ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

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Microlearning at school: getting the most out of the classroom and Dad

The pandemic of Covid-19 imposes, in the Italian education landscape, a digital reflection that is concrete and aimed at the learner's benefit. Microlearning is a viable and current solution.

While Distance Learning (DAD) has entered overwhelmingly into the common vocabulary, there is still too much struggle in our country to accept the advance of the times and digital.

However, eLearning has proven to be essential in pandemic times, and this is forcing even the most skeptical to come to terms with the new demands of education in both educational and professional settings. Microlearning, or teaching in a nutshell, is an ultramodern approach that not only promotes learning but also far surpasses any frontal lecture mode used in the classroom today.

An old-new concept

In a paper published on LinkedIn by **Mirjam Neelen** (Novartis) and **Paul A. Kirschner** (University of the Netherlands), it turns out that the concept of microlearning is anything but new.

The two researchers refer to it as a "new hipster term" but it actually **first peeps out in 1970** and specifically in a kind of video recorder's bugiardino published under the name "**VTR: In-Service Tool for Improving Instruction**" in which an entire chapter is devoted to the use of the (at that time hyper-technological) tool for teaching purposes.

Teachers, it read, can analyze their classroom behavior through the microlearning technique. A teacher, who presents a short lesson to a small group of students for a duration of 5-10 minutes, focuses on a specific teaching skill. After conveying the concepts in a short format, what was explained can be evaluated through a videotape recording that the lecturer can watch alone or with students. After identifying the segment of the lesson that is considered unclear, the teacher repeats to another group of students, changing his or her presentation to overcome those uncertainties that emerged from the video.

Why choose microlearning for school

Since this is a methodology that is fast and smart and, above all, broken down into small chunks (in English, in fact, it is also called bite-sized learning), it produces concrete results; the content sticks in the mind in greater detail. **Here are five advantages**:

1. Microlearning can make use of photos, charts, videos, podcasts and so on.
2. The short work session (5-10 minutes per single bite) is not boring for students
3. For everything there is an addressability, an address to take a look again
4. It is in line with a lifelong learning perspective that has become necessary for the world of work
5. It is a system that, once learned, can be applied to a wide variety of fields both in education and at the professional level

The pliability of microlearning lies mainly in the countless number of tools that can be used to put it into practice. As already pointed out, one can **make use of pills such as photos, charts, short videos or podcasts** to unpack content that can be too complex when analyzed as a whole.

The short duration of each individual session has a huge impact on students, especially young people who tend to be more easily distracted. Engaging the mind for 5 or 10 minutes knowing that there will be a stop afterwards helps them not to get bored and maintain an adequate level of concentration. Another aspect of microlearning is addressability: each of the content used corresponds to a link, an online addressability that therefore frees the student from the manic need to write, take notes, and so

on.

Everything is available online. We have also seen how the application in the classroom or in DAD is open to a broader perspective, of lifelong learning. Finally, once learned, this kind of approach can also be freely applied to one's own desire to develop a particular topic and so on. Choosing microlearning in face-to-face and distance learning represents on the one hand the willingness of the teaching staff to get involved by supplementing the usual mode with a method that produces different results, and on the other hand it is a real stimulus for the children especially at a time in history when even relationships are severely compromised.

The richness of micro content

"The ability to stay focused on content being conveyed to us that **requires constant mental effort** focused on a goal is known as sustained attention. In the case of students in the classroom, there are those who try to memorize the lecture immediately and those who, on the other hand, through their own interpretive key translate the content into notes to delegate memorization to a later stage.

If we consider that the **attention threshold is 40-45 minutes**, the advice is to observe 15 minutes of break between lectures during the morning, so as to preserve attentional efficiency also in the afternoon." Thus, Roberto Dell'Acqua, professor in the department of developmental and socialization psychology at the University of Padua, explains how the brain necessarily needs to rest after paying attention for 40-45 minutes.

Micro content has the potential to totally break down this mental pattern, demanding as little as 10 minutes of attention (if not less as we have already seen) thus giving immediate refreshment to the mind that can return to focus on another micro topic almost immediately afterwards. This kind of approach if it has validity in the classroom, between the desks, is even more valid when we move home, in Dad, when maintaining constant attention can be even more complex especially if very young.

Practical example of microlearning in today's school

Microlearning is applicable to virtually every subject: whether science, math, history or geography matters little. Every subject in fact can be unpacked to promote assimilation. The secret lies in minimizing the complexities of each subject so that students can, step by step, approach the macro concept without leaving anything out. Taking a practical example, learning a foreign language cannot fail to go through this teaching approach.

Through short videos, songs in the language and so on, the teacher can offer the class group small excerpts from everyday life so that we can practice conversation on a given topic. Imagine that we want to instruct the class to sustain a conversation on the topic of gender-based violence. In just 5 minutes, listening to Lady Gaga's 2016 "Til It Happens to You," for example, and with a translation of the lyrics in hand, the class learns all sorts of specific terms on the topic.

The famous song, written for the documentary "The Hunting Ground" about sexual assault on American campuses, focuses attention on the truth of truths: "Until it happens to you you don't know what it feels like." In so few minutes the class will have not only heard music, but learned new words in the language and addressed a topic of global interest. Another advantage of microlearning, in fact, is precisely that it is multidisciplinary.

No one left behind: microlearning breaks down diversity

The integrated approach of microlearning also counts, among its advantages, that of accompanying the class group toward a **leveling of progress and knowledge**. In a society that is increasingly focused on inclusivity and that, especially in schools, is faced with Bes, Dsa and hyperactivity syndrome children, lessons in pills allow everyone, even if in a different way, to keep up, to be equally stimulated thanks to the support of films and audio. This should not be mistakenly seen as a desire for uniformity that does not then allow the emergence of students' peculiarities and natural predispositions, but should be looked at as a **model of integration and protection of students who with special needs**.

The drawbacks of microlearning

What has been described so far lets all the positive aspects of using it in school settings become clear. Having to make an objective assessment of the problems that might be encountered by making use of microlearning, the only real problem is "bureaucratic" in that **teachers might experience some difficulties in reaching the conclusion of the ministerial curriculum of their teaching subject**. A "problem not a problem" in that it often happens that one does not manage to do all that is stipulated by the Ministry of Education in Viale Trastevere, but that could turn the nose up at that teacher or master who instead particularly cares about the achievement of the imposed objectives. In this case a choice must be made in the interest of the class and real learning. One can decide not to apply microlearning across the entire year's curriculum, one can choose to pull it out like a magic rabbit out of a hat when one realizes that the class is particularly struggling to complete a topic, a chapter, a piece of country history. One can resort to multidisciplinarity, involving another teacher for those topics that intersect and can be "solved" by watching a film. One must, in short, be able to run and keep up with the new demands that come from children who are increasingly oriented toward a fast traveling world.

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