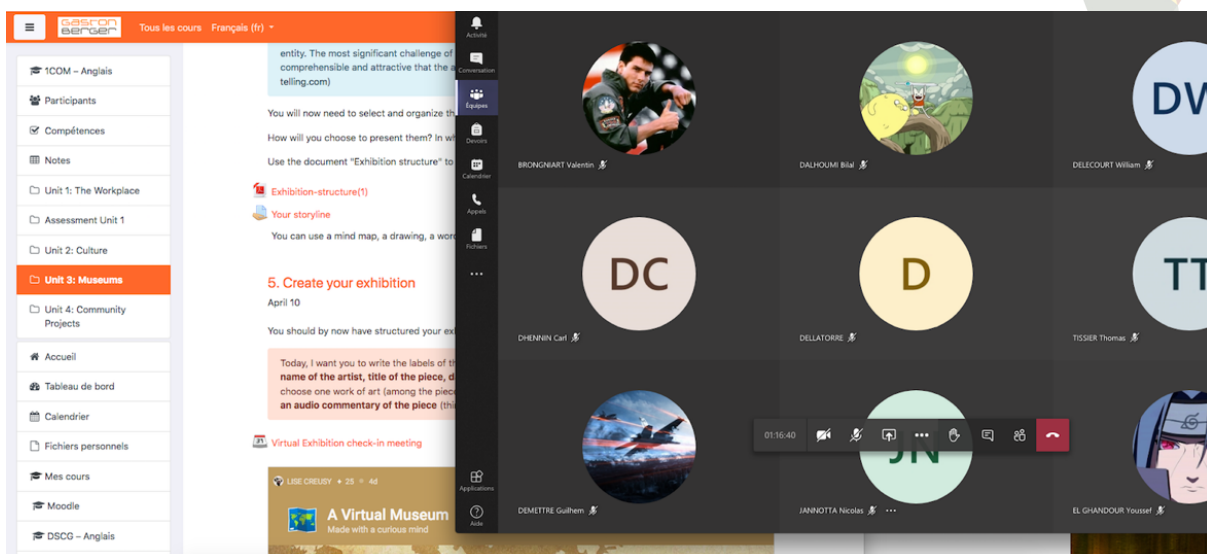




## Remote learning in VET schools

The lockdown most European students -and teachers- have been experiencing for several weeks has transformed our classes into virtual spaces. It took everyone by surprise and forced us to reconsider both how we teach and what we teach.

We had to get used to the tools themselves, which was in itself a full learning experience. The curve was steep in some instances, another opportunity to realize that for a lot of teenagers, using technology is not as self-evident as we may think. For teachers it also meant re-thinking pedagogy, keeping the workload manageable for everyone and of course spending a lot of time on maintaining connection with our students. It sometimes also required a juggling exercise between teaching students and homeschooling their own children, upsetting the precarious balance that a lot of families struggle to maintain at the best of times. For students it meant dealing with unpredictable workload, shared access to the family computer and Wi-Fi network, and often a lot of stress over exams and the health crisis itself.



Luckily the necessary tools have become more accessible and most of our students are now equipped with the devices they need for remote learning, even if it is sometimes just a smartphone. However, the main question remains: what should we teach remotely? Can the skills that our students need be taught through video conferencing, exercises sent by e-mail or via Moodle platforms? Should teachers simply adapt the contents of their classes, or should they re-think the curriculum? These questions have been particularly crucial in VET schools, where students often need the support of hands-on practice to fully grasp content and skills. All work placements have been cancelled, leaving teachers to try and compensate as best they can the lack of direct experience.



Creativity and resourcefulness have been more necessary than ever. A few examples of activities have included using e-mail to simulate interaction with clients, organizing online meetings, creating video tutorials, shooting lockdown versions of favourite films, setting up online exhibitions, recording presentations, and of course countless one-on-one interviews. These exercises may not prepare students for their exams, at least not in a straightforward way, but the skills they need to complete them will be crucial in their future lives.

In our area of France only elementary schools have been allowed to reopen. We don't know as of today if we will have the opportunity to go back to our classes this year, to see our students and colleagues in person before we break for the summer. We don't know how school will resume in September and what our classes will look like. But one thing is certain. No matter how agile and creative we may all try to be, no matter how hard our students work to stay on track and keep their spirits up, no matter how efficient the technology we use, nothing can replace the interactions formed inside the classroom. School work is not all about covering curriculum or practicing skills, it is first and foremost about helping young people grow to become responsible and happy adults. For our VET students it means daily contact and sustained relationships. The rest can only follow.