

TEACHING IN TIMES OF CORONAVIRUS

RIITTA MIKKOLA

In the middle of April, I made a small survey among European teachers about teaching during corona times. 77 teachers answered from 32 different countries, mostly from Europe but also outside Europe, for example from Lebanon and Israel. Most of the teachers work in secondary schools. A minority work in primary schools. Respondents were found via personal messages and the Euroclio website, so I have assumed that many of these teachers are more active and international in outlook than most teachers.

The answers reveal that teaching has rapidly moved from school to homes. 87% of the respondents now work at home and 12% work both at home and at school. 67% of the teachers use only their own electronic devices (computers, phones) while teaching. This situation is challenging for teachers, as evidenced by many respondents mentioning that working from home is difficult when their own children are at home at the same time.

At the moment teaching seems very variable in different countries, cities, schools and also among

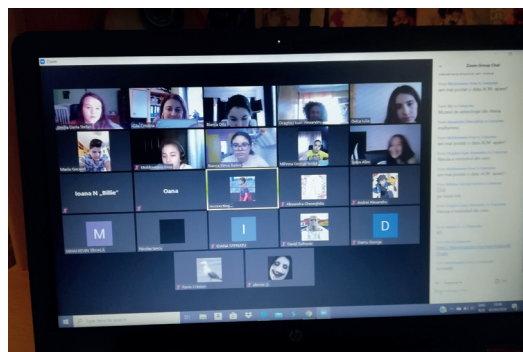
teachers. Most of the teachers say they can choose working methods independently and can organize the teaching in the way they find to be the best. The variety of realities is seen in the range of technical platforms respondents use. 60% of teachers use email in teaching, 46% Google tools (like Classroom and Meet), 27% Microsoft tools (like Teams) and 42% schools' or communities' own platforms. In addition to these, teachers use many other tools, such as Moodle, Zoom, Socrative, Kahoot and WhatsApp.

Challenges with time, skills and computers

Via the questionnaire I asked about the good and the bad experiences teachers are having. Interestingly enough, answers are very different and even contradictory. Some of the teachers say they now have more time than usual: *"I have been able to read many interesting historical books for which I didn't have enough time before."* On the other hand, many teachers are very tired: *"We work twice as much as previously, this type of working is very time consuming."*

Setting the right amount of tasks is a challenge for teachers. Some say assessment and feedback takes an unmanageable amount of time. At the same time support from colleagues and principles is needed, since many respondents say their ICT skills are not good enough, or their devices are not efficient enough.

Technical difficulties are the biggest problem for many teachers and students. It is hard to teach online, when students don't have a computer, or the connection is not working. In these cases, television can be a solution: *"As many students do not have the internet in Serbia, TV classes have been introduced. Dur-*



Romanialaisia oppilaita etätunnilla.
Kuva: Cristina Gila.

ing the day, students have a TV school class, tailored to their age and curriculum. For example, today they have classes in: Serbian language, mathematics and history. One school class lasts 30 minutes.”

Some students study hard, some not

Comments about students vary a lot. Some respondents say that students are indifferent and not motivated to study. Some teachers report cheating and copy-pasting. Many teachers are worried about pupils with special needs: “The gap between strong independent learners and pupils with lower prior attainment becomes larger due to this type of e-teaching.” On the other hand, one respondent writes: “Some students won’t engage, but they are the ones who didn’t engage in the classroom either!”

Conversely, many teachers are happy about their students’ commitment. They say students are engaged. One respondent writes: “Pupils who were not so active at school are now the first to hand in their assignments, which was surprising for me.” Studying at home can be even easier than at school. “When working alone my students stay focused on their assignments and are not distracted by noisy classmates”, notices one teacher.

Distance teaching can offer new opportunities. “Computer-related projects, such as Roots Family films, are easier for students, as they can manage their time and not think about bells”, writes one teacher. An Estonian teacher is widening the perspectives: “People are ready to talk about their speciality or other topics in conference calls to students, so teachers can invite guests into digital classrooms.”

Learning new things

One of the most frequent answers with positive points is the possibility to learn new things. Teachers

are happy they have the possibility - or are forced - to use new methods, applications, devices and materials. Being forced to do new things seems to be a great experience for many respondents. “Making digital tests is fun”, says one teacher. Another confesses: “I actually enjoy trying out many new digital ways of teaching.”

After teachers started to work alone at home, they started to share materials and methods, too. “I like the way we share teaching materials and ideas with colleagues I know and colleagues I have never seen”, says one respondent. “There are also teacher’s groups in social media, where you can share your experiences, great platforms and other ideas”, writes another.

Missing pupils and colleagues

Although many teachers find these exceptional times an opportunity, at the same time many miss their pupils, colleagues and face-to-face communication in the classroom. “The lack of ‘physical’ human contact is the most difficult part”, describes one respondent. Many teachers mention that they find it difficult to communicate with pupils when they don’t see their faces.

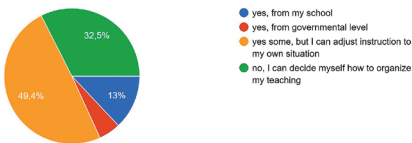
At the same time many teachers mention that online teaching helps communication and the giving of feedback. “Oddly enough it feels more personal, students appreciate my feedback and so on”, notices one teacher. Another respondent says: “We like communicating with video calls. It makes us closer. We never thought of visiting our students’ homes and being a part of their family.”

Obviously online teaching and learning is both an opportunity and a threat. Teachers and pupils need to have the necessary skills and devices. Professional networks and sufficient support are needed. In the worst scenarios both teachers and students are uncertain, stressed and lost. But this spring has shown us that online teaching can also be innovative, creative and a lot of fun.

I sincerely thank all colleagues who answered my questionnaire! ■

Kirjoittaja on espoolaisen Karakallion koulun historian ja yhteiskuntaopin lehtori sekä Euroclion hallituksen puheenjohtaja.

5. Do you have clear instructions how to work
77 vastauksia



Kysymykseen 5 annetut vastaukset.