Directorate for Education
Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), OECD

Innovative Learning Environments (ILE)

INVENTORY CASE STUDY
CEIP Andalucía (Seville, Spain)

Spain

This is a pre-primary and primary state school with all learners at risk of exclusion and very high numbers from the gypsy community. The teachers fostered the change and considered learning communities to be a key concept in providing quality education and to break the circle of poverty and social exclusion. These are realised through such activities and approaches as: weekly tutorship; students' representative meetings; discussion on the subjects for project work; the monthly family assembly; a close collaboration with the Administration for Education; and the assessment tool elaborated by staff together with a committee from the Learning Communities Programme which comprises indicators of achievements and obstacles while also guiding improvements. A key feature is the interactive groups based on cooperative learning. The learners split up into subgroups of 5 or 6 students each; lesson time is divided in periods of 15-20 minutes, each devoted to a different activity all subject related, with subgroup dynamics coordinated by volunteers from families, the university, and collaborating associations. Project work in a single class or in a grade or group of different grades aims to overcome curriculum fragmentation and is organised around four stages: planning, searching, organising, assessing.

OECD-CERI INNOVATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS (ILE)

CEIP 'ANDALUCÍA' LEARNING COMMUNITY
(Seville, Spain)

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report forms part of Spain's contribution to the international study on Innovative Learning Environments (ILE), carried out by the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The Institute for Teacher Training and Educational Research and Innovation (IFIIE) of the Ministry of Education coordinates Spanish participation in this project.

The present report, which follows the indications of the OECD, is on one of the schools Spain has chosen as an example of ILE: the *Andalucía* pre-primary and primary education school, which is located in the city of Seville, capital city of Andalusia, one of the 17 Autonomous Communities of Spain.

It comprises different sections to examine and understand the ILE of the school, preceded by an explanation of the methodology used during the data collection phase. It includes an introduction on the Spanish education system, a description and contextualisation of the school, as well as the objectives, history, organisation, characteristics, quality, nature, impact and effectiveness of the ILE. There is also a final section with the conclusions drawn on the issue.

2. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The data collection methods and techniques used to prepare this report were the following:

2.1. Revision and analysis of scientific literature, internal documents, regulations, school projects and legislation related to the ILE

In order to conduct the study on the ILE of the school and facilitate its understanding, a revision of the scientific literature specifically related to different aspects of the environment of the school was made, particularly on intercultural education, coeducation, inclusive education, special education, Gypsy culture, critical pedagogy, sociology, learning communities, etc. Bibliographical references which inspired the daily work of professionals of the school were also helpful to choose the scientific literature used to draw up this report.

The study and analysis of all the information provided by the school on internal regulations and educational projects and plans was vital to learn about the different aspects and characteristics of the ILE of the school in detail. Video recordings, pictures and existing documentaries on the school were also included. Finally, a revision of the legislation, orders and decrees affecting more directly the structure of the ILE was also necessary.

2.2. Field study

Apart from the bibliographical revision, a field study was carried out in the school in order to examine the ILE in greater depth, contrast the reality of the school with bibliographical references, be able to solve doubts and examine details and nuances which are only accessible through a field study. The data collection techniques used were the following:

a) **Communicative account:** It allows establishing a dialogue between the researcher and the person taking part in the research in order to think about their daily reality. The way both of them interpret the world is the starting point and, through dialogue, thoughts transforming reality are generated. During the study, dialogues with different people of the diverse groups involved in the school were maintained: teachers, families, volunteers, students and members of staff of the Commission for the *Polígono Sur*.

b) **Semi-structured communicative interview:** The aim is to understand the perspective of those who are interviewed, either teachers, relatives, volunteers, students, etc. Eight semi-structured interviews on different topics of interest according to the group interviewed were conducted: two interviews to teachers, two to relatives, two to students, one to a volunteer and another to several members of the staff of the Commission for the *Polígono Sur*.

c) **Anecdotal account and systematic observation:** Lastly, a systematic observation on different aspects and categories which were relevant to the analysis of the ILE was made and an anecdotal account including aspects which were considered significant was given.

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SPANISH EDUCATION SYSTEM

3.1. Administration and management

Education in Spain is a power **shared** between the State and the Autonomous Communities. The **State powers** are, through the **Ministry of Education**, essentially regulatory in nature and have to do with basic elements or aspects of the system, that is, those whose common regulation is objectively necessary to ensure the unity of the system and equal conditions for all Spaniards in the exercise of their educational rights. However, the State also has executive powers, such as senior inspection and the final decision regarding grants and assistance. The **Autonomous Communities**, in turn, through their **Departments for Education**, have regulatory powers for the development of basic State rules and the regulation of non-basic elements or aspects of the education system, as well as executive-administrative powers, with the exception of the very few State powers regarding this issue. **City Councils** also play a very important role in obtaining sites for the buiding of public pre-primary and primary education schools as well as in the preservation, reparation, surveillance and maintenance costs.

