentions “The perception of whether something is a benefit or a challenge is based on learning style and students’ needs”. Therefore, while it is undoubtedly the teacher's duty to create engaging learning opportunities, it is crucial to recognize that the students' commitment is equally essential for the success of the learning experience.

Embracing these new methods of instruction demands a significant amount of learning, experimentation, and exploration. Moreover, it necessitates support from peers—teachers who are willing to adapt to the changing times and embrace challenges, much like you. For both instructors and students, Component Two outlines novel tasks and responsibilities, prompting participants to consider how their roles compare to or differ from one another in the context of face-to-face sessions, leading to a better understanding of everyone's contributions to the course.

Throughout this section, we investigate new approaches and compare various communication and interaction types. The expectations and topics for Component Two are depicted in Figure 5 (Figure 5: Component Two). By embracing this exploration and reflection, educators can further enhance their teaching practices and adapt more effectively to the evolving educational landscape.



(Figure 5: Screenshot Component Two)

Component Three of the course is dedicated to presenting six carefully selected resources to the participants. The objective is to prevent teachers from feeling overwhelmed by the vast array of options available on the Internet. By providing an in-depth overview of each resource and highlighting their primary qualities, teachers can confidently decide whether to incorporate them into their own lessons.

Incorporating resources can be difficult as it is necessary first to be familiar with them, also to help students familiarise themselves and thirdly to deal with unexpected results and or problems to implement the resources therefore, a task-based approach is widely employed by educators worldwide, and its effectiveness is well-documented. Engaging students in tasks that involve creating a product or achieving a specific goal not only enhances their motivation but also provides a clear sense of direction and purpose in their learning journey. By working towards a tangible outcome, students find meaning and relevance in their studies. Moreover, there should be transparency about "both what they will learn and how that learning is important and relevant" (Saunders & Wong 2020).

Project or task-based approaches particularly excel in asynchronous learning environments, as they foster autonomy and creativity. As illustrated in the image, students collaborate to create a collective product, with each individual assuming responsibility for their assigned role in the project. This approach allows for a balance between collaborative work and independent contributions, empowering students to self-organize and make decisions on how to approach the project.

To effectively implement a task-based approach some cognitive processes are involved, such as selecting, reasoning, classifying, sequencing, and transforming information from one form to another (Ellis 2003).

Consequently the topic and desired output need to be established. Modelling or demonstrating outputs is suggested, while the facilitator encourages collaboration and peer feedback, as well as s/he does the organisation of presentations and deadlines.

By presenting all these components as an overview from the beginning, teachers are equipped with a comprehensive framework to structure their task-based approach effectively. This not only streamlines the planning process but also ensures that students have a clear understanding of expectations, timelines, and the collaborative nature of the project from the outset.

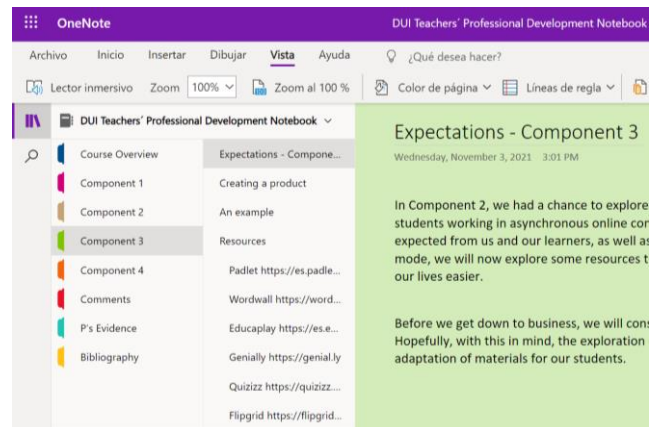
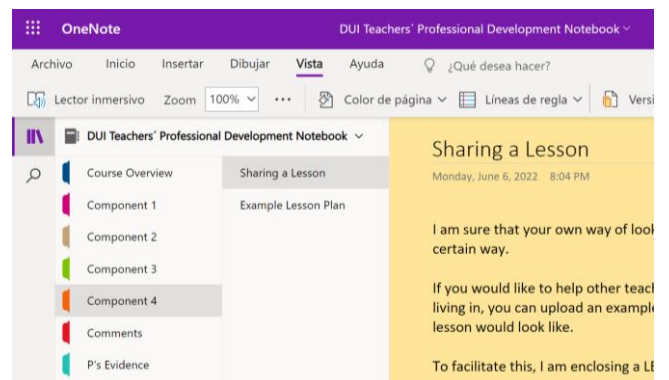


Figure 6: Screenshot Component Three

Component Four (Figure 6: Screenshot Component Four) invites participants to develop and share a plan for an hour-long lesson, using some or all of the resources provided in Component 3, which is consistent with the course's guiding collaborative principles. Sharing experiences can aid other participants in their learning because learning comes from experience. The continuance of a different cycle in which learning and reflection on the participants' own teaching continue will also be stimulated by this component, in addition to, and following, Kolb's learning cycle. To make lesson plans more uniform, a shared lesson plan format is used.



