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## **RESEARCH ON TEACHING STRATEGIES IN INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS: A CASE STUDY**

### **BADANIA NAD STRATEGIAMI NAUCZANIA INKLUZYJNEGO: STUDIUM PRZYPADKU**

#### **Abstract**

Considering the students' diversity with regards to abilities, skills, access school conditions, health conditions, ethnic background and even immigrant students who are not fluent in the Spanish language, most Primary and Secondary Schools are assuming an inclusive education. In the European Higher Education Area, and more specifically, in the Teacher Training degree, School Placements constitute the basic starting point and, in fact, they are a challenge for pre-service teachers. Undoubtedly, these students do not only carry out School Practice in normalized Primary Schools, rather they need to know the school's real functioning, its internal management and organization, the human, material and technical resources to face up students' diversity and offer them the necessary educative attention. Roughly speaking, the I School Practices are aimed at getting engaged in the knowledge of official and institutional documentation.

For this reason, this case study analyses how the I School Placements are carried out in a Spanish inclusive Primary School, located in Zaragoza which belongs to the region of Aragón. The research developed focuses on the analysis of the School Education Project, as far as we believe it is devoted to reflect how school works on (general and specific syllabus designs, guidelines, teaching-learning processes, didactic objectives, methodological approaches, classroom organization, assessment types and techniques and so on). In this sense, the results illustrate how the theoretical and the practical principles implicitly and explicitly undertaken in this school improve the development of an authentic inclusive education.

**Key words:** School Placements, School Practices thematic portal, institutional school documents, Primary Education, inclusive education, school organization, school management.

#### **Streszczenie**

Mając na uwadze różnorodność studentów, ich indywidualne spojrzenie, predyspozycje, umiejętności, dostęp do edukacji i ochrony zdrowia, pochodzenie etniczne, a także środowisko imigranckie, które niejednokrotnie słabo włada językiem hiszpańskim, większość szkół podstawowych i średnich dopuszcza nauczanie inkluzyjne. W europejskim środowisku akademickim, a dokładniej w obszarze kształcenia nauczycieli, ten typ nauczania jest wyzwaniem dla przyszłych nauczycieli. Bez wątplenia studenci przygotowujący się do zawodu nauczyciela podczas pierw-

szych praktyk potrzebują wiedzy o funkcjonowaniu szkoły, wewnętrznym zarządzaniu i organizacji, zasobach ludzkich i źródłach technik nauczania, aby zaoferować uczniom niezbędne indywidualne podejście. Pierwsze praktyki szkolne przyszłych nauczycieli opierają się na ich zaangażowaniu w poznanie dokumentacji instytucji.

Niniejsza praca analizuje przebieg praktyk studenckich przyszłych nauczycieli w hiszpańskiej szkole podstawowej w Saragossie (region Aragón). Badanie skupia się na analizie „Projektu edukacji szkolnej”, który ukazuje funkcjonowanie szkoły (opisy sylabusów, przewodniki, opis procesów nauczania, przedmioty dydaktyczne, podejście metodologiczne, organizacja pracy w klasie szkolnej, techniki nauczania i wiele innych). Wyniki badań pokazują, jak teoretyczne i praktyczne reguły wpływają na polepszenie rozwoju edukacji inkluzyjnej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** praktyki szkolne, portal tematyczny praktyk szkolnych, dokumenty szkolne, edukacja wczesnoszkolna, edukacja inkluzyjna, organizacja pracy w szkole, zarządzanie w szkole.

### **A reflective practice in the development of the school placements in the teacher training degree**

The syllabus design for the School Practices in the Kindergarten or Pre-Primary and Primary Teacher Training degrees have a higher amount of credits than previous studies in the same degree, obviously keeping its interdisciplinary character. Pre-Primary and Primary Schools (henceforth, CEIPs, Spanish acronym to name Pre-Primary and Primary Schools; “Centros de Educación Infantil y Primaria”) host pre-service teachers and thus their tutors at school develop a relevant role in tutoring, within a collaboration agreement with the Faculty of Education of the University of Zaragoza (Spain).

The wide variety of schools in the region of Aragón, to which Zaragoza belongs to being the capital of this Autonomous Community offer a wide range of opportunities for students to carry out their School Placements.

