



Insegnamento Remoto di Emergenza nelle Università in America Latina: il caso di una università pubblica regionale in Argentina

Emergency Remote Teaching in Latin America Higher Education: the case of a regional public university in Argentina

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the evolution of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) in a regional University in Argentina, and its possible consequences. The experiences lived by the author, narrated in the first person, are intertwined with observation, analysis and reflection on the issues imposed by ERT in Higher Education in the country that has a quarantine record and whose 2020 school year will be entirely under this modality. Didactic aspects, as well as infrastructure and institutional organization, are thoroughly informed and analysed in the light of theoretical-practical criteria. The adverse effects of a prolonged and uncertain quarantine, plus the problems inherent in the limiting conditions faced by the students, caused rapid exhaustion and disengagement. These effects can be a stumbling block for the post-pandemic stage or "New-Normal", to the extent that students and teachers could tend to revalue face-to-face teaching without capitalizing on the digital competencies acquired for the hybridization of teaching.

Questo articolo riporta l'evoluzione dell'insegnamento remoto di emergenza (ERT) in un'università regionale in Argentina e le sue possibili conseguenze. Le esperienze vissute dall'autore, narrate in prima persona, si intrecciano con l'osservazione, l'analisi e la riflessione sui temi imposti da ERT nell'istruzione superiore nel Paese che ha un record di quarantena e il cui anno scolastico 2020 sarà interamente in questa modalità. Gli aspetti didattici, così come le infrastrutture e l'organizzazione istituzionale, sono approfonditi e analizzati alla luce di criteri teorico-pratici. Gli effetti negativi di una quarantena prolungata e incerta, oltre ai problemi inerenti alle condizioni limitanti affrontate dagli studenti, hanno causato un rapido esaurimento e disimpegno. Questi effetti possono essere un ostacolo per la fase post-pandemica o "New-Normal", nella misura in cui studenti ed insegnanti potrebbero rivalutare l'insegnamento faccia a faccia senza capitalizzare le competenze digitali acquisite per una desiderabile ibridazione dell'insegnamento.

KEYWORDS

Emergency Remote Teaching; Higher Education; Blended Learning; Face-to-Face Teaching; Argentina.
Insegnamento Remoto di Emergenza; Università; Apprendimento Ibrido; Insegnamento in Presenza; Argentina.

1. Introduction

It is not necessary to describe or explain the coronavirus or SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. It is not only because of the amount of information produced and consumed since the late application of the term but also because of each person's experience. It is relevant to describe the impact caused on the educational system of a country, to reveal its fragility in infrastructure aspects. Moreover, it also highlights the efforts and ideas that have arisen to alleviate the adverse effects, some at the limit of real possibilities, and reflect on what teaching or benefit those responsible for Higher Education can draw from this extreme experience future. Perhaps the latter is very politically correct, but by no means do I intend to generalize criteria and less describe complex scenarios such as an entire country's educational system. From a theoretical-critical perspective and the participant experience with first-hand data, my objective is to narrate the impact that the pandemic has caused in the teaching system of a public, small, young, regional University, committed to ideals of inclusion education, human rights, and democracy. The most reliable data are limited to the teaching experience itself in one of the headquarters of my University (*Universidad Autónoma de Entre Ríos, UADER*), which is regionally decentralized, public and tuition-free. I say this because although I am aware of the institutional actions for participating as coordinator of the Council of Professors of one of the Faculty's careers, I do not believe that I have complete information and complete knowledge of all the details of the process of adaptation to the Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT). By this, I mean that it is not my intention to present an objective and complete picture of the situation, neither that the institution to which I belong is a "critical case" or atypical. In any case, the information I have collected traces a coherent and articulated scenario of the institutional evolution and of the resolved and unresolved problems that an extremely extensive "quarantine" (of a full academic year) has generated. All the institutional details are only contextual data to the challenges that, as a teacher, I have had to face (and continue to cope with) and what analysis and interpretation I do (and continue to do) as an expert in digital technologies and online education.

