

Good Practice from CP “Jesús Neira” (Pola de Lena, Asturias, Spain)

Collaborative School, School with a future

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INTRODUCTION.

“Jesús Neira” Public School is a Pre-Primary and Primary school situated in the southern part of Asturias, in the town of Pola de Lena. This town has a population of nine thousand inhabitants that has been suffering the crisis of coal industry restructuring from the 80s and that has experimented one of the highest rates in Europe concerning ageing of the population and descent in birth rates. There are four schools in the town: three public schools and a private school with state subsidy. Two of the public schools have got Pre-Primary and Primary students, whereas the third public school has got Secondary and *Bachillerato* (Upper Secondary Education Course). The private school with state subsidy has got all educative levels.

The school has a roll of more than 170 students of Pre-Primary and Primary level and it is being like this for the last years with a ratio of around 17-20 students per group. The infrastructure conditions are adequate for them, although the old age of the building doesn't allow a redistribution that could benefit some of the classrooms. It would be necessary some funding for improving the educative services (gym, store rooms, toilets, showers, AMPA's (Parents Association) office.

There are 17 teachers in the school. The two specialists in Speech, Language and Audition Therapy are shared with other schools.

The school has got a Parents' Association (AMPA “Jesús Neira”), federated in the regional FAPAS (Asturian Federation of Parents' Associations), with more than 50 % of the families.

DESCRIPTION

This school started working as an independent entity in 1996/97, as it had been previously a section of the “Vital Aza” Public School, which formerly attended most of the students. In the process of adapting to the new situation and to the new work conditions a new impulse arose which made of the school a community with its own identity marks in the surrounding environment. The amount of necessities put forward (redistribution of spaces, provision of adequate furniture and materials, redeployment of staff, approval of an educative project for the school and curricular projects that mirrored the school educative aims, organisation of a Parents’ Association that guided their participation in the school life...) means a hard, slow and constant work that has to be revised continuously as its own dynamics demands. The conditions for succeeding up to now have been: commitment, dialogue and compromise.

The main aims of the school staff have been (and still are):

1. Achieve a school management model that proves to be opened to dialogue, welcoming, creative and innovative, following a line of continuity, clear ideas and firm professional, institutional and social commitment, identified with the needs and demands of the environment regardless of the working timetable.
2. Attain an image of the teaching staff, as permanent as possible, with common professional interests, in tune with the management team, committed to their work and with a certain degree of progressive and innovative spirit.
3. Organize a significant group of parents willing to involve themselves in the school life, not only by taking part in the school board of governors, but also in the development of programmes and projects in which their presence is necessary, a group of parents who avoids being directed and promotes dialogue and agreements in the search of solutions for the problems that may come up.
4. Try to make students adopt a homogeneous attitude towards their daily homework, their coexistence relationships and their identification with the school aims for them, considering also their distinctive heterogeneity (ability, social status).
5. Become a true school community who, within its own diversity, looks for a convergence of interests.

The path followed throughout these last years has placed the school in a position which is positively valued by the community and there is a high level of acceptance on the part of the families, as expressed in the Self-Evaluation Process made last year. This means that the institution is going in the right direction. Nevertheless, there are also some weak aspects that must be improved, so they are being analyzed in order to look for solutions within the Comprehensive Plan for Improvement that is being carried out in the school.

The projects undertaken since the school creation have marked its trajectory step by step along the last twelve years: formative projects within the school for the elaboration of the School Educative Project, the curricular projects and activities elaborated with Clic (free software for the development of multimedia educational activities), project for the early introduction of a foreign language in early stages (Pre-Primary), educative innovation project on school libraries, project for the school opening to the community, project for establishing a continuous school timetable from 9:00 to 14:00, new technologies project, project for the advanced use of ICT, experimental project of self-evaluation... Since the first year, in which the School Educative Project was elaborated in a school training project, up to the present moment, when four projects are being developed simultaneously, the main points have continued with a common factor: a higher implication on the part of the teachers, in one way or another, and the leadership of some of the members of the management team.

Apart from these projects, the school has been taking part in the annual programme “Asturias, educative area” since 1996 in each of its categories.

The Project that more clearly reflects the school “philosophy” regarding what they mean by participation, in the broad sense of the word, is the project for the school opening to the community. At this moment, the programme affects more than 75% of the students and it is completely run by the AMPA (School Parents’ Association), with the support of the teacher who coordinates the project and a special committee from the School Board of Governors. Moreover, this programme does not only provide activities for the students in the established timetable (15:30 a 17:30), but it is also opened to any kind of cultural or leisure activities for any member of the school community (teachers, families, students). At present, the school has reached an agreement with several associations or institutions for the use of the school facilities: the Popular University of the coal mining areas of Asturias

with its courses for adults, the Bagpipe School of the Bagpipe Band “Güestia”, the Salsa Dance School, the Asturian dance group “Xanzaina“, Pilates, Painting School “Iraculis”. This opening up to the community has improved the school image in the environment and has given an identity mark to the school, which is committed beyond the normal activity in the classroom. This is reflected, on the one hand, in the appreciations collected in the surveys carried out in order to assess the image of the school, and, on the other hand, in the increase on the school roll in a town with a low birth rate.

In the Comprehensive Plan for Improvement that has been developed during this school year, several aims for improvement have been included considering the participation in the school life:

- Promoting *fathers*' participation in the group activities at a class group level.
- Promoting parents' specific participation as “specialists” in the development of curricular activities in the classroom.
- Create the figures of a parent as *representative* of every class group and a representative of all groups.
- Create, train and put into practice the figure of the *school mediator* in conflict resolution.

As regards students' participation, the school intends to create classroom rules through an activity of reflection and among the different groups of students, in order to include them later in the Comprehensive Coexistence Plan and assess them annually, that is, more as a consensus practice than as a modification of previously fixed agreements.

In short, the school is intended to progress in a welcoming, committed, collaborating and inclusive atmosphere in constant revision and opened to dialogue, consensus, openness and self-criticism.



Socrates

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