Even they are allowed to choose, depending on the specialization they want to get (Foreign Language, Therapeutic Pedagogy, Audition and Language, Physical Education, Pre-Primary, Primary and Special Education teachers), the school they would like to be at while participating in the School Practices. In fact, it also poses a challenge to students on account of the features some schools have considering the students' heterogeneity.

Especially in the city of Zaragoza there are two schools that are regarded by the Provincial Service (regional administration) of Zaragoza as “difficult performance schools” because their students are mainly Roma or gypsies, immigrants – who fail to know the language – and with a high degree of absenteeism<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> E. Smyth, *Pupil Performance, Absenteeism and School Drop-out: a Multidimensional Analysis*, “School Effectiveness and School Improvement” 1999, vol. 10(4).

Other schools are of integration and accommodate students with special educational needs (ACNEAE, under the still current Education Act, Organic Act 2/2006, of 3<sup>rd</sup> of May of Education, Official Bulletin of the State, number 106).

Moreover, in the Autonomous Community of Aragón there are a large number of schools in rural areas, which are themselves an excellent “laboratory” for educational innovation and thus represent a privileged destination for the development of the School Practices in both Teacher Training degrees.

The school’s diversity, the kind of education they provide (inclusive training<sup>2</sup>) and their intrinsic characteristics require the creation of a database that collects information and allows students to acknowledge this background just before selecting the school.

It is therefore important to create a digitalised support which may help distance students to develop their practice in this type of schools, and by extension, in all schools, in so far as it is interesting to keep a constant contact between the Faculty staff responsible for the School Placements, the school tutors and the students themselves.

Some teachers of the Department of Teacher Education, through the granting of a Teaching Innovation Project, included within the Blended Learning Programs of the University of Zaragoza line (PESUZ\_10\_6\_545) have developed a thematic portal of this subject in the Faculty of Education in order to systematize this process.

The main aim focuses on providing students specific necessary background information, methodological approaches, deadlines, evaluation criteria and the dissemination of information between the Faculty staff (those teaching credits are established in the Teaching Management Plan), the tutors of the Pre-Primary and Primary schools and the pre-service teachers. Specifically, we have analysed the institutional documents of the Pre-Primary and Primary School named “XX”, located in a marginal suburb in the city of Zaragoza.

Therefore, we have examined the school characteristics, as it develops an inclusive education and is highly involved in school equality processes to provide the student of the Faculty of Education with all the information necessary through the School Practices Thematic Portal.

A thorough study of how inclusive education is taught, teaching strategies, methodologies, etc., has been carried out, which will allow the student who wishes to know in advance the type of school in which he will do his School Practices do their best to prepare for it, developing a proposal for action through the guidelines established by the School Education Project and the Project for Inclusive Education<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> M. Ainscow, P. Ferrel and D.A. Tweedle, *Effective practice in inclusion and in special and mainstream schools working together*, Department for Education and Employments, London 1998.

<sup>3</sup> J.R. Soler, *Hacia una comunidad crítica en contextos educativos democráticos: una cuestión controvertida en la gestión escolar*, “Anuario de Pedagogía” 2000, vol. 2.

### **An overview on school's diversity**

The growing multiculturalism of our society<sup>4</sup> presents a dual challenge for teachers. The massive arrival of immigrants in a society plagued by learning problems in the early stages of Pre-Primary, Primary and Compulsory Secondary schools, associated with the lack of individualised attention in schools, increases the difficulties to be faced by teachers in their classrooms.

Schools are characterized mainly by an educational reality which is difficult to assume. Not only do they need more material resources, but the existing human resources are not the most appropriate either in a multicultural and diverse society like the present one<sup>5</sup>. For this reason, it is necessary for schools to assume common principles, to effectively manage the school with a coherent and coordinated action of all members of the educational community.

No doubt, this is only possible on the basis of a joint and coordinated development of the School Education Project, which must collect three management areas: the pedagogical, characterized by good organization and operation of the school in general, of the cycle team, of the level team, a specific methodology, the assumption of common criteria for students' promotion, their grouping, inclusive activities, evaluation, etc.; the institutional – conditioned by the external projection (relationships with the Association of Parents of Students – AMPA, with the educational administration, etc.); and the internal (one-person and collegiate governing bodies, the functions to be performed, fees, degree of participation, etc.); the administrative – with financial functions, of accounting, maintenance and use of spaces, communication, etc. – and, finally, the human-resources and interpersonal relationships (motivation, communication, conflict), regulation of coexistence, selection and promotion of teachers, etc. In fact, all these circumstances and the actions arising from educational policy may make the effective management of the school difficult. The educational institution needs tools that support the actions of the educational community<sup>6</sup>.