2. Country and pandemic coordinates

Argentina is a country that, long before but notably in the last five decades, has suffered a continuous deterioration with recurrent socio-economic crises. With an estimated population of 45,376,763 inhabitants, the number of people living below the so-called poverty line has been growing until reaching, in September 2020, 40.9 percent of the people¹.

The first case of Covid19 in Argentina was confirmed on March 3, 2020, in the City of Buenos Aires. An "imported case" given that it was a person who was returning from a trip to Europe, in particular to Spain (Barcelona) and Italy (Milano), countries that already had a considerable amount of cases. Two weeks later, given the increase in confirmed cases of travellers returning to the country, on Thursday, March 19, 2020, the government decreed a nationwide quarantine, officially known as Social, Preventive and Mandatory Isolation (*Aislamiento Social Preventivo Obligatorio, ASPO*). It began to rule from Friday, March 20, at 00:00, until

1 INDEC (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos*) <https://www.indec.gov.ar/indec/web/Nivel3-Tema-4-46>

March 31 at the beginning, although later it was extended twelve times more (up to now), taking it until October 11, date in which 205 days of quarantine will be totalized.

At first, the preeminent region affected by cases was the city of Buenos Aires and its periphery or “*Gran Buenos Aires*” (3 million and 12 million inhabitants respectively), - considered unified as the AMBA region (Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires). Since September, there has been a sustained and high curve of infections and deaths, mainly in the AMBA region and in the rest of the country for a couple of months (there is no province or territory that does not have cases). The scale of phases that determine the allowed and prohibited activities is as follows:

- Phase 1: Strict isolation (case duplication time: less than five days);
- Phase 2: Administrative isolation (case duplication time: 5 to 15 days);
- Phase 3: Geographical segmentation (case duplication time: 15 to 25 days);
- Phase 4: Progressive reopening (case doubling time: more than 25 days);
- Phase 5: New Normal.

At first, phase 1 was mainly in the AMBA and phases 2, 3, and 4 in the central and northern provinces. In September, the trend was reversed and diversified: cities, provinces, and regions decided to return to phase 1 for periods of 14 days, according to the appearance of sources of contagion, while the AMBA seemed to stabilize. Inter-jurisdictional transit is prohibited or extremely limited (only essential workers and cargo transportation). There are no domestic or international flights, and its opening has been delayed several times in recent months.

In summary, we have practically seven months of ASPO or regular intensity quarantine. The school and university calendar that goes from March to November will be entirely developed in distance mode, and then return to the classrooms is not expected for this year.

3. The tsunami in the first person and emergency actions

I take an autoethnographic methodological perspective (Denzin, 2014) to write about this phenomenon because this seems to be more appropriate to describe the impact on teachers and students, and the changes that the quarantine enlarged had caused to them. Indeed, at a regional and local level, the quantitative data available during the pandemic was scarce and not reliable.

3.1 The first wave: the forced transformation

The *Tsunami* analogy seems useful to describe the national, regional, and local circumstances of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic in Argentina. The first big wave was due to the so-called “imported cases”, this means Argentine travellers returning from their vacations abroad, many from countries and locations where the disease was most expanded.

Personally, the announcement (and subsequent decree-law) of the Preventive and Mandatory Social Isolation (ASPO) – i.e. quarantine – with a countdown of only 24 hours to move, forced me to return immediately from the University to my hometown to be with my family – at a distance of about 235 km. From that moment, the path of pedagogical and didactic reflection began regarding what was

erroneously envisioned as a time of approximately two months to return to everyday life and work. The first semester of classes would be started the following week, according to the official academic calendar of my University, which quickly announced that it was delaying the start of classes by a week to establish the necessary conditions for an emergency virtual teaching system.

