

[Print article](#)Jul 07, 2021
by Cecilia de la Paz**Newsletter**Register for our Newsletter and
stay up to date
[Register now](#)

Design with Purpose for the Early Years

Salzburg Global Fellow Cecilia de la Paz reflects on how the COVID-19 pandemic has created new opportunities for rural schools in Uruguay

Capacity building with rural teachers in Uruguay using hybrid teaching

This article first appeared in [Karanga's](#) monthly newsletter in June 2021.

The impact of geographic isolation that the planet is experiencing today is an inherent reality in all rural schools globally. However, whether the incidence of distance turns intellectual isolation into a gap in access to opportunities varies from region to region. In Uruguay, lower results in math and literacy occur in vulnerable socioeconomic contexts, particularly in rural areas. Many students will not complete their third year of secondary school, Uruguay's basic education level. In addition, the situation in the rest of Latin America is not very encouraging. According to the latest [Program for International Student Assessment \(PISA\) results](#) - published in 2018 - students reading, science, and math results in the region were below the average of OECD countries.

However, the global crisis we are going through brings the potential for development. We have a chance to find solutions together. In this context of fragile economies, technology has always been a promising solution to reverse negative learning outcomes and encourage cost-efficient scalability. While educational transformation is a [pending innovation](#) in the region, the pandemic is an excellent opportunity for technology to show its contribution to change in all its glory.

At [Educate Uruguay](#), we have been working since 2009 to reverse these statistics and demonstrate that rural schools are a space for innovation and a meeting place for sustainable, scalable, technological, and educational solutions. Educators and specialists from around the world have joined this mission. Since 2019 Microsoft LATAM has allowed us to experiment and create remote communities through Microsoft Teams. Last year was the year to apply all our knowledge and put our understanding to the test.

Did The World Stop To Move Forward?

Since the beginning of the pandemic, our objective has been to turn isolation into an opportunity and transform peoples' perspectives on technology use. If we succeed, our effects will benefit rural teachers far beyond the current crisis. So far, we have guided the actions through an ecosystem of change that leads to the sharing of effective practices of teachers in the different areas of knowledge and skill development. We send materials every two months to put these strategies into practice both in-person and remotely.

To make an impact, we have had to offer stability, be dynamic, purposeful, relevant, and especially empathetic. We rescheduled our entire program to match the requirements that the system demanded of the schools. As a result, we have strengthened communication channels with surveys, network groups, and telephone calls. We tripled the number of meetings, and we welcomed practicing teachers to our team to understand better what the teachers and children are going through.

Technology plays an essential role in this action plan considering the infrastructure, especially the socio-economic and socio-cultural reality of those using it. Our approach does not focus solely on instrumental knowledge of the environment but also on developing the link between technology and people, which [Helsper says](#) is "the motivation for using technologies and the structural and interpersonal relationships where they are integrated."

To generate these links, we adopted a case study methodology that accompanied this need for dialogue, putting the work of the teacher and the progress of the children at the center of the analysis. We complemented this work with the theoretical background and practical tools to implement improvements. We held meetings where each teacher presented an image that reflected what has worked from the project. They recommended to their colleagues how to use that resource or strategy.

The result was 95 percent participation in five times more workshops and Educate meetings than those who attended before the pandemic. We consider that the high level of acceptance and impact on learning came from addressing issues related to the lived reality. Our work offered a humanistic view and a deeply professional commitment not to let the pandemic affect the future lives of children in rural areas.

The rural teachers were under the eye of the entire Uruguayan society when activities reopened since they were the first to return to the classrooms. We are satisfied to know that many of the resources provided by Educate were helpful in the mixed work model they had to face. [Read experiences](#) from the teachers with whom we went through this challenge.

Creating An Opportunity From A Challenge

Crises can be an opportunity for positive change or reversal. We do not know what the future of education will be, but we know that it will depend on the training and tools that those who will guide the next generations to build will have. I hypothesize that if we want to impact equity in education, we must focus on human relationships and the view that underlies the design of new learning ecosystems so that new generations and their mentors can expand and advance. Suppose we integrate technology with the correct and rational role into the equation. In that case, we can deepen and scale its positive effect, overcoming the difficult contexts as those we have in Latin America.

How? That's the question that we invite everyone to continue answering together.

Cecilia de la Paz is the founder of Fundación Educate Uruguay. She is also part of NPDL Global, participates as an advisor for referents of the Uruguayan government, and serves as a mentor for technology entrepreneurship and education for Startup Chile. Cecilia is a member of Vital Voices, an organization that empowers women in LATAM and the world, and a member of the Karanga Advisory Council. She is a Salzburg Global Fellow.

Related Content

**Libraries and Museums in an Era of Participatory Culture**
Oct 19, 2011

Session 482

[Read more](#)**Education Reimagined: Leadership for a New Era**
Mar 02, 2021

Session 704

[Read more](#)**A Global Alliance for Social Emotional Learning**
Mar 26, 2019

Lucy Browett

[Read more](#)[Apply](#)
[Contact us](#)
[Support our work](#)
[Subscribe to our newsletter](#)**SALZBURG, AUSTRIA**
Salzburg Global Seminar
Schloss Leopoldsdorfer
Leopoldskronstrasse 56-58**WASHINGTON, D.C., USA**
Salzburg Global Seminar
Eaton House
1203 K Street, NW**Cookie-Settings**

Based on our legitimate interests and in order to provide optimal performance to you, we use functionally necessary cookies, which secure the functionality and security of our website. In addition, we use non-functional cookies for statistical and marketing purposes in order to improve our services and to personalize our website content - but only if you check the checkbox(es) and give us your consent herewith. You can change your settings at any time under [cookie-settings](#). More information is available at: [data-protection and privacy notice / cookies](#)

 Necessary cookies All cookies[ACCEPT SELECTION](#)



Cookie-Settings

Based on our legitimate interests and in order to provide optimal performance to you, we use functionally necessary cookies, which secure the functionality and security of our website. In addition, we use non-functional cookies for statistical and marketing purposes in order to improve our services and to personalize our website content – but only if you check the checkbox(es) and give us your consent herewith. You can change your settings at any time under [cookie-settings](#). More information is available at: [dataprotection and privacy notice / cookies](#)

Necessary cookies All cookies

ACCEPT SELECTION