



Geep

GLOBAL 全球
ENVIRONMENTAL 環境
EDUCATION 教育
PARTNERSHIP 夥伴

*Sharing ideas to create a more just
and sustainable future through the
power of environmental education*

CASE STUDY

Photo: Amiguitos del Océano, Ecuador

Latin American Marine Educators Network: A Step Forward to Connect Marine Educators in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

CONTRIBUTORS

Latin American Marine Educators Network,
Red de Educación Latinoamericana para el Océano, RELATO

GEEP is a partnership of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Environmental Protection Administration of Taiwan, and the North American Association for Environmental Education.



Latin American Marine Educators Network: A Step Forward to Connect Marine Educators in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)



United Nations Sustainable Development Goals addressed

Overview

This case study highlights the development of an integrative and multicultural network to support and strengthen marine education and ocean literacy, the Latin American Marine Educators Network in English, or “Red de Educación Latinoamericana para el Océano” in Spanish, known by its acronym **RELATO**. The network also advocates for greater visibility of the importance of education in marine conservation strategies and the need to bring the perspectives of educators into decision-making processes.

This case study shares lessons learned from the development of this network by exploring its collaborative approach and key achievements thus far, including highlighting education projects, promoting collaboration, developing a conference, uniting resources on one platform, and creating the first published report about marine education in LAC.



Photo: Museo Katsuo, México





Photo: COPAS Sur Austral, Chile

Background

A fundamental pillar in marine conservation is an informed community, including not only students and coastal inhabitants, but also decision-makers, journalists, and everybody who benefits from marine ecosystem services. However, marine education rarely gets the recognition that it deserves in decision-making spaces. In 2021, after years of hard work by networks around the world that promote marine education in formal and nonformal spaces, ocean literacy gained some traction in the public sphere with the launch of the [Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development](#) by UNESCO. Established networks such as the [National Marine Educators Association](#), the [European Marine Science Educators Association](#), the [International Pacific Marine Educators Network](#), and the [Canadian Network for Ocean Education](#) are just a few examples of the value that networks play in fostering collaboration and sharing knowledge and experiences between educators to strengthen their education practice and impact.

Despite hundreds of active marine education initiatives in LAC, there was not yet a regional network that connected educators to share their ideas, experiences, challenges and barriers. The [Latin American Marine Educators Network \(RELATO\)](#) was established by the end of 2019 to address this issue. RELATO started as a dream of two marine educators in Chile, and by 2022 the network includes 15 country coordinators who represent the network in their countries, and more than 1,000 members across LAC. RELATO's rapid growth has shown the clear, strong interest among educators to have a space for sparking great connections among initiatives in the region.

Approach

RELATO used a theory of change (TOC) approach to create a set of objectives that would help achieve an overarching goal. The TOC approach is a way to think about how change will happen, and includes creating a road map to deliver intended outcomes, including a critical multi-stakeholder exploration of intentions, interests, and power and gender relations in order to contribute to social justice, equality, and sustainable development goals. In their resulting TOC, RELATO's goal is to strengthen marine education in LAC. To pursue this goal, RELATO defined two key objectives: 1) to exchange experiences to build capacity as marine educators, and 2) to position educators' experiences in decision-making processes in marine conservation.



Photos: (1) Proyecto Iurukuá, Brasil; (2) Marine Education Day Poster; (3 top) Tras las huellas del venado, Uruguay; (4 bottom) Centinelas del Océano, Chile

Results and Outcomes

In its first two years, RELATO has attracted more than 1,000 marine educators from across LAC, demonstrating a pressing need for a network like this. RELATO's network has facilitated several new connections among RELATO's members, strengthening their initiatives and the network by working together on different marine education projects. A remarkable example is a project of two undergraduate students who developed a sign language dictionary to help people understand, value, and conserve the Colombian seas and coasts. Thanks to the support of RELATO, they were able to frame their work in the UN Ocean Decade and incorporate ocean literacy principles into their design. Furthermore, through the support of the RELATO coordinators, the project reached people willing to replicate the approach in other countries, including Chile, Ecuador, and Brazil.

