

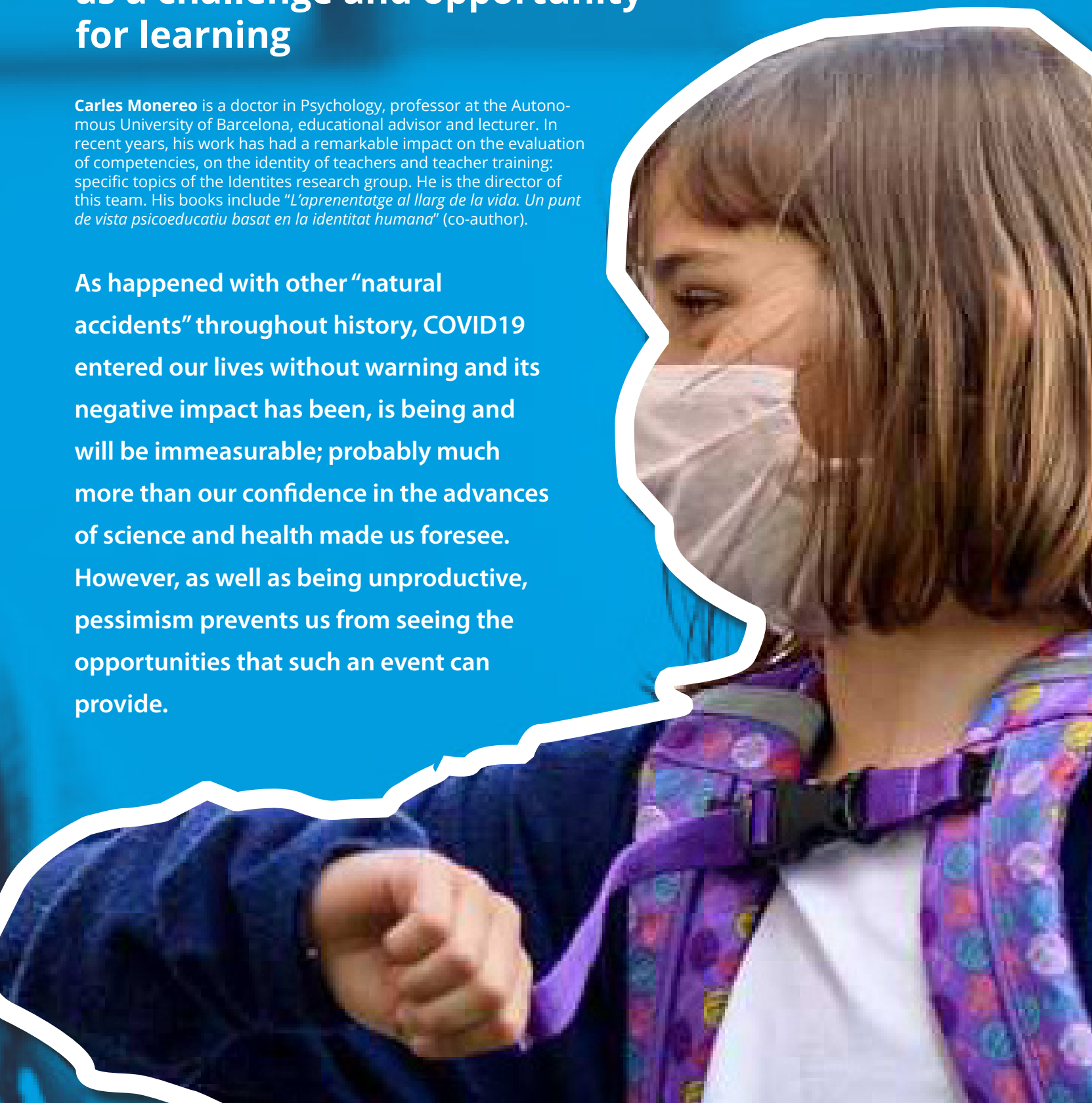
project



The COVID pandemic19 as a challenge and opportunity for learning

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As happened with other "natural accidents" throughout history, COVID19 entered our lives without warning and its negative impact has been, is being and will be immeasurable; probably much more than our confidence in the advances of science and health made us foresee. However, as well as being unproductive, pessimism prevents us from seeing the opportunities that such an event can provide.





by Carles Monereo

"The pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity and the optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty".
Winston Churchill.

