

LEADERS IN TIMES OF CRISIS

ITEN Teacher Fellows contribute to **national quarantine education plans** for young learners.

While many secondary and university-level teachers rely on online platforms to help them maintain some semblance of normalcy in their classes, early childhood and primary teachers face an additional challenge when it comes to keeping contact with their young students. Ana Sofía Salguero López, an early childhood teacher in Costa Rica, like many teachers in her country, is helping her country to overcome the obstacles that interfere with a quality education for its youngest students.

As a member of one of the ITEN Project Teams with the Uladislao Gámez Solano Institute for Professional Development (IDPUGS) of the Ministry of Public Education of Costa Rica, Ana Sofia receives training in STEM. Together, ITEN and IDPUGS have developed resources for professional teacher development in early childhood with emphasis in STEM education. Ana Sofía's perspective in this work strengthens the integration of resources offered by the Ministry and her own particular knowledge of disciplinary needs.

Since the suspension of classes in Costa Rica, the Ministry of Education has developed the pedagogical mediation strategy LEARNING AT HOME, an initiative to facilitate the use of technological resources and remote actions to support the educational process during this period of social distancing, with the use of a virtual platform and other resources such as television and radio programs, teacher training, emotional support, etc.

Among the guidelines is the document *Guidelines for the Support of the Distance Educational Process*, which is based on four regulatory guidelines of the Costa Rican educational system: educational policy, curricular policy, strategic lines of the current administration, and policies on information technology.

All teachers will have access to the platform and will be able to contact their students in the most convenient way - Microsoft Teams, WhatsApp or other platforms, and make use of guides and printed materials to include children who do not have access to technological devices or the Internet.



<https://idp.mep.go.cr/>

In addition to the **Open Virtual Classroom** website prepared for early childhood teachers by the Ministry, Ana Sofía also uses the **Technoideas** website, which specifically provides Spanish-language resources for doing STEM with young children at home.

<https://tecnoideaspreescol.wixsite.com/tecnoideas>



The goal is to have all teachers receive training in virtual and distance education by April 17, and to provide directors of each institution the ability to track teacher's work and the fulfillment of their functions. While the training is not completed, Ana Sofía comments that teachers, with the support of the Ministry, have been sending work and follow-up guides to the families through different channels.

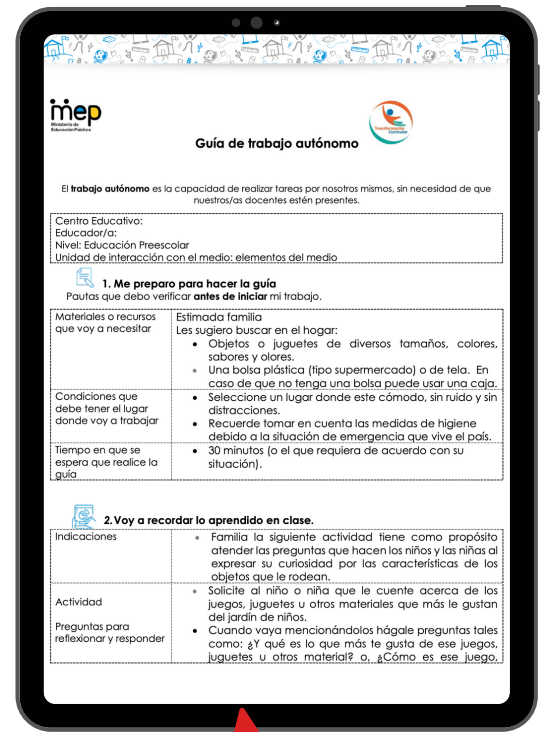
In Ana's case, she goes on to send the teaching material on WhatsApp daily. The idea is that the tasks do not take more than 30 minutes, since it is clear that the parents are not teachers, many are still working and have limited resources. At first, she had the desire to use the platform for live encounters, ZOOM, but once faced with the reality of her students, she decided to support them via WhatsApp.

"I work in an area of low resources, so I must accommodate myself to the circumstances," she says, stressing the reality is the same for many fellow teachers.

