

Online Schooling -

Although I have been working in the education field for over 30 years I used to be very sceptical regarding the quality and impact online learning may have on students. I was convinced that, in order to learn well, students have to be in a physical setting where they could mingle with both their peers and their teachers. I held the belief that online learning would not allow students nor teachers to form a community.

At the age of 54 I decided to undertake an online course myself – after having gone through formal education in a traditional way (two doctoral degrees, one master degree). During this particular online course – that was not only based on lecturing, but also on valuable live sessions where participants got engaged in debates, discussions and collaborative learning – I realised that I established a strong bond with the participants that resulted in further gatherings online and offline.

As, at that time, I was working towards becoming less location-dependent as a professional, I was looking into options that allowed me to live my mission differently in comparison to how I was doing it up until then. After many years of teaching, lecturing, coaching and leading international schools in different countries and experiencing the need to start from scratch again after each move (I moved due to family reasons), I was fascinated by creating something that would allow me and my job to work from anywhere.

Synchronicity is often at play and, indeed, the mentor of the online course that I subscribed to one day phoned me and asked me whether it would be possible to create an online school? You can imagine that my former beliefs were at a deviation. We brainstormed on the basis of our common experience and knowledge in different fields (mine in education, giftedness and personal development and Katharina's (my business partner) in Marketing and coaching) what would be the best way to bring a holistic education offering into reality: School Beyond Limitations was born.

School Beyond Limitations is not only based on online schooling, but it also integrates the opportunity of experiential learning weeks in different countries in Europe. Students learn to see themselves as unique human beings who are invited to pursue their own interests through the lenses of academic, social, emotional, personal and entrepreneurial learning opportunities.

The experience has now given us enough evidence that online learning has a number of huge advantages (although it may not be the right solution for everybody). Students who love to engage online and gain inspiration by connecting with people from different countries forget that they are not in the same physical room. Surprisingly, students say that they seem to bond more with their classmates in a contained online context (at School Beyond Limitations there are only maximum 8 students in each class) than they ever did before in traditional classes with over 20 students being present. They keep connected after lessons and communicate and collaborate beyond their school hours. As such, the online approach gives them the understanding how much value they gain through collaboration with one another and furthermore, they realise that they belong to a steady, friendly, caring and open learning community – an environment that promotes the notion that learning takes place at any time and anywhere.

Online learning allows students to connect with their peers and teachers also in times of change, such as during the COVID 19 pandemic throughout which the majority of countries have closed their schools and were not ready to phase an efficient solution for their students' learning. Often teachers just sent assignments out to their students by expecting the assignments to be handed in at the end of the week. Students, from one moment to the next, needed to learn everything independently whereas before there was never any focus on self-directed learning in school. There was no or very little interaction with the students. No wonder that students who experienced such an approach started to feel left alone and demotivated about their learning experience.

The online lessons at School Beyond Limitations allowed students to continue their learning journey. It never interrupted. Students are involved in their learning. It allows them to see the purpose of their learning by being seen in their individual uniqueness. They learn out of curiosity based on their interests, talents, experiences and competencies. Their learning takes place through inquiry and projects based on a trans-disciplinary approach. That allows them to integrate their learning holistically as it is relevant to their own lives. On top of supporting students' personal development, they are encouraged, through the exposure to experts in various fields, to develop their entrepreneurial mindset and their entrepreneurial ventures. Such powerful online classes allow them to learn how much value there is to connect with entrepreneurs and to be exposed to their expertise.

Online classes offer infinite possibilities for such learning experiences. Students connect easily with relevant people who may have an impact on their own professional career.

Another positive aspect of online learning is that students encounter less stress. There is no need to get up so early if school starts at 9 am from home. Students mention this aspect all the time: how much freer and more relaxed they feel about school by connecting from home. There is no need of commuting to school on a daily basis and that helps them to introduce a daily routine based on more freedom and choice.

In addition, the peer pressure that usually makes students suffer so much in traditional settings is something that online students do encounter much less. First of all because their environment is so different. Nobody can hide in the classroom. Everyone is seen and also the interaction between the

students is taking place openly. If their learning environment puts an emphasis on the whole human being – including their emotional and social wellbeing – then there is no space for such risks to take place.

So, is online learning an alternative to traditional schooling? For sure it is (not for all); especially if the online learning is based on the uniqueness of the learning journey of each single student and takes them on an interactive journey that ignites their passion for learning and their interest in creating value for themselves and the world they live in.

Author Dr Martina Geromin DBA, PhD

Contacts

Sarah Andrew

07457141569

mailto: sarah.andrew@inspireprmedia.com

kieran kingston

+44 7786272040

mailto: kieran.kingston@inspireprmedia.com