An accident is, according to dictionaries, an unforeseen event that alters the normal or expected course of things and that, in principle - beyond conspiracy theories - does not obey a will or intention to produce a certain effect. However, accidents cause problems, i.e. circumstances that make it difficult to achieve some end and these problems are usually evident or manifest through incidents.

An example may illustrate what we are saying: the massive appearance of COVID19 has caused the population to be confined on a massive scale and so it has led to problems of isolation which are at the origin of various incidents, such as non-compliance with the rules of conduct prescribed by the Administration.

Unlike accidents, incidents are voluntary, and yet they can also occur unexpectedly and have a great emotional impact, destabilising people in such a way as to force them to make drastic changes in their habits and behaviour. Therefore, these problems and their respective incidents are important drivers for change.

Avoiding the naivety of thinking that problems and incidents created by the pandemic are going to promote positive innovations which, in the educational field and just by themselves, will result in the quality



of learning, we do believe that these contingencies can constitute a good excuse to propitiate proactive changes in certain directions.

Trying to be concise, we propose that these changes should be oriented towards three key areas, at least: digital education, the management of emotions and the development of a curriculum based on challenges.

Putting digital education in the right place

With the advent of the pandemic and the situations of confinement, both the enthusiasts of digital technologies and their detractors have had to increase the time dedicated to telematic teaching. For the majority, this might have meant stimulating discoveries about its advantages, but also a greater awareness of its limitations when it is compared with face-to-face teaching. The underlying concepts of what teaching means to each teacher may condition their use; some might add even more fuel to their already boring master classes,



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turning them into unbearable monologues on a screen, while others will introduce new applications that will make what is taught more dynamic and attractive, but which will hardly complete all the objectives and be sustainable in the long term. This situation will cause problems and incidents for both, and an opportunity to: a) share difficulties and needs and b) cooperate to respond to them.

We cannot guarantee that this experience will be equally shocking and revealing for everyone, but we do think that it will put most people in a more sensitive position to reflect on when, how and why to use these technologies and when, how and why physical presence in the classroom is preferable. We should not waste it.

Placing the importance of learning to self-regulate one's emotions at the centre

Another evidence COVID19 and confinement are offering us is that we are quite incompetent when it comes to managing emotions. At the height of the pandemic in March 2020, the psychological emergency services in our community asked us for help face the flood of conflicts and incidents taking place inside private homes: There were situations of extreme apathy and addiction to screens and series, of isolation and anger for not being able to leave the house, of stress to control the children and their disputes, of guilt for not being able to take care of dependent relatives, of insecurity when helping the children with their homework, of alarm for the

contradictory news and, often too, the lack of security, the media's apocalyptic nature, fear of not having support in case of infection, tension due to conflicts with partners, anxiety due to the fear of losing one's job, frustration due to not taking advantage of the long-time available, or anguish due to having people with disorders at home who would have been attending specialized care centres.

In each of these contingencies, the twelve most frequently requested, children, adolescents and young people of school age suffer directly from the consequences of these conflicts, and their development and learning are clearly affected.

The demand for emotional training for pupils already has a certain tradition and, in fact, some school curricular projects have made this desire explicit through some objectives and content. It is, however, obvious that this has not been sufficiently translated into educational practice. As these “general or transversal competencies” are shared by everyone, are not generally taught by anyone.

Once again, we believe that the present moment exerts a desirable pressure to integrate once and for all the teaching of these competencies, so essential for mental health and social coexistence, into the curriculum. The use of problems and incidents can be a first-rate pedagogical device to deal with this demand. In our case, it was the trigger for the creation of the Psicofight¹ portal, a digital freely accessible site, which offers training on situations of emotional conflict through dramatized scenes, questions

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to users and the advice of expert advisors concerning each topic.

