European project

Smart
for Democracy
and Diversity

O3: National report on background information on digital learning tools – Italy

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Content

1. Interviews in Italy

For the drafting of this national report interviews have been carried out with:
Gianni Linari, Education & Training Advisor – "The American University of Rome".
Gabriele Pattaro, Influence & Education Project Manager - Schneider Electric Italia.
Giacomo Pellini, Head of Communication at the Italian climate change NGO "Kyoto Club".
Violetta Sternberg, Reiss-Davis Graduate School, Los Angeles.
Ilaria Todini, Training Advisor at ELIS, Diversity & Inclusion student at the "Giacomo Brodolini" Foundation and HR student at Rome "La Sapienza" University.

2. Findings

2.1. Use of methods and tools

[What digital tools do you use and for what learning purpose? Do you adapt the methods you use to your target group? And if so, how?]

Gianni Linari

The digital tools mainly used relate to the possibility of setting up interactive training processes, both group and personalized and both in the school and professional business environment for refresher and retraining courses. In addition to the "social networks" I would like to mention the use of specific training support tools such as Wordwall, Nearpod, Quizlet, LearningApps, ZOOM, Virbela, Google Meet.

Gabriele Pattaro

In Schneider we deal with various educational and training activities that thanks to digital tools allow us to reach and overcome the constraints imposed by logistical settings: Teams, Webex, YouTube, dedicated streaming on other platforms as well as local repositories of recorded lessons are some tools we use on a daily basis to reach vocational schools, secondary high schools, technical colleges, universities as well as professionals in the sectors we work with.

For each "profile" the educational purpose is different: product technologies and solutions for professionals; technologies; trends and skills required by the market for universities and technical high schools and awareness of the value of energy efficiency and sustainability.

Giacomo Pellini

Digital tools such as IWBs, computers, tablets, smart phones; in schools and training contexts the "contents" are increasingly in digital format and increasingly reside in the cloud; in which relationships start in presence, but also continue online.

The most used methodologies include interdisciplinary; circle time; role playing; cooperative learning; peer education and flipped classroom: The choice of methods and tools depends on the pre-established learning objectives; from the contents that are intended to be proposed; from the reality of the people who approach each other; by the learning rhythms of

individual students. There are various classifications of methods. No one is better than another just as no method is better than another.

Violetta Sternberg

We use the computer, including presentations with Power-point and showing videos/clips to illustrate examples. I used clips from documentaries and therapeutic sessions and YouTube to show clips from films.
We use standard group teaching methods, such as lectures and big group discussions, but often had more success in pairing people into two to discuss their ideas with a partner, and then return to the whole group to share what they had discussed. Small groups often are able to have more intimate, personal discussions rather than large groups in terms of meaningful discussion in teaching.

Ilaria Todini

In recent years, the phenomenon of digital transformation has accelerated the use of technical-digital tools and solutions, increasingly establishing itself as a real process of cultural transformation. Most of the organizational realities have responded to the phenomenon by digitizing processes, implementing a new way of working and relating with others - defining a new digital culture. The use of digital tools is therefore only a small part of the journey towards digital transformation.

Each of them has a specific educational and learning goal. Digital tools such as Miro, Mural or Padlet - promote collaborative learning, which stimulates group participation, encourages interaction and active participation of each member. Think of the school context: this type of educational approach plays an important role in promoting school inclusion, especially in the presence of pupils with specific learning disabilities. Digital tools like Mentimeter, Canva, Emaze, Powtoon - are useful for creating more engaging content, encouraging the participation of the listener. Finally, I believe that Digital Storytelling is an excellent tool to encourage, while having fun, involvement and teamwork.

2.2. Benefits

[What are the benefits for people who use digital tools? What are the benefits for trainers who use them?]

Gianni Linari

The main benefit of digital learning is the possibility, thanks to the Internet, of being able to create an integrated learning platform. It is possible, in fact, to create a network of interconnected training channels such as video courses, gamification, connected webinars and many others, allowing use both in presence and live, and remotely and on a deferred basis. All these channels and virtual spaces act as learning facilitators.

