APPInep e-Newsletter no. 17 — Winter/Spring 2021

From the editor's desk

WELCOME everyone to the first issue of the APPInep e-Newsletter in 2021.

These have been very challenging times for everyone. For us, teachers, the new school year started with a whole new routine at school and in the classroom. And after a few months, here we are again, back to online teaching. Adaptability seems to be the new buzz word and, in fact, during the past year, we have proven that we can adapt and go beyond our expectations. So, let us give ourselves a big round of applause.

In this e-Newsletter, we have a nice variety of articles, which also reflect these transitional times in our practices. Some articles reflect on our experience during online teaching; some show how we have carried on when everything around us was changing; some others describe how much we enjoy being back in the classroom with our students.

As usual, we hope you find this new issue useful. And don't forget, your feedback and suggestions are very important to us. Feel free to share with us your experience and teaching tips.

Ana Nunes

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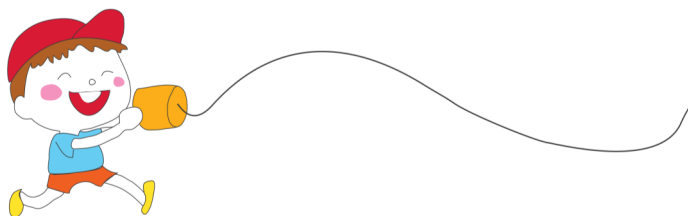
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An approach of awareness: integrating phonetics into our classrooms

What is difficult for you when you speak English? What do you do to practise and deepen your communicative competence? Both questions invite us to rethink skills that might come too short when it comes to communicating in English bearing in mind that learning is stressed by our awareness. Within the speaking skill, phonetics is one of these skills.

Being able to effectively communicate in English is the goal of every single student.

How can they achieve it and how can teachers help students reaching this goal?

Pronunciation is most of the time avoided and rarely does a teacher think about teaching pronunciation communicatively. In so doing we teachers tend to forget a core principle "Knowledge is forgotten. Know-how lasts a lifetime".

If students are only invited to "repeat after the teacher" they don't figure the sounds out for themselves. Nor do they become conscious of the muscles they have to use to make the sounds of English.

Adrian Underhill's phonemic chart takes students through the sounds of English, showing how they are organized according to how and where the sounds are made, and how the sounds relate to each other.

This is an approach of awareness, helping learners (and teachers) to understand how the sounds are made physically and how aspects of that physicality distinguishes one sound from another.

Pronunciation gives the language body and volume. What students know about the language differs from what they can do with that language.

Underhill's chart serves as a map of where to find the sounds in the mouth.

How are pronunciation skills usually dealt with in course books?

When looking closely at course books considering the primary school, pronunciation skills seem to be faded.

Isn't it the perfect moment to teach phonics, practising continuously blending and segmenting throughout the year, interwoven with other competencies and linked to the vocabulary of thematic areas?

Aren't we thereby enabling students to better engage their consciousness of the physicality and visibility of the language so as to make connections between the sound and the letter? A continuous practice surely consolidates their letters and sounds before moving on to sentences and captions.

Have a go on these websites!

1. Starfalls phonics
Children interactive phonics
http://www.starfall.com/

2. Free phonics and Reading game
https://www.teachyourmonstertoread.com/

Bearing in mind other levels

Having a look at the contents table of a few course

An approach of awareness: integrating phonetics into our classrooms (cont.)

books, we immediately realise that pronunciation shows up along with all the other items. Throughout the units, there are pronunciation based exercises linked to the vocabulary of the respective unit. One senses that pronunciation is an essential part of the language and not something that pops up every once in a while. This is the feeling that takes hold of us by taking a peek at other course books (from grammar school up to college).

Learning by doing

This is undoubtedly the best path we can show students.

