

# Distance teaching

## Motivation

When you need a teacher for a pupil in a certain subject and that teacher cannot be found in your school – what can you do? Distance teaching is a good option for obtaining for the pupil the support he or she needs, for example when it is not available in the pupil's own school or locally. Distance teaching is a way of finding a competent teacher for the pupil somewhere else. Through distance teaching, the pupil can study the subject in question or receive support for his or her studies from outside the school. In a distance teaching group, other pupils in a similar situation may also provide peer support to him or her. In addition to distance teaching, the teacher may also contact the pupil's guardian remotely and offer more comprehensive support for the pupil's learning.

## Models of distance learning

The following are examples of how distance teaching can be organised:

1. The teacher is in remote contact with the pupil and teaches him or her something, using the distance teaching equipment available in the workspace.
2. The pupil participates in distance teaching from his or her school or home.
3. The pupil participates remotely in classroom teaching. Other pupils study in the classroom with the teacher, and the pupil engaging in distance learning participates in the teaching situation through a remote connection. The teacher and/or assistant in the classroom ensures that the distance learning pupil can participate interactively in the lesson together with those pupils who are physically present.

## Basic devices

Which are the minimum hardware requirements for successful distance teaching/learning? The pupil needs a computer or laptop with a webcam and microphone as well as an internet connection for remote access. For completing learning assignments, the pupil needs a mobile device. Another computer or laptop can also be used to complete learning assignments.

## Peripherals

In addition to the basic devices needed for distance teaching/studying, other devices can also be used in the instruction to add variety to the learning situation.

**The teacher** can use the following peripherals:

- Document camera
- Tablet
- Smartphone
- Conference webcam
- Conference microphone
- Whiteboard, chalkboard, flipchart
- Smartboard
- Personal headsets
- Working materials (pen, paper, book, etc.)

**The pupil** can use the following peripherals:

- Tablet
- Smartphone, which also works as a document camera
- Personal headsets
- Audio connector or Bluetooth functionality in the pupil's personal hearing assistive device that can be used to transmit the sound received across a remote connection to the pupil's hearing aid without interference. You can consult the importer or manufacturer of the hearing assistive devices for any peripheral components for the devices.
- Working materials (pen, paper, book, etc.)

While the list of accessories sounds long and it may seem impossible to integrate multiple devices into the instruction, it is worth remembering that these are devices designed to diversify online teaching, and you do not need to use all of them. You can select the most suitable options on this list of peripherals for your teaching. It is a good idea to introduce peripherals step by step to allow enough time for pupils to learn to use the new devices.

## **Materials**

The materials for remote lessons should be designed and prepared with the digital learning environment in mind. Once you have created the materials, you import them onto the electronic learning platform. As all materials are digital, they are easy to share with the pupil on a common learning platform. The materials contribute to supporting the pupil in learning and also completing tasks alongside the teaching. The pupil uses ICT devices to complete assignments and the learning platform to hand them in to the teacher. The teacher can check and comment on the pupil's work using the learning platform or a remote connection.

## **Challenges**

Distance teaching sometimes presents challenges that have nothing to do with the actual teaching, but you can get over them! The most common challenges include mastering the use of ICT devices, quality of the internet connection/video/sound, and the development of the pupil's study skills or motivation to study online. Once the teacher has mastered the basics of the digital learning environment, he or she can apply the teaching and get past the different challenges. Good planning and preparation go a long way, and the teacher can encourage and guide the pupil to strive for the desired learning outcomes.

## **Activating pupils and maintaining their alertness**

Rather than merely using ICT devices, studying in a digital environment can involve a wide range of other things you do together: drawing, physical exercise, singing, playing a game together or doing crafts, even if the teacher and the pupil are not physically present in the same room. In distance teaching, doing activities together creates a shared, interactive connection between the two locations. The content of distance learning can easily be varied using different activities and assignments.

## **Assistant's role**

If the pupil has an assistant at school to support his or her learning or the distance teaching teacher is paired with an assistant, the assistant's task is to support and guide the pupil's studies, either together with the pupil as a support person in the background of the learning situation or by guiding the pupil to follow the teacher's instructions during the distance teaching session. The assistant can also partner with the distance teacher, among other things helping the pupils participating in distance teaching study effectively,

for example on chat or by differentiating the work for some pupils. The assistant can also help the teacher prepare learning materials. The assistant must ensure that the environment is functional for learning. (internet connection, sound and picture quality, lighting, noises etc.)

## **Environment**

The physical environment is important for successful digital learning, and the following aspects should be taken into account in teaching and learning:

- Remove unnecessary distractions.
- Take a comfortable posture.
- Don't stand in front of a light source.
- Make sure there is enough light.
- Choose clothes that has a good contrast against your background.

Once you have seen to these issues, the physical environment will provide better support for studying in the digital environment!

## **Cooperation**

Cooperation between the distance teaching teacher and the staff in the pupil's local school (teachers, assistants) is important. Among other things, this means two-way exchanges of information, monitoring of the studies, well-functioning technical tools, and notifying the teacher of absences or holidays. To ensure smooth communication, it is a good idea to have a designated contact person for liaising with the teacher and making the arrangements. It is also important to agree together on common practices of distance teaching between the distance teaching teacher and the pupil as well as the pupil's teacher, assistant and school.