Digital tools offer trainers a wide margin of choice within a wide range of strategies and tools available. The creative combination of these tools designed for educational and didactic purposes, allows them to adapt the training strategy to the learning context, as well as to the characteristics of the learner. In this way, trainers have the opportunity to exploit the new possibilities offered by technology by incorporating it into their courses so that they support their pedagogical goals. In fact, trainers have the possibility of becoming “activators” of moments of meaningful learning, and no longer just simple facilitators.

Gabriele Pattaro

For effective communication it is necessary to use different methods according to the interlocutors and therefore consequently to the level of "maturity". The tool used for dissemination together with other different tools to engage the recipients of the training "empowering" are different as well as the language and terms used. The combination of Teams and Kahoot with young teachers is a winner in professional and secondary schools (gamification), dedicated and recorded streaming (e-learning) together with platforms for remote collaboration such as MURAL and SLIDO guarantee valuable results with technical high schools and universities. For professionals who prefer targeted messages and do not like interaction, platforms such as WEBEX (webcasting) through their chat or surveys are more appreciated.

The awareness of our trainers of the benefits derived from digital tools is not so systematic; the naturalness in adapting the teaching method to the different profiles of "students" by innovating teaching strategies and teaching tools does not always allow to appreciate or highlight their benefits. The teaching based on real and multidisciplinary projects, and on the learning of problems encountered by "case studies" is however successful and somehow imposes on the trainer the need to concretize and organize their experiences. In summary, trainers learn to design and organize learning processes that take place in environments that this learning allows and fosters.

Giacomo Pellini

The integration of new technologies in training activities can facilitate a more creative and more personalized path of knowledge ownership by learners and foster sociality, sharing, collaboration between learners and trainers.

Thanks to the possibility of carrying out interactive games and tests relating to various subjects, the trainers can receive immediate and timely feedback with respect to each work carried out.

Violetta Sternberg

We think technology is important for education, both for teaching/pedagogy and as well for learning. We were able to communicate and teach on zoom during the pandemic! Technology can help environmentally, by using computers to read and share articles instead of paper. It also appeals to different types of learning – both visual and audio – as well as students with learning disabilities, such as having the ability to use computer typewriting instead of handwriting for dyslexia. Technology can also add some fun in education, like online quiz games where the students connected their cell phones to select the correct answer, which was a fun tool for their exam studying.

Ilaria Todini

Each digital tool carries with it a specific educational and learning goal. Encouraging teamwork, collaboration between different people, flexibility, adaptability - means implementing one's transversal skills, which take on a fundamental role in the world of work. Transversal skills or soft skills are represented by a mix of skills, resources and personal qualities that characterize the way of being of each person.

Starting from the centrality that the learner (or student) covers within a training path, I believe that the most important benefit is linked to the learners themselves: the use of digital tools,

as described above - favors education for socialization, the productivity of learners and the enhancement of their skills and abilities.

2.3. Challenges

[What are the problems in using or implementing the digital tools? Are there any support needs for the implementation of digital tools?]

Gianni Linari

The digital revolution has not yet been accompanied by equally extensive and profound transformations of education and teaching systems. In this evolving scenario, it is configured as a precise responsibility of trainers to create digital environments and opportunities for meaningful learning experiences, which can enhance the skills of learners, helping them both in the now indispensable path of digital literacy and in that of acquiring new disciplinary knowledge by overcoming any prejudicial feelings often widespread among teachers themselves and learners.

Gabriele Pattaro

Access to technologies, their cost as well as the rapid obsolescence of tools are a real problem, but also a large area for improvement.
In addition, the use of digital tools requires a considerable effort for the teacher who is not always able to interact with students, allowing them to be easily distracted and perhaps postpone requests for clarification for the aseptic environment in which they find themselves.

Furthermore, the trainer does not always have the perception of the level of understanding of the individual students and therefore cannot calibrate his intervention with respect to the specific moment; therefore a part of “contact” is missing which allows to have the pulse of the overall situation and the non-verbal communication is effectively annihilated.

