DEVELOPING DIGITAL AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS WITH THE ENGLISH

CLASS UTILIZING THE eTWINNING PROJECT *#FridaysForFuture@Schools*

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The educational process in all European countries is based on digital and communication skills. Students are more involved and motivated if they apply directly their knowledge in real-life situations. Educational projects make the students understand the reason why they must learn daily and how their daily digital homework can improve the world or at least the community they live in. In this article, we took as an example the eTwinning project #FridaysForFuture@Schools, a collaboration between five countries and six schools, where they have applied Greta Thunberg's campaign to solve environmental problems. The students demonstrated sufficiently their communication and digital skills.

Keywords: digital skills, communication, educational project, eTwinning, activities, environment.

DEZVOLTAREA COMPETENȚEI DIGITALE ȘI COMUNICATIVE LA ORELE DE LIMBĂ ENGLEZĂ UTILIZÂND PROIECTUL eTWINNING *#FridaysForFuture@Schools*

În toate țările europene, procesul educațional se axează majoritar pe dezvoltarea competenței comunicative și digitale. Elevii prezintă un interes sporit și sunt mai implicați dacă aplică cunoștințele direct în activitatea lor didactică în situații reale. Proiectele educaționale ajută elevii să înțeleagă motivul pentru care ei trebuie să învețe zilnic și cum temele lor pentru acasă digitale pot îmbunătăți lumea sau cel puțin comunitatea în care trăiesc. În acest articol am luat ca exemplu proiectul eTwinning #FridaysForFuture@Schools, o colaborare între cinci țări și șase școli, unde s-a aplicat campania lui Greta Thunberg pentru rezolvarea problemelor mediului înconjurător. Elevii au demonstrat suficient competențele lor digitale și de comunicare.

Cuvinte-cheie: competență digitală, comunicare, proiect educațional, eTwinning, activități, mediu.

Introduction

The world we live in is based on communication. This means that every message today, whether it is virtual or not, can be evaluated. It depends not only on the offer someone proposes, but in the way it is written, organized and sent. A great number of teachers in Moldova still teach using traditional methods, sending contents, without having a feedback from their students, as they apply the knowledge in their daily life. Digital and communication competences are the new invasion in modern education, being required in the student's future for getting a job. "Mastering digital communication skills also demonstrates efficiency, a major bonus for employers when considering worker's productivity. Employers want to know that employees are effectively delivering information to wide audiences. Understanding digital communication makes it easier to deliver content and information in more sophisticated ways; for example, layering an embedded product video in an email with a hyperlink to the company website" [1].

In this article, our aim was to explain how the educational projects eTwinning can involve students and teachers during the educational process to take action and solve world problems while they are studying school subjects. Our project #FridaysForFuture@Schools made the students understand the role of being actively involved in the environmental problems. We present here the project plan, its path and the results we have assessed at the end.

Materials and methods

We have used in this research the eTwinning platform and the project implemented by six schools from Europe. Our article is composed of the eTwinning project plan #FridaysForFuture@Schools, the activities implemented using several digital tools and the results of the students at the end of the project.

Our mission in schools is to create a young citizen who is able to take action in society, to be active and to take care of the world we live in. The results of these big tasks are based on communication, joint work and concrete outcomes. We teach students to apply knowledge in real life situations and we are pleased to see it as soon as possible. eTwinning is a way to see if we are on the right path. "The eTwinning action is an initiative of the European Commission that aims to encourage European schools to collaborate using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) by providing the necessary infrastructure (online tools, services, support). Therefore, teachers registered in the eTwinning action are enabled to form partnerships and develop collaborative, pedagogical school projects in any subject area with the sole requirements to employ ICT to develop their project and collaborate with teachers from other European countries (at least two teachers from two different European countries are needed)" [2]. The eTwinning European Staff outlines on the main page of the educational platform that the most important elements of eTwinning is collaboration among teachers, students, schools, parents, and local authorities. In eTwinning teachers work together and organise activities for their students. They have an active role, interact, investigate, make decisions, respect each other and learn 21st century skills. eTwinning projects involve the contribution of each member of the team. Take inspiration and explore these awarded projects [3].

This article aims to show how an eTwinning project can unite different students and teachers from Europe to solve a global issue, to apply the students' digital and communicative competence during English classes and in other subjects as well. This project involves the following curricular areas: Citizenship, Environmental Education, Foreign Languages and Media Education. The project name is #FridaysForFuture@Schools and is based on Greta Thunberg's campaign. "The Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, born in Stockholm in January 2003, has become known globally for her environmental campaign. In August 2018, aged 15, Thunberg began a solo climate protest by striking from school. She has since been joined by tens of thousands of school and university students in more than a dozen countries, in climate strikes that have become regular events. A global strike in March drew more than a million people, surpassed in September by the biggest yet with at least 4 million.

Thunberg has described the rapid spread of the strikes around the world as amazing. "It proves you are never too small to make a difference," she said. Her protests were inspired by US students who staged walkouts to demand better gun controls in response to multiple school shootings.

Veteran climate activists have expressed surprise at how much impact Thunberg has had on public awareness in such a short time.

Thunberg has begun travelling to spread her message outside Sweden. Speaking at the United Nations climate conference in December 2018, she berated world leaders for behaving like irresponsible children [4].