In my case, it began with two courses in Didactics and another two in Educational Research, one with a teaching team, two with two assistants, and one without collaborators; with a little over a hundred students in total. Of these, a third already knew them personally from previous courses. The first wave blow did not take me completely by surprise since I had gradually hybridized teaching some years ago, complementing the face-to-face classes with digital resources in an e-learning platform (Moodle) offered by the Faculty, and sharing digital libraries resources. I thought that only should have to redesign them, rearrange the curriculum and update the bibliography and learning guides for each thematic unit.

Given my online education expertise, I believe that redesigning those online courses did not require much effort, mostly when I had previously digitized many readings and learning materials. However, it was quite a challenge, for two reasons: the first, the total inexperience of the students of a distance course only with digital tools; second, the constant readjustment of the course spaces, considering the multimodal dimension; especially the didactic instructions and modifying the spotlight according to the progress of the course. Both reasons focused on the objective that the students did not lose the thread of the instructional sequence, given the multiplicity and diversity of teaching configurations that the teachers put into action (considering that each student takes between 4 and 6 subjects each semester). The assumption that the immobility of isolation would pay off in extra time to devote to the new teaching situation proved correct and necessary.

Obviously, for the rest of the professors, the situation was quite different: face-to-face classes were not only the usual and only way of teaching, but “face-to-face” is a trait that the Faculty holds as a value in its ideology, – more besides, the previous year he had advanced with a project to create a distance education program on the occasion of the 20 young years of the University's existence.

The first task was to contact the enrolled students and invite them to start the courses by offering their coordinates on the e-learning platform to bring them together and have a central communication channel, beyond email. As already given, the simultaneous work was to redesign the courses on the e-learning platform for the beginning of the online teaching, initially for a couple of months. After these, the National Government extended the ASPO to the first full semester; currently, it will cover the entire academic year). Then mimic the face-to-face classes with videoconferences. And here is the first big stumbling block: as is known, at the beginning of the pandemic, videoconferencing systems, both free and commercial (Zoom, Meet, Skype, Jitsi, etc.), were not prepared for a massive demand around the world. We tried with my students until we found easy one and multiple access (either from resident software or from the internet browser) and, fundamentally, that recorded virtual classes without problems and kept them available for 30 days to the participants. From that moment on, we decided not to change anymore - despite the rapid and competitive improvements between the different systems. The reasons of a didactic nature were mainly three: (a) accessibility for students, (b) the possibility of recovering and seeing the class if due to technical, personal, or family reasons it was not possible to attend; and (c) the need to have a fixed frame of reference (especially when students take several subjects, and there was no unifying strategy or resource, –e.g. the same e-learning platform, for all courses.

As soon as the class period began, at the request of the authorities of my university headquarters, I put together a guide of criteria to have for this emergency that implied organizing the learning tasks of the students remotely (§ 3.3). I mainly reflected on a proposal that has not lost its validity: the pyramid of e-learning systems that Banzato & Midoro (2005) raised several years ago (Figure 1). Hypothesizing about the possibilities that existed to achieve the highest level of online teaching and learning, I realized that the professors of my Faculty could reach the second level of *assisted-learning*. The first level, *autonomous learning* or delivery of learning materials, would be the first step of many of them. Briefly description of each level:

1. The *autonomous model* is a copy of distance education by mail: the printed materials came to the student with a working guide, and he/she had to carry out the final evaluation at a predetermined time. This model has nothing to do with digital education's current demands and possibilities since it lacks a didactic interaction.
2. The *assisted model* includes how fundamental the role of teacher-tutor. This model has a double focus on the learning materials and the teacher's feedback through various synchronous and asynchronous digital channels (email, forums, chats).
3. The *collaborative model* supposes a total immersion of students and teachers in the process of shared and dialogic construction of knowledge:
"Here, the participants' activities developed cooperatively assume great importance and technology tends above all to favor collaboration, although it continues to provide access to materials and interpersonal communication services (Banzato & Midoro, 2005)".