Stimulate the need for a challenge-based curriculum

Many of us have long been committed to a new competence-based curriculum framework based on social challenges. In contrast to the current curriculum in Spain which presents a multitude of fragmented skills focused on traditional areas and contents, in places such as Finland, Scotland or Quebec, a simpler and more open proposal has been designed, based on very general values and skills: they converge in problem-situations, so that centres and teachers have a great deal of autonomy to create their projects, adapted to their respective contexts. We believe that UNESCO’s “Education 2030” agenda, has set a clear and exciting horizon, the ultimate aim of which is to train responsible citizens who are capable of facing, on a personal, local and planetary level, the seventeen challenges that lie at the heart of a sustainable world.

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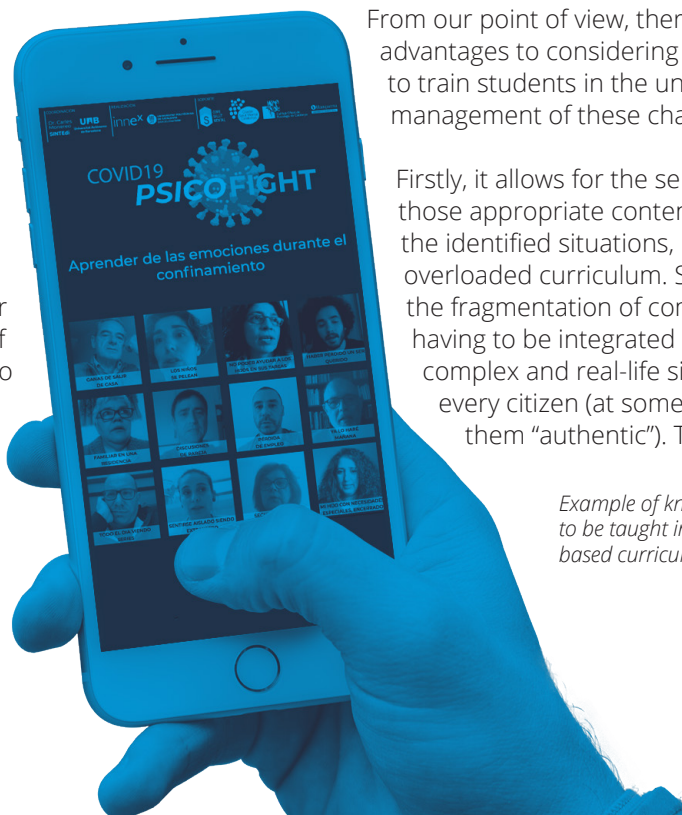
health resources, and also bringing to the fore the type of production and prevailing economy, which reveals political interests over health needs, showing the negative impact of our habits on the ecosystem, etc.