This article is a mere reflection on our teaching assignments in the classroom that led me to rethink mine. I forced myself to get out of my comfort zone and to be willing to change. A change I thought was unnecessary given that I was convinced I was already doing everything reasonably well. But the truth is that I have always wondered how to guide students to intelligible communication, how to bring them closer to the sounds of the language in an enduring, effective way. As a result, I have been engaging myself in integrating pronunciation into classroom activities. In fact, there are quite creative awareness-raising exercises concerning phonetics. I might share them with you next time.

I sense that many students do not communicate just because they cannot pronounce "properly". The fear of doing something wrong is not content-based but sound-based.

And as Morley puts it, "Without adequate pronunciation skills the learner's ability to communicate is severely limited" (1991:488) and therefore "intelligible pronunciation is seen as an essential component of communicative competence" (1991:513).

References

Interactive phonemic chart: British English, in onestopenglish (online), London, Macmillan Education. [retrieved 12 january 2021] Available online at https://www.onestopenglish.com/pronunciation/interactive-phonemic-chart-british-english/156649.article

Morley, Joan (1991). "The Pronunciation Component in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages." TESOL Quarterly 25(3).

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The original Phonemic Chart created by Adrian Underhill [retrieved from

www.macmillanenglish.com/phonemic-chart]

Going online with 4 to 10-Year-Olds: more than memories

It happened from one day to the next. Spain had gone into complete confinement; we were to move online. The provision included asynchronous content, such as videos and sheets for the Google Classroom, and real-time classes through Zoom. As a teacher, I went through the sharpest learning curve I ever experienced in my 30 plus years in the classroom. And in the midst of crisis and heartache, there were moments of sheer joy as we entered the homes of confined children eager for contact.

I am writing this with an eye to the future and not just as a *memoire* of a certain, crucial moment. The experience made me aware of the possibilities technology can offer. For example, one of my bones of contention with the curriculum is that it is paper-based and not hands-on enough. There is little competency building in Science and Art (common to my hard and soft CLIL work) due to limited time and resources. In the aftermath of this crisis, hygiene will ensure everything is "hands-off".

When we were online in our houses, though, we could do simple experiments, physical challenges like tossing a soft toy in the air and clapping, play instruments even if it was a pot and wooden spoon, create art with recycled material and even learn how to do household chores like cooking or hanging and folding laundry. We had no worksheets: we consolidated our paper-based tasks by folding, tearing and cutting scrap paper. Drawing played a key role. When our classmates were unable to pick something up straight away, we encouraged them to keep trying and then applauded them when they got it right. Resilience and confidence flourished, although feedback needed to be constant.

This back to basics approach informed most of my work, and out of choice rather than just out of necessity. My colleagues working with older students could click onto videos or PowerPoints and delve into escape rooms. With the under tens, my pedagogic instincts said less would be more. There was already a barrier with the screen; we didn't want to be further out of reach with a double tab. Songs were performed with our voices or our own musical accompaniment and movement. Stories were read aloud, not played as videos once the challenge was to find alternative presentation techniques: more exaggerated voices or strategic positioning of one's super-expressive face under or above the book. We relied on our sense of sight and hearing, although there was the sense of touch, too, through the objects within reach.

Creativity flourished on both sides of the screen. Children quickly became aware of how they could play with perspective. For example, a revision of body parts as monsters meant gnashing our teeth or popping our nose menacingly towards the screen. Guessing games involved putting objects right in front of the camera. Indeed, there was a paradox. The screen served as a boundary, but space confines could be overcome with movement and imagination. The typical walking-walking, hop-hop-hop rhyme used as a warmer in the young learner classroom was extended into climbing and sliding down the rainbow and even climbing up a mountain and then running and swimming to avoid a bear behind us. We fell out of view and then popped back in. All of this happened even before

Going online with 4 to 10-Year-Olds: more than memories (cont.)

we started to explore the vast expanse of space in their living rooms.

Popping out of view to get something meant personalisation was easier. For example, on Mother's Day, we left the camera to find a picture of our mothers and of us as babies. We spoke about our favourite objects and hobbies.

Shy children did suffer at the shock of such direct contact, but when parents gave them a little nudge, they came round and even acquired a sense of achievement for staying on. The other advantage of the hands-on approach is that learners have something to hide behind: an instrument or the materials for an experiment. They feel less exposed on-screen.