Figure 1. The e-learning system pyramid

It is thus then that, discarding the first model as undesirable, the *assisted model* is the one that appeared with the most significant possibilities of practical realization in the first phase of virtualization of a course with limited preparation times. This hypothesis arose after diagnosing the specific and complex situation of professors and students at the university headquarters. Although the *collabo-*

rative model is the one with the best learning quality, prior training and practice is required to apply it (in addition to adequate techno-digital resources).

3.2 Diagnosis of the local academic situation

A few days before starting the courses, the Faculty's academic authorities had released a document defining the situation and suggestions to deal with the new teaching modality. In this, they proposed the educational scenario generated by the pandemic and the quarantine as follows:

"The consequences of the social isolation measures by Covid-19 force us to think about our teaching task with the restrictions that they imply:

- a) Begin the work of the chair without having had a first contact with our students. This lack means transmitting the formative purposes of the chair using other means.
- b) Managing the class for its remote development involves a rethinking of each of the teaching team's tasks.
- c) Propose the study materials, including the orientations of why and for what of them in the unit's context, topic, or problem addressed.
- d) Propose the learning activities in an appropriate format to be prepared and sent through social networks, virtual classrooms, email, etc."²

In my case, I wrote a document with some "*Practical Guidelines for the Fast and Safe Virtualization of University Courses*" that based on the previous diagnosis, added the following aspects to consider:

- e) The technical problems of digital networks that are occurring when said networks are overwhelmed (or better said, saturated) by the existing demand, at global and local level;
- f) The consequent slowdown and inaccessibility ("hangs", "does not load", "cannot be seen", "cannot be heard") of websites and audio/videoconferences, beyond local infrastructure problems ("narrow" band instead of broadband; wireless network congestion);
- g) The difficulties of non-habitual or inexperienced users: the mastery of the applications (in their technical requirements, configuration, and use) demands practical knowledge through experience. Even experts may have difficulties or need a trial time for an App or a tool unknown to them.

These three last aspects highlight not only the difficulties that students had to face, but also the inequalities that the pandemic and the quarantine exposed (Beaunoyer, Dup  r  , & Guitton, 2020).

3.3 The basic criteria for emergency remote teaching

Given the initial hypothesis of the adoption of the first two models of the e-learning pyramid by Banzato & Midoro (2005), and the technologically deprived con-

2 <https://fhaycs-uader.edu.ar/novedades-institucionales/8753-catedras-a-distancia-opciones-y-criterios-para-su-implementacion>

text of a large proportion of the university campus students, the proposal for inexperienced teachers in resources and competencies for ERT in my *Practical Guidelines* was organized into five areas or aspects, whose criteria are summarized as:

1st) Communication:

- i. Ensure at least one main secure channel of communication between the teacher and the students, and that allows distinguishing the official communication from the informal one;
- ii. The didactic units of the programs must have their correlate in unitary blocks or didactic packs to facilitate recognition by students;
- iii. Deliver the information redundantly but not multiply communication channels unnecessarily (“Occam’s razor” for online communication) to not confuse students or overload the teaching task.

2nd) Teaching activities:

- i. Provide the essential personalized and group didactic scaffolding;
- ii. Always leave a synchronous query channel open, to avoid demotivating delays;
- iii. Design a strategic plan for digital media to be used and class formats;
- iv. Assemble “Packs of Apps” for each course, suitable for each teacher and their students;
- v. TIP: The best tool is the one you know and handle best.

3rd) Learning activities

- i. Provide detailed and comprehensive instructional guides;
- ii. Share digital and digitized bibliographic resources in the Cloud;
- iii. Encourage students’ participation according to their contextual conditioning (shared devices, available times, etc.).

4th) Presence and Assistance

- i. Stimulate both synchronous virtual presence and participation in asynchronous activities;
- ii. Monitor absences to prevent dropout;
- iii. Organize the course schedule in a shared way with the students, considering both the academic demands and the students’ real possibilities.

5th) Evaluation

- i. Consider the modality as an occasion for a formative evaluation;
- ii. Give relevance in the evaluation system to practical work and participation in videoconferences and discussion forums;
- iii. Seek to mitigate the anxiety inherent in the exam situation through clear and precise instructions and prior training with items from previous years exams (so as not to add more stress than that caused by the quarantine and the pandemic).

