The BlueDot

Exploring new ideas for a shared future

Reimagining Learning Spaces for Uncertain Times

FEATURES

- **Designing for Care: Hybrid Pedagogy in the Time of COVID-19**
- **Facilitating Parent Involvement in Distance Learning**
- **Unleashing the Potential of Digital Learning: Framerspace and Libre Pedagogy**

The BlueDOT

Exploring new ideas for a shared future

ISSUE 12, 2020

THE BLUE DOT features articles showcasing UNESCO MGIEP's activities and areas of interest. The magazine's overarching theme is the relationship between education, peace, sustainable development and global citizenship. THE BLUE DOT's role is to engage with readers on these issues in a fun and interactive manner. The magazine is designed to address audiences across generations and walks of life, thereby taking the discourse on education for peace, sustainable development and global citizenship beyond academia, civil society organisations and governments, to the actual stakeholders.

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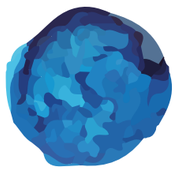


“Look again at that dot.
That’s here. That’s home. That’s us.

On it, everyone you love,
everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of,
every human being who ever was,
lived out their lives.
The aggregate of our joy and suffering
thousands of confident religions,
ideologies, and economic doctrines,
every hunter and forager, every hero and coward,
every creator and destroyer of civilization,
every king and peasant, every young couple in love,
every mother and father, hopeful child,
inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals,
every corrupt politician, every superstar,
every supreme leader, every saint
and sinner in the history of our species lived there-
on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.”

CARL SAGAN
PALE BLUE DOT: A VISION OF THE HUMAN FUTURE IN SPACE

Recreating Novel Learning Spaces *for the Post-Pandemic World*

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the norm, forcing us to rethink how we live, work, study, educate and learn. The pandemic has affected learners globally with 1.2 billion students out of school in over 140 countries worldwide. COVID-19 has forced us to relook at education with a fresh lens and in many ways given us an opportunity to explore novel learning spaces. These include the use of the digital medium by students, but also defining the role of teachers, families and content developers.

I would venture to say that a majority of education systems have failed to deliver during this pandemic. Even those which had online learning systems were not prepared in the true sense of providing a rich learning experience that took advantage of what the digital medium could offer. Instead, education was reduced to YouTube videos, visual presentations (such as through Microsoft Powerpoint) and PDF versions of traditional text books.

The time is right to reflect and reimagine how education systems should be designed for the future – not just for the uncertain times but post COVID-19 and beyond. The shift towards digital learning during the pandemic has revealed the advantages the medium has to offer in the form of interactive, immersive and personalised learning. On the other hand, the change has also brought to light the grave challenges that educators and policymakers are faced with - while trying to provide accessible, inclusive, quality and equitable education for all, in line with the United Nations’ (UN) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.

[2]. https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse

Is digital learning the answer for the 21st century? Is a hybrid-learning approach the best answer for the future of education? What principles of universal design need to be incorporated while designing digital content to ensure inclusive and equitable learning for all? How do we reach the most vulnerable children and youth in times of crises and otherwise?

These are some of the thoughts that triggered the conceptualizing of Issue 12 of The Blue DOT, titled ‘Reimagining Learning Spaces for Uncertain Times’. The Issue aims to capitalize on learning from the pandemic and propose transformative alternatives to today’s education systems in terms of purpose, delivery and content as we proceed to a world that presents a lot of opportunities, but also its own set of challenges.

