Google for Education

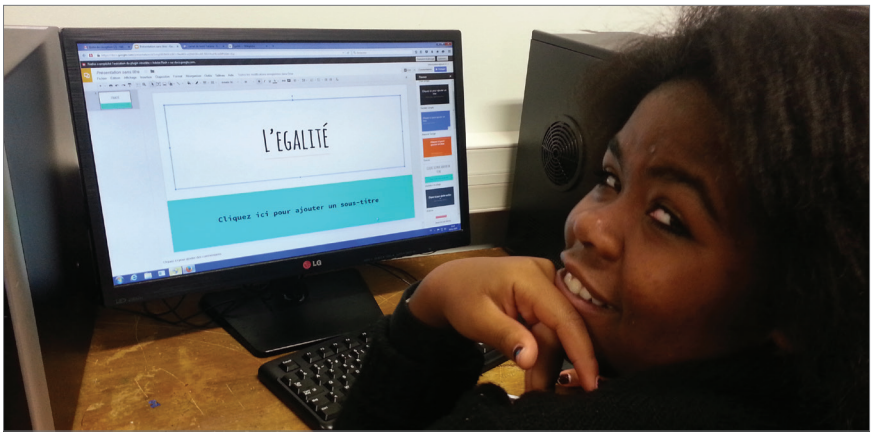
L'Ensemble Scolaire Saint Jacques de Compostelle develops new approaches to learning with Google Apps for Education

Ensemble Scolaire Saint Jacques de Compostelle - Le Puy-en-Velay

Saint Jacques de Compostelle campus teaches 1,300 students, from secondary, college and higher education to adult education level. The campus started using Google for Education in 2013 in order to develop its use of digital technology and innovative teaching methods.

"We were looking for collaborative tools that would enable us to go fully online," explains campus director Michel Belledent. When they set about modernising their technology environment, the decision to use Google for Education was an easy one. "Google puts all its tools at our disposal for free. Google Apps for Education are easy to use, very efficient, and known and used worldwide. The functionality stays the same whatever type of device you use to access them. Wherever users are, they can store an unlimited amount of documents. Finally, the system requires no maintenance and the rollout speed is super fast. The other solutions we considered were no match."

Google Drive was the springboard that enabled the teachers to start switching to using Google Apps for Education. Initially, the teachers were reluctant to store their documents anywhere other than on the desktop of their own computers. They were worried about students getting their hands on the answers to exam questions or hours of work being deleted by mistake. But gradually, they came to understand that not only is Drive perfectly secure, it also gives them full control over access to their documents. By creating shared folders that colleagues from the same department can access, they can now share lesson plans, research articles and lists of students without having to manage the usual tangle of emails. No more missing people off email distribution lists, long email trails, forwarding outdated versions and running to a computer when someone asks you to re-send a document you've already shared. Once this way of storing and sharing documents was well established, the switch to using



the productivity tools (the apps) was naturally the next step. The teachers were soon enthusiastic about the idea of working directly together on documents shared through Google Docs. They could go off to the country for the weekend without taking their laptops and quickly make changes to a departmental lesson plan from their smartphones instead. They felt in control of their work, but not slaves to their computers.

Google Classroom also enables teachers to regain control of their schedules. They can start marking work as and when students submit it online, thereby avoiding work overloads and long nights of marking after the work is submitted in class on the deadline. The students receive their marks and comments more quickly and can soon establish whether or not more in-depth study is needed.

Technology that brings people together

Giving students the opportunity to use Google Hangouts completely changed their way of working. For the first time, the campus offered them an appealing way to communicate among all the social apps they were already used to. Conversations about academic work were incorporated into their online social interactions very naturally, and suddenly the world of education found its rightful place in their lives. In class, the students forged real links via videoconference. A group of students preparing for an exchange trip to the USA chatted with their American hosts on Hangouts before they left, reducing the stress of the unknown and making communication in person easier.

The use of Google for Education also promoted team spirit among teachers. In addition to training sessions and official “champions”, an informal support network developed. Support files were created in Drive and everyone could add their own tips and tricks to a Google Doc. “Collaboration was soon established between teachers of different subjects who had barely talked to each other before,” explains Michel. “They don’t share their frustration about bugs – they discuss the many ways to get the most out of the tools and their teaching methods, and they support each other.”

The flipped classroom

In this interactive setting, students became important players and took responsibility for their own learning. The teachers use Google Classroom to put resources online so that the students can view them before the lesson, at a time that suits them and wherever they are most comfortable learning. The classroom is no longer a place for passive listening and the teachers play more and more of a guiding role. The students can contact them by email or chat when they need an answer fast, and the teachers will gladly reply quickly, even at the weekend. Some teachers have also set up 30-minute virtual interactive sessions to provide help between two classes. To the teachers’

Google Apps

Google Apps for Education is a suite of free communication and collaboration tools, including Gmail, Classroom, Docs and Drive, that facilitate learning – any time, anywhere, and from any device.

goo.gl/3F4Mr9

Chromebooks

Chromebooks are reliable and affordable laptops that automatically update and are easy for to schools to configure and manage.

goo.gl/tQ1QrY

great surprise, the students often submit their work before the deadline, and some even ask for extra work.

As with the flipped classroom model, mutual learning is observed in both teachers and pupils. Michel explains: "A teacher was concerned to see a student arrive in class for an oral exam empty-handed apart from a smartphone. The student connected the phone to the projector to access a Google Slides slideshow online, then delivered a brilliant presentation. The youngster then showed the teacher how to connect devices and do this kind of presentation." Over time, thanks to the mobile element to Google tools, the campus gradually allowed students to use their own devices in class for educational purposes.

Classroom and Google Apps enable young people to demonstrate learning skills that are not observed in class. Informal teams are often put together to speed up the preparation for an individual assignment that has to be submitted. The students organise a meeting on Hangouts to discuss their respective strengths and interests. They then designate one student to carry out the research, another to take charge of the complex calculations, one to start the analysis, one to put the questions together and communicate with the teacher, and one to set up the schedule in Google Calendar. All the information that is collected goes into a specially created folder in Drive, and the students use Docs and Sheets to share their results and comment on them. These tasks require team leadership and teamwork that takes everyone's particular strengths and abilities into account – skills that are not generally taught in class, yet are highly sought-after on the job market.

"We were very proud to see a team work together online to create a slideshow with Slides and present it to some politicians as part of an application for funding," says Michel. "The students obviously love working with technology, so they endeavour to master it and do their utmost to produce content that goes well beyond educational requirements."

Substantial savings

The campus recently piloted the use of around a dozen Google Chromebooks in its labs. Michel comments: "We currently have between 500 and 600 computers. After conclusive testing with the Chromebook, carried out with the help of teams from **Business Cloud**, we anticipate savings of up to double." The computers are very affordable and require no programming or individual configuration. The access levels are managed through a highly efficient permissions system. The cost of IT resources is virtually nil, as they require no maintenance. Updates appear automatically and are directly applied to the online environment.

A promising future

After using Google for Education for a full school term, the teachers made a general observation that the quality of work and turnaround time had improved, and that Google for Education is a catalyst for development. "Classroom and Google Apps are making us change the way we see education. The students and teachers are learning to work together in a mutually beneficial way," explains Michel. "The teachers are stepping out of their comfort zone and connecting more closely with the students in their world. We are very enthusiastic about the future of our learning programmes. There are now no limits to our progress!"

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