hope students will be more inspired to use English for learning and their part-time job and for anything else in their lives.

Afterthoughts

Ken: Those who have ears to hear - how many students will hear our stories and use them to inspire them to do likewise or change their ways?

Exit Cards as a Bridge between Teachers and Students in Online Learning

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Introduction

With the wide-scale introduction of online learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous strategies have been employed to maintain quality in university education. To overcome the lack of technological preparedness, Japanese universities have adopted a range of multimedia tools to facilitate synchronous and asynchronous communication between teachers and students. Zoom, a previously relatively unknown software, burst onto the educational scene offering videoconferencing as a solution which would bridge the geographic divide between teachers and students doing online learning (Zoom, 2020). The attraction of Zoom, vis-a-vis other video conferencing technology, is its ability to offer a viable alternative to group work through the breakout room functionality, which allows teachers to assign students into small, adjustable groups within larger meetings.

However, with a lack of in-person contact, it is difficult for teachers to ascertain how students are doing. Despite the various classroom experience substitutes available, limitations remain. It is difficult for teachers to move between breakout groups smoothly and unobtrusively, and more so to get a sense of the whole class when students are separated into groups, making it challenging to assess the class' progress and well-being. Teachers therefore need to develop strategies to ascertain students' progress, feelings, and sense of the class in online learning.

Literature Review

According to Mazna Patka et al., exit cards "are formative evaluations of student knowledge and instruction undertaken at every class meeting" (2016, 659). They are an established teaching practice typically used to give "on-going feedback to help instructors make decisions about instructional techniques, pacing, or classroom management" (Eifler, 2018). Exit cards are common in the Japanese university setting, with many universities providing pre-cut slips of paper to teachers to be distributed in class to collect student feedback.

Exit cards, or the concept behind them, are particularly well-suited to an online learning environment with a few alterations, and present a high potential yield of information with little initial effort on the part of the teachers or students. Furthermore, they provide a wealth of data from students to assist in the transition between offline and online learning. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many educators with little to no online teaching experience were suddenly thrust into the world of entirely online lessons--while general advice and guidelines are useful, for many teachers, each class presents particular and potentially unique challenges, in which case direct feedback from students is best for managing and adjusting class content, pace, format, etc. Previous research has suggested "that Exit Cards are

most useful in creating a dialogue between students and teacher" (Patka et al., 2016, 666), and thus well suited to making these adjustments in response to student needs. In light of this, exit cards are a highly effective and rich tool.

Background

We began to employ online exit cards for a confluence of reasons. In the first semester, from our observation, some students were overwhelmed with the switch to online learning due to large amounts of homework, social isolation, and comparative difficulty in communicating with teachers. We also reevaluated our own first-semester efforts to have students write weekly about their progress towards course learning objectives in their introductory seminar classes. We judged that this opportunity for feedback was valuable, but the focus on recording academic progress did not provide adequate space for students to communicate their broader situation about struggles and success in the class. Furthermore, the length and detail required of these original weekly progress reports seemed to be overwhelming, and the feedback gradually became less rich over the course of the semester from the majority of students.

Before the second semester began, we decided to alter the form of the feedback sheets to give students more freedom to choose what to report. Lengthy feedback on specifically academic progress occurred only at the end of a unit in introductory seminars. Exit cards were also employed in second semester elective courses due to large numbers of enrolled students. Exit cards would provide an easier way for students in large, multi-level classes to communicate with their teachers more broadly about their successes or troubles, including content, interpersonal, and technical problems. We aimed to use information from the students as a way to check on their perception and understanding of the class to inform decisions about the way the class was conducted.

Implementation

The original template was created with Google Docs, and assigned to students individually within Google Classrooms. The same template was used for introductory seminar and elective courses. Respondents ranged from first to fourth year English majors.

Students were instructed to choose two (2) questions from the following list, and write at least thirty (30) words in response to each.

1. What was something that went well in today's class?
2. What was something that was difficult for you today?
3. What would you change to improve the next class?
4. How did your group work go today?
5. What was something new / interesting you learned today?
6. What was something you learned today that you will be able to use in the future?

Table 1. Exit Card Questions

Students could choose any combination of two questions each week. Students were also provided with a "free talk" section which was not required, but allowed them to speak about other topics not covered with the questions.