The spread of digital technologies involves the way we communicate, work and find information. Trainers grow up with the younger generation in a world where technology is pervasive, yet this does not imply that they automatically possess the necessary skills to use digital technologies effectively.

Giacomo Pellini

Digital tools cannot be expected to innovate teaching per se, much less that this innovation necessarily has positive effects on students' knowledge and skills. Very often it is a common belief that too much technology limits creativity and at the same time offers harmful shortcuts for students and pupils.

Teachers and trainers need specific digital training, it is not enough simply to give them the tools, they must be enabled to exploit the devices in the best possible way for their final goal.

Violetta Sternberg

Sometimes technology can be an escape, where they read the material but do not truly connect with or process it. Using computers, it is easy to be distracted, students can easily disconnect from meaningful engagement and not be present in class.

It is important to have an IT or Technology team that will help with any technical issues or problems, because there will be!! You can also set standards or rules to technology at the beginning of the course, for example not allowing cell phones during classes.

Ilaria Todini

A critical issue is linked to the issue of social disparity and inequality, with respect to the digital gap between those who have the skills to use digital tools and those who do not. This is why good digital literacy is important. In this respect The OECD study on the impact of technological innovation is interesting *("How's Life in the Digital Age?").*

The first step to be implemented could be to design a basic training course, aimed at those who use digital tools - with the aim on the one hand of transmitting technical and specific knowledge on the tools themselves, on the other hand experimenting them with laboratory activities.

2.4. Recommendations

[Which tools do you recommend?]

Gianni Linari

- Naboo Academy: (https://naboo.academy/?utm_source=capterra&utm_medium=ppc&utm_campaign=gartnerdigitalmarkets),
- eTrainCenter: (https://www.etraincenter.com/capterra_landing.aspx?campaign=GetApp),
- CreatixCampus (https://www.creatrixcampus.com/)

For the creation of an "educational metaverse" I would suggest Virbela which I used at Stanford (https://www.virbela.com/news-articles/virbela-launches-new-metaverse-campus-to-better-connect-physical-and-virtual-working-worlds).

Gabriele Pattaro

I do not believe that there is a better tool than another, the use of one means and only function of the goal you want to achieve based on the recipient of the training. Instead, the pedagogical aspect linked to the trainer is the key element: in an elementary mathematical formula .... if the product of two factors is "0", the second factor is irrelevant, the result will always be "0". It is therefore essential, more than the digital tool, the ability of the trainer to use it to the fullest, favouring the involvement and engagement of the recipient

Giacomo Pellini

Tablet, video, IWB for the youngest.

Violetta Sternberg

We recommend Power point and video/clips to illustrate concepts. Games are also fun for a more casual or younger audience.

2.5. Other and references

Ilaria Todini

https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/top-10-work-skills-of-tomorrow-how-long-it-takes-to-learn-them/

https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/science-and-technology/how-s-life-in-the-digital-age_9789264311800-en

Gardner, Howard (1983; 1993) Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences, New York: Basic Books.

3. Conclusions

1. Formal and informal educational systems and initiatives must therefore evolve according to new learning needs and methods (preferring images, videos and music over texts) and at the same time "pedagogy in the digital age" must assume and integrating the new cognitive, communicative and knowledge management practices by recognizing the characteristics of “enlarged and diversified contexts”.

2. Digital tools make it possible to reach all realities, without any kind of social division by democratizing educational systems.

3. Although virtualized and remote, the on-line experiences are not able to equate the direct experiences in presence.

4. Educational materials and digital tools are capable of making the teaching-learning process more motivating and improving the learners' climate by allowing each educational situation greater flexibility and ability to customize content according to the needs of each learner. In fact, from experience, the use of digital tools facilitate the diversified adoption of educational and inclusive teaching strategies.

5. To ensure that learners are able to participate constructively, there is a growing need to provide trainers with the appropriate skills. Trainers should continue to be students: self-assessment tools, refresher programs and sharing of good practices are some of the means to be put in place to grow and further develop the level of "digital pedagogical competence" .

4. Sources

The sources of the information included in this report are the interviews mentioned above. We are very grateful to the Colleagues who gave their availability to be interviewed and for sharing their experiences and knowledge.