### **Case study: method and approach assumed**

The School Education Project is an instrument that makes it possible to guide and facilitate the management of schools, it is coherent with the school context, it numbers and defines the identity of the school, it formulates the in-

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<sup>4</sup> Ch. Banks and J. Banks, *Equity Pedagogy: An Essential component of Multicultural Education*, "Theory into Practice" 1995, vol. 34(3).

<sup>5</sup> H. Daniels and P. Garner, *Inclusive Education. Supporting inclusion in education systems*, Kogan Page, London 1999.

<sup>6</sup> J.R. Soler, *La participación democrática de la comunidad educativa en la gestión del centro escolar. El consejo escolar*, "Participación Educativa" 2006, vol. 1.

tended objectives and it expresses the organizational structure of the institution. It is a school project which is a result of dialogue and consensus between different positions of the groups that have participated in its elaboration (parents, teachers, students...).

For these reasons, it must be unique, be inclusive and cover all areas of school management. It has to “project” by expressing an action consistent with the identity of the school and its educational community. The most interesting aspect regarding how to provide an answer to that multiculturalism and also to the difficulties of students’ learning<sup>7</sup> is that this instrument shows the essential guidelines to follow, the action strategies that will facilitate to provide students with specific needs and the assumption of specific educational practices and methodologies<sup>8</sup>.

Every project should begin with an analysis of the reality in which it is aimed to intervene, ie, its context, so that its proposals respond to it and may be appropriately contextualized<sup>9</sup>. When it comes to an education project, we must proceed to perform this analysis both at the school of reference and in its social environment: the context, then, is the “XX” School of the city of Zaragoza.

For obvious reasons, the analysis in this context is limited to data on it that are reflected in public documents<sup>10</sup>. It has not been feasible to carry out a detailed study of the educational needs using relevant evaluation research techniques. First, reversing the terms and proceeding from the general to the particular, it can be stated that the District underwent a profound change in its social setting when, in 1988, the urban area in Zaragoza was dismantled and the subsequent settlement of most of its Roma or gipsy population in this neighbourhood.

A very active Neighbourhood Association – called “Aragón”, whose bylaws date from 1977 – has been working intensively to protest against the neglect of the district and the problems besetting its population (high unemployment, drug trafficking...). Their work was very positive in relation to improving the quality of life of their neighbours. However, this scenario is characterized by social marginalization and a rising rate of multiculturalism with the arrival of immigrants from many different sources.

The history of the Pre-Primary School named “XX” parallels logically to its neighbourhood. The above mentioned massive transfer of Roma made that since 1992 the school was abandoned by non-Roma school population, when it

<sup>7</sup> T. Booth et al., *The Index of Inclusion: developing learning and participation in schools*, CSIE, London 2000.

<sup>8</sup> R. Soler, *Acciones educativas para colectivos en situación de vulnerabilidad social en Aragón: Alumnos inmigrantes con diversidad lingüística. ¿Cuál sigue siendo el problema de fondo?*, “Educar” 2013, vol. 49(2).

<sup>9</sup> J. Brynner, *Risks and Outcomes of Social Exclusion: Insights from Longitudinal Data*, OECD Reports, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> R. Soler, *El poder de las palabras: un análisis del lenguaje pedagógico*, Mira Editores, Zaragoza 2015.

was seen that this was the ethnic majority in the school. Roma students increased considerably and, in the late 90s, it had already reached 90% of the pupils.

In an analysis of the situation of the students that the school did in the 2002–03 academic year, the following problems were detected: very low levels of learning, absenteeism, indiscipline, lack of motivation, low self esteem, lack of hygienic habits, parents often illiterate and careless of the education of their children and very problematic family backgrounds (parents in prison, aggression, poverty...). Currently, students belonging to the Roma ethnic group represent 70% in Pre-primary education and 80% in primary education. Children of immigrant families from Colombia, Ecuador, Gambia, Dominican Republic and Romania have joined. Immigrant students amount to approximately 28% of enrolment in Pre-primary Education and 14% in primary education. Students who are not represented in these two groups constitute only 2% in Pre-primary Education and 6% in Primary Education.