(Figure 6: Screenshot Component Four)

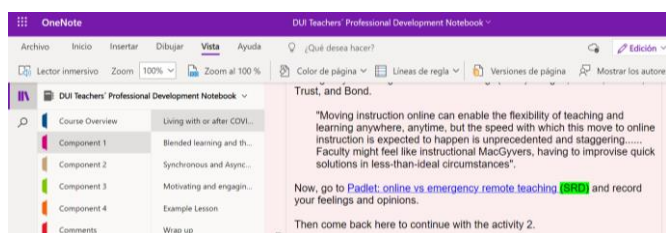
## SRD Activities

In addition to the aforementioned content, it is essential to acknowledge the emotional and personal impact of teaching during the pandemic. Therefore, the author has incorporated exercises known as "Self-Reflection for Development" (SRD) strategically throughout the course. These exercises are designed to encourage teachers to contemplate their own experiences, practices, and the newly acquired knowledge. They serve as opportunities for introspection and enable educators to gain insights into their teaching journeys. One such example of an SRD exercise is as follows:

### Example of SRD question: How have you felt teaching during the pandemic?

Take a moment to reflect on your personal experience as a teacher during this challenging period. Consider the emotions, thoughts, and challenges that have emerged as you navigated through the unique circumstances. Write down your reflections, focusing on both the positive and negative aspects. Consider the strategies and approaches that have worked well for you and those that may have presented difficulties. This exercise aims to provide you with a space for self-reflection and to recognize your resilience and growth throughout this journey.

By incorporating these SRD exercises, the course not only encourages professional development but also acknowledges the holistic well-being of educators, providing a platform for self-care and self-awareness. These moments of introspection contribute to the continuous growth and enhancement of teaching practices in a dynamic and evolving educational context. (Figure 8: Screenshot of example SRD Activity)

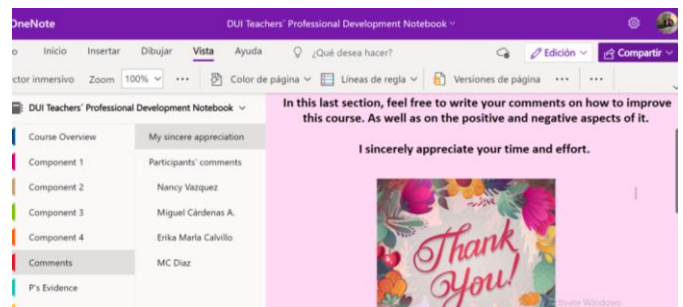


(Figure 8: Screenshot of example SRD Activity)

## Spaces provided for the Participants' work

The teachers are invited to submit their thoughts and work in the three folders marked Component Four, Comments (Figure 9: Comments), and Participants' Evidence (Figure 10: Participants' Evidence). In the final component of the course, teachers have the opportunity to showcase their learning and creativity by sharing an hour-long lesson plan that incorporates the suggested course resources. This allows them to demonstrate how they have integrated their newfound knowledge into practical teaching scenarios.

Furthermore, participants are encouraged to provide feedback in the designated folder, offering their insights on various aspects such as the effectiveness of activities, their emotional experiences, preferred learning strategies, and any challenges encountered. This feedback process facilitates continuous improvement and fosters a supportive learning community where teachers can learn from one another's experiences. By actively engaging in this final component, teachers contribute to the collective growth and refinement of the course



(Figure 9: Screenshot Comments)

In the concluding phase, teachers are encouraged to create a separate section within the individual participant Evidence folder, that is exclusively designated for their personal use. This personalized area allows them to compile all their Self-Reflection for Development (SRD) activities, thoughts, and noteworthy quotes. Teachers are given the freedom to employ various highlighting techniques, such as underlining important points or utilizing emoticons to express their sentiments.

The purpose of providing each teacher with a folder bearing their name is to ensure easy access to their personal notebooks. This enables them to utilize the notebooks in a manner that best aligns with their preferences and needs. By having their own designated space, teachers can conveniently organize and review their SRD reflections, making it a valuable resource for their ongoing professional growth.

