Learning From the Crisis

How can teaching and learning continue to be **grounded in the real needs of students** and a **learner-centered approach**?

Updated September 2021

Teach For All
A Global Network

Learning From the Crisis

Insights from the Teach For All Network During the COVID-19 Pandemic

When the global pandemic began, staff, teachers, and alumni of Teach For All network partners leveraged their leadership to ensure that students were safe and could continue learning. Stories, strategies, and successes shared across the global network helped to accelerate impact and drive innovation. We also created the "Learning Through The Crisis" insights documents which were a synthesis of our learnings from these stories.

Network partners continued to redesign and implement new ways of working, teaching, and learning. Many of these discoveries are informing their work far beyond distance learning. As such, we posed this question to the network: "What are you learning from the crisis?" We listened to teachers, teacher coaches, senior leaders, and alumni across our network to understand their experiences and the lessons they've learned. We then synthesized them into insights and examples which are contained in this document.

How can teaching and learning continue to be **grounded in the real needs of students** and a **learner-centered approach**?

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INSIGHTS
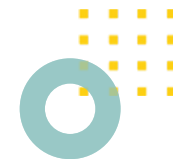
As a result of the pandemic, teachers and school leaders had to find new and innovative ways to firstly, reach their students, and then secondly, ensure that they were still learning effectively. The additional challenge of not being face-to-face made it apparent that there are several personal, social, and external factors that can affect a child's desire and ability to learn well. There was a need to redesign the learning experience such that students actively engaged in lessons and were motivated to learn.

To achieve this, teachers would often need to widen the boundaries of their curricula and address other external factors that would affect a child's ability to participate and effectively learn. The argument for a learner-centered approach to education has never been more relevant, and the pandemic brought to light the urgency and the powerful results this approach can bring.

1 Virtual classrooms, blended learning initiatives, and other curriculum innovations can help build teachers' awareness, digitals skills, and expertise to design programs that fit the needs of students and families and reach them outside of the classroom.

2 Redesigning learning experiences to tap into students' motivations and interests increases student engagement in lessons and incentivises them to learn.

3 Flexible learning experiences and teaching styles allow students to have leadership over their own learning and to learn at their own pace. Students co-created knowledge and shared based on their context.

4 Teachers designing learning experiences that focus on student well-being and social and emotional learning helps students feel safe and confident to learn.
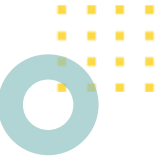
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01 | INSIGHT

Virtual classrooms, blended learning initiatives, and other curriculum innovations can help **build teacher awareness as well as their digitals skills and expertise** to design programs that fit the needs of students and their families outside of the classroom.

As teachers began engaging with students and families virtually, they were often engaging in smaller groups and needing to personalize their approach with different students. It became a necessity to think of their students as living in vastly different circumstances with vastly different needs, which allowed them to adapt to those differences. In doing so, teachers learned to use a variety of methods that can also be used in a classroom setting or to supplement classroom learning.
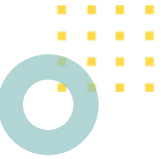
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Enseña Chile– La Radio Enseña/Canales Enseña

Last spring, inspired by Teach For Nigeria teachers who were teaching lessons on the radio, two Enseña Chile teachers recorded 30-minute radio lessons in five subjects. They deliberately designed them to be dynamic and relevant to students. Enseña Chile's CEO Tomás Recart shared the lessons with the Chilean Radio Broadcasters Association, local government officials, and the media—all of whom quickly became advocates for the project, which officially launched as *La Radio Enseña*. Through the initiative, more than 50 Enseña Chile teachers and 10 staff members are working with community leaders to record lessons that are broadcast on the radio throughout the country.
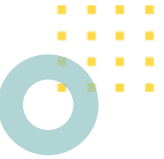
Now, the team is working to create new audio content along with online and printed learning guides; develop an online platform where students and teachers can find the existing content as well as new resources (*Canales Enseña*) and launch a WhatsApp tool called *Aló Enseña* to provide automated learning support for students. Developing and implementing content for Canales Enseña will become one of the pathways Enseña Chile participants can choose during their two-year teaching commitment. **Click here to access lessons and resources** from the La Radio Enseña/Canales Enseña archive.

