

# proPIC played a significant role in my professional development as it helped me understand how to use digital tools in the classroom to aid student's learning.

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In the first school I ever worked at, I was a teacher's assistant in a pre-K class. The teacher taught 3- and 4-year-old students how to use the computer using educational games websites, such as *ABC mouse*. The students improved their motor skills by clicking the mouse on a specific on-screen target, which expanded their ability to focus by looking for answers and allowed them to develop their motor skills. At the time, I was skeptical about whether or not students were benefiting from playing these educational games. However, looking back, I can see how using the computer in the classroom helped them improve and acquire various important skills.

In 2016, I obtained my bachelor's degree in Mathematics and Spanish Literature and got a job as a 7th-grade math teacher in a middle school. There were 40 students and four teachers in the same classroom. There was a lead teacher, and the rest of us were support teachers. It was very challenging, but we tried to make it work.

The lead teacher was in charge of creating the lessons and delivering the main concepts. The other support teachers and I were responsible for dividing the class into four groups and delivering more specific parts of the lessons to the students. We would help the students complete assignments related to the topics they were learning in class, and solve word problems and different exercises. The lead teacher used a Smart Board to deliver her lessons, and the only digital tool allowed in the classroom was the projector.

Were the students able to benefit from lessons delivered this way? They did not have access to the content after the class ended, nor would they use the Smartboards to participate during the class. The only way students could have had access to the lessons would have been to download the software used for digital boards onto their smart devices and request the teacher to send the lessons directly to them.

After a few months at this school, our lead teacher quit her job, and the school's administration decided to divide the class into two groups. I became the leader of one of the classes on my own, while the other two support teachers were with the other class. We would create and deliver lessons separately. Having worked in two different schools at this stage, I implemented the techniques and teaching methods I had been exposed to, which did not include the promotion of intentional autonomous learning utilizing digital tools. In my opinion, my lack of knowledge in this area put my students at a disadvantage. They were dependent on me in order to learn, when I could have taught them how to use reliable resources online in order to find information and apply it into their studies.

In 2017, I was accepted onto a teaching master's program at the University of Barcelona. There, I had the amazing opportunity to take classes that encouraged students to learn using digital tools. Professors Jaume and Olivia taught me just how effective digital tools could be in helping students understanding, whether in the classroom or through distance learning. We did a project in collaboration with students from the University of the HÁSKÓLI Islands, and used *Google Docs*, *Google Slides*, *Canva*, *WhatsApp*, and other similar platforms to deliver our lessons, while students used the same digital resources to complete their assignments.

According to Simonson, Smaldino, and Zvacek, "the keys to successful distance education are in the design, development, and delivery of instruction, and are not related to geography or time" (2014: 9). Distance learning gives advantages to students and teachers because they do not have to be together in the same place at the same time to have a lesson. Students can have synchronous sessions and work independently with asynchronous lessons. Also, the time to submit assignments could be more flexible for students and easier to check for teachers. When working with Icelandic students, we realized that they were not limited to the resources we offered them. They had the freedom to look for other tools and use them in their assignments. In

the same way, our group was able to design and develop our activities collaboratively by attending online meetings whenever our schedules allowed.

Going to Karlsruhe was the perfect supplement to my studies in Barcelona. The contribution of knowledge from my proPIC peers, our group discussions, presentations, and school visits truly resonated with me, having a lasting impact on how I teach. This is especially true now that, we, as educators, have been forced to adopt these new forms of teaching due to the pandemic. Times change, and we need to adapt.

At this moment, I am an educator at La Guardia Community College in Queens, New York. I spend at least 50 hours per week delivering lessons, planning, evaluating, and correcting in front of a computer and a variety of other technological devices. This has impressed upon me the need for all educators to possess the basic skills to be able to teach a class using digital tools, whether synchronous or asynchronous.

I am proof that acquiring knowledge does not only come from classroom experience. I had plenty of experience in the classroom prior to the pandemic. However, without the knowledge gained through my studies at the Universitat de Barcelona and my study week in Karlsruhe, I would not have been able to teach effectively via distance learning during the pandemic. This is because instead of focusing on the design, development and delivery of subject matter, I would have been preoccupied with simply learning how to use the digital tools that would enable me to teach effectively.

In conclusion, it is crucial that educators spend time learning about digital tools that will improve the quality of their lessons. They must consider researching the numerous applications, websites, and software that can and should be used by students to promote autonomous learning. Looking back on my first teaching experiences, I realize that although I was very comfortable using technology, I could have helped students develop greater skills if I were able to better implement the use of digital tools in the classroom. Focusing on how to use digital tools in the classroom will allow educators to improve the experience of distance learning for themselves, and their students.

## **References**

Simonson, M., Smaldino, S., & Zvacek, S. M. (2014). *Teaching and Learning at a Distance: Foundations of Distance Education* (6th Edition). Information Age Publishing.