

Group Dynamics in the Virtual EFL Classroom

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Abstract

With the outbreak of COVID-19 classes around the world went abruptly online, in a situation called emergency remote teaching (ERT). Under these circumstances, videoconferencing (VC) was often seen as a way to replicate the face-to-face interactions of classrooms. However, it is not certain if VC replicated the positive group dynamics which can occur during in-person classes. Given the crucial role these play in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003), this research was undertaken to determine whether a VC classroom during ERT produced positive group dynamics. This paper describes a year-long ERT course given via VC to three university EFL classes in Japan. Students were surveyed on their feelings towards VC classes twice during the year. Results of the surveys seem to indicate that positive group dynamics was possible in VC classes. Issues related to online group dynamics will also be discussed.

Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was a bombshell that affected, and continues to affect, every aspect of our lives. In its early stages, most were simply trying to adapt their lives as best they could while trying to comprehend the unprecedented situation. Teachers were no exception to this. Having to contend with the sudden adoption of new technologies and conversion of lessons, they could be forgiven for merely trying to meet minimum educational requirements at the pandemic's onset.

Yet with time and perseverance, it should be possible to move beyond simply surviving, and to contemplate how to thrive in the new situation. One of the ways to do this is by considering how group dynamics can play a key role in videoconferencing (VC) classrooms. In the earliest stages of what became known as emergency remote teaching (ERT), it was understandable to overlook this facet of teaching. After all, when we are concerned about if we can even have a 'group' at all, given connectivity and other issues, it is easy to overlook the 'dynamics' aspect of the equation. And yet, as research has shown (Dörnyei & Malderez, 1999; Schmuck & Schmuck, 1975; Senior, 2002), group dynamics plays an extremely important role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. As Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) noted, "group dynamics is probably one of the most - if not *the* most - important subdisciplines in the social sciences for language teachers" (p. 1).

Researchers, it seems, were also inclined to overlook group dynamics during the initial stages of ERT. In a review of research literature, Stewart (2021) identified 38 empirical studies of ERT in higher education published in English from January to early October 2020 (i.e. the onset of the pandemic), none of which specifically dealt with the topic of group dynamics. Instead, the majority of the studies identified in Stewart's paper, as might be expected, dealt with the shock of the initial transition to ERT, and the diverse problems encountered therein (though there were occasionally positive experiences recorded as well). It would seem that researchers, in line with teachers, were initially concerned with simply understanding the dilemmas posed by ERT, and how to overcome them.

Given the dearth of research concerning group dynamics under this situation, this paper will seek to explore the connections between published research on EFL classroom group dynamics and VC classes. It will also explicate the results of a longitudinal study conducted with three freshman English classes undergoing VC classes during the early stages of the current pandemic.

Background

First, a bit of history on the subject. The term *group dynamics* was coined by the psychologist Kurt Lewin. He described it as the processes that emerge when groups and individuals act and react to changing circumstances (Lewin, 1951). Though a number of psychologists had alluded to the subject before him, Lewin was one of the first and most prominent voices to insist upon the scientific analysis of group dynamics. The field was actively taken up and evolved in Lewin's wake. Bruce Tuckman proposed the idea of groups having a sort of life, or cycle, undergoing various incarnations from formation through to dissolution (Tuckman, 1965). The study of group dynamics naturally lent itself to those with a vested interest in the subject, such as businesses striving to improve the efficiency of their management.

Of course, the educational implications of group dynamics were not missed either. As Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) state, "group dynamics is also relevant to educational contexts because the class group can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of learning" (p. 3). Patricia and Richard Schmuck produced one of the first practical guides of group dynamics intended for teachers in the field, *Group Processes in the Classroom* (1975). As for EFL specific contexts, Jill Hadfield's (1992) publication, *Classroom Dynamics*, was the first book to deal with group dynamics in relation to language learning and, like the Schmucks' book before it, was intended for classroom use by teachers. The aforementioned Dörnyei and Murphey also created a book specifically dealing with the topic, *Group Dynamics in the Language Classroom* (2003). In this book, the authors apply the findings of years of research into group dynamics to the second-language (L2) classroom, with a particular focus on the way that groups "have a life of their own" (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003, p. ix), and how teachers can aid in the formation of successful classes at each of the stages in the class group's life. Forming cohesive groups is seen as particularly valuable in a communicative focused L2 class setting, in which students must rely on each other to develop language skills while working as an interdependent group.

