In honor of Albert Einstein... Let's NOT let this educational crisis go to waste

By Luciano Macagno and Leo Martellotto

The global expansion of COVID-19 and its impact in most of our region faces us with unprecedented social challenges, and the education of our children and youth is undoubtedly one of them. More than 85% of schools are closed in our region and 87% of the world population (including more than 1.5 billion students) has been affected. Are we able to adapt to the new educational scheme, not only to go through this emergency phase but to generate a necessary change? How do we avoid slowing down processes that are critical to new generations given access to technology-based learning?

At Junior Achievement we take this complex scenario as an opportunity to contribute to the improvement of education. An education that is based on "learning-by-doing" through multiple formats and channels for students with challenges and diverse contexts, such as those in our region.

Albert Einstein firmly believed that crises were the greatest opportunities that could be presented to humans. According to the physicist, the great crises of history have put humanity before the challenge of innovating, of developing creativity, of revising paradigms: of changing. Once fear is overcome, the inevitable end of the crisis is evolution, the jump to a new stage as an evolutionary response to conditions that do not allow us to continue doing things the same way. During his more than 100-year history, Junior Achievement has witnessed countless crisis scenarios (even a few more than Einstein himself); in fact, we were born in 1919 in the midst of one of the largest economic recession crises in history, and emerged as an innovative response to a recurring problem such as youth job readiness. Resilience is part of what we teach and our DNA.

Throughout our history, at Junior Achievement we learned not only to overcome obstacles but also to teach our young people to transform them into opportunities. The unprecedented current context places us once again before the need to put the JA experience into practice; once again, to be resilient. But, fortunately, we not only have the entrepreneurial attitude necessary to surf turbulent waters, but also a varied range of digital and self-administrable content in which we have been working intensively in recent years.

Sources:
(1) JA internal survey with 30 JA Member Nations leaders, as of March 23.
(2) COVID-19 Educational Disruption and Respond, UNESCO
The advantage of being part of a global network with more than 100 countries is the ability to connect and offer alternatives quickly and effectively. That is why, in our communication channels, mainly on social networks, you can already find proposals that are part of our #KeepLearning campaign through which we open digital content to all audiences.

We are happy to be part of a global effort that makes Junior Achievement content available online today through the www.jaworldwide.org/keeplearning platform. The main digital products of our content offer are concentrated there, with free access and ready to use. But the most interesting thing about this proposal is that it will permanently update and add content that different countries in the region and the world have digitally transformed. This is the case, for example, of "Adventures and Finances", an innovative application developed by Junior Achievement Uruguay to learn about financial education in a fun way.

Although our usual implementation model combines digital content with the role of a volunteer or mentor, the context has led us to select specific content so that children and young people can learn in a fun and easy way from their homes, through platforms that guide them in their learning. And... why not, in times of being at home and sharing with the family, we redouble our bet and we propose to be ourselves, parents and family, those volunteers who take young people through the content of JA? A good way to honor Albert Einstein is applying his thinking of taking advantage of the crisis as a necessary chance to change.

Some ideas of evolution in Education, which apply to the challenges that we are living in quarantine today:

- As educators, promote the dissemination of prevention measures recommended by health agencies, with the aim of protecting those who are part of our ecosystem as a top priority.
- Make available to our public (governments, through their ministers and secretaries of Education; schools and teachers; partners and employees, especially those who are parents; youth directly) virtual content of the “learning-by-doing” type that allow meaningful learning by connecting education with fun.
- Train our volunteers and launch activities in a virtual way so that, when the schools reopen, we have already generated a positive inertia of the educational processes, facilitating the return of students to the classrooms.
- Put the focus on the educational urgency but, at the same time, lay the foundations for a long-term cultural change, necessary to improve the education of future generations, ensuring that distance learning remains an installed capacity.