Our project we present in this short communication has started in August 2019 and will continue until the end of the year. Using Greta Thunberg's campaign as point of departure for this project, we want to explore what our contribution to a greener world could be (inside and outside of schools). We are going to discuss environmental problems in our home regions. As transnational groups of student activists, we want to be united as Europeans by a common desire for clean air and an unspoilt environment. This challenge is not easily tackled because very few are actually prepared to sacrifice their habits or luxury for that. We will try to suggest solutions and present them at the end of our project to our communities, groups involved in the project and eTwinning members from the countries that are involved in and. Furthermore, we will have a look at the limits of protest, i.e. what can be achieved and/or what is acceptable.

The partners of this project are: Germany (Gerhart-Hauptmann-Gymnasium, Berlin and Geschwister-Scholl-Gymnasium in Taucha), Italy (Liceo Porporato, Pinerolo), Bulgaria (Secondary School with the study of European languages "St. Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher", Ruse), Spain (IES Valle del Saja, Cantabria) and Moldova (Lyceum Meșterul Manole, Sălcuța, Căușeni) – Figure 1.

The main objective is to use online tools in order to suggest some potential solutions and commit to doing what you can to preserve our environment. And the tools that have been used lately are: Twinspace, AnswerGarden, Padlet, AvatarMaker, Quizlet, Kahoot, Google Docs, Tricider, etc.

Fig.1. Countries and schools involved in the project.

The project plan (see Table) was completed by Marco Schober, the founder and coordinator of the project, and it was followed weekly by all participants.

Table

PROJECT PLAN: #FridaysForFuture @ Schools

Stage	Step	Tool/Remarks
0. GETTING READY FOR OUR PROJECT	My login name: My password: My sub-group: My campaign group:	TwinSpace
I. GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER AND THE PROJECT	Making an avatar for yourself (2 credits)	AvatarMaker
(Deadline: 11 October 2019)	*Hosting a logo contest***	Design contest: Creative students can earn extra credits here**
	Introducing oneself to cross-national student team (3 credits)	Forum TwinSpace
II. STUDYING TOPIC VOCABULARY: NATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT	Providing lists with topic vocabulary	Quizlet and Kahoot help you to practise the new words
(Deadline: 1 November 2019)	Team competition: vocabulary test (1 credit)	Google Forms (quiz mode)
III. IDENTIFYING ENVIRONMENTAL KEY PROBLEMS IN OUR HOME REGIONS	Collecting key problems (2 credits)	Padlet (short entry) + AnswerGarden (key words)
(Deadline: 1 November 2019)	Comparing key problems	In-class discussion
IV. FOCUSING ON ONE ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM	Deciding on one environmental problem per team (1 credit)	Forum TwinSpace

(Deadline: 29 November 2019)	Designing a campaign to raise awareness of this problem and how to change something about it (10 credits)	Google Docs / Google Pages
	*Launching the campaign in your home region***	(** additional task)
	Giving feedback on campaigns (1 credit)	TwinSpace Pages (using the discussion function)
V. THE LIMITS OF PROTEST (Deadline: 29 November 2019)	Punishing students on strike? - What are the limitations of protest? (3 credits)	Tricider discussion
VI. SENDING AN E-MAIL TO GRETA THUNBERG**	*All teams write ONE e-mail to Greta Thunberg collaboratively in which we are going to inform her about our project.*	Google Docs (** additional task)
VII. EVALUATION	Student feedback	Google Forms

A group of students from the ninth grade were involved directly in the project with their own account on the platform, working for the aim of the project and communicating with all the students and the teachers from the project. First, all of the countries presented themselves digitally: country, school, habits, traditions, interests, using online tools. Some students used Avatar Makers, others directly introducing themselves. They have been informed about the tasks of the project, Greta Thunberg, and the global and local environmental problems. All of the teams have created their own view of the issue, the project logo and it was voted online by the students (Fig.2). All of these actions were done to make the students collaborate for the next activities. In order to make the students informed and motivated for the actions, the teachers prepared a list of words about the environment and nature. During the past week, they have learned the vocabulary list and each team had to answer an online quiz on the subject. All teams designed a campaign to raise awareness of one environmental problem, and wrote one email to Greta Thunberg collaboratively in which they informed her about the project. They worked individually and in groups using online tools.

Fig.2. Voting results.

As a result, digital competence is widely connected with communicative competence. Both of them are being required in the new digital era. Below we have mentioned a few explanations of the digital competence that could be found in our eTwinning project #FridaysForFuture@Schools:

An employability requirement of the digital age;

A 'skills' connotation, implying competency with some of today's computer applications, including word processing and e-mail, etc;

Set of abilities needed to apply digital technologies to work, leisure and education;

Skills people should have in the digital era;

Skills to communicate with others and address a wide range of texts in all media;

A range of capabilities (knowledge, skills and competences) covering three main categories: ICT practitioner skills; ICT user skills, and e-business skills;

Demonstrated ability to apply knowledge, skills and attitudes to achieve observable results; measurable performance through rubrics;

Confident and critical use of Information Society Technology (IST) for work, leisure and communication;

Underpinned by basic skills in ICT: the use of computers to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet [5].

The project involved the students in the future employment world related to environment, computer applications, communicating with new people, leisure and education.

Conclusion

The project *#FridaysForFuture@Schools* succeeded to involve the students from the all six schools in their community environmental problems, they communicated productively in English among them and decided how to write the letter for Greta, they have worked together using Google Doc tools. They shared their experience and thanked her for being active. As a result, the project will be forwarded to the National/European Quality Label and the students started similar campaigns for the environment protection.

Acknowledgment

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