We've seen firsthand marine educators' interest in having a network to share ideas, experiences, and projects through their participation in surveys, the virtual conference (more detail below), and local workshops activities. In response to this great interest, our members have played an important role in RELATO's first study of the status of marine education in the region.

Below are some additional outcomes:

- Developed a governance structure and process for RELATO.**

The identification and involvement of country coordinators (CC) across the region helped strategically to expand the mission of RELATO in each of their countries. Thanks to the efforts of many people involved, the RELATO network increased, allowing synergies between people and institutions to flourish. Every CC supports the network through their projects and social media, while also serving on committees focused on different areas to help build a stronger and larger network. Each CC operates on an honorary basis without receiving funding from RELATO or other incentives. Currently, they self-apply for the position and are vetted by their peers. The team plans to adopt a more democratic process for selecting CCs in the future.
- Communication and sharing of marine education projects and educational resources from LAC across the region and internationally.**

RELATO developed a website (which includes an interactive map with initiatives) and established a social media presence as two key communications outlets. Marine education resources were also posted in both Spanish and Portuguese. Additionally, RELATO organized a Marine Education Day in LAC to help promote the importance of education in marine conservation strategies, show the presence of marine education in LAC, and promote RELATO's alliance. In 2021, twenty different activities were carried out in parallel throughout LAC, which made visible the unity and strength of marine education across the region. These activities had face-to-face and online formats, and engaged a total of 1,281 participants. Network members also participated in international conferences to share their work and results, bringing LAC marine educators' voices to different sectors.

- **Report of marine education in LAC, including research, funding sources, and barriers.**

Thanks to survey responses from 579 people from 29 different countries, RELATO created the region's first report about perspectives on marine education in LAC. The report includes some of the biggest obstacles that educators face for the development of their projects and programs. The report also highlights connections between marine education and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), available funding sources, current research being carried out in the field, and next steps for marine education. From this research, RELATO was also able to explore ideas and issues associated with diversity, inclusion, and gender gaps in both formal and nonformal marine education contexts. To share the results of the surveys across the region, RELATO developed outreach videos in Spanish, Portuguese, and English.

- **Facilitated connections between marine educators in LAC.**

RELATO's social media and website are some of the primary places where we facilitate connections between marine educators in LAC. Featuring marine educators' projects on RELATO's social media and website helps marine educators gain visibility, and led to many educators reaching out to each other to collaborate, share ideas, and congratulate each other's successful initiatives. However, the greatest connections we helped foster were during the First Latin American Marine Education Conference, a free and virtual conference open to all RELATO members to participate actively through presentations, workshops, and activities. A total of 507 people participated in the conference through Zoom throughout the four full days of the event. The conference included: 70 oral presentations (all of them available on RELATO's YouTube channel); four training workshops informed by surveys of attendees before the conference; and five 'conversation panels' on topics such as inclusion, gender, networks, marine conservation, and education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the conference, there were four group-based interactive activities to promote connections and alliances between the educators. Thanks to this conference, RELATO grew from 230 to 1,030 members from January 2021 to July 2021.

- **Promoted research within the field of marine education.**

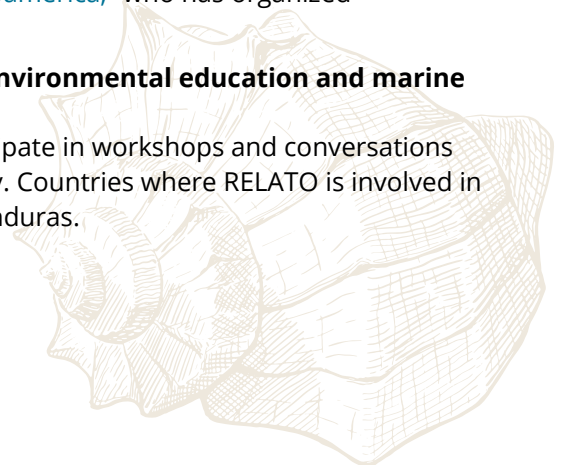
RELATO compiled information from its members about research and scientific publications in the region and is working to publish a special issue on marine education in LAC. Furthermore, some of the members of RELATO's coordination team are collaborating on projects to promote marine education research and measure the impact of programs and networks, paying special attention to the evaluation and validation of educational tools to promote quality education.