Introductory Seminar Exit Card

1. Think about today's class and read each question.
2. Choose **two** questions to answer about today's class & copy-paste them to the question box.
3. Answer each question with **detail** (at least 30 words each)
4. Complete it **before** the end of scheduled class time and submit.

Questions:
  a) What was something you did well today?
  b) What was something that went well in today's class?
  c) What is something that you think you should work on for next time?
  d) What is something that you want to improve about the class?
  e) What was something new and interesting you learned today?
  f) What was something you learned today that you will be able to use in the future?

Question	My Answer

Free Talk (Feel free to write any other comments about today's class here!)

Figure 1. Sample Exit Card

The deadlines for exit cards varied throughout the semester; initially, we hypothesized that, like an in-person exit card, which is completed before students leave class, it should be completed as soon as possible after the end of class. Thus, an initial deadline of an hour after class was utilized. However, this deadline proved to be unfeasible. Students, in some cases, have more than 20 classes a week as well as responsibilities outside school, such as part-time jobs. Some students reported the short time frame for completion was stressful and did not allow them enough time to complete the exit cards to their own satisfaction. In negotiation with students, the deadline was gradually extended, typically by the weekend after a class was completed.

Exit cards were given in two elective classes (one conducted by each author) and all introductory seminar classes for first and second year students (four total). Points for the cards were assigned based on a rubric with eight (8) total points: two (2) points assigned for timeliness, two (2) points assigned for completion, and four (4) points allotted for effort and detail. It was emphasized to students that they would not be judged on the content of their answers (e.g. they were free to criticize and be honest), but rather on the above three criteria only.

We provided feedback on the students' responses (a) through the Google Classroom "private comment" feature directly in response to the exit card and, when appropriate, (b) in class time through action (e.g. adjusting breakout rooms) or spoken comment (e.g. providing details regarding an uncertainty, while maintaining the anonymity of the writer).

Results

For the sake of brevity, lengthy reports on student feedback will not be covered here. Instead, we will present a brief overview of the main issues discovered through the use of exit cards, and examples of students' feelings about teachers' use of exit cards.

While the amount and quality of feedback varied depending on the student and week, we were able to ascertain and then work to address the following major issues with students' online learning experience through the use of online exit cards:

Interpersonal Issues	e.g. different levels of commitment/effort within groups leading to frustration
Confidence & Ability Issues	e.g. inability to understand instructor's directions
Structural Issues	e.g. overall workload, issues with overlapping deadlines
Personal Issues	e.g. family concerns that affected online learning

Table 2. Main Issues Uncovered through Exit Cards

At the end of the semester, we gathered student feedback in a longer-form semester reflection. Within it, we specifically requested students' advice to future teachers if online learning were to continue. The following quotes are from students who explicitly suggested the use of exit cards in their appraisal of the semester

Advice to Teachers (Week 15)	"Exit card is a very good way to know how students feel and their opinions about class. Teachers can see their class from students' perspective."
"5b. What advice would you give teachers and the school to make a better environment for students?"	"Collect students' feelings about the class. Unlike the normal face-to-face class, teachers can't see students when we are in the breakout room, so, teachers can't see us "what we do in the room". So, teachers have to know about us through our eyes (our feeling) For example, using like Exit cards"

Table 3. Students Recommending Use of Exit Cards

Discussion

Overall, we report significant success with the use of online exit cards. They were able to obtain invaluable feedback from the students through the use of the exit cards, and implemented a number of classroom improvements and adjustments based on this feedback. Students also reported that in the isolated environment of online learning, they were relieved to have a direct means of communication with teachers. Because the teachers are both full-time, the feedback was also used to inform department policy about students and online learning. In a subsequent paper, we will detail the improvements we implemented specifically through the Zoom breakout room functionality thanks to feedback from exit cards.

As the students were all English majors, the exit cards were all conducted entirely in English, which likely had a non-negligible impact on students' (a) ability to fully express their ideas and (b) potentially diminished their understanding of what was being asked. Regardless, the information obtained from these exit cards remains valuable, even considering this limitation. Furthermore, it had the added benefit of improving students' English skills, which added both (a) academic merit and (b) potential motivation for students. In particular, the students responded positively to the opportunity for individualized feedback from teachers presented by the exit cards.

In summary, we find that digital exit cards are a valuable addition to any online learning class, and provide a wealth of information to allow educators to have a better grasp on their students' learning, progress, and overall situation during the school year.

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