>> Maria Vazquez: Hello, everyone. Hello, everyone. My name is Maria Vazquez and today I want to share with you this presentation called: Research as a Work Strategy and Monitoring in the Development of Projects in Latin America. This presentation is the result of the work carried out in the framework of the research project called "Development of a New Model to Generate Changes in Educational Practices of Teachers and Student Learning.” This research study focuses on the relationship between training and the transformations that are generated in the work of teachers and the outcome of the learning of children located in Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico. It was based on the follow-up of the impact of the training called “Basis of the Education of Students with Multiple Disabilities and Sensory Impairment” that is organized at different levels: basic, intermediate, and advanced, and is developed and carried out by Perkins Academy in the countries mentioned above.

Perkins' leadership in quality education for students with deafblindness and multiple disabilities and the work done for over 30 years in Latin America to improve the capacity of school systems to meet the needs of children with multiple disabilities are the background to this current commitment to document and share scientific evidence on the effect of training and the changes made in the settings under study

In 2018, Pekins started a new project was started from Perkins in Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico with the main motivation of contributing to the access to quality education for children with visual impairment and multiple disabilities who live there. Some of the objectives proposed for this project are the need to carry out research to document and support the changes that we have been observing and to think about the future of sharing this experience. That is why, in the structurw of the project, there is a research component focused on documenting and monitoring an intervention model defined by the online training of Perkins Academy to understand the impact of the changes in practices of teachers and learning results of children in schools participating in this project. These schools are located in Morelos in Mexico, in Tocantins, Brazil and in Córdoba, Argentina.

Research on the education of children with multiple and sensory disabilities in Latin America is limited. So it is considered essential that new research initiatives document practices and identify actions that lead to better educational outcomes for this group that is still vulnerable when it comes to the access to quality education.

The methodological decisions made during the research were meant to support the project by collecting the meanings and interpretations that the participants themselves construct in their classrooms, with their stories, the analysis of their experience, and reflection on the experience, in response to the research question about the relationship between training and changes in practice. This is why the research perspective is conducted from a qualitative, interpretative approach. Working in these three settings not only presents the challenge of access to the field and monitoring at a distance, but also decisions had to be made to implement a variety of strategies that would allow the collection of data in the social setting under study and then be able to conduct an analysis and interpretation of this portion of the social world that, as Vasilachi says, "allows for the understanding of complexity, detail and context". Each of the schools, with their teams, brings unique experiences in relation to education and also to the social contribution in their communities. This way, a multiple case study was the framework chosen to understand and value these experiences that are being studied

and to create explanations that relate facts to processes, referring to a specific context and capturing the different events

In this slide, I share one team about the diversity and similitude that contributed to each case in the research. This diversity in the case is given by the special school/regular school modality. For example, the schools in Argentina and Mexico are special schools and the one in Brazil is a regular school. This means that the student populations are different and the dynamics and work strategies are also very different. Also the disciplines of teachers and their professional careers are very different. In the regular school in Brazil, the teachers come from specific disciplines, such as math, language. While in Argentina and Mexico, the special modality gives another identity to the educational community, the training is more specific and related to the problems of disability. In their teams we have teachers of Special Education, educational psychologists, psychologists, communication therapists among others, all associated to the area/field of disability.

Now I talk about the coincidences between the three observed scenarios. One is the support of the management team in this study. This is a very important fact that will be discussed later for its relevance during the analysis. These management teams participate taking online training proposed by [Perkins Academy]. Another coincidence- or another similarity- is the commitment and positive attitude of each of the schools, in addition to the conviction of achieving progress in education by making short- and long-term changes. And finally, similar subjects of interest are also observed about inclusion, the educational versus rehabilitative therapeutic approach, and the contents of educational proposals, among others.