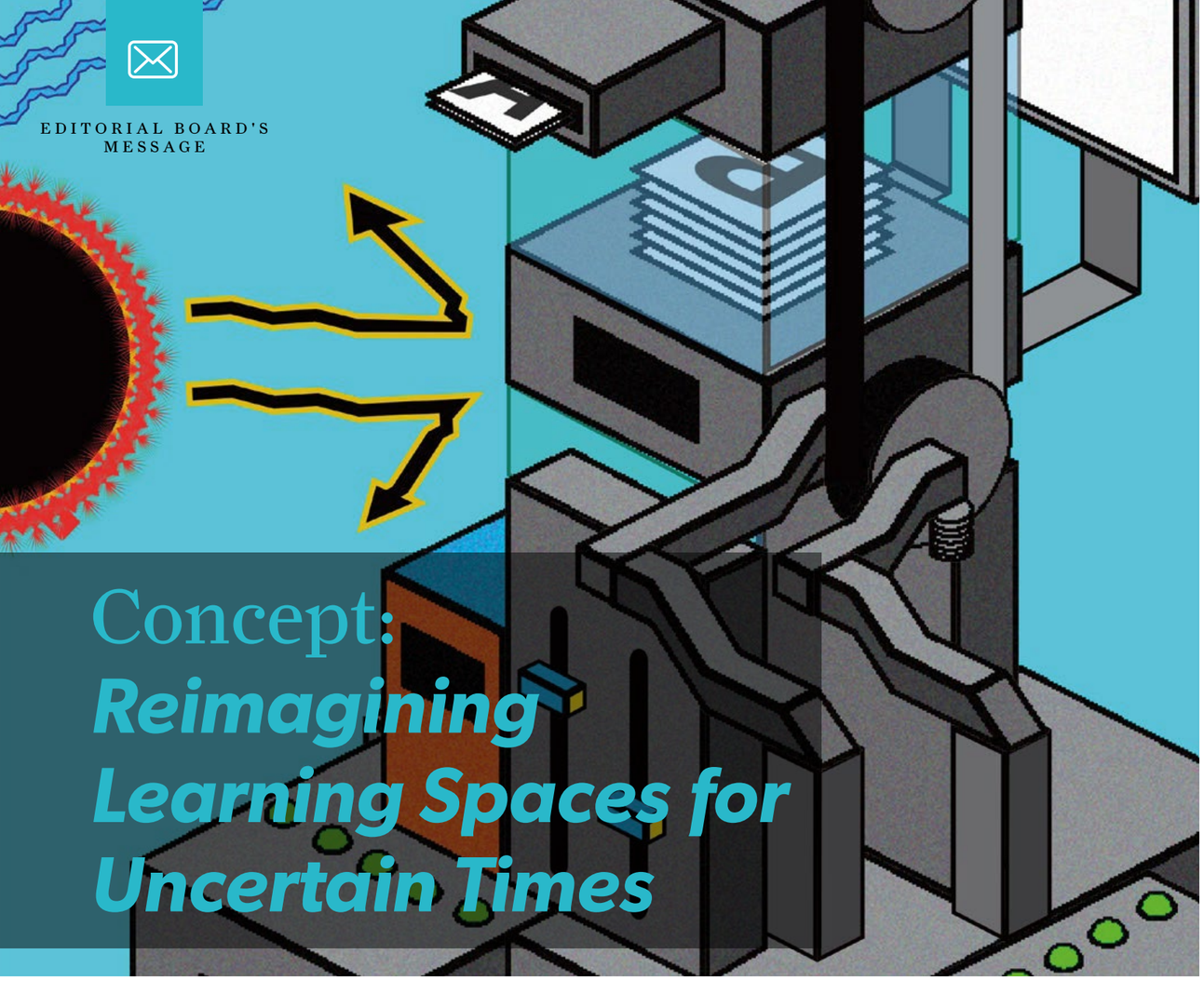
In this issue, we hear from educators, academics, researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and youth contributors on learnings from the pandemic and proposals of novel learning systems for the 21st century and beyond. Amongst others, we hear from the Minister of Education, Sri Lanka, Suzie Boss on Pushing the Boundaries of the Traditional Classroom through Project-Based Learning, Jesse Stommel on Hybrid Pedagogy at the time of COVID-19 and Caroline Torres on Critical Place-based Pedagogy for Rural and Distance Learning.

Additionally, for the first time in The Blue DOT, we invited external Guest Editors to be a part of our Editorial Board. I am very pleased to introduce Kavita Rao, Professor in the Department of Special Education at the University of Hawai'i, College of Education; Juan Felipe Restrepo Mesa from the Montessori Schools in Colombia and Matthew Farber, Assistant Professor of Technology, Innovation and Pedagogy (TIP) at the University of Northern Colorado as part of the Editorial team of this issue. Their contributions to the issue have been invaluable and we at the Institute appreciate their guidance and expert views in shaping the publication.