The typology of students presents 55% of pupils in Primary Education (between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> years, both inclusive) corresponding to the modality of Inclusive Education, with a lag of two years; 31% present a lag of one school year. In turn, there is a high percentage (not specified in the document cited) of pupils with Special Educational Needs of Type A. Aware of these unique circumstances, the Board of this School<sup>11</sup> has designed and implemented the Inclusive School Education Project “Together” (Ibid.), which has been recently granted the Second National Inclusive Education Award and the Honourable Mention in the National Context “School Experiences” by Editorial Santillana.

However, besides considering this relevant information, we must also provide a theoretical framework to demonstrate how the teaching-learning processes must be developed in this inclusive school. Roughly speaking, the learning process includes the binomial teaching and learning; *didaxis* develops teaching but always as a task oriented and directed to promote learning, and this, of course, in an educational key<sup>12</sup>.

“General Teaching” or “General Didactics” is the scientific discipline that studies this process, with the essential support of “Educational Psychology” – within it, the “Psychology of Learning” – and from the ascription of both to the field of Educational Sciences<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, for expository purposes only, and in order to reflect quite clearly the concept of the teaching-learning process and then reflect it on the lines of action necessary in learning processes of inclusive

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<sup>11</sup> D. Sparks, *Designing Powerful Professional Development for Teachers and Principals*, National Staff Development Council, Oxford 2002.

<sup>12</sup> A. Parilla, *Acerca Del origen y sentido de la Educación Inclusiva*, “Revista de Educación” 2002, vol. 327.

<sup>13</sup> J.R. Soler, *Retos de la gestión escolar: desde postulados comunitaristas y críticos*, “Educar” 2002, vol. 0.

education, we will deal primarily from the perspective of teaching and, subsequently, from learning, although in both moments I shall reflect and assume that holistic view of this combination that constitutes the learning process.

The approach to this process and therefore to teaching in inclusive education lies mainly in the paradigms of “General Teaching” called “mediational teacher-centered” and “mediational student-centered”. These paradigmatic ascriptions carry a certain interpretation of the role of the teacher and of student’s activity in the teaching-learning process that has its logical implications for the design, development and evaluation of the teaching practice.

According to the ascription to “mediational teacher-centered” paradigm the teacher is regarded as a reflective “planner” of his teaching which, abandoning the standard models, typical of the tradition of the process-product paradigm, understands planning as a process that attempts to assess *a priori* and prepare adequate attention to the needs to be faced by his work before the diversity (of interests, abilities, cultures...) that his student group will have<sup>14</sup>.

As teachers, we must plan and program from a previous analysis (initial assessment) of the educational needs of the class group that has been entrusted to us by trying to anticipate the responses that cause didactic program will rise in each and every one of the students. Consequently, the third level of curricular development, instructional programming, must be contextualized and flexible to be adjusted, permanently, to the future of the class group.

To play the necessary role of guidance or support, we must necessarily start on a programming based on the knowledge of the level of cognitive development of students, of each student, and their interests and previous knowledge, and develop the learning process in such a way that it may motivate and activate their cognitive processes (organization of meanings, transfer of information, coding and decoding of messages).

In this sense, the “formal behaviours” included in the general taxonomies by Bloom et al. – for the field of knowledge – and Krathwohl et al. – for the affective domain – including the cognitive and affective levels, which are basic reference points for the concretisation of basic skills in formulating objectives and contents of any inclusive education teaching program.

We assume, therefore, a consideration of student learning that exceeds the reception-retention scheme of knowledge transmitted by the teacher, the textbook, any audiovisual or computer resource..., and which demands from the student a more active cognitive involvement, which is more autonomous, higher and complex.

We share the constructivist approach to learning, which, within “Educational Psychology” is the epistemological position that corresponds to the *mediational paradigm centered learning*, the “General Teaching”.

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<sup>14</sup> J.R. Soler, *La participación social en la construcción de la democracia, reto consustancial a la formación a lo largo de la vida*, Tornapunta, Madrid 2009.

This is the kind of learning that we enhance, and which should consequently be developed in the classroom, even though it must necessarily be complemented with other means of acquiring knowledge, skills... that are characteristic of learning by association, mainly when it is done through comprehensive memory processes.