As can be quickly inferred, the focus was on scaffolding the student to meet academic requirements and prevent dropout. In any case, we were able to indirectly corroborate that during the first months, several teachers proposed activities of the type of *autonomous e-learning*, in some cases with instructions to read little detailed texts and with a minimal communication channel (only email). I had to supervise several course cases that showed me the other side of the quarantine problem: teachers with children or dependent parents who, in the absence of

personal care personnel due to the prohibition of circulation of non-essential personnel, had to assume themselves the care of their relatives.

In other cases, the absence of digital competence or adequate devices prevented them from generating valid teaching alternatives. Some students only had their cell phones to follow the courses, particularly those whose younger siblings continued their primary or secondary schooling remotely, or their parents' teleworked. In general, there was a hopeful belief that the quarantine would not last long and at the end of which it would return to normal.

In short, taking up the analogy with the *Tsunami*, this first big wave that struck unexpectedly found everyone with little or no preparation to cushion or overcome the impact. Immediately afterward, an arduous task of designing or redesigning courses on platforms, searching, and selecting digital materials (books, journals, papers), planning virtual classes, and teaching virtually began. However, the arrival of a second wave was not foreseen. An even less was the permanence in quarantine due to the arrival of the "community transmission" of the SARS-CoV2 virus.

3.4 The second wave: there is no an early return to normality

The ASPO or quarantine was extended, every 15 or 21 days, and little by little, we were warning that the first part of the year until the winter break (July), there would be no changes, that the peak of infections did not arrive but that the pandemic progressed slowly but steadily. Undoubtedly this was a second shock, the hopes of those (teachers and students) projecting a speedy recovery crumbled. This new reality had various effects.

First, some courses reached an adequate level of stabilization or predictability. That is, stable and predictable didactic configurations –that include teachers' teaching styles (Litwin, 2012)–, were generated in terms of communication channels, workspaces, digital repositories, practical work, virtual classes' dynamics by videoconference, and distance exams. Regarding videoconferences, they were located at the scheduled times for face-to-face classes, as a way to avoid conflicting overlaps.

Second, there was a kind of rearrangement, due to the convergent effects of the experience, the institutional regulations that were given since the beginning of the ASPO (in mid-March, but that was experienced as long ago), the supply of internal and external training, the allocation of virtual classrooms in the institutional e-learning platform space, etc.³

Third, as a counterpart, the problems of attending and studying at home and with devices and connectivity not adequate to the demand were evidenced and deepened. In particular, the problems of newcomers who, without any experience of university life, were forced to start higher studies in this way, with little possibility of receiving guidance from advanced students and peers.

Fourth, an unwanted difference in teachers' perception began to be noticeably between previously known students in person and unknown or "faceless" students. In my courses, I asked in the presentation forums to attach a photo, a selfie, a short video to a short personal story. I discounted that my students, mostly Centennials, would have no problem accessing this. Despite the insistence, only ¼ of

3 <https://fhaycs-uader.edu.ar/coronavirus>

the student body met the requirement. In video conferences, something similar happened: the cameras were turned off, under the pretext (often valid) of not overloading or losing the connection, or also because of a faulty or limited operation of the device.

Fifth, and already evidenced as an effect of the first wave, group work that had been planned as a way to achieve collaborative learning, –and as secondary effects, group cohesion and a sense of belonging– had to be made more flexible, including the possibility of performing them individually. Connectivity obstacles and difficulties in scheduling shared schedules prevented all students' integration in groups or work teams.

Sixth, a positive effect forced by the circumstances was that several of the teachers who speculated to overcome the first two months of quarantine and return to the classrooms normally, had no alternative but to plan an instructional strategy appropriate to the ERT.