Though these past works on group dynamics, and particularly those focused on classroom and EFL situations, can be of immense value to EFL teachers under normal circumstances, the fact remains that very few of them deal with online teaching. Many of the seminal works on group dynamics were written before the invention of the internet, and even those dealing more specifically with education and the EFL context, such as Hadfield's work, were written when online education was still in its very early stages. Dörnyei and Murphey's (2003) work, for example, has an entire chapter devoted to classroom environments,

including spatial organization, temperature, movement and the like, but almost no mention of online classroom environments. Nevertheless, there is a great deal to be learned from these works, applicable even to VC classes, provided we can successfully filter them through the lens of our contemporary experiences.

This is not to say that no research has been conducted in the area of group dynamics and online education. From the early stages of online learning up until its more recent widespread use in remote learning programs, researchers have been interested in the effects this type of learning has on the inter-relations of classes that underwent them. Much of the early work in this area focused on either asynchronous communication, or synchronous text messages, between teachers and students, as well as between students themselves, to find out what effect this had on group processes (Kern, 1995; Kroonenberg, 1995; Warschauer, 1996). With the more recent advent of immersive synchronous communication platforms such as VC, research has begun in this area as well. Háhn, and Podlášková (2018) have examined the roles that learners take on in these types of classrooms, and how to maximize their learning outcomes. Moallem (2015) has done some interesting work comparing synchronous, asynchronous and combined teaching mediums to find what effect these had on student perceptions of social presence, intimacy and related factors all closely tied with group dynamics.

Still, though these more recent studies dealt specifically with the issue of online courses and their effects on group dynamics, what they did not, nor could not, take into account was the situation with COVID and ERT. A number of researchers and educators have pointed to the essential differences between regular online courses and the ERT situation which prevailed at the onset of the pandemic (Bokurtz & Sharma, 2020; Golden, 2020). They emphasize that, whereas true online courses take months, if not years, of careful preparation and implementation, the prevailing conditions under ERT were far removed from this. According to these authors, it follows that we should not directly equate online learning with ERT, particularly if we are inclined to hastily form judgements based on negative aspects of the latter and confuse these with the former.

It is an excellent point and one worth keeping in mind as we transition out of the ERT phase. Still, we are left with the fact that under ERT, very little attention or research was focused on group dynamics, particularly in EFL classes. That is the ground this paper would like to cover. While presenting the research project listed below, it will also take time to reflect on more general practices and theories involving group dynamics, whether these deal specifically with online learning or not, and try to reconcile these with the ERT situation.

Research Questions

The research questions for this project were as follows:

- RQ1. Were classes conducted via VC during the onset of the COVID pandemic able to achieve positive group dynamics?
- RQ2. Did the VC format have an effect on the rate and degree of group dynamics formed in these classes?

The Study

Method

During this project, three classes of first-year English at a Japanese university received instruction via VC. The classes were conducted under the ERT situation prevalent during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic; that is to say, both students and the teacher received relatively little notice or advanced preparation for the unique type of course in which they would be taking part. The students completed two surveys concerning their feelings about VC courses and aspects of group dynamics during the academic year: once near the end of the first semester, and once near the end of the school year. The instructor of the course also regularly recorded impressions of the class and any discernible group dynamics occurring therein.

Participants

The students in the classes were of intermediate English ability, with Common European Framework (CEF) levels generally ranging from B1 to C1. One class consisted of 18 students majoring in Business Hospitality, another of 16 students majoring in Law, and the final class had 17 students majoring in Economics, for a total of 51 students. At the end of the first semester 36 of these responded to the survey, while 28 responded to the survey at the end of the year. The students enrolled in Business Hospitality participated in VC classes three times a week, while the other two classes participated in VC classes twice a week. All the participants gave informed consent. In addition, all participants were informed that the surveys were anonymous and would have no bearing on their grades.

