

Sprout Alumni Impact Story

“Merging Education and Technology”

Educa·T: An Academic Advancement Project by Ignacio Rodriguez

Twenty-one year old Ignacio Rodriguez is a management and leadership development student from Caracas, Venezuela. Ignacio has realized that the public education system in Venezuela is suffering a teacher shortage due to a variety of factors.

In Caracas, the shortage stems from issues such as low wages, poor working conditions, and increased weapons use at schools to name a few. This problem has an extremely big impact on the development of students who struggle just to get to school. Many parents often discourage their kids from pursuing an education and push them into work at an early age to contribute to the family income. Drugs and weapon use have become so prevalent on school grounds that some institutions force students to use transparent backpacks as a security measure. Learning conditions are less than tolerable as many buildings have no electricity, bathrooms or potable water and many times, students that are lucky enough to overcome these obstacles are still left without a teacher. In April 2010, Ignacio joined the Sprout program in order to help the growing concern for the school system in Venezuela.



Ignacio’s project plan merges education and technology to try and fill the gap left by an absence of teachers. Ignacio is currently working on creating an online software platform that is specifically designed to meet the educational needs of youth in Venezuela. In an online classroom, one teacher can have access to far more students than in a conventional classroom. Using an online course management system called Moodle, Ignacio will be able to design and deliver content that is specifically tailored to youth in Venezuela. Ignacio feels strongly that “it is important to make a program that youth will WANT to take because it helps them in everyday life. It must be useful to them in the near future and based around useful life-enhancing skills”.

Using the information delivered in Sprout, Ignacio has already successfully developed several key partnerships. ‘Joy and Faith’ is an organization that has developed hundreds of public schools across the country as well as two universities. This organization has been an extremely valuable resource to learn about the industry. Another current partner is a non-profit group called ‘Roots’. In Venezuela, older students must acquire volunteer experience in order to graduate. ‘Roots’ provides volunteer opportunities for students which could be a great resource to harness volunteer efforts. In order to collect data on the current state of the education system, Ignacio has been able to interview several student teachers, or ‘teacher helpers’ at his university. At this university, some students are put into classrooms as teacher helpers and these volunteers have been a good source of information concerning course content and conditions. Once the online platform is launched, the scope of this particular project is quite vast. The content can be easily disseminated and replicated throughout the community using the same number of teachers. Starting on a small scale with several schools in the area to form the pilot, the project will eventually be scaled up between 15 to 20 schools in the area.

In August, Ignacio will be attending the Latin America and Caribbean Youth Summit as part of the global change-makers community. Here he looks forward to networking with like-minded leaders and learn more about academic projects from across the continent. Ignacio reflects on his Sprout experience and says: “Sometimes I didn’t know how to go about asserting myself in certain areas such as stakeholders and funding but the Sprout lessons have helped me be able to take the right direction”.



Educa-T: An Interview with Ignacio Rodriguez

In Caracas, Venezuela, schools are struggling to provide students with an adequate education due to a massive shortage of professional teachers. The shortage stems from issues such as low wages, poor working conditions, and increased weapon use in schools. In April 2010, Ignacio Rodriguez joined the Sprout e-course in order to address the growing concern for students. Recently, we were able to talk to Ignacio about his experience with the Sprout course and his ideas to change education delivery methods in his surrounding communities.

Could you please explain your Sprout project idea?

I am basically trying to merge education and technology. In Caracas, there is huge lack of teachers, due to low wages, poor conditions etc. The best solution could be technologies specially designed for children and youth. They must be applicable to the youth in this area and meet their specific educational needs. One teacher can have access to many students and maximize their impact by using the internet.

Have you been able to find any interested partners for your project?

Yes, I have partnered with an organization that develops public schools in Venezuela called 'Joy and Faith'. They have produced hundreds of schools in the country as well as two universities. They have been a great partner to learn and research about the industry. I have also connected with a not for profit organization called Roots. Here, a university student requires a certain number of volunteer hours in order to graduate and Roots provides many people with volunteer placements. This option has provided a great opportunity to harness volunteer teacher hours.

What is the current political mindset concerning the state of education in Venezuela?

The local government is currently increasing their investment in other educational projects which indicates that there is potential to develop more computer rooms in schools. The government has also built several information centres where people can have access to computers and this could be another potential partnership opportunity to make this project sustainable.

How did the Sprout e-course contribute to your project?

Sprout has been the core of everything. I only had a very vague idea of what I wanted to do. Being able to have the help of the e-mentor was something I really appreciated about this course. They really helped me out with the project. The lessons have helped me be able to take the right direction. Sometimes I didn't know how to start or which direction to take next. I didn't know how to go about asserting myself in certain areas such as stakeholders, funding etc. until Sprout. It was also really great to be able to exchange a lot of information with the other participants around the world and learn from each other.

For more information on this project, visit: <http://prezi.com/wzh2bgse4rsh/educat-presentation/>

Educa-T

Meet Ignacio Rodriguez from Caracas, Venezuela. Ignacio joined the Sprout e-course with the goal of improving Venezuela's ailing education system and subsequent lack of teachers. Teachers are in short supply in Caracas due to low wages, poor working conditions in schools and an increase in student weapon possession. However, Ignacio's project looks to remedy this situation by creating a platform for education delivery online. Once the project is in place, one teacher will be able to maximize their impact with a greater access to students than they would in a conventional classroom. By merging education and technology, Ignacio has addressed the main problems that teachers face while simultaneously providing a low-cost education that can be specifically tailored to life skills in Venezuela.