Within this learning theory, it is necessary to remember, the error that amounts to considering learning based upon reception (associated with the use of technique of presentations by the teacher) as inevitably *rote learning*, and in turn that learning-based upon discovery (problem-solving based techniques, faced individually or in peer groups...) as necessarily *significant*.

Both types of learning techniques can induce a *significant* learning, depending on the conditions in which learning takes place: in both cases it would be significant if the learning task can be linked in a non-arbitrary and non-literal manner with what the student already knows.

Therefore, the work of teachers in the context of reference as the present one should include a comprehensive and inclusive educational work, sensitive to multiculturalism present in the social fabric and embodied in the educational intervention from the angle of the postulates of multiculturalism.

### **Didactic strategies to develop an inclusive education**

It is clear that when facing this socio-educational reality, all teachers in the school, regardless of specialty, should work as Inclusive Education teachers, both in their classroom and in other scenarios of the school, and also in relation to the families of students and other social services of the neighbourhood (education, health, recreational...). In fact, the School has been developing the Specific and Global Inclusive School Project, which involves the entire school community.

The action of the different professionals springs from the following basic principles. In this sense, first of all, the development of educational practice must be assumed from the requirements of prevention and compensation of the students' difficulties or learning disabilities, provided that the two conditions must be implemented as soon as possible, early in the school environment.

Secondly, attention to the students' classroom diversity must be analysed and coherently carried out, both in terms of cognitive abilities and also of cultural backgrounds, assuming that differences and inequalities must be addressed through statements of affirmative discrimination and not on the basis of universal or standardized solutions in the context of an inclusive school.

Thirdly, it is necessary to make clear the principles of intercultural education, in line with the growing multiculturalism that characterizes our society and in favour of education for citizenship in accordance with the configuration of the latter.



Last but not least, the organization of the school community as a general framework consisting of all the actors involved in the education of students, understanding that the cooperative endeavour of all of them is essential at all times of school life.

Consequently, we may go further on and, bearing in mind the educational principles put forward in the School Education Project, and in the Inclusive Education Project, we should establish targets to guide and facilitate the development of the teaching-learning processes<sup>15</sup>. For example, the research carried out shows it is helpful to enhance the students' interests in school work, reinforcing motivational processes previous and simultaneous to the didactic processes.

On the other hand, supporting the students' learning processes by seeking individualised attention, not conditioning the group dimension in classroom work. Moreover, cultivating a climate of cooperation in the classroom and throughout the school as a prerequisite for the proper development of school work. In addition, contributing to the reduction of truancy and failures that accompany it.

It is also convenient as the results show it, to enhance collaboration of the school with families, other neighbourhood institutions and other social settings, thus establishing links that extend and enhance the educational work beyond the school environment.

Finally, to promote innovation processes in the school to be constantly updated and go further in the formative assessment practice offering students the feedback they need. What seems to be left then? No doubt these didactic strategies must go on with the action lines assumed in the school.

To offer to the reader specific examples, XX Pre-Primary and Primary School has specific programs developed with methodological principles that we will show latter on. Note as an example the following programs carried out with students with specific need of educational support.

Projects Workshop: these assume the transversal axis of each school year (multiculturalism, health education...): "Green School", "Animaland", "My Friend the Computer", "Creative Hands" and "I read, write and enjoy".
Interdisciplinary projects: they involve all curricular areas and present a variety of activities: "Multiculturalism" and "Environmental Education".
Library Project: promoting reading with students ("Tales near heat of the fire", "travelling suitcase Library") and parents ("Memories of the past" and "Library-van"), along with other cultural activities (day book, cultural week...).
Cooperative groups: they promoting cooperative learning and their organization has been designed in detail: posts (coordinator, moderator, secretary and responsible for the material) and member functions, performance standards, naming them (eg., in 3rd year of primary: "Rap", "Bandits", "Sports" and "Little Brains").

<sup>15</sup> I. Gine and Cl. Gine, *Inclusión y sistema educativo*, Universidad de Salamanca, INICO, 2001.