- **Organized opportunities for continuous training for RELATO members and other people interested in marine education, to continue adding allies to our network.**

Beyond training workshops organized for the conference, RELATO [actively participates](#) in initiatives and collaborates with other organizations to promote marine education and develop educational resources. An example is the group "[AO Latinoamérica](#)," who has organized workshops with RELATO's support.

- **Participated in decision-making processes related to environmental education and marine conservation together with policymakers in LAC.**

RELATO's country coordinators have been invited to participate in workshops and conversations about how to better integrate marine education into policy. Countries where RELATO is involved in policy making include Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Honduras.





Photos: Amiguitos del océano, Ecuador

Evaluation Plan

RELATO was shaped by a shared goal to be participatory and inclusive through all stages of its establishment. The project started with a survey in 2019 to identify the needs and expectations for the creation of a network for people dedicated to marine education in LAC. There were a total of 157 responses from 15 different countries. These helped define objectives, expectations, and strategies for organizing the network, and in particular, confirmed the need for a regional meeting of educators to share experiences from all over LAC.

In 2021, in conjunction with our first conference, we launched a second survey to identify priorities, barriers, and opportunities for marine education throughout LAC. A total of 579 people from 29 countries registered for the conference, and all voluntarily participated in the survey. This allowed us to identify pressing issues related to marine education and ocean literacy in LAC and ensure there was an inclusive decision-making process around the conference design and implementation.

Through this process of developing RELATO, we have been able to incorporate the vision of educators regarding the issues and challenges associated with marine education, such as its role in supporting the SDGs and how marine education can inspire innovative strategies to help minimize poverty in coastal communities.

Additionally, we carried out post-conference consultations to solicit feedback, collecting opinions from participants to help us improve future events. A total of 107 conference attendees participated, and our most important findings included the positive impact that this type of meeting can have for the visibility and strength of marine education, and for building connections between educators from all over LAC. The full report on the establishment of RELATO can be found on the RELATO website: <https://relatoceano.org>



Photos: Activities on the Conference, RELATO

Through this process of developing RELATO, we have been able to incorporate the vision of educators regarding the issues and challenges associated with marine education, such as its role in supporting the SDGs and how marine education can inspire innovative strategies to help minimize poverty in coastal communities.



Photo (1): Country Coordinators, RELATO

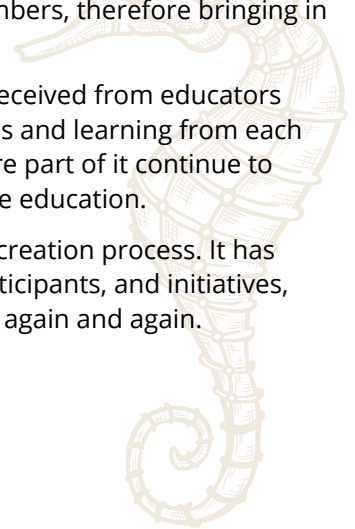
Lessons Learned

RELATO was built based on feedback and input from marine educators and stakeholders across LAC. All of our surveys have guided us to model the network in a way that integrates different cultures and perspectives from all over LAC, enriching the network and the entire process. According to our Theory of Change (TOC), our ultimate goal is to strengthen marine education in LAC and, from our outcomes listed above, we can see how these results have contributed towards our ultimate goal with the vital input from our network members.

Collaboration is key. This network has reinforced the need for collaboration in marine education in LAC. With the intention of leaving no one out of the conversation, the network has become even more creative, inclusive, multicultural, and participative as it grows. We have learned from the process of creating this network, and we recognize the importance of taking a step back to rethink our strategy before moving forward again. The activities we carried out to promote the network, such as talks, panels, interviews, and the conference, have forged alliances. All these connections have promoted the exchange of ideas and collaboration between educators. Secondly, collaboration with regional leaders that are integrated into the network, and who believe in the network, has helped make RELATO more visible. Thanks to them, the network found more opportunities to spread its message and invite more members, therefore bringing in enriching new perspectives and ideas.