I would like to thank the authors of this issue for sharing their ideas and thoughts with us and our reader audience. I sincerely hope that some of the proposed principles, learnings and suggestions can be applied to education systems for the post-pandemic world. I would welcome your feedback/suggestions through email on bluedot.mgiep@unesco.org

I would also like to take this opportunity to dedicate this issue to Sir Ken Robinson – whose ideologies on education have inspired the Institute’s vision and approach as well as many of the programmatic activities, including the focus on creativity, critical thinking and inquiry. His famous words “If you are not prepared to be wrong, you’ll never come up with anything original” have driven the formulation of the Institute’s Manifesto, which governs how we operate at the Institute, specifically the one that focuses on risks and learning: “we are willing to take risks because without risk we do not learn.”

ANANTHA KUMAR DURAIAPPAH



Concept: *Reimagining Learning Spaces for Uncertain Times*

The speed and magnitude with which COVID-19 spread across the globe has been a wake-up call to many. The current crisis has made the notion that we live in a world characterized by uncertainty and vulnerability much more concrete and personally relevant. **Amid the COVID-19 outbreak, as of 30 March 2020, 1.5 billion children and youth – close to 90 per cent of the world's student population – were affected by school closures in more than 180 countries.**[i] This has given a renewed impetus for taking seriously calls for making education systems prepared for, and responsive to, interconnected global challenges – from climate change to pandemics like the one we are facing today.[ii]

The present crisis offers an opportunity—albeit forced rather than voluntary—to explore alternatives to face-to-face instruction that takes place in schools. Calls for radical alternatives to institutionalized education systems are not new, and times of uncertainty and turmoil often advance calls for such alternatives to counter what is seen as de-humanizing tendencies of school education. Early in the 20th century, between the two World Wars, Maria Montessori travelled around Europe and urged teachers to replace authoritarian pedagogies with a dynamic curriculum which allowed students to choose what to study.[iii] In the 1970s, following radical leftist movements rejecting traditional standards and authorities in the 1960s, Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich led the international education debate, hitting a chord with many alternative educators. Freire's theories approached education as civic, political, and moral practice, whereby learners espouse their own power as critically engaged citizens. In Deschooling Society, Illich developed a radical critique of schools as stifling genuine learning and proposed the creation of 'learning webs' with the technologies of the time, such as tape recorders.[iv] Although Illich's ideas, reflecting radical criticism of capitalist society and its institutions including schools, largely became obscured in recent decades, his ideas of learning webs or networks went far ahead of the time, proposing to make learning personalized (driven by learner interest), collaborative (supported by peers), interconnected and equitable.

Novel Learning Spaces

The Issue 12 of the MGIEP Blue Dot highlights how novel learning spaces and modes of learning that emerged in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic provide valuable lessons for preparing for future shocks and disruptions. In so doing, it also underscores our potential to innovate existing education systems to be better equipped to cultivate young people's competencies for engaging creatively and responsibly with the uncertain—difficult yet hopefully reflexive and transformative—times ahead. The individual and collective experiences of the current education systems following the COVID-19 crisis are important sources of reflection and inspiration that can be mobilized to shape the future of education. This issue of Blue Dot introduces inspiring examples of educational programmes and interventions aimed at (1) providing distance learning solutions (both high-tech and low-tech), (2) reaching the most vulnerable children and youth, and (3) enabling people to cope with stress, fears and uncertainty and resist a capture by narrow self-interest at the times of crisis. It also provides insights on ways forward to make a transition from an education system designed for face-to-face instruction to a blended and hybrid system combining the best of what the physical and virtual worlds have to offer. It reflects on both the promises and challenges of going digital, including development of partnerships with the private sector for the provision of infrastructure, hardware and software as well as the collection, management and use of data, especially the personal data of children and youth.

The Issue 12 of the MGIEP Blue Dot highlights how novel learning spaces and modes of learning that emerged in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic provide valuable lessons for preparing for future shocks and disruptions.