<i>English Project</i> : its Motivating axes are fantasy and reality, humour, surprise, uses lots of strategies and highly motivating learning resources, chaired by <i>Mossy</i> pet.
Learning through rumbas: project for learning literacy in the 1st cycle, created by Armando Carmona, Teacher of Music Education, based on the gypsy character and the combination of three components: pre-writing, vowels and consonants.
Organizational adaptations: dividing the class into groups and flexible groupings of students, differentiating between “fixed teachers” and “mobile teachers”.
Program of study aid and educational support with the help of staff and volunteers.
“Patriarch” Program, which introduces students positive roles for them in their own ethnic people with a university education, committed patriarchs, “shepherds”...
Coexistence School Project, which includes the “Learn to be people programme”.
Coexistence Project, with two public schools and the district school.
Host Protocol for immigrant students, which guides their enrolment step by step.
Rigorous assistance control with systematic registers, calls to the families...
Parents’ Programme: development of literacy, sewing, hairdressing and cooking seminars.
Comprehensive School Spaces Project (PIEE), organized by the City Hall.
External relations: with Leisure Centre, Outpatient Health Services...

## Discussion and results

Considering the data analysis, I must say the teacher’s in schools inclusive education performance should start, and very especially in this Pre-Primary and Primary School following specific principles. On the one hand, realism, mainly to start with the students’ reality. Thus, we must analyse their interests and resources for teaching and learning. In addition, the School and the social reality of which it is a part must be in constant interaction (learning for life, learning functional...).

On the other hand, globalization to integrate all curricular areas (not just those associated with Primary Education) around centres or points of interest, designing teaching or didactic units, to the reality in question; it is indispensable to avoid all academicism (manipulative activities, the use of computers, the world of animals, visual and oral language, stories and role-plays, songs and games, affective treatment by teachers, etc.).

Furthermore, an interdisciplinary work: in certain circumstances (workshops, specific programs...) an interdisciplinary treatment of the curricula may be considered. Activity also constitutes a basic principle to be aware of. The student should be the main protagonist of his/her own learning, which appeals to his/her intense cognitive activity, more or less accompanied by motor or manipulative activity, and always provided by the logical graduation of the complexity of the proposed activities.

Even more, meaningful learning: the student must be able to integrate their prior knowledge with that which is newly acquired, so that the latter will prove significant in both the receptive and the constructivist learning. Only if this condition is met can we speak of functional learning and enable learning to learn.

No doubt, individualization, through an individualized attention to students is appropriate, based on their level of cognitive competence, their previous knowledge, their work rate, etc.: this entails a system of reinforcements, rewards, incentives... to achieve learning objectives that should be immediate and very tightly related to the student's interests.

It is also necessary to assume a cooperative learning: identification must be made compatible with cooperative learning (diversification of teaching-learning situations), since the latter improves both the socialization and learning of students. Last but not least, the necessary diversification of teaching resources by using a variety of means involving different languages (auditory, visual, audio-visual, body...) and stimulating the senses. Of particular importance are the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the educational context: the computer and its resources are very motivating for these children, who have almost replaced the notebooks by the *Tablet PC* and the interactive whiteboard.

Being coherent with the data obtained, the analysis carried out and the current pedagogical approaches, we must say the methodological principles rose so far, appropriate inclusive education requires certain criteria in classroom organization so as to facilitate the development of the teaching-learning process and contribute to better communication between teacher and student. There are different ways of grouping students in the classroom. We are going to expose those best suited to work with student inclusive education.

On the one hand, flexible students' groupings as it can arise within a class or group or involve two groups of the same cycle; strictly speaking, a non-graduate teaching within each cycle might be considered. Within each class group stable teams or groups of students can be proposed.

It would be interesting to combine this method with other ones which are flexible in nature, as these options: groups of students formed by the teacher's appointment, by students' free choice; heterogeneous groups (and always with the gender variable) or homogeneous in terms of levels of learning; groups doing the same task or else having different tasks carried out, which are then put in common; work by equal partners is also an option that should be applied.

Obviously, given the nature of the pupils, stable working groups may be more effective for the purpose of socialization and learning in so far as they foster close relations between its members. However, depending on the objectives that are pursued in every teaching situation and the characteristics of the resulting activity, there should be a clever combination of all options outlined so as to cultivate a social climate of full coexistence in the classroom.

