



**Continuing Professional Development
in Vocational Education and Training**

Other Countries of the Commonwealth

Inspiration for online teaching



In the COVET project, we have collected many great examples of teaching that have been transformed from the classic off-line version into a modern online learning method.

These sample lessons have been created by VET teachers from different EU countries. We present them to you as inspiration for your work.

The lessons are particularly suitable for vocational teachers, but can also serve as a training tool for teachers, trainers and lecturers in other educational settings.

All sample lessons, training materials as well as all information about the project are available at:

<https://www.covet-project.eu/>

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Other Countries of the Commonwealth

(English – Conversation, level B2)

Off-line version of the preparation:

In total there were 3 lessons:

Lesson 1:

Lead-in (joint brainstorming on the board) - reviewing information about the Commonwealth and the countries we have already discussed (Canada, Australia)

Guided discussion - colonialism, the British Empire (what they already know from history lessons), the topic The White Man's Burden - discussion of Rudyard Kipling's poem in the original

Map work - which other countries are/were part of the British Empire / today's Commonwealth - students are given a black and white copy of a world map and plot the Commonwealth countries in colour

Video - a short clip from The Crown - an episode that begins with a speech by the young Elizabeth during her tour of the Commonwealth. Students have 2 tasks - first watch just the video (pictures) and take notes on what they see (there are shots from each Commonwealth country); when they watch the video a second time, they focus on the speech itself.

Discussion (feedback) - which countries were shown and why did they think that; opinion on Elizabeth's speech - well structured, what was the objective, did it meet it? Pair work first, then joint feedback.

Lesson 2:

Lead-in (follow-up to last lesson) - gap-fill exercise (pair work) - selected quotes from Prince Phillip, husband of Queen Elizabeth, who was famous for his incorrectness and "socially unacceptable" public comments about Commonwealth nations; the names of the countries to which the quotes refer are omitted; students are asked to guess which countries they refer to and justify their opinion in the subsequent group discussion.

Group work - preparation of short presentations of selected Commonwealth countries; the task is to prepare 4 group presentations, each should be about 7 minutes long, each member of the group

must present his/her part. Students should also prepare pictures to illustrate their presentations; however, there is no need to prepare slides with text.

Lesson 3:

Student presentations - students take notes, in the remaining time (about 15 minutes) there is a summary of the whole topic - students use their notes.

Online version of the preparation

Time allocation for this topic - students always had half of the lessons online, the other half as independent work.

It was very difficult to work in groups or pairs - for a long time we did not have a functional simple online tool that would allow us to quickly divide students into individual online rooms. The paid service, which the school did not purchase for us, was quite difficult to "work around" by creating simultaneous meetings, which did not always work reliably and took a while to set up. Therefore, I always strongly considered whether it was worth it to undergo all of this for the sake of, for example, about three minutes of work in pairs, whether to replace these short discussions in pairs with another tool.

Overall, online learning is also much slower, especially interaction, which is the basis of language classes, is sometimes slowed down by poor connections or even just delays in turning the microphone on and off. For this reason, it was necessary to reduce the number of activities and the volume of information.

The course of teaching therefore changed as follows:

The reasons for the changes are usually given above.

In total, there were 2 online lessons and about 1 hour of independent work of students.

Lesson 1

I cut the lead-in (brainstorming) short - we just reviewed the basic information about the Commonwealth and I just reminded them that we had already talked about Canada and Australia and that they could possibly review them on their own.

I also changed the guided discussion a bit and combined it with the work with the "map" - I replaced the map with a picture of the extent of the British Empire, including the slogan "The Empire on which the sun never sets". The image was in the form of an online puzzle that students had to complete, and then discussion took place over the images and the characters of each country and the slogan.

Video - I played a short clip from The Crown only once and the task was less strict - they had to take notes only about what they see. While watching the video, students posted notes (ideas) in the chat room. I then uploaded the speech itself to Google Classroom for those interested, including the original BBC transcript.

The discussion - the feedback - (which countries were shown and why do they think so) was shorter and concerned only the individual countries and the reasons why they were shown that way. For reasons of time and practicality, I have done away with pair work altogether.

Lesson 2

As this is an offline lesson of independent work by students, I have of course omitted the lead-in.

