

## ESL Conversation Groups Go Online!

### Notes from 5/22/20 Zoom call

#### What are people doing?

- Many people haven't started online activities yet, or are just planning them now.
- Zoom most commonly used platform, but also Google Meet and others.
- Has started online ESL group. Wants to start reading group online too!
- How can we implement hybrid blended learning service for the programs we do run? Spanish literacy.
- Has started online program—32 people are attending now!
- Has started group—very popular! Doing a small-scale pilot of online classes for three weeks at 3 locations and 3 time slots-weekday morning, weekday evening and weekend midday. Cap of 20 enrollees. Staff and volunteer co-facilitate. Facilitator goes in with a list of topics. Their model is closer to the Speak Easy model. Volunteers empowered to bring in articles, etc. Can use screen share and video clips. Plan is to continue even when they have in-person programming again.
- Has moved conversation group online. Don't use recurring Zoom set-up; make a new one every Friday. Class is Wednesday. Send reminders. Have volunteers in breakout rooms with topics, but can make it more organic. Used to read together in class, but each tutor has their own way of connecting with their students and connect. Also trying to move book club online, but difficult to get access to the book. Now it's morphing to look like something like the Conversation and Culture group with reading, sharing thoughts on news, etc. Will be launched soon.
- Tutors resistant to Zoom. Has one tutor with two learners. Conversation and grammar.
- Considering a group open to just literacy students. All intermediate level and above who may or not be meeting with their learners.
- Texas is doing remarkable things, even text-based using phones. Great for those who do not have data. More digital tool info at <https://www.proliteracy.org/webinars>
- Consider JamBoard <https://teachercenter.withgoogle.com/first-day-trainings/welcome-to-jamboard>
- What is the dynamic of your group? All levels and from all around the world, want to learn more, shy, won't join because they are afraid of the word "class", fun dynamic.
- For a larger group, assign people into breakout rooms ; have 1 facilitator per every 5 to 6 learners
- Add facilitators to introduce different sounding voices and inflections
- Don't try to replicate in-person classes; embrace the benefits of virtual technology
- Virtual can expand your audience; it doesn't limit your learners to branch specific patrons. Learners can attend remotely to a variety of locations
- Don't have to limit or separate learners by learning level; they also use ESL tutors as facilitators
- 1 hour is probably a good amount of time for a conversation group with allowance for extra time to linger and socialize
- How do you balance multi-level learners? One library has two groups for different levels, placed after an assessment.

- Screen share has been encouraged
- Some bookclubs haven't been able to move online due to copyright laws so session turned into a cultural session and newspaper reading
- Groups range from 10-25 or 3-10
- Transition to moving online: Went smoothly, use the first meeting to teach the technology, pay for Zoom and get Advanced Technology – remote control to help a participant who is struggling. Learn more: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICCU-kwzD91>
- Maintaining social interaction, maintaining continuity, maintaining or improving skills level, learning about using various devices and becoming comfortable with the and maintaining the value of the tutor/facilitator-learner relationship.
- Online chapter a week book club specifically for English learners
- 90 minute sessions
- Utilizing Zoom Whiteboard instead of Chat
- Will ESL online programming continue with in person programming begins again – one library will as they are getting learners from around the world participating
- One-on-ones were set up before the group meetings started
- There have been one-on-one Zoom session

#### **How are folks able to recruit volunteers at this time?**

- Some are recruiting through the library newsletter, flyers. \* Some not allowed to use volunteers at this time. How else can we support learners? \* More focus is on getting current volunteers up to speed, as only about 25%-50% are currently tutoring. \*Tutors and conversation leaders have the most problems with the platforms \*Volunteers could be utilized to help teach patrons how to use technology \* Finally, volunteers came from another program that wasn't meeting virtually, and that really helped. \*More tutors who want to facilitate than learners participating.
- Suggestions:
  - Have tutors rotate facilitating.
  - Have more than one group that meets at different day and time.
  - Delegate different jobs to the tutors within each group