On the other hand, flexibility in planning and utilization of space and time: the flexibility in the grouping of students demands acting in accordance with the distribution of classroom space or cycle spaces (workshops or corners, dramatization, pooling...) and, in turn, allocate time according to the activities that are put forward. As a general rule, it is interesting to establish short periods of time

(maximum of 15 or 20 minutes) in the first years of primary education, to avoid fatigue and disinterest of the students; the one-hour format should be reserved for the final years and only for certain tasks.

However, in addition to organizing the classroom, the teacher must consider classroom organization criteria. Thus, teamwork and cooperative learning, as they allow the integration into the team of all teachers involved in each cycle. This cycle teaching team must work as such in the planning of activities and in the development and evaluation of them.

For the intervention in class groups we can distinguish between “fixed teachers” and “mobile teachers”, performing educational support in the class group of student membership and seeking class presence of two or more adults (“mobile teachers”, volunteers...) acting as reinforcement, for purposes of motivation... It is also relevant the coordination with other agents. Close coordination is essential between teachers with families and also with professionals, hired (by the Town Hall) or from the voluntary acts, to reinforce the educational process of the students.

These methodological principles established in the classroom should be complemented with a series of organizational criteria concerning teachers, for example, teamwork and cooperative learning, thus integrating into the team all the teachers of each cycle. It would also be necessary to coordinate with other collaborating agents, such as a close coordination between the teacher and the social worker with families and external collaborators, which is essential.

Relevant to highlight is that within inclusive education, the development of the tutorial function is of paramount importance. It is necessary to achieve the necessary empathy with students and their families, and develop strong cooperation bonds with them. For this purpose, the tutorial or mentoring function can be performed on different levels, necessarily complementary:

Tutoring with each class group, which also entails meeting with their parents.
Tutoring with the class group to work upon values, study skills, etc.
Tutoring with all parents of students in the class group, with an informative purpose, motivating, searching for commitment...
Tutor's or mentor's visits to families, etc.

The tutorial function is therefore crucial, to achieve the necessary empathy and understanding with students and their families. This is the main reason why this mentoring function can be performed on different levels, which, as has just been shown, are necessarily complementary. Thus, a tutorial is made with each graduating class group, which also amounts to also the meeting with their parents.

In extremely problematic cases, a student may have a “personal guardian or tutor” appointed by the Management Team. To this action adds a tutorial with the class group to work upon values, social skills (self-esteem, assertiveness), pre-

vent or cope with conflict resolution, etc. This tutorial should be supplemented by direct communication with all parents of students in the class group, with an informative, motivating purpose, as well as with visits to families by the tutor, accompanied by senior management, the counsellor or the social worker.

Last but not least, it is convenient to insist on assessment, distinguishing between the student's learning, the teacher's practice and the syllabus design. This assessment would respond to the following typology: initial assessment, previous to the teaching-learning process so to identify prior knowledge and cognitive competence of each student; continuous assessment, i.e., developed throughout the learning process and, as a result, formative evaluation that is, with the intention of improving students' learning process; final evaluation, to get the necessary *feedback* of the whole of the didactic process (both by individual teachers and also by all the team teaching through regular evaluation sessions); criterial and individualized assessment, because, as we are in the level of Pre-Primary or Primary Education, we must integrate evaluation criteria derived from the binomial objectives-contents, and, as a key issue in this case, the specificity of each student; hetero-evaluation, gradually combined with peer assessment, thus giving the student participation in the evaluation process, and, with due caution, testing experiences of his/her self-evaluation.

The evaluation techniques which are best suited to the case are: observation (with and without pre-defined reference patterns; records of critical incidents...), informal conversation or unstructured interviews, document analysis (all of it a product or a result of the student's tasks) and to a lesser degree and in a slow and gradual implementation, written tests or a more or less structured questionnaire.

From a diachronic perspective, people with learning difficulties, regardless of their type (biological, intellectual, physical, social or adaptive) have existed, though the measures assumed have improved in our present-day society. Fortunately, rhetorical conceptions have been stagnant over the fear of speaking, treating or educating the intellectually poor people, and our education system pays special attention to improving the ordinary school, thus making personal, human and material resources which are necessary available for the public teaching professionals.

Difficult performance schools still pose a challenge for teachers. The principles of inclusive education contribute to the reduction of illiterate population and provide solid foundations for the establishment of inclusive education, tailored to the needs of students, inclusive for their difficulties and aiming to equal opportunities. It is not enough to break classes into smaller groups in classrooms, to provide students with support from specialist teachers in Therapeutic Pedagogy, language immersion programs and educational support.

