CLASSROOM EXPERIENCES

Virtual teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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In 2020, Chile faced one of the most unexpected events in history: from one day to another, we found ourselves in a new and unknown reality where we had to abandon our routines and every household became classrooms and offices at once due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the great changes that the pandemic brought was the incipient transformation of the teaching model. During my formative years I had the opportunity to work in various educational environments, which allowed me to acquire significant knowledge for my teaching practice. Despite this, facing my first professional teaching experience in charge of six levels (Pre school and Primary school) under the current health circumstances has been a great challenge, with ups and downs, but above all, a significant learning opportunity.

As teachers we have had to rebuild our knowledge under a new premise: teaching meaningfully even when we cannot see or hear our students. We put aside the pencil and the blackboard and adapt our practices to learn about new softwares that would allow us to reach children from miles away. Considering that students don't live in an environment that supports learning, we have been challenged to find resources that engage students to learn from their computer screen and that can help us to achieve the learning objectives and develop abilities in our virtual classrooms. For teachers this work means to double and even triple the time and dedication. However, spending time learning how to use new tools and articulating them with those theories and methods that we already know - such as the Total Physical Response method - has allowed me to develop an active, collective and significant participation of 35 students within a limited 30 minutes class, those are the longest sessions I have.

Besides, it is important to highlight the importance of developing personal relationships with our students even despite the distance and "cold" virtuality. Creating instances that allow us to get to know students better and understand what happens in each of their particular contexts has allowed me to access their reality and support their educational and even emotional needs. Despite the complexity of balancing the curriculum, student's attention span, time and resources, it is essential that as teachers we consider flexibility in the teaching-learning processes.

The global context in which we find ourselves has put us all in situations of great pressure, stress and inevitable readjustment, a situation from which children are not excluded. Therefore, it becomes fundamental to consider this reality within the classroom, understanding the classes as the few instances that students have to interact with others, receive new stimuli and in some cases - due to the complex articulation of homework and telework that the parents face - the "speaking turn" we give a child may be the only time someone listens carefully to their ideas. Even when what they have to say has nothing to do with the class, they value and need that attention, and we must be there for them.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that there is no going back. Following its normal flow, after all technology would come into our classrooms gradually over time, but the pandemic gave us the boost that education needed to make the leap to technology. We are teachers, we have more tasks and challenges than we can often cover, but I have no doubt that technology is and will be a contribution to education.