#### **How to recruit learners?**

- Word of mouth, flyers that represent the new virtual opportunities. \* Phone calls \* Reached out to past participants through email and posts on website \* Newsletter \* Texting learners \* Multi language announcements and tailored to the different population groups that participate in program \*Partnering with senior centers \*Sending to email addresses for learners that we do have, but not getting new learners \*Using social media like Facebook \* Reached out to the city's multilingual coordinator. \*Contacting tutors and asking them to encourage their learners to participate and also inviting the tutors to attend the group \*Have sessions open to everyone where those who are still beginners naturally weed themselves out of the conversation \* Google Hangout is used where participants register through Google Forms \* A lot of students know how to use these platforms as they are using them to talk to family, but issues come when they have

internet or audio issues \* our city has done great job in putting in their daily announcements what the Library is doing (also Parks/Rec virtual programs) \* Got in contact with adult schools. \* Might have to phone call the learner to gauge their interest in participating and to maybe persuade them that connecting isn't hard \* Maybe market program at the churches or community centers where the learners gather, or job centers

- Group size up to 15 in Zoom – tried making it unlimited, but had less register, so 15 seems to be the magic number
- Various levels participate together
- Added benefit is that those that could not come in person due to needing to stay home with kids can now participate. We had a baby sitting on a lap this this.
- We had a few people from Peru in our group last night as well! \* I have two participants from Japan \* I have one from Belarus yesterday \* These out of country participants, were they in person group members originally? \* They found us online \* Not mine, but they have family here who told them about the group. \*: Amazing! Worldwide reach! \* Yes, locals told them
- What keeps people from joining is that they are not tech savvy and are afraid to try – suggestion was the one-on-one approach to teach them how to use technology

#### **What tips can you share about how to help with tech?**

- If they cannot join with their device, let them know they can call in.
- If they have an older device, they have to login with zoom.com and enter meeting ID.
- Don't set a password (if allowed). \* Without a password, you might be zoombombed. Password can result in more difficulty accessing. \* Put the password in the confirmation email text, large and easy to find! \* use the waiting room feature instead of password to make it easier for people to join \* Passwords can sometimes be a hindrance on learners who might not understand the purpose of the password
- Warn your learners ahead of time that you're going to share your screen (they might not know what is going on).
- Best to have staff member in the "room." Using Zoom Pro, password protected. On online calendar as a virtual event. Email registrants the Zoom link. Seems to be working. Will have a debrief meeting after the classes are done to see if they should split up into different levels.
- Concern over participants not having access to technology... phones work fine. Those already hosting online said they didn't feel this was a problem.
- Learners are in waiting room, volunteers and coordinator are also there. Breakout rooms are random levels. Coordinator can get a rough of level. Using Zoom Pro. Doing training, practice meetings. \* Questions: When new people come in, how do you manage getting them onboard with Zoom? Talk to them in the main room first, then move them into a breakout. Cap was 35, but never got that high. Have one weekly session, Wednesday at 11 a.m. Now will likely split sessions if greater than 20. Question: how do you train volunteers? Most folks are pretty tech savvy. Went through co-hosting skills, breakouts, main room. Two sessions. Staff available to help. \* With Zoom you still have the option to phone in without having video \* Onboarding – talk to person in main room to make sure they can be heard and seen and that they can hear

and see, before moving them into the breakout room\* First time you meet as a group maybe use that time as practice and getting going \*Buying into Zoom gives you the ability to assist individuals with their technology issues while in Zoom \* Have volunteer tutors in rooms and facilitator manually places learners in rooms depending on either level of learning or if the learner wants a specific tutor \* for a larger group, assign people into breakout rooms ; have 1 facilitator per every 5 to 6 learners \* One challenge was learning Zoom (for the organizers). The other challenge was how to deal with the numbers of learners. One group manually places learners in a room, depending on their experience and the tutor in the room. Allow extra time for manually assigning rooms. One group was having 12-18 learners, and it was a challenge to manage that large a group. They hadn't tried the breakout rooms yet. \* use the waiting room feature instead of password to make it easier for people to join

