The day when the school is deserted

In March 2020, the schools in Austria were closed due to COVID 19 and all the lessons had to be converted to distance learning. Without any real warning from one second to the other. The first thing that came to my mind was that now all colleagues have to keep contact with the students as soon as possible. An uncomplicated way of communication that works low-threshold. But what kind of communication options exist?

Synchronous communication	Asynchronous communication
Students learn at the same time.	Students learn at different times.
Communication happens in real time.	Communication is not live.
Possibly more engaging and effective.	Possibly more convenient and flexible.
Allows for instant feedback and clarification.	Allows students to work at their own pace.

(source: https://myeltcafe.com/teach/teaching-online/)

Communication is very important but must be very simple and direct. One type of communication is Instant messaging. The advantage is that the students already know how it works. Instagram, Snapchat, Telegram, Signal, ... are certainly closer to young people than e-mails. We therefore need an application that enables us as teachers to communicate best with learners. The important thing is not to impose a new, unknown form of communication on learners. The necessary communication methods can be summarized as follows: single chat, group chat, live lessons.

In order to be able to use the above-mentioned communication methods optimally, a suitable application is required. The following aspects should be considered when selecting the application: free of charge or inexpensive, easy handling of the application, and platform independent (Windows, MacOS, Android, iOS).

Focus on synchronous communication and collaboration

Microsoft Teams https://www.microsoft.com/de-de/education/products/teams
    + free of charge
    + Learning management system
    + fast communication
    + Class digitally imageable
    + Live lessons
    + large community

Google Classroom https://edu.google.com/?modal_active=none
    + free of charge
    + Learning management system
    + fast communication
    + Class digitally imageable
    + Live lessons
    + large community

Jitsi https://meet.jit.si/
    + free of charge
    + Live lessons

Zoom https://zoom.us/
+ free of charge
+ Live lessons

Despite distance, it's school

Even though the handling of school applications is similar to the applications used in everyday life, the way of communication is different. Discipline and use of language, as used in class, also apply in virtual space. Therefore, rules must be defined. Respectful interaction with teachers and students must be at the top of this list of rules. Further rules can be as follows: daily review of new communication; fixed times for live lessons, "office hours" etc.

One tool to rule them all

If you use the free systems like Microsoft Teams (license A1), Google Classroom or Moodle, you will find a complete learning management environment. All important tasks of the teacher in the school area, from distributing and collecting tasks to sharing files and live lessons, are possible with Microsoft Teams on the one hand and on the other hand can be used low-threshold. But the most important thing, communication, comes first.

Slow but steady

If you have decided on a system, you should first look at the possibilities of synchronous communication. All of the above mentioned applications include exclusive direct (synchronous) communication with students. A slow, cautious but also comprehensible expansion of the functionality of the applications, which can also be used as a learning management system, leads to a higher acceptance by teachers and students.