However, the role of parents is crucial. It did not take long for children to work out that our authority was limited. In the very young learners classrooms parents or carers had to learn how to be present but not intrusive, although there was always a sense of community when we baked or did an experiment. Physical challenges were popular with everyone. One involved bending your arm back with a coin resting on your elbow and then extending your forearm out to catch the coin mid-air. This was oddly addictive.

The on-line experience was an excellent way for parents to glimpse into our classrooms and see what we get up to in a more playful environment. They were shocked by the intensity of the sessions and the amount of participation that took place. We all mention how real-time, online classes are exhausting. If your classes are normally lively, they will tend to implode on-line. One has to be careful not to overtax physical energy on both sides. I also firmly believe that texture is a quality

of any class: quiet moments and thoughtful periods are needed to balance out more boisterous ones. Moreover, learner training is essential, especially if a child is accustomed to a more traditional set-up. There are boundaries; family dialogue and authority are a must.

I really hope more schools will plan in at home sessions on-line so that we can explore the magic world it offers. Perhaps it can tie in with afterschool activities or special weekend sessions, or boost active grandparenting programmes so that the human capital of their older relatives can be passed down. Certainly, before the pandemic, I never would have thought this teacher old enough to be a granny herself would be espousing technology.

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Your opinion matters...

We are looking forward to your feedback, ideas and suggestions. Visit our *Padlet* and post your message or "like" some of the posts.

Story buddies

There is something to be said about shared experiences – in the grand scheme of things, we can talk about cultural experiences that bring people together as a nation. Likewise, we can refer to our annual (H)APPI gatherings that bring us together as teachers invested in our professional development. On the smaller scheme of things, let's say, we could argue that shared classroom experiences bring our classes together as a group. And what better experience could be shared than a story?

In a time when so many of our shared experiences are lived in the isolation of our homes in front of a screen, why not have a buddy to keep us company?

Some weeks ago, before I read the story *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* to my 1st graders, I introduced my buddy Benny to them. Benny (see picture below) is a yellow rabbit, he's got long ears and a small, round tail. He loves eating carrots and his favourite colour is orange. So, I asked my students to each get a buddy to keep them company as they listened to the story. When they were all sitting in front of the screen again, I told them I'd like them to introduce their buddy to the group. I gave students one minute to think about two things they would like to tell us about their buddy – it could be what animal it was, what they liked/didn't like or their favourite food. The focus on food was due to the fact that not only was it the topic of the unit we were finishing, but to also get students already thinking about food that animals eat – thus linking it to *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* story. Then, I asked students to introduce their buddy to the class. We had Ellie, the elephant, with a very,

very long 'tromba'; Nini, the unicorn, who likes rainbows; Sushi, the cat, who likes to eat fish; and, among others, Spiderman, whose favourite food is spiders(?!).

Did this activity take a long time? Yes. Was it worth it? Definitely. On the one hand, students were producing language (some they knew, some they asked as they went along, some mixed English with Portuguese, others asked their parents) in a meaningful context. We didn't know students' buddies, so there was a real need to listen as the information students provided was new to everyone. On the other hand, this was a learner centred and learner-driven activity, in which students were given not only an opportunity to make a choice (about the toy they wanted to show the group and what they would share with the class), but also an opportunity to use their voice in the lesson. Even though I limited the topic to toys and introductions, students made various independent decisions. I believe this is a small, yet meaningful, example of the learner agency we want to instil in our students from a very young age.

Once everyone had presented their buddy, we counted how many cats, dogs, bears we had. This was also an opportunity to revise numbers, which would be coming up in the story. Unsurprisingly, we had a lot of bears and dogs in our group! Then we moved on with our storytelling moment. In the end, I asked students if they had liked the story, if their buddies had liked the story and what their favourite part had been.

Students still bring their buddies to class from time to time and I usually make a comment about it –

Story buddies (cont.)