In this slide, I share some bibliographic data that were used to design the project. Before the pandemic, two visits to each of the schools could be made, in which information was collected and the first face-to-face follow-up was carried out. This made it possible to agree on strategies and dynamics for remote follow-up, and between the visits virtual meetings were also held. These face-to-face and virtual meetings, and the comparative analysis of these schools made to learn and understand the practices that take place, has implied the use of different methods that not only allowed optimizing time and participation of the teams in the research, but also, organized all the information that was being recovered from: interviews, observations, focus groups, analysis of documents, and audiovisual records. In this way, the voice of the participants and the meanings they attributed to the events taking place were recovered.

In this case, special attention was made on the tools agreed on for remote monitoring, because of the importance they had in the current research context, which was related not only with virtual meetings but also with the use and analysis of photographic and video records of those practices that professionals considered evidence of changes and implementation of strategies proposed according to the work done in the [Perkins Academy] training. According to Denzin in Flick: "the films and photographs reveal and help to understand an approach to the symbolic world of the subject and its visions... the theoretical assumptions that determine what is filmed and when, what features of the film are selected for analysis, etc., leave their mark in their use as data or to document relationships.”

In this process. we could go through different phases that Adler and Adler, Denzin, and Spradley in Flick define and include. These range from the most basic decisions in selecting the environment, which involve defining where and when they can be observed, to more complex questions about defining what should be documented in the observation and the training the observers need in each case to understand these approaches.

Over time, the follow-up records were focused on aspects more relevant to the research question. The use of videos is now considered by each of the teams the most important means of recording evidence, and their use is important because of the contribution made by the research subjects in relation to their own perspective on what is being analyzed.

For the interpretation of these videos, the use of sequential procedures is proposed. Its analysis is mostly combined with the other methods and data in a collective work, so that the perspective of the different participants can be discovered during the development of the first level of the online course and after its completion. In this slide I share some forms that we use for this activity.

Aligned with this process and following the method of document analysis, the proposal for online training was studied at the different levels of the teachers involved. Going back to Taylor and Bogdan, the analysis of the document allows researchers to approach the discourses that underlie them and the social practices they create. Noguero suggests that by focusing on a descriptive perspective, an attempt has been made to discover the basic components of online training by extracting them from a given content. Although the written document, as a source of social observation is secondary, it also allows us to understand the perception and interpretation of the authors. In writing, the life of modern societies, values, cultural patterns, and attitudes to the problems of man and society that take place at any given time are captured.

The research was affected by the pandemic and changes were necessary to continue working in these new conditions. In this context, what was urgent was to know the impact of the COVID in each country, and to talk about what was being experienced in order to identify the actions planned. The schools were emptied, the connections with each team became more systematic and other realities defined the characteristics of our meetings. Individual connectivity conditions which were previously guaranteed by the institution, living together with other family members combining the reality of work and family, knowledge about technology use and access to different devices, as well as the educational demands made by each government. All these factors changed relationships and plans.

In the pandemic time, we can identify two big moment that feels when the attention was on the individualities within the team, on the issue of submersion in each case, and the focus on solving the immediate difficulties. There were new needs to change and challenges that had not been of observed at the beginning of the research when the cases were introduced, and also the impact of the uncertainty that made all the decisions follow the daily events. This is why the meetings were more systematic.

The second moment was defined by a reorganization of educational schedule and work logics, where each school begins to find its own rhythm and virtuality becomes a reality now in a remote working environment, proposing a new way of teaching with different participants.

A lot of flexibility was necessary to review agendas and redefine agreements, but that gave rise to creativity. The strategy for each country was to define a support plan that respected these new dynamics, prioritizing their agendas in each place and actions, and then reflecting together on the practices that were being documented in the context of the pandemic. The educational practices took the form of virtual classes implemented in different ways, teachers were responsible for several tasks ranging from information on COVID-19 to advice to the family on how to use an app. All combined with uncertainty, the effects of isolation and the impact of atypical working conditions.