I set the group work as a collaborative task via Google Classroom. I gave them the following task:

You will work in groups on one common presentation, shared in Google Slides. Each of you will prepare one slide to present in the next class. As this is a collaborative assignment, you will work as follows:

- *you will communicate and agree ONLY through the comments function in Google Slides;*
- *each of you will think about the content of your slide (e.g. New Zealand - sports) and share your idea with the others in the comments;*
- *you will work on your presentations in a shared space; you will consult together not only on the content of your slide, but also on the order of the slides and the overall structure and feel of the presentation. Any agreements, haggling and corrections or suggestions for changes or misunderstandings will be addressed only in the comments.*

I have already prepped the first slide with the title of the presentation. The topics are as follows: India (4 slides), New Zealand (3 slides), South Africa (3 slides), Lands of the Caribbean (3 slides). I will keep monitoring the whole process of working together and participate in the chat as well, so that I can possibly coordinate the whole process to get everything done within the given deadline.

Lesson 3

This lesson remained more or less unchanged, except that the students presented online.

Student presentations - students take notes, in the remaining time (about 15 minutes) there is a summary of the whole topic - students use their notes.

Online teaching applications and tools

- Online group video calling tool - Google Meet. This tool was assigned to us by the school; as I have already written, unlike some other tools we use (e.g. MS Teams, Zoom) we lacked an add-on for group Meets and it made teaching very difficult. However, I did not consider another tool as the school management did not allow us to do so.
- Other tools in the Google suite suited me well, e.g. Google Jamboard was great for brainstorming, Google Slides with its shared space for chat and comments was great for replacing group work in class with a similar activity in an online space.
- Among other tools, I decided to use the paid tool for creating educational content, *BookWidgets*, <https://www.bookwidgets.com/>, as I found the breadth of its educational tools admirable and perfectly usable for my purposes. I explored its possibilities and started to use a few so-called widgets, such as an online puzzle, which was a great substitute for working with a map. I chose this tool, despite the fact that it is a paid license that is not reimbursed by the school, because I needed to find a substitute for the various interactive activities that I normally use in my "offline" classes. Its other advantage is that it is absolutely easy to connect it to Google Classroom, which our school used, and to assign other tasks (e.

g. worksheets, interactive tests, etc.) in this way. By linking to Google Classroom, it was possible to correct the assignments and the assessment automatically appeared on this platform.

Online result

In total, there were 2 online lessons and about 1 hour of independent work of students.

Lesson 1

Lead-in (brainstorming) - a pre-made Jamboard called The Commonwealth is/means ... Students complete according to their knowledge and ideas and always explain everything afterwards. This replaces the discussion. I would omit the online puzzle work altogether, assigning it as a class assignment beforehand. The students can then also draw on this picture when brainstorming. We would very likely get to individual Commonwealth member countries at this stage.

Video - I would play a short excerpt from The Crown to the students once in order to focus instead on Queen Elizabeth's speech itself and whether and how it corresponds to the idea of the Commonwealth as we outlined it in the brainstorming session. What linguistic devices does she use in her speech? What is the aim of the speech? Is it a good speech from this perspective?

Summary - we would review the countries we have mentioned during the lesson and select four to work on the presentation together. We would try to deduce why these four (India, New Zealand, South Africa, Caribbean countries) are the ones we are looking for.

Lesson 2

I would assign the group work again via Google Classroom as a collaborative task in basically the same wording, with a few additions:

I will follow and monitor your work, as the goal is to interact as much as possible in a shared chat environment and to test your ability to effectively discuss and find common solutions using the collaborative tools Google offers.

The entire interaction process should not exceed 24 hours, I will send you the link to the shared Google Slide on (date) at (time).

Lesson 3

This hour would remain unchanged.

Feedback on the lesson

Maintaining as much interaction as possible using online chat and comment tools. This was not a problem for the students; on the contrary, given that this generation routinely prefers these tools to "live" communication even in their daily lives, collaborative presentations were perhaps more effective than in a regular classroom. In addition, it was a benefit for me that I could actually follow all the communication going on, as opposed to group work in a classroom where I move from one group to another and thus hear only part of their interaction.

Weaknesses of the chosen solution: Time consuming and too many activities. In the online classes, it was again evident how much slower the online interaction is. I felt that I had reduced the amount of activities enough and adjusted them so that they didn't take up as much space, but even that wasn't enough. I found that there was no point in substituting a few shorter activities in an online lesson, as

there is often no time for the others and often no time for feedback or follow-up. It is better to concentrate on for example two activities and give enough time to do them and then link and evaluate them. Since I normally rotate the activities a lot in my classes, I found this difficult to fulfil.

In order for the students to truly meet the goal of collaborative discussion over the presentations, I had to moderate their discussion and make them aware that the extent of their chat discussion would also be subject to assessment. Thus, I had to again use the tool of extrinsic motivation for learning, even though I felt that the activity could be interesting on its own.



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