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p r e s e n t s

*Meeting Beyond
Borders*

DISTANCE LEARNING

EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ABOUT
DISTANCE LEARNING
TO SHARE BEST PRACTICES
BETWEEN TEACHERS AND
EDUCATIONAL STAFF ACROSS
EUROPE

Report of the conference led by
Sara Natalini

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ABOUT DISTANCE LEARNING

Even before Covid-19 crisis, the use of distance learning and the integration of Information and Communications Technology into teaching and training was already a hot topic. The past few months have highlighted even more this urgent need for education to become more adaptable to distance learning. Because of the pandemic, teachers, educators and students have tested first-hand the great potential which numerous apps and e-learning tools can offer, which is a showcase for how quickly individuals are able to adapt.

CONFERENCE GOALS

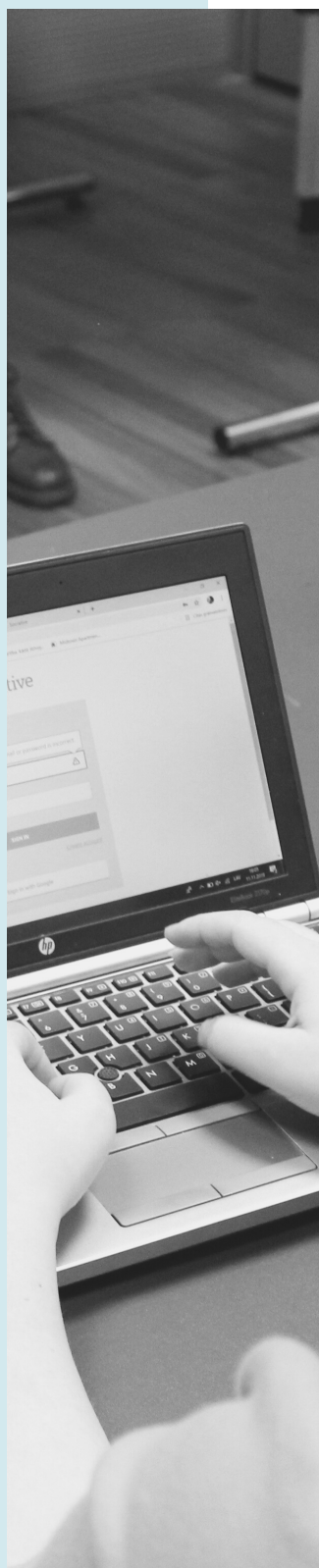
During this conference, teachers and other education staff had the opportunity to discuss about the tools, the apps and websites they use in their daily practice, but also confront their opinions on the strenghts and weaknesses of distance learning.

CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

“What were the general themes dealt with during the conference? What key points have proven to be crucial to discuss?”

In line with the conference goals, several main areas of interest were highlighted by all participant as very important to discuss:

- Discovering the role of Distance Learning in the teaching process, including its influence on niche topics such as reception for new students by distance.
- Receiving an overview of the leading learning platforms used for Distance Learning, comparing their functionalities and their advantages and disadvantages.
- Overview of specific stand-alone tools in areas such as online assessment, communication, gamification, as well as subject-specific online tools (History, Art, Languages).



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ANNA FROM GREECE:

Keywords: preschool // relevance of ICT nowadays // resources

Anna is a kindergarten teacher and principal of her school. After giving an overview about distant learning for preschool education, she shared best practices which she believes are applicable to all levels. She made a point about the changing nature of education and the need for teacher to adapt and follow the digital knowledge trends and be able to keep up with them. Anna also made clear that distance learning's role is not to replace live training, but to rather compliment it and build upon it. Offline teaching will always be relevant as seeing the reactions and reading the emotional state of students in real time is a valuable asset for creating bond and nurturing achievement.

In COVID-19 time, most teachers in Greece did not know how to use the platforms for e-learning, sometimes even to use hardware, but in 15 days they managed to adapt and create e-classes and e-content. In her case, school staff used platforms as Google Classroom, Zoom and many other independent tools in order to accommodate the students' needs.

Preschool education cannot stay outside of e-learning. Technology and all the valuable tools on the internet help the interaction between teachers, empower them to share materials and exchange experiences and teaching practices. New technology will also help organize teaching better, use different sources of knowledge in the same time, which is as applicable for kindergarten education as it is for the rest. A key learning point is that teachers are required to adapt in order not to be left out the education process. That is why her school follows the trends and has put a focus on nurturing skills of youngsters in the fields of STEM, informatics and robotics at kindergarten.

In the spirit of sharing good practices, Anna presented a list of

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tools which she and her colleagues use to create different games and activities useful in maintaining the interest of the students:

www.jigsawplanet.com to create puzzle

www.thinglink.com for interactive games with images

www.learningapps.org to create memory games and more

www.canva.com for engaging graphics and slides

www.fotojet.com to edit photos and make artworks

www.storyjumper.com to create storybooks

www.smilebox.com to create designs from different templates

www.padlet.com virtual shared board to share content

On an inspiring note, Anna concluded mentioning that the implementation of digital tools improved the learning experience of children as they enjoyed to see their work (same can be said about their parents), which greatly improves their motivation.