The pandemic, over time, also allowed other opportunities to do activities and to turn individual capacities into collective ones through connection. This allowed other forms of data collection, new spaces to listen and reflect together, shared research activities that made our distance relationship more real. Making videos to present each of the schools, organizing presentations reflecting on the work done, setting up meetings with people from three countries and designing a shared web page were all collective actions that motivated the commitment and reinforced the sense and identity of the research work. This situation of isolation also made us witness negative circumstances: the diversity of conditions of access to technology and connectivity reminded us of the inequality of living conditions that many children and young people with disabilities and their families in Latin America go through. Also the additional difficulty that is added for students with multiple disabilities and deafblindness in the possibilities of using technology. In sum up, the actions taken in this context of work involved the following:

Establishing priorities in each program according to the context of the pandemic.

Organizing systematic meetings to support discussion and exchange of ideas on practical challenges and needs and the contents covered on the [Perkins Academy] training course in the context of the pandemic.

Defining follow-up plans to collect information on remote teaching dynamics, based on distance learning and communication imposed by the pandemic that would include planning, elaboration of digital material, and implementation of dynamics with family participation.

Enabling new forms of data collection and group discussion scenarios where the process could be analyzed and redefined collectively.

Carrying out an individual closing event with each of the teams to make an assessment based on the implementation of quality indicators and the development of group discussions and exchanges on the evidence of practices chosen for analysis.

These actions are briefly presented in the following video.

[start video]

[Spanish and Portuguese]

[end of video]

>> Maria Vazquez: Data analysis and interpretation has been a continuous and progressive process, from information obtained in the field through field notes, to observations and recordings of interviews, video and photographic records, and document analysis. In line with Glaser and Strauss' proposal of constant comparison procedure, this has allowed for a more comprehensive data collection process to understand and discover different meanings increasing the impact of knowledge.

As I said before, the study- the research- had an agenda for the face-to-face and virtual meetings that in general could be completed entirely from the virtual side because:

On one side, the virtual modality of the PA course made it possible for it to continue in rhythm.

The reorganization of the educational proposals within each school allowed to recover some previous individual goals and project new ones.

The teachers' knowledge to implement some follow-up strategies allowed them to continue collecting evidence.

I think that the greatest methodological decision of this research was to turn this crisis into an opportunity to continue working and to support us in this process of researching and learning to move through this new scenario. The collection of evidence became a natural process of the meetings and the teachers collected a diversity of testimonies to share the changes in different ways in the school in a virtual context. These are some of them:

Online communications: meeting with the student with or without family support.

Distance communications. Her we show a diversity of ways for communication. You know, sending instructions, written instructions, photographic sequence, screenshot of a WhatsApp conversation.

School documents: plans, work grids.

All the resources were analyzed in groups, which allowed to identify regularities in relation to the work development during this time and some of the changes proposed.

From the analysis of all of this evidence, we arrived at two main conclusions: working scheme and global transformation.

From the analysis of the evidence gathered in the context of the pandemic, it has been possible to identify findings shared among the different institutions that gave identity to this process, involving structural aspects and work dynamics. These regularities had the following characteristics:

Sharing a conceptual approach, in this case provided by the PA training, that goes beyond disciplines and connects professionals with institutional challenges and questions to be solved as a team.

To have different levels of classroom, institutional, and regional leadership in the team to promote changes with significant impact.

Promote the meeting and discussion of practices with external participants in order to objectively analyze them.

Generate evidence and document changes to establish reference points and materials on innovative practices.

Use and agree on evaluation systems that allow for follow-up. This is the point in relation that Perkins…

In relations with the global transformations, I can see that in the three schools, real changes could be identified that are linked to the impact of the training proposed by PA. These changes are taking place in similar stages in each of the schools, with different levels of intensity. In this screen that I share, I put Changes in Teachers and Changes in Students.

In teachers, this was observed in the elaboration of materials, in the interventions in the dynamics of encounter and in the teaching of the family for the implementation of strategies. In the students, it was observed in the attitude of comfort and joy for the encounter, in the participation and in the times of involvement of the task in its different modalities. It can be stated that the transformations were systematically evident, with different intensity, in two kinds of actions: one given in the proposal of organizational aspects, social interaction, and development of the dynamics. And another through the academic tasks, the instructions to be developed outside the class and the proposed content.