Our research confirmed the need for this network. The valuable input we received from educators confirmed the need for this network and for opportunities to share experiences and learning from each other. The network has grown as it has become more visible, and those who are part of it continue to share an interest in learning and integrating new tools into their work in marine education.

Time, persistence, patience and engagement has been key in the network creation process. It has been essential to take our time to make connections with relevant leaders, participants, and initiatives, and to consistently build awareness by hosting meetings to introduce RELATO, again and again.



Partnerships are crucial. Even with our time and work put into it, this network would never have grown as it has without the support of our partners and other leaders. The wealth of experience and vision from our international partner networks guided us from the beginning. They not only helped us with the formal processes to create a network, but also gave us the confidence to move forward. We extend special gratitude to the Scottish Funding Council and the University of Edinburgh, who financed the First Latin American Marine Educators Conference.

Listening to diverse viewpoints has strengthened RELATO. Since starting RELATO, we have learned that listening is essential to manage a group of people with such different ideas and strategies, in order to integrate their ideas into our daily decisions. Having several meetings to strategize, collect ideas, and make decisions, all while taking into account the variety of opinions from members, has been key to our collaborative success.

Funding is scarce. Finally, we need to highlight the financial barriers we faced along the way, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Institutions that sponsor our work have greatly helped us extend our capacity and formalize our network. However, to ensure RELATO's continuous growth and development, we still need funders for long-term projects.



Resources

Video annual report:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_boLkpVtYM&t=70s&ab_channel=RELATOC%C3%A9ano

Website: www.relatoceanoo.org

Facebook: Relato Oceano | Instagram: @relatoceanoo | Youtube: RELATOCéano | LinkedIn: RELATOCéano

Is there more in-depth information that might be of interest to other practitioners (e.g materials, resources, etc)?

Don't forget to visit RELATO's website. You can share marine education resources and related content with us, download educational material, as well as see initiatives situated on the LAC map. The only condition to be part of RELATO is to be interested in marine education, and, if you are reading this article, you already meet the requirements. Welcome!

Visiting our social media, you will find incredible marine educators and their initiatives that work to promote ocean literacy throughout LAC. They will be happy to be contacted and hear from you!

Contact

Yolanda Sánchez

Founder and coordinator of RELATO

relatoceanoo@gmail.com

yolanda.meer@gmail.com

Celeste Kroeger

Founder

celekroeger@gmail.com

Gonzalo Bravo

gonzalobravoargentina@gmail.com

Patricia Furtado

contato@acquamater.com

Daniela Hill

daniela@amiguitosdeloceanoo.com

Paul Gómez

paulgomez76@gmail.com

Geiner Golfín

geiner.golfín@gmail.com

Pablo Malhue

pablo.malhue@gmail.com

María de los Angeles Rosales

mrosales@fundacionmundoazul.com

Gilary Morales

concienciamarinaperu@gmail.com

Timna Varela

timna.varelas@gmail.com

Ma. Alicia Martínez

malimartipra@gmail.com

Ana Yranzo

anayranzo@gmail.com

Evelyn Paredes

evelynbio22@gmail.com

Fernando Castillo

fernando010tm@gmail.com

Fran Villalón

fran.villalon@gmail.com

Mayra Figueroa

mayra.figueroa.sanhueza@gmail.com

Juan Pablo Laclau

LaclauJeanPaul@gmail.com

Juliana Mancera

mancerajuliana@gmail.com

Vinicius Albano

vialbano@gmail.com

Jacqueline González

pajaritomarinoocl@gmail.com

Argentina Coordinator

Brasil Coordinator

Ecuador Coordinator

Chile Coordinator

Costa Rica Coordinator

Chile Coordinator

Guatemala Coordinator

Perú Coordinator

Honduras Coordinator

Uruguay Coordinator

Venezuela Coordinator

Perú Coordinator

Mexico Coordinator

Designer

Social Media Coordinator

Argentina Coordinator

Colombia Coordinator

Brazil Coordinator

Social Media

