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## **TEACHERS IN STORMY TIMES**

The focus of the presentation is how teachers in Croatia have felt in the past two years regarding all the challenges Croatia has been put through, i.e. Coronavirus, earthquakes, a loss of a colleague. The presentation is divided into three parts.

The introductory part deals with a general view of teachers and their profession, importance of teaching profession, and challenges while they were teaching online classes.

The main part explains and discusses the questionnaire which was prepared by the Foreign Language Center (FLC) managers for their teachers to complete so the teachers could say how online teaching affected them both professionally and personally.

The conclusion offers some food for thought, something what managers should remember in the future to reduce stress and anxiety on the part of teachers.

The presentation starts with the words by Carl Ransom Rogers (January 8, 1902 – February 4, 1987), an American psychologist and one of the most influential thinkers in the development of humanist approaches to counselling and learning, who said once, "...there is only one truth about modern man and that he lives in an environment that is constantly changing... The only man who is educated is the man who has learnt how to learn... The most socially useful learning in the modern world is the learning about the process of learning..."

Teachers fit into that picture, because they are always willing to learn and to try something new. They have been central to the whole teaching-learning process, and the most important assets of any educational institutions. Particularly in these difficult times of Coronavirus, when we have been spending so much time online, glued to different types of screens, when Croatia was struck by earthquakes, and the Center by a loss of a colleague...

Teachers are the 'hearts and souls' of learning for their energy and passion for teaching no matter what, their commitment to their chosen path, and their unquestionable eagerness to respond in an adequate and timely way to the ever-changing realities of our life. (Wright in ETP, July 2020)

Still, to change teachers' working routine, particularly of the established ones, at such challenging times seemed to be very daunting.

The Covid-19 situation has redefined the notion of teaching, and assigned teachers a completely new role. However, lack of appropriate guidance, training and resources has put a lot of stress on teachers across the globe.

The FLC managers wanted to find out how their teachers felt at that time, and what can be done to avoid possible problems in the future. So, they prepared a **QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS** by using a Google form, 10 4-point Likert Scale Questions (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree), and four open ended questions. The focus of the questionnaire was the teachers' preparedness for online teaching, their feeling before and after they started teaching online, the

teaching goals achieved in the process, and their skills regarding the use of new digital and technological tools. Twenty-six teachers participated in the questionnaire.

Before starting online courses, most teachers felt uncertain about using new technologies and online teaching. However, they also exhibited a certain level of curiosity in front of new challenges. The highest level of uncertainty was caused by the potential problems regarding technical support (internet stability, for example) and new ways of communicating with course participants/students (i.e. feeling uncomfortable in front of the screen, students' computer literacy and students' feedback throughout the course).

Still, the majority of teachers found online teaching a valuable professional experience and a part of their professional development. Some of them suggested the FLC introduce some form of blended learning. Although nothing can replace face-to-face teaching, online teaching has contributed to acquiring new skills which might not have been acquired otherwise.

In teachers' opinion the greatest disadvantage of online teaching was a lack of face-to-face communication/interaction which had an impact on work dynamics, group cohesion as well as spontaneity. Besides, the teachers faced technical problems which included Zoom breakups, poor connectivity, and internet instability. This particularly affected their students in beginner/elementary classes because it was hard to hear and correct their pronunciation, and they would sometimes mishear their teachers.

#### **Based on the questionnaire and lessons learned, the FLC is planning to:**

- organize training workshop to master better use of technology
- develop 'share point' platform to exchange/share materials and experience
- organize workshops to deal with the pacing of new lessons/contents (the best application of face-to-face teaching syllabi to online teaching)
- discuss optimal ways of utilizing the Internet resources and technical tools (not to discard online teaching when we return to face-to-face teaching)

#### **Some food for thought**

Working at these times of pandemic, in my humble opinion, just reminded me of reexamining my position/role, and what I, together with my staff, can and must do.

The concern about how teachers could be affected emotionally or psychologically does not only refer to the difficult moments we have experienced in the past or are living at present. These are things that should be considered at all times.

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