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Teach For Pakistan's WhatsApp School

Teach For Pakistan teachers developed a full model of instruction to be conducted over WhatsApp that allowed for instruction, engagement, and feedback, which they believe could continue to be leveraged for students who are out of school either short- or long-term in the future. Each week "WhatsApp School" had a flow of activities starting with sharing of content and videos, allowing students to ask questions and interact via text or voice notes, and having students submit their work and get feedback from teachers. They were even able to work in groups on various assignments over WhatsApp. **Watch a video** of teacher Rabiah describing how she and her co-teachers Fajarna and Sannia, leaned into the challenge of low-tech learning, and set up a WhatsApp School with thriving student engagement! Read more **here**.

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Teach For the Philippines– Learning Together at a Distance

Source: Teach For the Philippines

Over the course of the pandemic, Teach For the Philippines worked hard to both deliver the national curriculum at a distance, and to digitize remediation and life skill lessons into modules so teachers could use them with their students. In the future teachers can also leverage these for remote learning or for catching up students outside of the classroom. In creating these interventions, they focused on:

- **Using data to inform programs:** At the onset of the pandemic, Teach For the Philippines implemented rapid assessment surveys to understand COVID's impact on school communities. These surveys enabled the organization to smartly redesign its literacy and life skills programs, tailored to the communities it works with.
- **Working in proximity to the community:** Throughout the pandemic and despite the restrictions on movement, Teach For the Philippines deployed its teachers safely across the country to work hand-in-hand with community members in ensuring that students continue to learn despite having among the world's most prolonged school closures.
- **Including caregiver training:** During the pandemic, the organization expanded its skills development training to include hundreds of parents and guardians, an expansion it will now continue to grow.
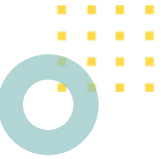
Redesigning learning experiences to tap into students' motivations and interests **increases student engagement** in lessons and incentivises them to learn.

Teachers have always designed their lessons based on student interest, but when students were not physically in their classrooms they had to go above and beyond with this approach. Maintaining students' attention during this incredibly difficult time required even more creativity and interaction through different media tools—all of which can continue in the future.

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Teach For Portugal's Digital Strategy
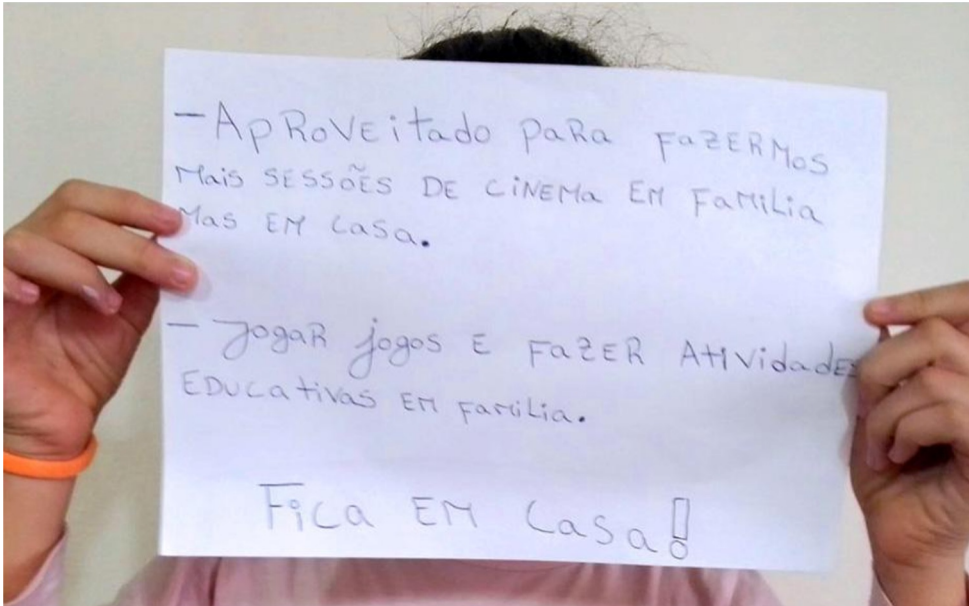
Source: Teach For Portugal Instagram page

Teachers created an Instagram account to engage with students when schools closed in order to stay connected to them at such a difficult time. Taking inspiration from an Ensina Brasil teacher, they connected with students, sent reminders about lessons, and used live broadcasts to encourage students to attend online classes. Students and families were highly engaged and even participated in extracurricular events such as an online live Christmas show!