- add facilitators to introduce different sounding voices and inflections
- Online classes make it easier for learners to participate, but made digital divide more apparent.
- Equity questions – not everyone has access to technology, so maybe utilize one-to-one phone calls
- Doing the sessions online could be difficult for some because of the language and technology barriers
- Learners may not know where to look to find online ESL programming – how do you reach them?
- Materials handed out ahead of time
- Technical issues include getting everyone on board to use and feel comfortable, and the audio issues have been difficult to navigate \* Not certain who have devices and if they know how to work the devices they have
- don't try to replicate in-person classes; embrace the benefits of virtual technology
- virtual can expand your audience; it doesn't limit your learners to branch specific patrons. Learners can attend remotely to a variety of locations
- Sending out detailed instructions.
- Calling the learners on the phone and helping them get comfortable.
- Learners have had family members help with the technology
- Difficulty with learners talking over each other or walking with their phone
  - Suggestion:
    - Maybe starting with muting everyone
    - Have learners physically raise their hand
- Screenshare: Showing Voice of America clips; to introduce vocab and grammar; Have used the whiteboard for hangman, but the more advanced learners kind of took over; Typing out a word using whiteboard/share screen
- Breakout rooms: Putting different proficiency levels in breakout rooms; putting 4-5 people in breakout rooms
- 30 second video recording of what the topic will be next week and put this on their website which generates great participation

**How to increase comfort and accessibility?**

- helping student adapt to online format. Step by step thoughtful and supported transition for learners (and facilitators). \* Making sure there is the availability for learners to call in \* Have learners been shy (shyer) online? How do you bring the learner who is feeling shy out into the conversation? \* Some have older technology where they have to enter the meeting in a different way than just clicking on the invitation link \* How to you make the learner comfortable with using the technology?
- access to broadband & ease of platform use
- Ensuring technology is not the thing keeping participants from being able to participate (for lack of a better word).
- how to manage people virtually and give people equal opportunity to speak
- Offering relevant discussion suggestions and an equitable experience for all learners
- Maintaining a connection for learners who don't have other connections right now.
- What is the limit for breakouts – how much do you want them to talk and work they get out of it, and how many staff members to facilitate kind of drives this – so if you have a lot of staff then you can have more rooms will less participants to have more time to talk/practice – 3-7 seems to be a good number
- Phone call services that librarians can field from home and those calling in are feeling isolated and needing to connect, so this give them the opportunity to connect and practice
- One person was making phone contact with her learners only, as technology access was difficult.
- Another conversation was around Beginner vs Advanced learners. Everyone agreed that mixing the two seems to be more the current practice than before. More advanced learners can help the beginners. Right now, the social aspect of the group seems to be very valuable.
- Helping learning assimilate to virtual learning. Helping them put their fear at ease and constantly praising them for the time and effort they are putting into their learning. Especially during these times when many of them have a lot going on
- Some are difficult to understand and asked to repeat for group to understand what they were saying – or use the chat tool to restate the question to the individual they couldn't understand to clarify what they we were saying
- Like the idea of showing YouTube clips as a base for discussion
- How do you get the newspaper in the hands of the learner – suggestion was to take a picture or send audio clips of someone reading the paper
- Times? Kept the online ECG the same time as the in-person ECG; Evening after 4 or 5 is what seems to be working best for people; Usually 7 pm on Tuesdays; Thursdays at 1 pm; Emailed out a survey to ask what time of day works best
- Keep conversation topics broad but relevant – holidays, food
- Keep track of what you talk about and send recap to those who participated

## Resources

- ask learners for topics they would like to discuss
- come prepared with topics to discuss; news, health insurance, credit cards

- ask for show and tell; pets, mementos, photos. Tell learners in advance, if possible, so they can prepare something
- discuss idioms from English language as well as different languages
- Topics: News for You, Voice of America, ESL Library
  - Book, “Compelling Conversations”
  - Ask participants what topics interest them
- Balance grammar/pronunciation – allow the process to flow with the conversation. You will know when it is important to correct.
- BBC portal for learning British English
- Voice of America news online often has the story in text and in video or radio
- ProLiteracy is hosting weekly webinars every Friday from 11-12 or 12:30 on distance learning. Programs in the field who have transitioned successfully from in-person to virtual are sharing their successes, challenges, ideas, insights, lessons learned and resources. They have ideas for learners who don’t have digital devices or have data limits. I’ve learned a ton and highly recommend watching the archived webinars and joining the upcoming ones. The webinars are archived at <https://www.proliteracy.org/webinars>
- Shanti B. at Santa Clara City Library created a great basic Zoom tutorial: <https://www.loom.com/share/0e773cafe52c4b0894d6cfb4d9f966ff>
- Remote control on Zoom tutorial video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICCU-kwzD9I>
- Has anyone brought Spanish literacy groups online?
- Do you plan on keeping your ECG group going even after in-person meetings will be allowed again? Already talked about it with manager; Planning on keeping it going. They are getting learners from all over the world.