"Nice to see Sushi!" or *"Did Nini like the song too?"* It helps building rapport with the students and it brings our spatially distanced group closer together.

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Have you visited the APPI website recently?

Our website has a new and fresher look. A new interface, new functions and even a Member's Area which you can access using your APPI member number. Visit our website and let us know your opinion.

appi.pt/home

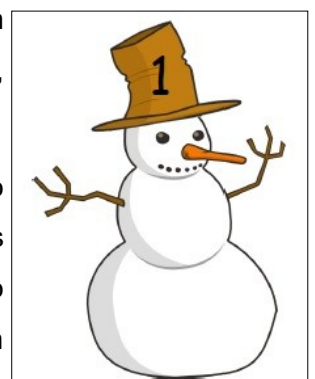## English and Maths in the pre-school classroom: counting mats

Maths plays a very important role in a child's development. It helps children make sense of the world around them and early maths skills are used by children in their activities and daily routines. Spatial awareness, size, shape, patterns, sequences, movement, direction, measurements... These are just a few examples of maths concepts that children start developing at a very young age. Every activity can and should become a math learning opportunity, at home and also at school.

Numeracy, which comprises saying number words, writing numbers, counting, and recognizing a number of objects, is an essential skill for successful daily life and will support children in their learning path. We, as educators, should provide plenty of opportunities to learn and practise these skills, especially through play.

This is a very simple activity that turned into one more opportunity to practice counting.

When returning to school after Christmas break, the topic in the pre-school classroom is, inevitably, Winter! We started by introducing a well-known rhyme, "I'm a little snowman". After learning the words and the song, we introduced this activity by displaying 3 posters with four snowmen in each poster and each snowman has a number on his hat, going from 1 to 12.

We counted together 1 to 12 and back several times and asked the children to come and point to a certain number. Then, they took

English and Maths in the preschool classroom: counting mats (cont.)

turns asking one another about the numbers on the snowmen's hats.

Next, we drew buttons on the snowmen. Using a marker on the laminated posters, we would ask, pointing to one of the snowmen, "How many buttons are there on the snowman?" The teacher would draw the corresponding number of buttons and then count them ("1, 2, there are two buttons").

When all the snowmen had their corresponding number of buttons, the children would come and count the buttons. First, we would ask the question "How many buttons are there?" but after some practice, we started asking a child to choose a colleague and ask the question while pointing to one of the snowmen on the posters.

Finally, we let them play in their groups. This year, because of the pandemic and the safety and health recommendations, the classroom is set up in small groups. We prepared a set of 3 A4 posters with a bag of "buttons" (as buttons can be dangerous for small children, we used colourful pompom balls) for each group. In their groups, children started playing with their snowmen counting mats and placing the "buttons" as they asked one another "How many buttons are there on the snowman?". You can imagine what happened to the pompom balls after a while. ☺

With the younger children (3/4 years old), we started with one counting mat (1 to 4), but the older ones played with all three. The teachers just sat with the children and played counting with them. It is so gratifying to hear their short interactions in English "One, two, three, five..." "*Não, não, é* one,

two, three, four, five, six..." or "*Põe os botões*" "*Não, não.* How many buttons?").