This Blue Dot issue aims to propose transformative alternatives to today's education systems in terms of purpose, delivery, and content – alternatives that are more fully human and allow us not only to survive but to thrive, leading a life that makes sense and a difference in our interconnected, interdependent world, into an inherently unknowable future. ▶

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Reimagining Learning Spaces for Uncertain Times

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Melina Furman holds a Ph.D. in Education from Columbia University. She is an Associate Professor at the University of San Andrés, Argentina, and a Researcher at the National Council of Science and Technology. Her research focuses on educational innovation in schools and community settings. She has extensively worked with schools, non-profit organizations, international agencies and governments on innovative programs aimed to spark lifelong learning in students of all ages.

Imagine the children and youth of today in 10, 20, 50 years time… What kind of adults do you hope they are? What drives, informs and inspires them? What challenges do they face and how do they solve them?

I have been doing this thought experiment for years and getting similar responses from people all over the world. **Collectively, we wish future generations to be curious, critical and independent thinkers.** We also hope that they become life-long learners and develop the tools to build their own futures, with effort and motivation. We aspire that they become responsible and committed citizens, showing empathy to others and respect for the environment. We also seek to give them the tools to solve the global challenges they will most certainly have to face as a generation, such as climate change, rising inequalities, violent extremism and pandemics like the COVID-19 we are facing these days.

If that is the future we dream about, then another question arises: what do we need to do now? How should we educate our children today in order to plant the seeds for that future?
For some time now, the idea that we live in a VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) world has been part of the discourse of innovation in many fields, including education. Yet, educational innovation has mostly occurred on the margins, led by passionate and adventurous individuals and organizations (and, sometimes, states or countries) with a clear vision that transforming education is both urgent and possible.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a wake-up call to many, making the notion that we live in a world characterized by uncertainty and vulnerability much more concrete and personally relevant.

Amongst the hardship involved in this global crisis, perhaps one of the opportunities we are finding as an international community is a renewed impetus for making education systems prepared for, and responsive to, interconnected global challenges. We are starting to understand the need to reimagine learning spaces, therefore transforming traditional classrooms into environments where children can thrive and develop the knowledge and tools they need for the uncertain future they will need to navigate as adults. Addressing this goal requires taking educational innovation to the next level, scaling up current initiatives and creating new ones that look at education as a lifelong endeavor that occurs both within and outside of schools. It means, thus, working with teachers and school leaders, but also with families, informal educators, social organizations and the community as a whole.

Scaling up innovative approaches to reach all children and youth in the world requires a sense of adventure and a big commitment of policymakers, practitioners, academics and the society as a whole.

I believe a good starting place is to build on what we know about effective educational practices. We already know a lot. **For instance, we know how to design experiences that spark a love for learning, including the power of play and collaborative learning.** We are aware that content needs to be meaningful to students and connected to the real world. We know about the value of teachers´ high expectations and careful scaffolding. We recognize the importance of emotional well being in order to learn and that the physical environment where learning occurs matters. We have seen the potential of digital resources to enrich learning experiences.

Over and over, research has confirmed a set of ideas about the nature of effective teaching and learning that we can and must draw upon to ensure that we best prepare the children and youth of today for the VUCA world they will face in the future.

Scaling up innovative approaches to reach all children and youth in the world requires a sense of adventure and a big commitment of policymakers, practitioners, academics and the society as a whole. In this 12th issue of The Blue Dot you will find many great examples and reflections of what is possible in educational innovation, which I hope will be inspiring for all seeking ways to make it happen.

Crises push us forward. Perhaps more than ever, the education we dream about is closer than we think. Let´s take the plunge. ▶

Re-looking at Learning Spaces

DULLAS ALAHAPPERERUMA
MINISTER OF EDUCATION,
SPORTS & YOUTH AFFAIRS,
SRI LANKA

Dullas Daham Kumara Alahapperuma is a Sri Lankan politician, current Cabinet Minister of Education and Sports and a Matara District member of the Parliament of Sri Lanka.

Being invited by UNESCO MGIEP's Director, Professor Anantha Kumar Duraiappah, to write a foreword to the 12th issue of the Institute's flagship publication The Blue Dot, under the theme of "Reimaging Learning Spaces in Uncertain Times.", has been one of the greatest honors and privileges of my life and I wish to express my utmost gratitude to the Director for his kind invitation, on behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka.