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Teach For Romania – Exploring New Worlds While Schools Were Closed
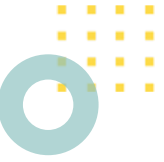
Teach For Romania teacher Mihaela Bucsa, who had been using field trips as an essential part of her students' exposure to the world, turned her class's inability to travel during the pandemic into an opportunity to explore places they could not have visited in person. She secured devices so that all of her students were able to join virtual sessions with experts from around the world—and beyond. They virtually visited a black hole with the European Space Agency, Google in California, a Sonographer's practice, and many more places. These visits exposed her students to new worlds and ideas, and brought scientists and innovators from all over the world into their classroom. Nearly a year since the first virtual field trip, these interactive experiences with experts in science and technology have become a permanent activity at Mihaela's school, and she hopes it's an innovation that will be sustained in education more widely. **Watch a video** about Mihaela and her students' virtual field trips.

External Research

"Inspiring students' intrinsic motivation to learn is a more effective strategy to get and keep students interested. And it's more than that. Students actually learn better when motivated this way. They put forth more effort, tackle more challenging tasks, and end up gaining a more profound understanding of the concepts they study."

The Hechinger Report - *How to unlock students' internal drive for learning*
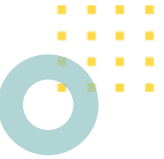
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03 | **INSIGHT**

Flexible learning experiences and teaching styles allow **students to have leadership over their own learning and to learn at their own pace**. Students co-created knowledge and shared based on their context.

During this unprecedented time students really were the ones in charge of how they spent their time—and embracing that allowed teachers to develop tools that enabled students to set their own pace, manage their own time and created their own knowledge. All of which are skills they can continue to use into the future.

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Enseña Perú– Nuevo Progreso (Áncash)

Source: Enseña Perú Youtube website

A shift in the pedagogy, adopting project-based approaches and competency-based methodologies grounded in local realities allowed students to interact with practical knowledge anchored in their own communities and daily lives, fostering engagement with families around what they are learning and increasing attendance by up to three times. It is so interesting to hear how students took ownership of their learning, producing content and adapting their learning time according to their own realities given all the work they were doing to contribute to their families' daily commitments.

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External Research

"*As students and teachers have shifted from setting to setting (e.g., remote, hybrid, in-person), educators have recognized the critical need to develop systems, teaching strategies, and content that is flexible and can shift easily across settings. The benefits associated with providing students with "voice and choice" in when, where, and how they learn are far-reaching, and can help prepare all learners with the skills they need to succeed in an increasingly complex world.*"

American Institute for Research - *Using Flexible Learning Strategies to Foster Equitable and Inclusive Education Opportunities*

Teachers designing learning experiences that focus on **student well-being and social and emotional learning** helps students feel safe and confident to learn.

A very real fear of safety became a huge focus for teachers as they helped students navigate through lockdowns and loss. Student depression skyrocketed as lockdowns wore on and teachers and school systems responded by discussing and supporting well-being. This will continue to be a huge focus for education systems going forward.
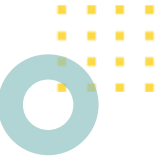
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Enseña por México– Jugamos Juntos
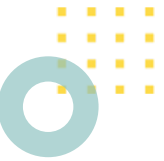
In 2020, Enseña por México launched Jugamos Juntos ("Playing Together"), an initiative inspired by research demonstrating that young children who have a relationship with a caring adult have better cognitive and social-emotional development throughout their lives. Enseña por México teachers designed the program to help parents develop responsive caregiving skills and provide tools for relating with their children.

Jugamos Juntos was planned to be a hybrid initiative, featuring in-person learning and play sessions supplemented by digital content. COVID-19 forced Enseña por México to deliver all of the content online. Using WhatsApp, teachers connected directly with the parents to discuss how they were relating to their children, and introduce tools to enhance social-emotional development. Through messages and videos, parents shared how they were interacting with their children and received feedback and "assignments" in response. Additional content created by the teachers (videos, games, lessons, and more) is shared on Jugamos Juntos social media channels. When schools reopen post-pandemic, the initiative will evolve to include both in-person and virtual sessions to reach more parents and caregivers than would be possible just in person. **Click here** to learn more (in Spanish).