These resources are kept in the classroom so that they can play counting whenever they want. As for me, I am already planning on the next counting mats we are going to introduce when we come back to school!
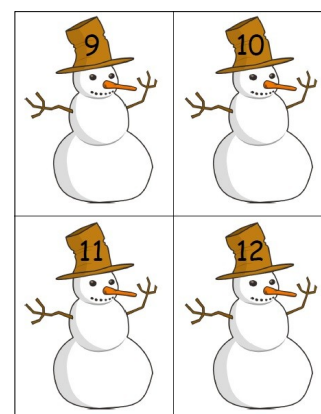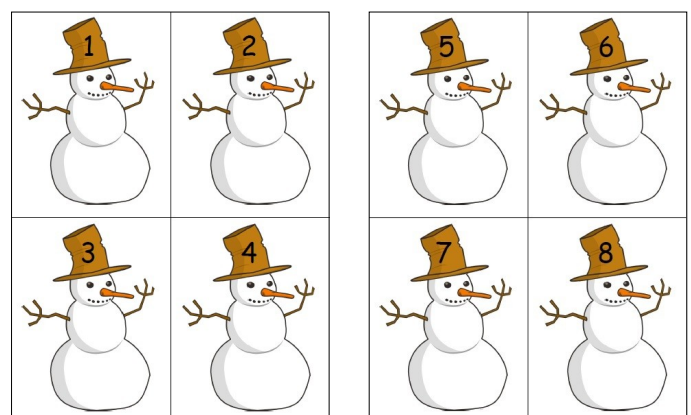
Note: To create more opportunities to develop language, we could add the prompt "How many buttons?" to the posters. Writing the numbers in English (one, two, three...) under each snowman would also be a nice idea, as children are developing letter and word recognition, too.

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Christmas cracker

After 3 months of confinement, the training course Arts & Crafts in the YL Classroom, by Dila Gaspar came as a breath of fresh air ...

I confess I used to be reticent, regarding the use of Crafts, due to time constraints. Now I realize that if it enhances the involvement of students in the learning process, it isn't a "waste" of time.

Crafts do add meaning to learning and can be applied to any content you're teaching!

As a result of the workshop, everyone shared a suggestion for the craft.

- My project work: a Christmas cracker

Before starting an Arts and Crafts activity, an introduction about Christmas traditions in Portugal (in comparison with those in Britain) should be carried out to develop cultural diversity awareness.

it is recommendable to practise instruction verbs: fold, cut, wrap… before starting any Arts and Crafts activity,

Description of the activity

Students' age: 8-10 (or any other age range)

Aims: Raise awareness of cultural diversity; promote diverse, socializing and meaningful language experiences; develop communication skills.

Step 1: Make a crown (5 minutes)

Materials: 1 piece of (malleable) paper, A4 or a paper napkin.

Procedure: Fold the paper in half (horizontally). Cut triangles on the folded part, then staple or glue the sides.

Step 2: Write a message (5 minutes)

Materials: a small piece of paper (approx. 6cm x 4cm); zigzag scissors.

Procedure: Write a (Christmas) message, riddle or quote – *"Merry Christmas, and a Happy new year"* *"What do the elves learn at school? – The Elfabet."*

Step 3: Wrapping-up (5 minutes)

Materials: Toilet roll; a "gift" (small toy, accessories, candies); 2 pieces of ribbon/string (approx. 50 cm).

Procedure: Place the crown, the gift and the message inside the toilet roll and wrap it with paper that tears (crepe, silk, wrapping paper …). Shape it like a sweet and tie both ends (loose ends or bows).

Step 4: Decoration (5-10 minutes)

Materials: Xmas decoration objects (stickers or others).

Procedure: Decorate the cracker with a Christmas touch.

Possible issues: children's lack of dexterity; students without the required materials.

Possible solutions: get another teacher to help out/ work in pairs; bring extra materials.

In the end, students are told to take it home and share the tradition with their family and, eventually, make crackers for other family members and decorate the table for Xmas dinner.

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eTwinning project: "Kindness will save the world"

As you know, eTwinning is a free online community for schools in Europe. This platform allows you to: find teachers to collaborate on projects; put your students (from Kindergarten to Secondary School) in contact with other students all over Europe; develop your students' skills; show the amazing work you have been doing; share what you know with other teachers and students; learn new skills and tools; and contribute to your professional development. It is also the perfect place to establish partnerships for Erasmus+ proposals.

During the last two years, my 8- to 10-year-old students and I were given the chance to participate in a fantastic project called "Kindness will save the world". We collaborated with teachers and students from Italy, Spain, Greece and Lithuania and the project was recently awarded an eTwinning Quality Label.