Survey

Students were given two identical Likert scale surveys composed of seven statements and asked to select their level of agreement with each. One additional reflective statement

was added in the second survey. The statements were intended to gauge students' feelings towards VC classes, as well as any potential positive or negative group dynamics which students experienced in them. The statements were written in both English and Japanese. Certain statements were rephrased in order to check for reliability of responses (Paulhus, 1991). Finally, a free response section was included for any further comments, with students encouraged to reply in English or Japanese according to their preference.

Results

The first statement, "I enjoy doing online classes on Zoom," was meant to gauge the overall satisfaction of students participating in the VC classes. A number of researchers have pointed out the importance of enjoyment as a part of positive group dynamics. Mullen and Copper (1994) mention interpersonal attraction, the desire to be with and work together with other members of a group, as one of the key factors involved in group cohesiveness. Likewise, Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) state that members of a highly functioning group, "Express more satisfaction with the group experience." (p. 63).

In response to the first statement on the first survey, 30.6% of respondents indicated that they strongly agreed with the statement, 55.6% that they agreed, 8.3% that they were neutral, and 5.6% that they disagreed, with no respondents indicating strong disagreement (see Table 1). In the second survey given at the end of the year, 32.1% of respondents indicated that they strongly agreed with the statement, 60.7% that they agreed, and 7.1% that they were neutral, with no respondents indicating either disagreement or strong disagreement (see Table 2). This would already seem to indicate a trend towards more satisfaction. Indeed, putting the results of the survey statement through a paired samples T test indicated a statistically significant result ($p < .001$). Of particular note is the trend away from negative responses in the second survey.

Table 1.

End of First Semester Survey Results

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither or N/A	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I enjoy doing online classes on Zoom. / Zoom のオンラインクラスを楽しんでいます。	11	20	3	2	0

2. I find it easy to communicate with (listen to / speak to) the teacher during Zoom classes. / Zoom のクラスでは、先生とのやり取り（聞く/話す）は問題なくできています。	9	20	5	2	0
3. I find it easy to communicate with (listen to / speak to) my classmates during Zoom classes. / Zoom のクラスでは、私のクラスメイトとのやり取り（聞く/話す）は問題なくできています。	15	12	8	1	0
4. I often don't understand what is happening during Zoom classes. / Zoom の授業で何をしたらいいのかよくわかりません。	0	1	7	20	8
5. I feel comfortable during Zoom classes. / 私は快適に Zoom の授業を受けています。	12	15	6	3	0
6. I have learned a lot about my teacher during Zoom classes. / Zoom のクラスで先生について多くのことを学びました。	8	22	5	1	0
7. I have learned a lot about my classmates during Zoom classes. / Zoom のクラスで、クラスメイトについて多くのことを学びました。	11	14	5	6	0

Table 2.*End of Year Survey Results*

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither or N/A	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I enjoy doing online classes on Zoom. / Zoom のオンラインクラスを楽しんでいます。	9	17	2	0	0
2. I find it easy to communicate with (listen to / speak to) the teacher during Zoom classes. / Zoom のクラスでは、先生とのやり取り（聞く/話す）は問題なくできています。	8	15	5	0	0
3. I find it easy to communicate with (listen to / speak to) my classmates during Zoom classes. / Zoom のクラスでは、私のクラスメイトとのやり取り（聞く/話す）は問題なくできています。	8	16	4	0	0
4. I often don't understand what is happening during Zoom classes. / Zoom の授業で何をしたらいいのかよくわかりません。	0	0	3	19	6
5. I feel comfortable during Zoom classes. / 私は快適に Zoom の授業を受けています。	6	16	4	1	0
6. I have learned a lot about my teacher during Zoom classes. / Zoom のクラスで先生について多くのことを学びました。	2	16	9	1	0
7. I have learned a lot about my classmates during Zoom classes. / Zoom のクラスで、クラスメイトについて多くのことを学びました。	3	14	10	0	1

Both the second and third statements of the surveys dealt with the crucial aspect of communication, both amongst class members and with the teacher. If satisfaction can be seen as one of the strongest indicators of a highly functioning, cohesive group, then communication is the foundation which makes it possible. As Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) state, “the principal mediational means of learning for any group is the *interaction* between the members” (p. 76). Without communication, of course, this interaction would be impossible. Moreover, in the modern, communicative focused EFL classroom, this aspect gains even more prominence. According to Dörnyei and Murphey (2003), many of the cohesive features in highly functioning EFL groups “are parallel concerns in communicative language teaching (CLT), where recent emphasis has been on developing the students’ communicative skills through participatory learning experiences in ‘lifelike’ communicative tasks.” (p. 63). Additionally, from the viewpoint of learning strategies, Rubin (1987) has identified the importance of communication strategies, such as paraphrasing and non-verbal cues, for learners to keep conversations going, thereby increasing their learning opportunities. All of this points to the foundational nature of communication in a successful, cohesive classroom.