Growing up, I idolized and admired some of the greatest humanitarians such as Mahatma Gandhi, Rev. Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. In a world where each of us has been inter-connected through globalization while living in a highly divisive world, I strongly believe the necessity to draw inspiration of those extraordinary human beings, their vision and ideology has been more important than ever. UNESCO MGIEP is following the path guided by virtues established by Mahatma Gandhi himself, and I was delighted to find out, The Blue Dot, as the organization's premier publication, shares wide information, knowledge and news in the diverse sphere of education, globally shedding light especially on education, and how such values of education could be utilised as a viable tool for building social integrity, cohesion and sustainable global citizenship in a plural world.

As the theme of this Issue suggests, **the world has quivered in uncertainty in the face of greatest adversity humankind endeavoured in a century.** The COVID-19 pandemic has

The world has quivered in uncertainty in the face of greatest adversity humankind endeavoured in a century.

affected entire educational systems globally leading to the closure of schools, and higher academic institutions. The pandemic has also resulted in various social and economic challenges and changes, including increasing student debt, migration to digital learning, food insecurity, and homelessness, as well as limited means to access to childcare, health care, housing, internet, and disability services. To make it worse, the impact of COVID-19 has highlighted the apparent disparity in our societies and hit it the hardest by growing severer day by day for the disadvantaged children and their families, causing disruption in learning, malnutrition, childcare problems, domestic violence and related economic problems to the unemployed and families who could not work.

According to UNESCO, "one section of the population is enjoying online learning, with virtual classrooms, with all kinds of apps, whilst a total of 826 million students are kept out of classrooms - and only 43 percent of this number has access to some form of online learning today." To meet with this critical challenge, **the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka launched a series of subject - wise academic programmes nation-wide through TV channels for school children from morning till late in the evening according to the schedule of the academic calendar.** Thus, the less privileged children who did not have wide access to the internet were able to benefit from this method of teaching.

Most countries with advanced technological development, have curtailed in-person classes and switched to online teaching and they had the ability the make that transition smoothly. Because of the pandemic, technologically ill-equipped countries have suffered the most, due to lack of a proper alternative to in-person classes. This particularly holds true for the South East Asian and African countries - where about 56 million learners live in places without mobile technology. Half of this population is in sub-Saharan Africa experiencing disruption in studies due to the closure of higher educational institutions. Only 24% of the population has access to the internet; poor connectivity, exorbitant costs and frequent power interruptions are serious challenges.

Hence, at this critical situation, it is our duty to protect the children and equip them with educational facilities. **Precautionary measures need to be taken to prevent the potential spread of COVID-19 in academic institution settings.** I believe that utmost care must be taken to avoid stigmatizing students and staff who may have been exposed to the virus. While taking effort collectively to mitigate the deadly threat of COVID-9, we must ensure the protection of children and young people. **I urge the international communities to give a helping hand in unison to the less affluent and digitally ill equipped nations, and create a vision to deal with the global pandemic challenge, create new models realigning priorities and entering a post-coronavirus in order to rebuild the world not in isolation but in collaboration.** I also wish to appeal the younger generation be more resilient, adaptable and skillful - as essential aspects to navigate this critical situation effectively, mainly because, if history has taught us anything, that would be the human spirit is and has always been able to bounce back and grow stronger in the face of adversity. The same human spirit has led humanity to overcome the most brutal wars, pandemics, natural and man-made disasters throughout history. I have faith in us to overcome this difficulty together and if we do so, in near future we will reap benefits of our efforts and determination, perseverance. I'd like to end my foreword quoting the Greek Philosopher Aristotle who said, " the roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet.

Finally, I wish the Director of The Blue Dot UNESCO MGIEP, the editorial committee and the contributors of the magazine all the very best for their future endeavors.

Thank you.