This approach encourages teachers to take ownership of their learning journey and fosters a sense of autonomy and personalization. Having an individualised personal folder allows teachers to document their progress, track their insights, and refer back to their reflections as they continue to refine their teaching practices.

By offering a personalized space for teachers to compile their SRD materials, the course also empowers educators to engage in meaningful self-reflection and supports their individual development.

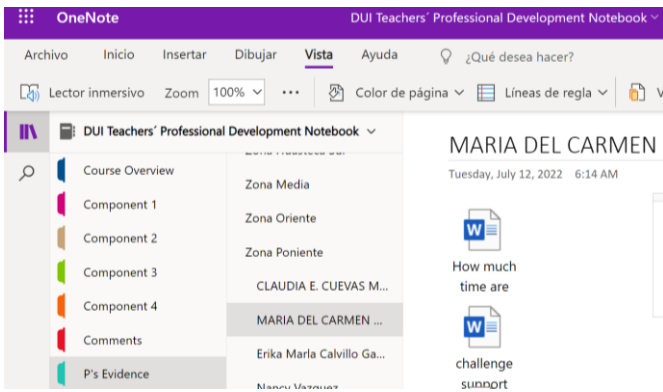


Figure 10: Screenshot Ppts' Evidence

## Feedback and Evaluation

In order to foster a collaborative and interactive learning environment, this online course actively encourages participants to provide feedback and engage in discussions with their peers. Various tools such as wikis, polls, and Padlet are employed to facilitate this process. Through these platforms, teachers have the opportunity to read and respond to the thoughts and perspectives of their fellow course attendees, fostering a sense of community and creating a space for meaningful dialogue.

The richness of the course experience is enhanced when participants actively engage and share their insights simultaneously. The collective knowledge and diverse perspectives contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the topics being discussed. By actively participating and providing feedback, teachers not only benefit from their own reflections but also contribute to the growth and development of their peers.

When the course was completed, and with the necessity to have some feedback, a small group of teachers was invited to complete the course. Special thanks and appreciation are extended to MMC, MCA, MCA, EC, MCDC, CRT, CECM, NVR, FGA, for taking the time during busy schedules to complete the course and express their insights about it. As the course has been planned for all the teachers at the English Department, in the next training period, the course will be available for all the colleagues. A research project to evaluate it in a systematic and deeper form is being planned.

The active engagement and constructive criticism from fellow colleagues played a crucial role in the continuous improvement of the course. By valuing and incorporating their feedback, the course facilitators can refine and enhance the learning experience for future participants, ensuring its ongoing relevance and effectiveness.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the recent change in the context of English language teaching has brought about both challenges and opportunities for students and teachers alike. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for innovation and adaptation, forcing educators to explore new methods and technologies to continue providing quality education. While traditional classroom settings have largely returned, the lessons learned from remote and online teaching cannot be ignored.

Recognizing the valuable insights and experiences gained during the pandemic, this teacher development course has been designed to assist educators in evaluating their current practices and enhancing their learning approaches. Throughout this course, a unique opportunity for teachers is offered to reflect on their methods and integrate the knowledge and resources they acquired during the challenging times of remote teaching.

One of the key advantages of this course is the ability to embrace change and explore new ways to achieve better learning outcomes for students. Through the utilization of various online tools such as wikis, polls, and padlets, teachers can actively engage with their peers and exchange ideas and feedback. This collaborative aspect enhances the course's richness and fosters a supportive learning community where teachers can learn from one another and refine their teaching strategies.

In this dynamic and rapidly changing world, the course serves as a reminder that embracing innovation and continuous professional development are essential for educators to meet the needs and challenges of their students. By actively participating in this course and implementing the insights gained, teachers can make a lasting impact on their students' language learning journey and contribute to the advancement of English language education as a whole.

## Important Note

If you are interested in taking the course, please feel free to contact the author: [oviedoan@uaslp.mx](mailto:oviedoan@uaslp.mx) to join in. It is free and open to anyone interested.

## References

This course was created based on the following Courses:

How to teach online: Providing Continuity for Students by Future Learn. (2021) <<https://www.futurelearn.com/info/courses/teach-online/0/steps/73950>>

Blended learning Essentials: Digitally Enriched Apprenticeships by the University of Leeds (2020) <https://instituteofcoding.org/courses/cour>

[se/university-of-leeds-blended-learning-essentials-digitally-enriched-apprenticeships/](#)

Creating apps in the Classroom by Future Learn (2021)

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/creating-apps-classroom>

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