If you want, you can check out our *TwinSpace*:

https://twinspace.etwinning.net/75019/home

The title of this project was chosen bearing in mind the famous sentence in Dostojevskji's celebrated novel "Idiot": "Beauty will save the world!". Nowadays, when we look around us, we feel that selfish and incorrect attitudes seem to be prevailing. Therefore, we wanted to develop a project to encourage pupils to assume kind behaviours every time and everywhere and to reinforce their consciousness that by being a tolerant, friendly, respectful and polite person, they can become future active citizens who act for the common interest of all, contributing to an inclusive and equitable society.

All throughout the project, I tried to take advantage of my students' ideas on how we could implement practices of kindness in our daily life, sharing them with the partner schools. Whenever possible, we organised online meetings using the chatroom on our TwinSpace, so that students could exchange ideas and participate actively in the development of the project.

In the beginning, students brainstormed the concept of "kindness". Many answers were given to the central question: "What is kindness for you?". To celebrate Kindness Day we produced a collaborative wall on *Padlet* and shared the students' ideas: https://padlet.com/pgadi/lm9516ceoteo

In our classroom, we dedicated a special corner to the project with students' definitions of "kindness" and a "random acts of kindness" sheet of paper, where students would eagerly register their kind actions in regard to school, family, etc.

Students were also excited about creating slogans about kindness. These are some of my students' slogans: "Live your day with kindness and respect!"; "Being kind is being a true hero!" and "If you're kind, you're contributing to a better world!". After analysing the slogans produced by all the partner schools, students chose their favourite and, in groups, they
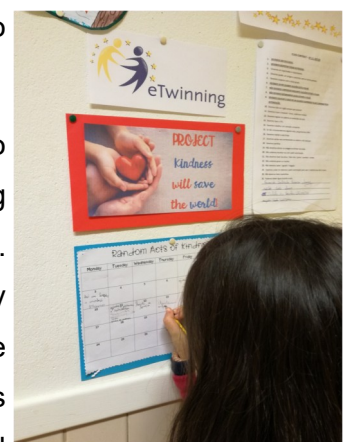
made posters to be shared with partner schools and our school community. Afterwards, students played a *Kahoot* quiz based on all the slogans they had created.

In our second year, we built a **Kindness box** and some **Kindness albums**. Students brought in the materials and gave shape to a lovely kindness box! Every time they wanted, they would write down a kind action they had performed and put it in the box. We would read them at the end of the month so that they would feel that their kindness was noticed and cherished. In groups, students decorated little notebooks which became their kindness albums. One of the members of the group was responsible for the kindness album for 2 weeks and during that period of time, they would register all the kind practices they had witnessed. Thus, we intended to make kindness part of students' lives on a daily basis.

With so many different languages involved, we decided to share **Kind words**. For this activity, each group of students chose kind words in their own language and recorded them, so that they could be shared with the other members of the project using Google Drive (the document contained the written words and audio files). This way, my students learnt kind words in English, Greek (what a challenge!!), Spanish and Italian. Later on, students had fun playing "The Hangman with kind words" (a game we prepared using Learningapps): https://learningapps.org/watch?v=p54mdvyhk20.

At Christmas time, we exchanged e-cards spreading our kindness and wishes of a merry Christmas.

One of our last activities would be "Our real experience: when choosing kindness is better!". Students would film sketches showing them choosing between kind or unkind behaviours in daily situations. However, Covid-19 changed our plans. At the end of February schools closed in Italy. Spain, Portugal and Greece followed their steps and we were all safely at home. Still, we did not let this pandemic ruin our project. Students from all countries started sharing "Everything will be fine" drawings, sending love and solidarity in difficult times for everyone. In our online lessons, we scanned for students' ideas on how we could finalize our project. We came to a decision: each partner school would think of a story about kindness – it could be something real that had happened at school or something made up by students.

To bring our stories into life and create an eBook we opted for *StoryJumper* – an online tool which allows students to combine words with images and to create and publish their own stories. They can

eTwinning project: "Kindness will save the world" (cont.)

use their imagination to illustrate stories and several people can edit the same book at the same time. It was exactly what we needed. The final product was a huge success and students were thrilled! https://www.storyjumper.com/book/read/83688985.