Concerning the second statement, “I find it easy to communicate with (listen to / speak to) the teacher during Zoom classes,” the evolution of student responses between the first and second surveys mirrored that of the first statement, with students indicating a significantly more positive reaction in the second survey, and with negative reactions absent. The third statement, “I find it easy to communicate with (listen to / speak to) my classmates during Zoom classes,” interestingly showed a kind of cooling off between the first and second surveys, with the percentage of strongly agree responses shifting from 41.7% to 28.6%, while the agree responses grew, from 33.3% to 57.1%. Nevertheless, this statement also received no negative responses on the second survey.

The fourth statement, “I often don't understand what is happening during Zoom classes,” was included both to check the reliability of the survey (all of the other statements being positive), as well as to identify communication and reception difficulties amongst students. The fact that it showed a reverse trend compared to the other responses (with responses favoring the disagree spectrum in this case), lends credence to the reliability of the test. This statement also evinced a similar trend to the first three in its evolution between surveys, with a number of students shifting towards disagreement responses (from 55.6% to 67.9%), and with no students indicating that they agreed with the statement in the second survey.

Turning to the fifth statement, the concept of comfort, and its related notion of acceptance, is also seen as a foundation of positive group dynamics by the majority of researchers in the field. Senior (1997) interviewed a group of experienced English language teachers, who described classes with positive whole group atmospheres as “including ‘a feeling of warmth’; ‘mutual support’; ‘an absence of fear’ ... ‘a safe environment’” (p. 3). Littlewood (1981) also mentions the importance of providing students with “a learning atmosphere which gives them a sense of security and value as individuals.” (p. 93). It is safe to say that in the absence of these qualities, the majority of students will not feel free to open up, form connections, express themselves and engage in the formation of a positive group.

Responses to the fifth statement demonstrated a trend towards increasing comfort in the VC classroom, with the combined percentages of agreeing and strongly agreeing responses increasing from 78% in the first to 81.5% in the second survey. However, these responses also showed a similar cooling off between surveys as that seen in responses to statement three, with strongly agreeing responses actually decreasing from 33.3% to 22.2%, though agreeing responses increased significantly. Neutral responses remained about the same between surveys, and disagreeing responses decreased from 8.3% to 3.7%.

The sixth and seventh statements on the surveys were intended to address one further pillar of positive group dynamics, that of familiarity. As Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) put it, “the most crucial and general factor fostering intermember relationships is *learning about each other* as much as possible” (p. 20). Williams and Burden (1997), in their argument for adopting a social constructivist view of teaching, state that “we learn a language through using the language to interact meaningfully with other people.” (p. 39). A classroom in which students feel they have learned a good deal about both their fellow classmates, and the teacher, can thus be viewed as succeeding in this crucial aspect. Furthermore, teachers are seen to play an important role in modeling open and honest behavior, by demonstrating what the psychologist Carl Rogers (1961) termed *congruence*, a state in which one's actions and beliefs align in a real, genuine manner.

Responses to both the sixth and seventh statements went against the trend for other statements in the survey, with the percentage of neutral and negative responses increasing in the second survey. Neutral responses in particular showed a marked increase, with a 13.9% rate for both statements six and seven on the first survey, and a rate of 32.1% and 35.7%, respectively, on the second survey. Nevertheless, agreeing and strongly agreeing responses still formed a majority on both surveys for statements six and seven, though these also demonstrated the cooling off trend seen in other statements, with strongly agreeing responses

diminishing in favor of agreeing responses on the second survey. It would seem that a number of students' opinions on their familiarity with other members of the class changed during the course of the year.

