

Challenges of various online learning implementations

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Experiences from Finland as well as from other countries – a summary of key challenges of young students and online learning





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● ● Importance of interaction

- However the learning activities are organised, **regular** interaction with the teacher and the peers is very important for learning, for well-being and for not feeling isolated.
- For young students, both the teacher and the peers are important, for older students especially the peers.
- Loneliness, even depression, is the most often mentioned problem and emphasised at various levels of education, in all countries. This is not only a problem during COVID, it existed even before but COVID increased it.

● ● Importance of interaction

- Teacher interaction can be online or asynchronous, it can be also e.g. a short video in which teacher explains issues, but somehow the teacher should be present. Plain packages of tasks without guidance and support put the students (and their parents) to face a too big challenge.
- Young students need teacher's support for the tasks and for organising their learning work
- As much as possible also seeing, not only by text, such as voice messages, WhatsApps, emails etc.

● ● Importance of interaction with peers

- Students need a feeling of a community (*We belong to the same group although in net*)
- The collaboration with peers need to be organised, the teacher have to follow it and have to know how to support it. Collaboration in learning activities does not raise by itself.
- Peers presence (however organised) is important because it also increases student's resilience and protect against hard experiences; students can play and have funny moments with their peers. Support also playful collaboration.

● ● Structuring the learning 1

- The way how any learning is organised affects in students' experiences, motivation, and learning outcomes. (And for students in all age groups!)
- Organising means e.g. how the digital learning environment is organised, how digital tools are used, how teacher's support and presence is organised, what is the learning material and how it is available.
- A well and strongly organised distance learning did not cause problems (in Finland, elementary schools during the COVID).
- In case of small students, also their parents (older siblings etc.) might use the environment to help the student.

● ● Structuring the learning 2

- Young students need support to organise their learning, and this should / could be done in the learning environment. Daily routines in a timetable are good! E.g. 30 mins studies, 15 mins break doing something else, 30 mins studies, 30 mins for lunch ... etc. Students can even share their day programs and plan the activities together. Such activities increase students self-regulation skills.
- Important to be clear: the learning materials, timetables, digital tools, meaningful tasks. If the "external" issues of learning are clear, students can concentrate on issues to be learnt, not to wonder what to do and how.
- It is important to have same structures, e.g., among all teachers and during various learning events to help students orientate.

● ● Importance of support at home from parents, older siblings or other adults

- Young students need support for studying online / asynchronous also from home.
- During COVID, parents felt often over-crowded and got exhausted IF the teacher did not structure the learning well enough and if he/she was not present enough.
- Families were the more satisfied the more they had collaboration with the teacher.
- All parents (or other people at home) are not able to guide and support the student. Therefore the teacher's roll is very important.

● ● Student's own strengths

- Students' competence of self-initiative and of taking responsibility of their own learning varies, but in general, all young students need support for these.
- There is a group of students who need especially much support (students with special needs, students living in difficult situations) but during COVID, they were left too alone.
- Problems in learning situations might lead to more serious problems: students lose the belief in their skills and competences, they have serious gaps in basic learning and their attitudes to learning and education become negative. Moreover, the problems might lead to drop outs, especially in transition phases from one level to another.

● ● Student's own strengths

- Even some "good" students were stressed because of the challenges of independence.
- There was a group of students who enjoyed the independence and they managed well in their studies.
- Bullying decreased, which was a benefit to many students.
- Some special education students (autistic, especially sensitive students) got advantages for studying at home, in a peaceful environment.

● ● Some other problems

- In the beginning of COVID, the majority of teacher had limited skills to organise learning in distance, but the skill improved. However, there were major differences in teachers' competences to organise the distance learning.
- Often teachers lacked digi-pedagogical skills.
- In Finland, the technical problems were not severe and schools (local communities) were responsible for organising technical resources.

● ● References

Because of the tight timetable before this first webinar, the full list of references will be shared later