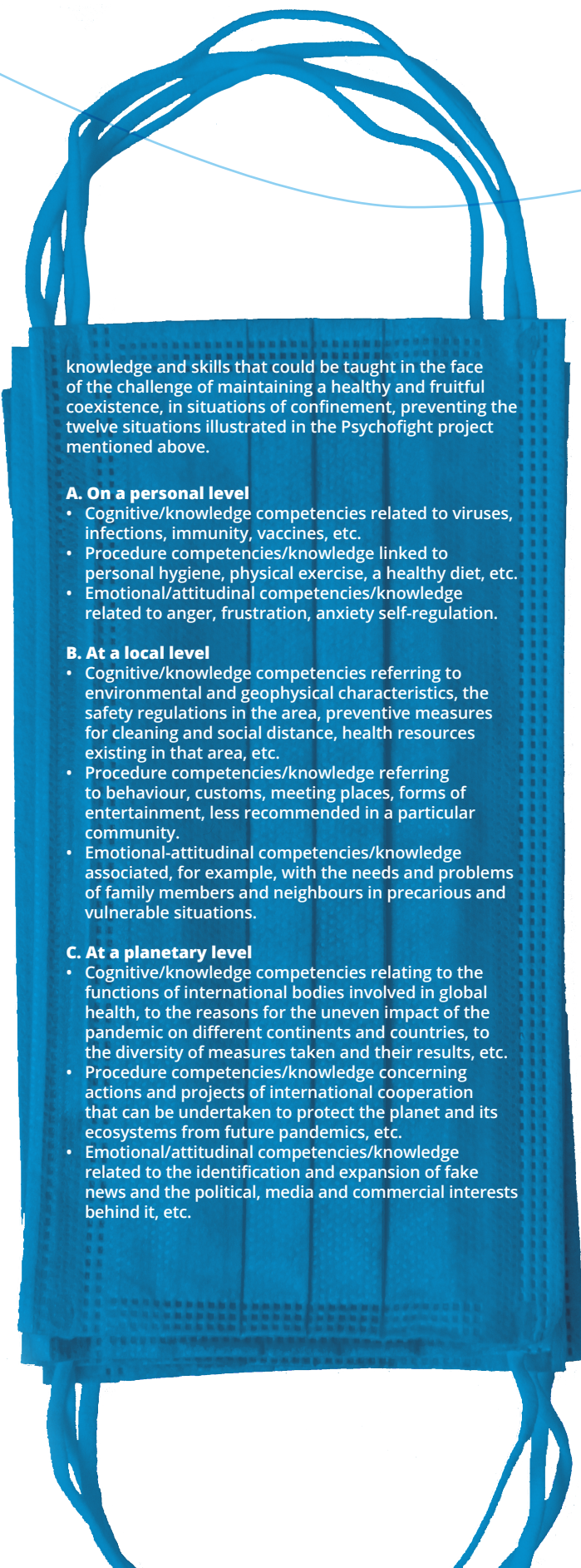
Why don’t we be brave and set these challenges as goals to be achieved by the end of compulsory schooling? This could be the exit profile of every schoolboy, being able to explain and manage, on a personal, local and global level, this set of challenges.

From our point of view, there are many advantages to considering teaching that aims to train students in the understanding and management of these challenges.

Firstly, it allows for the selection of only those appropriate contents and skills for the identified situations, pruning a currently overloaded curriculum. Secondly, it avoids the fragmentation of competencies by having to be integrated into complete, complex and real-life situations of every citizen (at some point we call them “authentic”). Thirdly, teaching

Example of knowledge and skills to be taught in a challenge-based curriculum proposal.





knowledge and skills that could be taught in the face of the challenge of maintaining a healthy and fruitful coexistence, in situations of confinement, preventing the twelve situations illustrated in the Psychofight project mentioned above.

A. On a personal level

- Cognitive/knowledge competencies related to viruses, infections, immunity, vaccines, etc.
- Procedure competencies/knowledge linked to personal hygiene, physical exercise, a healthy diet, etc.
- Emotional/attitudinal competencies/knowledge related to anger, frustration, anxiety self-regulation.

B. At a local level

- Cognitive/knowledge competencies referring to environmental and geophysical characteristics, the safety regulations in the area, preventive measures for cleaning and social distance, health resources existing in that area, etc.
- Procedure competencies/knowledge referring to behaviour, customs, meeting places, forms of entertainment, less recommended in a particular community.
- Emotional-attitudinal competencies/knowledge associated, for example, with the needs and problems of family members and neighbours in precarious and vulnerable situations.

C. At a planetary level

- Cognitive/knowledge competencies relating to the functions of international bodies involved in global health, to the reasons for the uneven impact of the pandemic on different continents and countries, to the diversity of measures taken and their results, etc.
- Procedure competencies/knowledge concerning actions and projects of international cooperation that can be undertaken to protect the planet and its ecosystems from future pandemics, etc.
- Emotional/attitudinal competencies/knowledge related to the identification and expansion of fake news and the political, media and commercial interests behind it, etc.

based on of these situations means giving meaning to what is learned, increasing the motivation of both the trainees and the teachers involved.

Finally, starting from the challenges proposed by a supranational institution such as UNESCO, it should facilitate -at least as far as the general framework is concerned- an agreement between the various political, trade union, educational and social forces and associations. This is absolutely necessary if we want to give coherence and continuity to our education system, preventing each new political party that comes to power from introducing a new law.

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¹ Josep Maria Monguet from UPC and Alex Trejo from Onsanity company also collaborated on this project, apart from the autor of this article.