Multiculturalism in Spanish classrooms in Primary and in Secondary Education requires highly motivated and skilled professionals who are able to meet the specific needs of their students by promoting a school climate which is comfortable and motivating for students in their processes teaching and learning.

First, it is necessary to determine the most relevant content to deliver in the process of teaching and learning, through which we will achieve that students are able to develop their abilities to the fullest, although the social, cultural and family conditions in which they are may limit and discourage them a lot. Learning to be and act as adult people and be able to develop a comprehensive education of students in intellectual, emotional and social aspects, should be the priority objectives in the development of inclusive education in schools providing inclusive education.

Second, the teacher's work is not only to evaluate the class group before intervening in it, i.e., when we plan the educational process, but we must also do so permanently, throughout the learning process (continuous assessment). This way, we get the necessary feedback to make such modifications as it is deemed appropriate. In other words, teaching is “a decision-making process”, and the teacher is a permanent “decision maker”: when we are programming, we decide how to act in class in terms of the characteristics that we have detected in our students; when performing as has been projected, and depending on the messages or answers given by our students – by each of them – we shall decide whether to keep or retrofit it (formative evaluation). This decision has to be taken on the fly, while we undertake our intervention in the classroom; when we finish the class session or the teaching unit... and we may assess the achievement of learning attained.

Certainly, the learning process of each student is different from the one which is followed by his peers, and so is the result. The knowledge that each one comes to attain is a cognitive construction of his own, peculiar, perhaps unique – the pupil is the mediator par excellence of his own learning, the protagonist of it – in which his interests, and also previous life experiences, and also the knowledge that he already possesses together with the cognitive processes that he activates and how they are activated come into play.

This is the fundamental premise that the *mediational learning centered* paradigm has also assumed, which – in line with the approaches of cognitive psychology of learning – has understood teaching as a process that should lead to the construction of knowledge and the development of information processing strategies by students, both in their individual work, and in cooperation with their peers, and under the guidance and support of the teacher.

Third, schools developing inclusive education should define the concept of teaching and learning and adapt it in line with the actual achievement of the priorities in their students. Only then will it be possible to say that the implementation of an innovative line of methodology in the treatment of inclusive education helps overcome educational inequalities, extend schooling to poorly favoured contexts and cope with the growing multiculturalism in the classroom.

However, other actions could be considered to help the entire school community in this process of educational intervention. For example, the creation of

discussion groups, composed by teachers, and, in other cases, representatives of parents and other educational agents, would make it possible to supply a permanent and shared situation of critical analysis of the activity of the school; the internal and external evaluation of School Education Project would complement the performance of different educational agents with input from external agents, experts in educational innovation; the participation in forums of diffusion and debate about educational innovations (with Roma students, immigrants...), taking place whether in attending sessions, on paper or *on-line*, and finally, the processes of involvement in permanent teacher training to improve their teaching skills in caring for diversity, etc.

Fourth, the organization of classroom life in such schools is especially relevant. It requires certain methodological principles, which in line with those methodological principles assumed, encourage aspects such as interaction among students, the principle of equality in a school setting of plural and diverse actions. We must establish a flexible grouping of students, well raised within the class group or groups that may involve two kinds of the same cycle.

Strictly speaking, a non-graduate teaching within each cycle could be implemented, provided that the non-graduation work was limited to instrumental techniques. In terms of the objectives that are pursued in every teaching situation and also of the characteristics of the resulting activity, it would be convenient to use a smart combination of all options outlined to cultivate a social climate of full coexistence in the classroom.

Finally, we must encourage flexibility in the planning and utilization of space and time: flexibility in the grouping of students requires acting in accordance with the distribution of classroom space or spaces of the cycle and, in turn, distributing the time span depending on the activities that arise.

As a general criterion, it is interesting to establish short periods of time for each subject-activity, in order to avoid fatigue and disinterest of the students; the format of an hour or similar is not always feasible given the short selective attention span of these students. The thematic portal of this subject makes it possible to access to this kind of information so that students can decide whether to do their School Placements in schools of this kind – which requires highly motivated and professionally qualified teachers. It also favours the interaction between the different educational agents involved in the development of this process.

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