4. The institutional “change”: actions of technological rearrangement and expansion

Up to this point, I have made almost no mention of institutional decisions and actions related to the beginning of the academic year and the maintenance of teachers and students' activities. It cannot ignore that the decision to activate all of the courses meant a risky decision that implied convergent actions, both technological and pedagogical ones.

Regarding the former, a strategic reengineering of institutional services to expand the LMS's capacity in such a way as to substantially expand the number of simultaneous connections and the number of courses supported. Added to this, the work team's expansion guaranteed the resolution of user problems on time. By example, a policy change regarding institutional emails and the institutional GSuite tools' use allowed the democratization of access and free tools use, previously very restricted. It is worth clarifying that this change could not be made immediately, and that during the first weeks, teachers were consulted what they planned to use: an e-learning platform outside the institutional LMS (because they had no way to attend to all requests to open courses without a prior moving systems to more robust and faster servers), and (or) social networks, voice messaging services, and others issues. During the “second wave” internal training offers were consolidated. A connectivity scholarship system was also instituted to subsidize the purchase of internet minutes for students' cell phones and some local office as internet-points for exams, with authorized health protocols.

Regarding the pedagogical and didactical order, the most outstanding issues are the following: (a) it was resolved to maintain the regularity of all enrolled students beyond their attendance/participation in the course activities; (b) the formal evaluations or partial exams of the annual subjects of the first semester were suspended, setting a single integrative exam during the second semester; (c) for the final exam instances, procedural rules were drawn up to be carried out remotely virtually. Taking into account that the University offers several teacher training courses for teaching at all levels of the system (from Kindergarten to Higher Education), it was resolved that the issue of professional practices would remain pending, and students could carry them out within a specified period two years after completing the course.

5. The third wave: “broken dreams, false promises”

The hope of returning quickly to face-to-face classes at least from August / September (2nd semester) faded as the advance of the pandemic in the country and the reiteration of the quarantine extensions (the October 11, we will have completed 205 days of ASPO). The Ministry of Education ensures that there is no date of return to the classrooms for any system level, and some universities already announced in September that they will complete the 2020 school year remotely.

I have perceived a feeling of resignation, even boredom, and diffuse burnout that provokes a rejection of ERT and the digital technology as an exclusive mode of training university. I have discussed this phenomenon with the students, with the assistant professors and with student assistants and other colleagues, and all were coincident about it. Completing the 2020 courses in this modality represents an unprecedented effort. Despite the extraordinary adaptations and aid, dropouts from courses have been significant (understood as deferral to next year), and attendance at classes by videoconference has declined.

I return to the chapter's sentence, thus titled of the classic book by Peter McLaren to show a state of affairs and a cognitive-emotional state. The hope of a soon return to a “normality” of face-to-face teaching faded, and the growing dissatisfaction with the false promise of efficient and effective replacement by remote teaching gained ground among teachers and students. Nevertheless, the reference to McLaren's work does not end there, since this work shows how social inequalities are reflected in educational institutions. In our case, we can affirm that a significant number of students from our University are, due to their socio-economic status of origin, at greater risk of delay or disengagement due to the technological and pedagogical demands of this remote emergency teaching.

In contrast, a case that I have examined very closely from the beginning is two Developmental Psychology courses from an elite private university in the periphery of the AMBA region. Once the virtualization of the courses was decided, which had already been offered in blended or hybrid mode last years, that University proceeded both (a) to reinforce the LMS and videoconferencing systems with complete services in their own and secured environment or space, (b) the implementation launching an intense training plan for their teachers in the use of digital systems and resources available. Students were obliged to attend classes by videoconference, generally not having technical difficulties to participate (with voice and image). In this case, a state of fatigue and stress was also evidenced, in the teachers and the students, although in a certain sense less pronounced because the technical difficulties were scarce, the resources and digital devices were sufficient, and the support services were satisfactory. However, the “waves” were also felt and caused uncertainty and discouragement.