Turning to the reflective statement included on the final survey, “Compared to last semester, my feelings about Zoom classes now...”, student responses were evenly divided, with 50% indicating their feelings were either much more positive (10.7%) or slightly more positive (39.3%), and 50% indicating their feelings were either unchanged (39.3%) or slightly more negative (10.7%) (see Figure 1). This final statement was included to gauge the development in students’ attitudes towards what had initially been a mostly unknown mode of learning, the VC classroom.

Figure 1.

End of Year Survey Reflective Question

Compared to last semester, my feelings about Zoom classes now... /

前期に比べて、Zoomでのクラスに対する現在の気持ちは、、、

28 responses



Analysis of Results and Discussion

Concerning the relatively less enthusiastic responses in the first survey, and the limited yet persistent inclusion of negative responses, we must ponder why this was the case. One thing that immediately stands out, particularly after reviewing student comments on the first survey, are technological difficulties encountered. One student wrote, “Sometimes the communication environment was unstable and I could not hear my voice.” Another commented, “インターネット環境の悪化によって授業中、会話や映像が途切れてしまうことが時々あったので、そこは悪い点だと感じる” (Due to the deterioration of the internet environment, conversations and videos were sometimes interrupted during class,

so I feel this was a bad point). In all, 5 out of 14 comments on the first survey mentioned technical difficulties (compared with no mentions of technical difficulties on the second survey).

To be sure, a certain amount of anxiety can be expected during the initial stages of any class, whether online or not. In the terminology of group dynamics, these initial stages are referred to as *formation*, and are often characterized by feelings of uncertainty, as participants “must deal with others whom they hardly know, and they are uncertain about whether they will like them or, more importantly, whether they will be liked by them.” (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003, p. 14). Still, learning and adapting to the new technology seemed to exacerbate the situation, judging by student comments, as well as my own experience as the instructor of the course. This was particularly true under the ERT situation which these classes went through.

It follows that problems with the technology will also lead to problems with communication, previously identified as key to positive group dynamics. Indeed, one student wrote that “Only one thing that I concerned about is a bit hard to communicate with the others.” Though it is possible the student is referring to technical problems, the lack of any defined issue here, in contrast to other comments, could indicate that this is a reference to a more general problem in the class. The relatively tepid responses to the seventh statement on the first survey would also seem to back up this view, communication being as it is a prerequisite to familiarity.

At the same time, the negative aspects of the first semester survey should not be overemphasized. Responses to the statements still largely favored the positive spectrum, if not quite as strongly as on the second survey. There were a number of positive student comments left on the first survey as well. Some of these were generally praising the class: “The teacher's class was very fun,” and “Zoom class is very good”; others commented positively on connections made with other members: “楽しかったです！クラスメイトと仲良くなれて良かった！” (It was fun! I'm glad I got to know my classmates!); still others commented specifically about benefits they felt either VC or remote learning classes offered them: “オンラインで移動時間が省ける分、時間に余裕を持てるという点は良かった” (It was good that I had more time to spare because I could save time commuting online), and, “ブレイクアウトルームという少人数で行うクラスがあることがよい” (It's good to have the small classes called breakout rooms). The last comment about breakout rooms (a feature of the Zoom VC application) illustrates one way in which the technology may have

promoted, rather than hindered, positive group dynamics.

As noted in the results, responses to the second survey were generally much more positive in comparison with the first survey. The question remains however, to what extent can this be attributed to an increase in positive group dynamics in the class? Based on student comments from the second survey, it would appear that a good deal was due to an increase in positive group dynamics. One student wrote, “I became positive because it is easier to talk to teacher and classmates. Another commented that “授業にも慣れてきて、クラスメイトたちと学ぶ楽しさがでてきた” (I’m getting used to the lessons, and the fun of learning with my classmates has come out). These comments would seem to indicate an increasingly communicative atmosphere, as can be found in a cohesive, highly functioning group.

Other students highlighted their increasing level of comfort in a safe, familiar environment. One wrote that “慣れてきて、緊張がなくなった” (As I got used to it, I was less nervous), while another commented, “緊張がとけたりと、話しやすくなった” (The tension melted and it became easier to talk). Indeed, when entering breakout rooms, I also witnessed an increasing level of familiarity and comfort amongst students as the school year progressed. Students who before had spent a good deal of their breakout session time in silence started to open up and share more with classmates. Perhaps one of the best summations of this phenomenon came from a student who commented that “「慣れ」が最も大きい理由だと思う。知り合って時間が経つほど会話が弾むようになったし、個性的でフレンドリーな学生とともに授業を受けていて楽しいと思うようになった” (I think "familiarity" is the biggest reason. The more time we spent getting to know each other, the more lively the conversation became, and I started to enjoy taking classes with unique and friendly students).