DULLAS ALAHAPPERUMA
MINISTER OF EDUCATION, SPORTS & YOUTH AFFAIRS
SRI LANKA

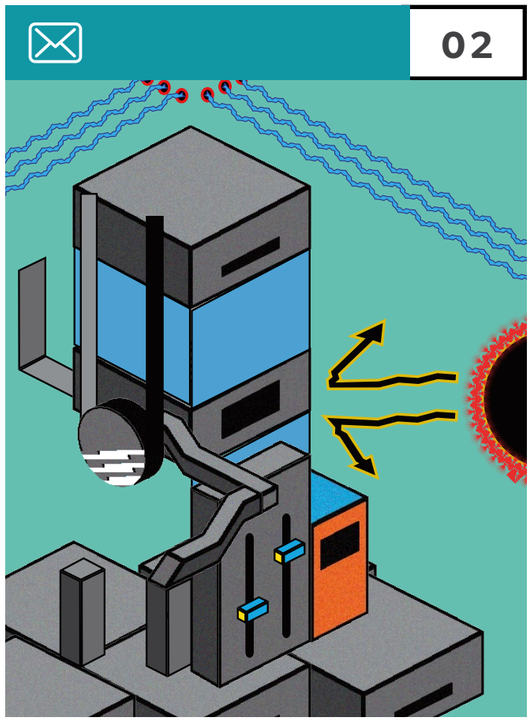
CONTENT

The BlueDot
ISSUE 12, 2020

Chief Editor's Message 01

Recreating Novel Learning Spaces for the Post-Pandemic World
By Anantha Kumar Duraiappah | Director, UNESCO MGIEP

02



Editorial Board's Message

Reimagining Learning Spaces for Uncertain Times

04

Foreword

- **Reimagining Learning Spaces for Uncertain Times**
  By Melina Furman | Research Professor at the School of Education of the University of San Andrés, CONICET researcher
- **Re-looking at Learning Spaces**
  By Dullas Alahappereruma | Minister of Education, Sports & Youth Affairs, Sri Lanka

FEATURE ARTICLE 10

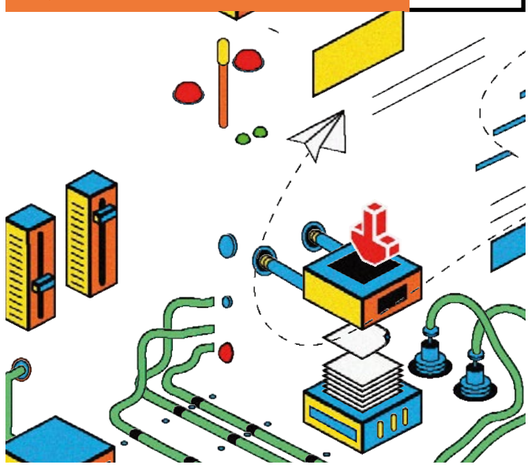
Designing for Care: Hybrid Pedagogy in the Time of COVID-19
By Jesse Stommel | Co-Founder, Digital Pedagogy Lab & Hybrid Pedagogy: The Journal of Critical Digital Pedagogy

14

OPINIONS

- **Facilitating Parent Involvement in Distance Learning**
  By Sean Smith
- **Overcoming Uncertainty of COVID-19 in the Citizen Science (more specifically GLOBE) Community**
  By Tony Murphy
- **How Games Connect Us**
  By Matthew Farber
- **Pushing the Boundaries of the Traditional Classroom through Project-Based Learning**
  By Suzie Boss
- **Scaling Up Environmental Actions through Global Online Learning Communities**
  By Marianne Krasney, Yue Li
- **Critical Place-based Pedagogy for Rural and Distance Learning**
  By Caroline Torres
- **The Renewed Significance of New School Approaches in the Post-COVID-19 World**
  By Eder Cuevas
- **Unleashing the Potential of Digital Learning: Framerspace and Libre Pedagogy**
  By Aditi Pathak, Renuka Rautela, Shraddha Rawat
- **What Games Do**
  By Antero Garcia

30



COVER STORY

Changed Priorities Ahead: Designing for Online Learning Environments
By Kavita Rao

INTERVIEWS 61

Q&A with Ziba Scott - Game Designer of Kind Words
Matthew Farber

YOUTH VOICES 64

- **How COVID-19 is Dismantling Unsustainable Elements of the Education System**
  By Aaryan Salman
- **Education for All in the Times of COVID-19**
  By Mithela Haque
- **Project-based learning: Pushing Boundaries of the Traditional Classroom**
  By Sebastian Herrera Mejia