Thus, this project was an excellent opportunity for my students to practise key skills (writing, reading and listening) which are part of our curriculum.

Besides the collaboration with European Teachers made possible by eTwinning, the collaboration with my students' Main Teacher was also crucial. We took advantage of the school's materials and tools and we wouldn't have been able to achieve our set of goals hadn't it been for her support. We were all rowing in the same direction, trying to make pupils understand "kindness", not only as a superficial term which concerns people's behaviour, but also as a broad term which concerns a way of thinking, which leads to a proper way of acting – which includes qualities such as honesty, integrity, responsibility, respectfulness, compassion, tolerance, courtesy and love for justice. Additionally, we were able to: develop the students' collaborative and interpersonal skills; boost their creativity and critical thinking; enhance their ability to communicate in English; motivate students to learn English and other foreign languages; improve the teachers and pupils' ICT skills and make them aware of the variety of tools for digital communication.

The feedback I got from my students and parents at the end of this project was remarkable! I will share with you a message I received from one of my students: this project "enabled us to interact with students from other countries, learn new contents, but, most important of all, helped to identify values which are very important to our continuous development as human beings"!

Hence, if you already have an idea for a project and you are looking for partners, or if you just want to take a look at the infinite possibilities of collaboration, check the eTwinning online community. I'm sure you won't regret it and it will definitely make a difference in your life!

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Training corner

APPIforma

APPInep 20 years

Dear colleagues,

APPInep celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2020 and despite the pandemic situation (COVID 19) we are still living in, we manage to adapt to the new circumstances. We didn't do as much as we wished to, but we were able to run some teacher training courses, a webinar and we ended up celebrating APPInep 20 years with a huge online Young Learners & Very Young Learners Conference that took place in November (28th) and December(5th), in the APPI Zoom platform.

So, in 2020 APPIforma ran 11 teacher training accredited courses: three F2F courses and eight online courses. We also collaborated with Escola Superior de Leiria and held the "Primary English TeachMeet Leiria 2020". This event took place on the 29th of February, in Leiria, and was accredited as *Ação de Formação de Curta Duração*. In June we also promoted the webinar "Structuring fun for primary learners online" which was presented by our well-known speaker, Chris Roland.

And we ended up the year with the YL & VYL Conference – celebrating APPInep 20 years. The Conference was attended by 200 participants and we had 15 speakers from different countries in the world: Portugal, Spain, Italy, Norway and the USA.

During these two days, teachers could participate in 16 different sessions, either webinars or workshops. The sessions covered lots of different topics related to YL & VYL: storytelling, inclusion, arts & crafts, drama, ICT and online teaching, just to name a few. Most of these sessions are still available on our webpage if you want to review or watch them for the first time. https://appinep.appi.pt/storage/app/media/uploaded-files/

materialsylvyl-online-conf2020.pdf

There are lots of great ideas to put into practice!

There was a very friendly atmosphere during these two days and 93% of the participants were very pleased with the online format of the conference, according to their feedback.

To celebrate APPInep 20 years we have also considered collecting some articles of Portuguese teachers which would depict some good teaching practices. Due to the pandemic, we weren't able to finish this project, but we are still working on it and we hope to have it published in 2021.

Since 2019, APPI is also involved in the Erasmus+ project ICEPELL – Intercultural Citizenship Education through Picturebooks in Early Language Learning. So, throughout 2021 we are offering two online ICEPELL courses where Portuguese teachers will work collaboratively with teachers from other countries (Italy, Germany, The Netherlands and Norway) to develop some materials and resources (ICEKits) focussed on Intercultural Citizenship Education through Picturebooks. If you want to know more about this, please contact us.

APPIforma teacher training centre continues to promote teacher training focussed on YL and VYL and for further information on our Annual CPD programme, please have look at our website: https://www.appi.pt/appiforma-cpd-centre/annual-pd-programme. We will come up very soon with new online courses. Stay tuned and keep safe!

SÓNIA FERREIRINHA | APPIFORMA

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