Ana sends written and oral instructions in case a parent cannot read and receives photos or videos of the tasks for feedback. *"We are in constant communication, and I told them if they could save some works for sharing when we return,"* she says.

From her perspective, she comments that most parents are very involved, grateful, and that students are highly motivated. Also that one of the biggest challenges of teaching STEM by distance is knowing how to motivate to observe, explore, and experiment.

For this, she counts on the effort of the region to not only share the experiences of Costa Rica, but also to receive recommendations for ideas on how to reach different populations despite social limitations.



Access to digital teaching resources, alone, is not enough. The Ministry has also provided a "Guide for Autonomous Work" that provides parents with metacognitive strategies to help them assess their own effectiveness as teachers and learners.



"I think that no one was prepared to live through this situation caused by the pandemic, but that does not mean that we can't be resilient in the face of circumstances, move forward and succeed."

- Ana Sofía

In the context of COVID-19, Ana Sofia makes use of a wide variety of multimedia resources to help her own students address social and emotional learning standards, STEM learning for preschool skills pedagogical mediation and creativity through the arts.

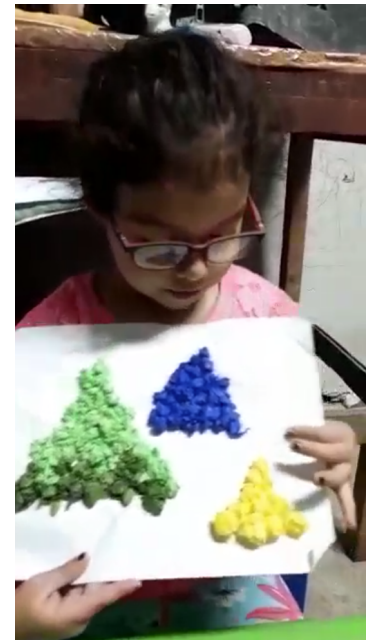
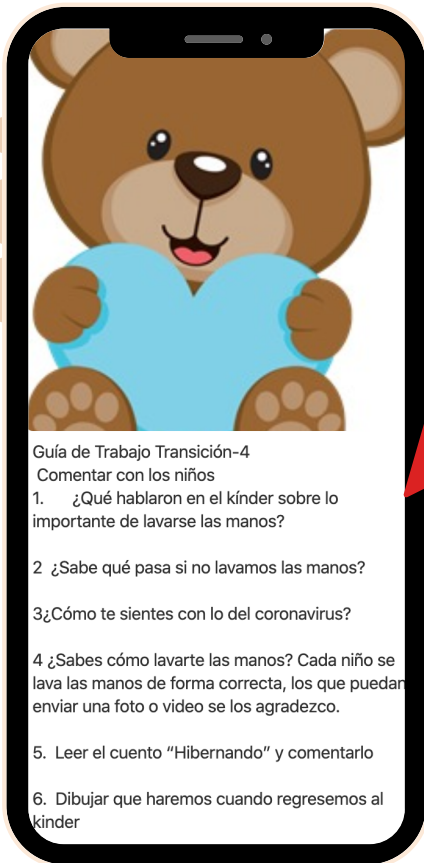
In a recent STEM-related assignment for her students, she sent parents a digital copy of "Hibernating: A story to help young children understand quarantine and process their emotions," a Spanish-language storybook written by a Chilean psychologist. The story draws parallels between the safety of a bear's den and one's home during the pandemic, and emphasizes both creative outlets and management of emotions.



<https://bit.ly/2yZSTms>

Ana Sofia further provided a set of discussion questions to encourage interaction with the storyline, asking students to reflect on their own feelings about quarantine.

To extend the storybook into the realm of STEM awareness, she then asked parents to show children another story via a YouTube video, "The Monster of Colors," which associates each of the monster's various emotions with a different color.



<https://bit.ly/2yi7dpO>

Children were then asked to creatively demonstrate their own emotions by creating a craft, and to illustrate their feelings with their teacher by submitting a video narrative. Teaching sequences such as these maintain educational coherence for students even under quarantine.

"We have a commitment to education, with our students and ourselves." - Ana Sofía