

“The children learn that there are many ways to see the world.”

By building their own digital books, Swiss kindergarten teacher Caroline Cortès' young pupils learn to structure and communicate their ideas.

Caroline Smrstik Gentner: Why did you decide to use tablets with your kindergarten pupils?

Caroline Cortès: During the first COVID-19 lockdown in spring 2020, I searched for work my students could do at home without the need for too much help from their parents. I found an app online to create books, and started making e-books to send to my students, including pictures and videos that parents sent me and educational materials I had made. Opening the book, the kids at home could hear my voice and their friends' voices, and they could see pictures of their friends – which was especially valuable because they were isolated from one another. I started to think that making e-books was something I could do with my students. When the children returned to school in May, I borrowed some tablets from the regional media library and we made an album introducing the class.

CSG: Young children are quite familiar with using tablets, but their parents don't always like them to have so much screen time. Was it difficult to integrate tablets into the regular curriculum?

CC: This was something new for students at such a young age. We have computers in our school, but the children have difficulty mastering the mouse, and the 'work' they do often involves games that have nothing to do with the curriculum. However, it's easy to integrate the tablet into the life of the classroom. For example, we spend every Tuesday morning in the forest. We work with the objects we find, and then return everything to its natural setting. We use the tablets to document our work, and afterwards the children comment on their discoveries in their own albums.

CSG: Do the children learn to view the tablets as a tool rather than a toy?

CC: The school tablets aren't there to play with. When children start playing a game on a tablet or phone, they tend to be so fascinated by the bright lights and the music that it's hard for them to concentrate on anything else, or to communicate with others. I want to show that we can use the tablets as a tool to learn how to communicate. Each student creates an album with photos they've taken and things they like. Each time they add something, they have to explain why. And since they aren't yet able to read or write, they have to make a voice recording explaining their choice. That helps them develop their language skills; if it's not right the first time, they erase and re-record. In sharing their albums with one another, they are able to exchange ideas and practice conversation. We also send a link to the parents so that they can follow what their children are doing and talk about it at home. The books become a tool for encouraging communication.

CSG: After working on this project, are your pupils better prepared for first grade?

CC: The project provides a different kind of preparation. Working with the tablet helps the children learn to control their impulses; learning to think before they take a picture helps them learn to think before speaking or doing anything else. Taking pictures also shows the children a new way of looking at the world. Whatever the perspective – from the front, the

back, above, or below – there is no single picture that is the prettiest or most interesting. It's important to show that there are many ways of looking at things, and this applies to ideas and opinions as well.

I'm sure I'll know much more by the end of this school year! I'm hardly a computer specialist, and I had never even touched a tablet before starting this project. I want to let teachers like me – I'm nearly 60 – know that working with these tools is very easy, and they should give it a try. There are so many ideas to explore, for the benefit of the class and each individual child.

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Caroline Cortès is a kindergarten teacher in Les Ponts-du-Martel, a village on the French border in the canton of Neuchatel, Switzerland. She is one of the [Educreators 2020](#) award winners.

The two-year public **kindergarten in Les Ponts-du-Martel** in western Switzerland prepares children aged 4 to 5 for primary school.

With the project “**Des livres pas comme les autres**”, preschool-aged children use tablet computers to create their own electronic books. The children take photos on field trips and upload them to their 'book', along with drawings, photographs of things they have made and videos. By developing, designing, and presenting their 'books', the children learn to structure their ideas, expand their vocabulary, and hone their verbal communication skills.

“**Des livres pas comme les autres**” was one of ten projects in Switzerland recognized by the Educreators Foundation in its Shapers of the Future 2020 competition. The prizewinning projects use digital transformation as an opportunity to create inspiring learning environments. The initiative is a collaboration between the Gebert Rűf Stiftung, the Jacobs Foundation, the Mercator Foundation Switzerland, the Beisheim Foundation and movetia.