

An Interview with Andrea Diaz-Varela

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Neil Boothby sat down with Andrea Diaz-Varela over Zoom to learn more about Right To Play's response to COVID-19.

01. Summary

Through work with teachers and teacher training programs, Right To Play (RTP) integrates play-based learning methodologies and after school programming into classrooms and schools in 15 different countries. During the first weeks of March, COVID-19 prompted school closures in 14 of the 15 countries where RTP works and necessitated the pause of its traditional programming. RTP teams began to work with local education clusters to see how they could most effectively be a part of country responses. On March 16th, RTP teams came together as an organization to learn what was happening on the ground and to identify the most pressing issues in their communities.

02. Response

The team determined the most immediate needs were not academic in nature but psychosocial. Fear and anxiety, especially among children, around COVID-19 was particularly salient. Therefore, RTP drew on its database of 1,000+ game-based resources and developed a social and emotional learning (SEL) framework with an accompanying collection of games to be used in radio spots, leaflets, TV, and WhatsApp-based distance learning programs. These materials were then distributed via teachers and other partners.

Although the lessons in these materials are specific to mental health and psychosocial skills, they can be integrated into academic learning, and RTP teams are partnering with ministries of education to disseminate these resources as part of different countries' distance learning programs.

Since the integration of RTP materials into distance learning programs has varied by country, RTP has offered support in making these resources available through a diversity of mediums including digital learning platforms, radio, television, WhatsApp, and take-home kits.

Right To Play

Right To Play (RTP) harnesses one of the most powerful and fundamental forces in every child's life, the power of play. Their programs protect, educate, and empower children to heal from the harsh realities of war and abuse, to change their behavior and protect themselves from disease, to go to school, graduate and create a better future. Their mission is to *protect, educate and empower children to rise above adversity using the power of play.*

03. Play-Based Learning (PBL)

Recognizing the need for more distance learning opportunities for younger students, RTP has partnered with ministries of education to blend PBL into countries' existing distance learning programs. By providing technical support to teachers in lesson planning and integrating PBL strategies into curriculum, RTP is able to ensure that learning sessions, delivered across a variety of mediums depending on the country, are high quality, creative, and participatory for students.

04. Challenges

At the beginning, it was difficult for RTP to conceptualize how to respond to the crisis since teams work primarily with teachers, and teachers, for the most part, were not involved in distance learning programs, especially in regards to mental health. RTP had to advocate for teachers to be involved in and to play a role in the development and dissemination of the new programming.

Not accustomed to being a first-response-oriented organization, RTP had to creatively strategize as to how to most efficiently and effectively meet the needs of children. With very few resources that were ready for implementation at the onset of the crisis, they had to work quickly to develop resources to meet the needs of their learners.

Learn more about Right To Play's work at righttoplay.com.