This manifestation of change has been focused and more stable in some participants than in others. Likewise, from group analysis and collective reflection, other deeper indicators emerged that have to do with transformations at the level of cognition, emotion, and purposes, which are those that precede, accompany and follow actions.

While these are emerging qualities in each of the teams and do not reach all teachers and managers, it stands out as an interesting indicator of deeper and more stable change for the future. Therefore, it is important to continue promoting the meeting space to follow up and pay attention to the changes and its impact.

But so far, the changes have been presented in a global way for this presentation. But we can also identify some individualities that give it an identity tied to the change in each country. Very valuable educational scenes have been recorded that show in each country an innovative identity and are linked to the content of the PA training. For Brazil, the curriculum is aligned with the national curriculum, where professionals create new knowledge to ensure access to quality education, elaborating accessible material for the student to use. For Argentina, to carry out plans person-oriented with the participation of the family and to use that shared time with the team in the virtual world to design the educational program. For Mexico, to advance in how to teach, developing digital materials, implementing and teaching the family strategies so that this time apart is not lost time, but a time of change.

From the time I work, I shared some lessons learned that are summarized in this idea. Combine teacher knowledge with research knowledge. Proposal of foundational research to the reality Perkins studied to make visible the knowledge of the teacher in interaction with the proposals of formation of training of PA. To provide the teacher with the strategies and resource to make the study systematic and to share the tensions.

Although the study has a specific objective on the knowledge of the impact of the PA training on teachers' practices and students' behaviors, the participatory approach of the research also seeks to extend the scope towards teachers, to guarantee the usefulness of the results of this study by combining the researcher's knowledge with the teacher's knowledge. This is why the methodological strategies- the methods used- were related to this goal. All the teams were involved in the definition of objectives, the interpretation of the process itself, and the delivery of study results at each stage so that they could be used.

This has meant following the school agenda and making the research proposal more flexible in order to be functional to the reality being studied. This perspective in the context of a pandemic demanded finding new and more innovative ways to present knowledge and involve teachers in the research process, providing quality opportunities in each meeting. We worked on incorporating research strategies to collect, analyze, and organize evidence so that we could capture teachers' knowledge with more detail through active participation and reflection on their own practice, and also worked on developing a shared language to define problems and record or collect the results of the analyses.

The role of the researcher was always that of an external participant who receives feedback on strategies, research questions, and follow-ups by examining the evidence and by conducting the research according to the experience of the teachers in order to learn how to identify the points in common. The impact of the transformation and change on the practices of teachers and student participation and learning depends on teamwork, understanding the diversity of roles, functions, and power positions in the team so that we can make consistent plans for the future. In this sense, Perkins' proposal about research goals has become an opportunity for the whole team to continue learning from PA training and participation in the impact of monitoring.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that changes in practice, no matter how simple they are, have an immediate impact on students with disabilities, as manifested in motivation, intentionality in participation, and attitude. Likewise, the participation of the family was necessary during the pandemic and was improved with the approach proposed by the PA training. This has been identified as one of the great changes present in the three cases and which will be interesting to follow up in the future.

Finally, I want to share these three ideas: One is in relation the positive interruption, I like this concept. And the other is the role of the researcher. And the other is teamwork.

In relation to the first concept, I want to say that the content of the PA training in the context of the research and the proposed working dynamic were positive interaction in individual professional role in order to think about the making of changes. It allowed the identification of possibilities that were not visible before and to make a decision to transform them. Even when the context of the pandemic demanded a typical social distancing.

In relation with the role of the researcher was always that of an external participant who received feedback on a strategic research question and a follow-up by examining the evidence and by conducting their research according to the experience of a teacher in order to learn how to identify the points in common.

And the last concept, the teamwork. I would say that the impact of the transformation and changes on the practice of teachers and student participation and learning depended on teamwork. Understanding the diversity of the roles, function of power position in the team so that we can make consistent plans for the future. In this sense, Perkins proposals about the research world has become an opportunity for all teams to continue learning from PA training and participation on the impact of the monitoring.

At the end of the presentation, you will find my personal contact if your need to ask any questions or consult. And thank you so much.