All of these aspects of positive group dynamics can reasonably be viewed as factors behind the increase in positive responses in the second survey. One further aspect that should not be overlooked however is the students’ increased familiarity with the technology and format of VC classes. As seen in the answers to the reflective question, half of the respondents felt more positive about the technology at the end of the year. This trend was also noted in the comments. One student wrote that, “前期はオンラインにて対する戸惑いもあり慣れない授業に苦勞したが後期は自分のすべきことが事前に理解できている点” (In the first semester, I had a hard time with lessons that I was not used to because I was confused about online, but in the second semester, I understood in advance what I should do).

Another commented that “zoom での授業に慣れてきた” (I've become accustomed to classes on zoom). As noted earlier, there were also no comments about technical problems left on the second survey. Thus, improved technical confidence would seem to be one further contributing factor towards increasingly positive views of the VC classes.

A few more trends from the surveys should be analyzed. First amongst these is the cooling down trend seen in statements 3, 5, 6, and 7, wherein students tended to shift their responses from strongly agreeing to agreeing or neutral. While it is difficult to say with certainty what may have caused this, a few potential explanations present themselves. The first is that many of the students may have been experiencing the natural excitement that comes with starting college. It bears keeping in mind that these were all first year students with no previous university experience; any student would feel excited in this situation, despite the circumstances. This might help to explain the spike in enthusiasm seen in the first survey. Moreover, as it was their first experience of college, they would have had nothing to compare the experience with. A survey of second- or third-year students, who would have had a very different college experience pre-COVID, might have produced very different results.

One further, perhaps even complementary explanation is that of pandemic fatigue. More precisely, what may have seemed like a novel and temporary replacement for in-person classes at the beginning of the school year was starting to have an air of permanence by the end of it (indeed, the following year would see a continuation of remote and, occasionally, hybrid classrooms at the school). In addition, the initial excitement of starting university may have been wearing off, at the same time as a realization of what was lacking in their experience (e.g. meeting friends, joining clubs) was becoming clear to students. A few more of the comments would seem to support this idea. One student stated that “I want to get to know my classmates more, I want to meet them in person.” Though not expressly stated, it seems plausible to read into this a certain fatigue with ERT. Another student wrote that “I can't go to college, but I decided to use this time meaningfully.” Again, it's hard not to detect a certain resignation in this comment, though at the same time the student's determination to make the most of the situation is inspiring.

Returning to the research questions for this project, in answer to the first question, we can now state that: in view of the shift towards positive responses on the second survey; comments which explained this shift in terms of increased communication, familiarity, comfort and enjoyment; and instructor observations of increased group cohesiveness, it is

reasonable to assume that classes conducted via VC during the onset of the COVID pandemic were able to achieve positive group dynamics. In answer to the second question, we can now state that: according to a comparison of surveys; comments about technical difficulties; as well as instructor observation, positive group dynamics may have been slower to develop than what might normally be expected in an in-person classroom. Nevertheless, based on results from the second survey, by the end of the year students were able to overcome technical difficulties and form a strongly bonded group. It should be noted, however, that several students on the second survey expressed a desire to meet their classmates in person, a wish that can never be completely assuaged through VC classes.

Conclusion

The experience of ERT, much like the experience of the pandemic itself, is not one that many of us would care to repeat. Yet the knowledge we have gained by conducting ERT will enable us to have much more control over future interruptions to normal teaching schedules. Though it may not be ideal to teach a communicative EFL class online, and even less so in an ERT situation, the results of this study indicate that classes can still develop positive dynamics, even under such trying circumstances. As we have seen, technical problems and unfamiliar formats can add a layer of difficulty to, and even slow down the pace of group formation. Yet as we have also seen, given time these issues can be overcome, leading to a classroom in which students feel much freer to open up and form connections. The resultant positive group dynamics make this more than worth the effort; and the obstacles overcome to achieve a bonded, cohesive class make it all the more meaningful.

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