

Education and COVID



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Spanish translation

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My name is Marina González, and I am a lecturer in UVEG's master's degree in education. I am currently doing a post-doctorate at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa and I want to take advantage of this space to share with you some of the lessons that this pandemic has taught me while living in this a country so far away, but with many similarities to ours.

I came to South Africa with thousands of expectations, I had won a scholarship for a one-year post-doctoral stay and the future looked full of possibilities. Possibilities that were shattered in two weeks, because just two weeks after arriving in this beautiful country, the president declared a state of national emergency.

At the time there were no more than 200 cases, but in a country where HIV has left great devastation, they wanted to be cautious. So, one of the strictest quarantines in the world was ordered, the sale of alcohol, cigarettes, and even hot takeaway food (such as that usually sold in supermarkets) was prohibited and strict curfews were established.

At first, I thought that this would be over quickly (I was very naive), then I believed that the pandemic would ruin my entire research project (this was also naive), but in the end, I realized that this pandemic would allow me to experience the country and its educational models in a totally different and interesting way.

After the first cases of Covid-19 were detected, the university where I am working announced that it would close its doors "for a few days" but even now activities have not resumed normally.

This closing of doors not only meant that thousands of students were left without a school, but also that hundreds of them were left homeless, as the school dormitories were closed, and the students had to return to live with their families, and in several cases, this involved returning to live in their country of origin.

For the younger students, the experience was different. During the first months of the pandemic, all the schools closed, but the students were gradually returning and by the second half of last year, most of the students had returned to "normality".

In the country with the highest rate of economic inequality in the world (according to the World Bank), education is nothing more than a reflection of this. While many South African children and youth can access high-speed internet from the comfort of their home, many others not only do not have internet service (which in this country is a very expensive service), but they also do not have basic infrastructure in their homes, and many of them even depend on the food they receive at school to have enough food.

The education authorities of this country implemented educational strategies that included radio and television programs, but it quickly became obvious that these efforts were fruitless.

Twenty-five years after the end of the apartheid regime, South Africa continues to suffer the consequences, now it will be a matter of waiting and hoping that these consequences do not get worse in post-pandemic times.

Today we are experiencing the second wave of infections, with about 20 thousand infections a day on the worst days, and half the total population of Mexico the rate of infections in this country has once again alarmed the authorities, who, among other things, have postponed the return of students to the new academic cycle.

Regarding the research project that brought me to this country, I had to change the methodology and perspective, but I learned, like many people last year, that there are thousands of digital tools that have been created to make our lives easier, but that they had simply been ignored in favour of the traditional way of doing things.

I have also seen the bright side of this terrible world situation. Researchers from all corners of the world, with whom I share the same methodology, have begun to build real academic support networks, from those who have shared free software they have created to those who have taken the time to reply by Email all the doubts that amateurs like me have had. Another way to be close in the distance.

It remains now to ask ourselves what the future holds for our two nations, so different in culture, but so similar in inequality. For my part, I prefer to bet on an increasingly better future, because, if I have learned something from the history of our two countries, it is that the resilience of our people defines us; people have faced the most challenging situations and have come out stronger. I am sure that this pandemic will not be the exception.

Sobre la autora

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Ha planeado y dirigido proyectos de investigación e intervención interdisciplinar relacionados con la educación y la psicología educativa. Al margen de su actividad de investigación, también se desempeña como asesora de la maestría en educación de la UVEG.