Use of technology in homes, schools, and communities in times of rapid change

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Image 1: Creative writing competition '*Easter at home*' (Grec pour Tous, 2020).

Barely a month after the first lockdown was implemented across Switzerland, the Greek school Vally's daughter attends launched an online creative writing competition entitled '*Easter at home*' (Image 1). While the school and teachers had swiftly and effectively adapted to online delivery to ensure the continuation of Greek language classes, there was an acute sense of losing the physical and affective bonds that constitute a school community nurtured over face-to-face classes. To recreate these bonds virtually, students were encouraged to share their stories about how they had experienced Easter under lockdown using different forms of creative expression.

This small action is representative of the many ways schools around the globe sought to maintain continuity, community and belonging in times of disruption and rapid change. These actions sparked our own interest in exploring how teachers, parents, and students experienced teaching, learning, and communication online, what they felt were the gains and what were the losses. With a group of colleagues based at the Centre for Language, Culture and Learning at Goldsmiths, and at UCL Institute of Education, UCL BiLingo we organised

two virtual panel discussions on using technology. Participants shared a wealth of ideas, experiences, and emotions.

In '*Community/heritage language learning during the Covid-19 pandemic: Lessons for pedagogy and community building*' (December 2020) we identified possibilities and challenges community schools were facing at the time. Panellists highlighted innovative and inclusive pedagogies and inventive ways to keep school communities together that drew on the affordances of digital tools. Key lessons were:

- Online teaching and learning refashioned the role of the teacher from sage on stage to levelling the relationship between teachers and learners.
- Strengthening teacher professional networks and novel opportunities for teacher reflection and collaboration. Dr Cátia Verguete (deputy director at Instituto Camões for the promotion of Portuguese) described how her organisation created a teacher professional learning community:

'Teachers drew on their professional knowledge and experiences in order to reconstruct their practice according to the new reality of online and blended learning. They relied greatly on this new network we created, they benefited from the experience of colleagues who were previously teaching online, and they benefited from online training that we organised and our headquarters in Lisbon organised.'

- Greater involvement of parents and other family members in children's language learning. Schools took up new roles and forged new relationships with parents. They were called to 'educate parents about how to support their children with online lessons' and to work with parents in inventive ways 'like meeting out in parks […] to keep communities together', as Marianne Siegfried-Brookes (director at the German Academy UK) remarked.

In '*Sustaining multilingualism and social and emotional well-being among multilingual families during the pandemic*' (May 2021), panellists focused on multilingual families and the diverse ways they mobilised and managed their languages when they were forced to keep apart. Key lessons were:

- Accelerated use of digital skills to maintain contact, recreate a sense of togetherness and forge affective spaces for difficult conversations around grief, economic precarity, and mental health. Dr Mahera Ruby (founder of 'Blooming Parenting') described the creation of such spaces in Bangladeshi British families:

'Before Covid I think we were really good at creating safe spaces, where we could have certain conversations, but choose what to share with the children. Whereas now with Covid, I personally tend to use this word this phrase of brave spaces, where parents are actually not able to separate those, so now they are having to have the spaces where brave conversations are happening with the children, and exploring feelings, and which isn't very comfortable in many communities'.

- Digital communication enhanced reciprocal learning between grandparents and children in developing heritage language and digital skills. Dr Sara Young (UCL Institute of Education) stressed that 'there is that potential for older members of families to connect with the younger generation. I work with teenagers [in the Polish

community] and they're so tech savvy and are prepared to teach other people in the family how to use this...and suddenly it's opened up new worlds'.

(718 words)