AGATA FROM POLAND:

Keywords: storyjumper // educators' struggles

Agata shared her experience of using Storyjumper in her classes as a platform for showcasing the work of her primary students. She explained that teachers of all subjects can use the platform for a variety of projects. In order for participants to gain better understanding of the platform, Agata went through the process on how to register, invite students and manage projects in a live preview of the platform, including use of ready to use templates.

Agata showed all the different options students have to express their creativity, as well as functions to encourage teamwork. She explained that the teacher can provide feedback and follow all the steps the students make thus having full overview of their creative process. She highlighted how important it was for her students to have the ability to use the platform to express themselves and embrace their creative spirits in times of adversity. Teachers use it mostly for science lessons for 9-10-11 y.o., but it can be applicable for older students as well. Then, she discussed the use of tools such as Teams and Zoom to facilitate the teaching process.

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This brought to everyone's agreement that the main struggle which educators have to face is exploring all platforms available and choosing the right ones to integrate seamlessly in the teaching process.

Sara Natalini, ELA's trainer and facilitator of the event, shared her experience with Google Classroom and encouraged the other participants to share their learnings and best practices.

SABINE FROM BELGIUM:

Keywords: storytelling // Microsoft 365 // PLC // online quizzes

Sabine is a French Language Teacher at Sint-Lodewijkscollege Bruges. She currently teaches in first grade to students from 12 to 14 years old. Her students have laptop in class and are used to work with computer in the learning process. Due to her experience, she was glad to share a wide variety of useful tools for educators. First on focus was the local platform Smartschool.be. Sabina did a showcase on how teachers can use the platform to collaborate with each other and she shared how you can personalize the teaching process. For example, at her class students who complete task fast can get extra material to practice and improve, so all students are moving with their own rate.

She also introduced the topic of interactive storytelling, where the reader is a part of the creation of the story. She showed an example on how interdisciplinary learning can be incorporated in the process of teaching French (math was used in that example) and she also mentioned about the use of video as a richer medium for sharing information/learning.

Next, Sabina proceeded with a real time demonstration on the capabilities on the Microsoft 365 platform for Education. She shared that her students have access to office 365, highlighting how useful Teams app can be within the suite, showcasing how teacher can manage their learning content and can record lessons, which allows students to watch the lesson and do the work in a convenient time for them. Good integration with Class Notebook,

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which gives teacher access to the content, but allows students to be part of the co-creation of the educational content. Engage students to not only consume the content, but to personalize it and tailor it to their needs, thus expressing their creativity and gaining sense of accomplishment. Later Sabina showed how interactive and engaging tools such as online quizzes can be. She pointed out that quizzes can be a tool for learning, but also can be a great tool for gathering real time feedback on teaching methods and surveying the emotional state and motivation of students.

She made an overview on Microsoft's platform and explained how basic functionalities of the Office Suite can be used to create engaging learning materials for students to use as exercises. She briefly talked about the importance of PLC in the education process (Professional Learning Community), where teachers can work together and exchange ideas. When her presentation ended, the participant congratulated her and remarked that those best practices can be used with other similar platform, such as Google.

MARINA FROM BULGARIA:

Keywords: Google suite for Education// Virtual Escape Room

Marina Tomova is a primary school teacher from Bulgaria, working with children from the age of 7 to 14. She is a certified trainer for Google's Suite for educators, which schools can use for free as opposed to Microsoft 365. She shared how her school has deployed distant learning during the lockdown. She went through most of the most useful tools of G-Suite for education, such as Google Classroom, Google meet and other available tools which are integrated into the suite and guarantee a seamless process flow for both teachers and students. Other presented tools included:

- PADLET - to organize student's creative work
- PearDeck – an extension to help with the teaching and assessing
- Screencastomatic – to record sessions
- EdPuzzle – to create interactive video lessons and exercises
- Google Meet – to arrange videolessons and meetings
- Kahoot – to do quizzes

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- Google Jumpboard
- Bookwidget – to do test in the classroom

After the overview, a walkthrough from Google Classroom was conducted in real-time. Among the benefits mentioned were automated gradings, or extra added functionalities for evaluation where students are equipped with Google. She was talking about monitoring the progress of students in real time, as well as going through the automation in terms of recording grades and performance.

One of the most notable good practices which attracted a lot of interest was when Marina presented how she and her colleagues have used Google Docs and Google Forms to create interactive educational activities that recreate the dynamics of an escape room, where students can work in teams and compete amongst themselves. As a conclusion, a full overview was given on the available learning resources from Google.

ELA'S CONTRIBUTION

Keywords: Mentimeter

Sara Natalini concluded the session by showcasing an interactive tool for creating presentation on the platform Menti. The platform allows participants to provide their input in real time in a very engaging manner. She led a demonstration which went in detail on how such interactive presentations can be created, as well as to show what the end results look like. Participant had a chance to experience the point of the viewers.

GREETINGS AND CLOSURE

This report has been produced thanks to the precious contribution and help of Radoslav Bezprizvanniy and Xiana Entenza Escobedo.

This report is the outcome of the second conference of the initiative "Meeting Beyond Borders: 5 Conferences to share best practices between teachers and educational staff across Europe", a series of five conferences organised by ELA - Erasmus Learning Academy, with speakers and participants from all over Europe.

To learn more about the other conferences of the series, [visit our website](#)