Teach For Bangladesh– Social-emotional learning

Source: Teach For Bangladesh Twitter account

Sharmistha Deb of Teach For Bangladesh is a teacher whose experience of teaching her fourth-grade girls remotely led her to start a project developing new content on social-emotional learning. "Research suggests that such learning can help reduce anxiety, suicide, substance abuse, depression, and impulsive behavior in children, while increasing test scores, attendance, and social behaviors such as kindness, personal awareness, and empathy," she explains. During the lockdowns in Bangladesh, she realized that teaching academic lessons was not going to meet the real needs of her students who were going through high levels of stress from the health and economic impacts of the pandemic. In order to support them, she developed a way to incorporate wellness into her lessons. Her focus is to ensure students are learning academic content while boosting well-being through prayer, healthy food, mediation, exercise, and sleep. By addressing the social-emotional needs of her students, Sharmistha has realized that well-being should be a core part of her lessons when students return to school and is developing her plans to incorporate all these practices for virtual and in-person lessons. You can **read more here**.

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Empieza por Educar– Menttores (Tutoring)
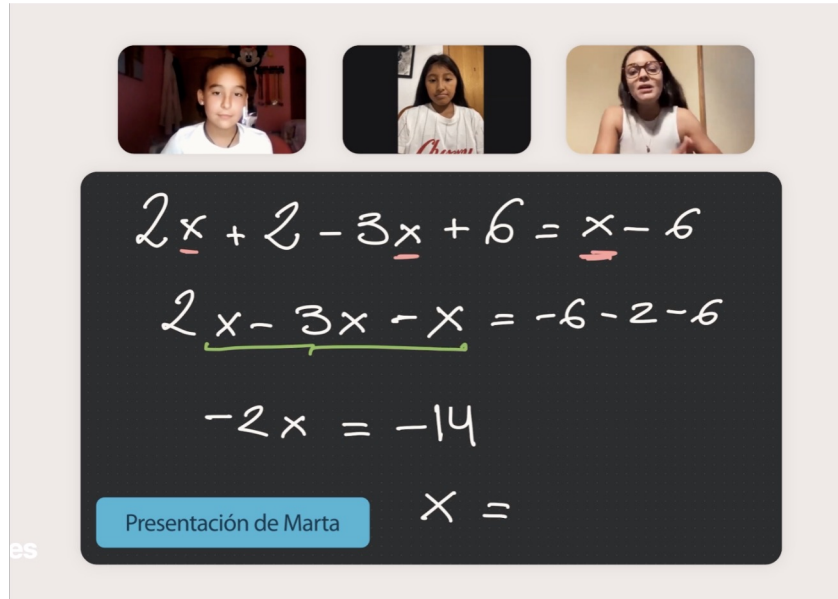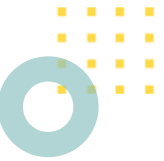
Source: Menttores website (video)

*NOTE: Updated information on the project can be found here; and this is the Menttores website*

Empieza por Educar launched a program called "Menttores" which seeks to support the students from disadvantaged backgrounds most affected by COVID-19 and the closure of schools. The program, which will target 600 students in Madrid and Catalonia, was developed between April and June 2021, throughout 3 sessions per week during 8 weeks, in an online format of 2-to-1 tutoring sessions.

The structure of these sessions consists of extra-curricular math and socio-educational reinforcement, in which students with the greatest needs are supported to try to reverse the growing educational gap caused by the pandemic. Socio-educational reinforcement not only consists of academic reinforcement but also social-emotional support (motivation, routines, well-being, etc). This project was developed through an alliance between Empieza por Educar and the Think Tank EsadeEcPol, and was based on best practices worldwide. Following the pilot, Empieza por Educar planned to scale the program to thousands of students in Spanish regions through the support of EU-Next Generation funding.

THANK YOU!
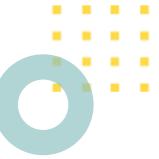
We are deeply grateful to the teachers, alumni, and educators from the Teach For All network organizations who co-created these insights and made these resources possible.

If you are a part of the Teach For All network and are interested in contributing additional stories, case studies, tools, and templates to this resource, contact us at virtual@teachforall.org.

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