The “broken dreams” are those of the students who have started a university career this year, and, to the problems related to adapting to university studies, technological and didactical problems have been added. Taking into account that many students attend my University who are the first university students in their families (approximately 66%), this means that in general, they lack the extra-academic support resources in their studies, –e.g. example and advice from parents, environments suitable for home study– (Williamson, Eynon & Potter, 2020). These factors have caused a disorientation that leads, in many cases, to abandon courses and also to leave the careers started, waiting for better times. If we add the labor and economic crisis that leads many students to seek work for their subsistence or that of their families, they can delay or make the possibilities of academic reintegration disappear.

Also, the broken dreams are those of the students hoped to finish their undergraduate studies this year and have not been able to achieve it, either due to technical reasons or due to the impossibility of carrying out internships and residencies, which have been deferred for next year, in the best case.

Likewise, the broken dreams correspond to the professors who bet to return quickly to face-to-face classes, but also to the professors who hoped to transfer their courses to virtuality and obtain the same results as teaching in presence (Zimmerman, J. 2020).

6. Concluding remarks and prospective challenges

The delay of the pandemic in Argentina makes us predict that we will possibly suffer the same contagion outbreaks in some European countries (England, France, Spain, and Italy) without a continuity solution because the people do not more resist the individual and social stress and the economic crash. At this time, –September 2020–, our country has the longest quarantine in the world (200 days), 825,000 infected (eighth in the world ranking), and 22,000 deaths (twelfth among the countries with the most deaths, and nineteenth among the most deceased per million of population). Unemployment and the closure of commercial establishments and factories register unthinkable figures, calculating the drop in GDP of no less than 12% this year.

In this critical scenario, a question that flies in the academic environment is whether the so-called “virtualization” of teaching provoked for the ERT is an online education format, or is it a new format (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020). Others consider the ERT how an opportunity for determining the quality of online learning (Zimmerman, 2020). The true is that ERT will stay with us during the next year, until the vaccine is ready and a large part of the population will be vaccinated. Returning to the so-called normal schooling in Argentina will be very difficult if high levels of infected and deceased are maintained without the alternative of immunization. Health protocols reduce the chances of infection, but do not eliminate them. Few universities in the country have a campus structure can have classes outdoors or in ventilated environments for all students.

Perhaps a paradoxical aspect is the revaluation of face-to-face teaching. If we go to a highly digitally hybridized Higher Education, it is now clearly seen that face-to-face presence in education has a unique and irreplaceable value. Videoconferencing is what, today, is closest to face-to-face, but does not come to equate it. It has undoubtedly meant “salvation” in these pandemic circumstances. However, it forces us to rethink the extent to which we have been influenced by extreme technological optimism (Ranieri, 2011), or why some academics see only the “good side” pandemic scenario as an opportunity for increasing the digitality in education (Alfadala, Kirby, Zaki, Baghdady & Regester, 2020).

In the coming years, probably investment in connectivity infrastructure will grow in Argentina and Latin America, either due to the people’s demand or due to government policies, or for both reasons. However, for a country with the economic-financial investment difficulties that Argentina has and its scarcity, it is not easy to reach a broader coverage in low-urbanized areas and those far from large urban centers. On the other hand, the return to face-to-face classes will soon obliterate technological limitations, which could quickly return to a pre-pandemic state of affairs. Given this, it will be possible to see if the effort made during 2020 (and surely the first semester of 2021) determines a change of modality in the uni-

versity teaching systems that are strongly face-to-face. The most evident hypothesis is that the hybridization of teaching in Higher Education in Argentina and neighboring countries will have a preponderant place in the offer of regular undergraduate and postgraduate courses in university careers. I hope that this blow that the pandemic has given us will allow us to capitalize on the most challenging experience with an expansion of teachers and students' digital skills and successful hybrid teaching strategies for students' sustained engagement (McMurtrie, 2020). The desirable end in any of the possible scenarios, including ERT, should be the shared construction of knowledge represented by the top of the online teaching models of the e-learning pyramid (Constantino & Raffaghelli, *in press*).

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