The governance of non-university public school is the responsibility of the School Council and the Teachers' Assembly, as mixed-membership bodies, and of the headteacher, the head of studies and the secretary, as individual bodies.

The **School Council** is the highest governing body through which the educational community participates in the school's affairs. In public schools, it comprises the headteacher and the head of studies, a representative of the City Council and a specific number of representatives of teachers, students, students' families and administrative and service staff. Some of its functions are: select the headteacher, decide upon student admission and solve student disciplinary problems, and, regarding the economic management of the school, approve and evaluate the budget. It also approves the school's internal rules and the annual programme and establishes the guidelines for participation in additional, extracurricular and collaboration activities with other schools for educational purposes.

The **Teachers' Assembly** is made up of all the teachers of the school and chaired by the headteacher. It is in charge of planning, coordinating and making decisions on all pedagogical and teaching aspects.

3.2. Structure and organisation

Pre-primary education: Up to the age of 6, it is non-compulsory and divided into two cycles of three years each.

Primary education: Between the ages of 6 and 12, it is the first compulsory stage of the education system and it is organised into three cycles of two years each.

Secondary education: Including compulsory secondary education, from 12 to 16, general upper secondary education, of a two years' duration, and intermediate vocational training.

Tertiary education: Both university education and advanced vocational training are organised in cycles with specific training objectives and autonomous academic value. Their duration ranges between two and five years.
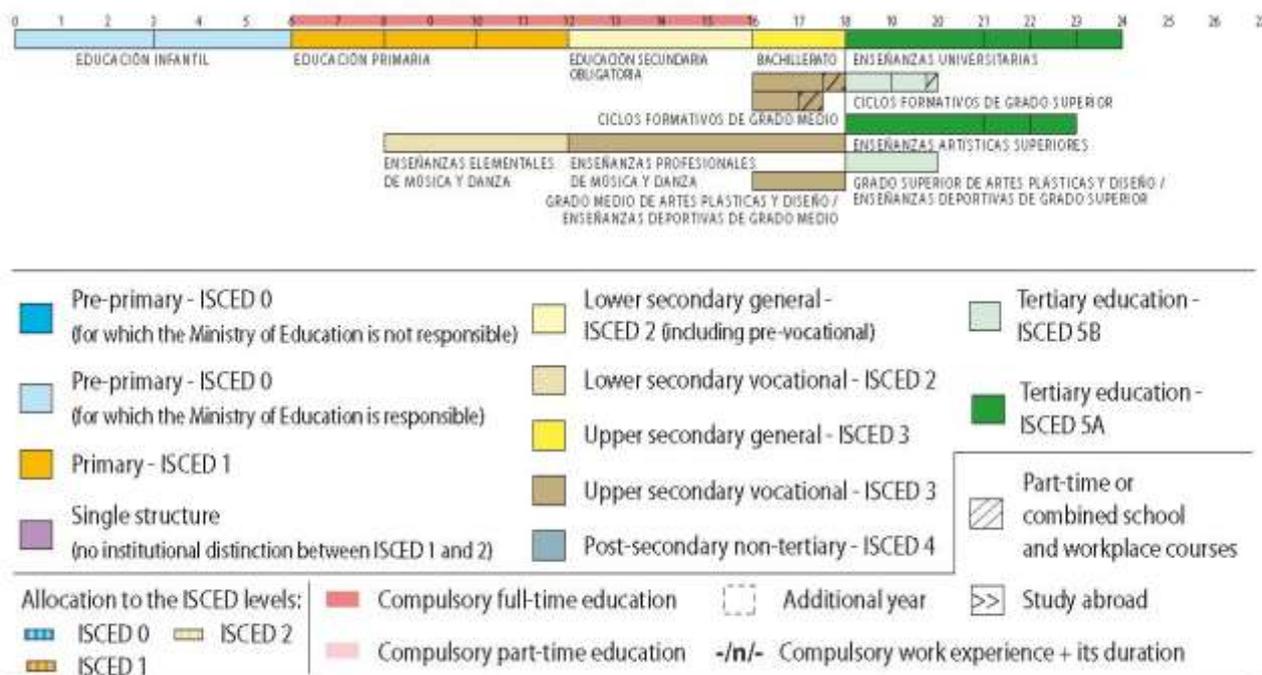

Fig. 1. Current structure of the Spanish education system. Education Act (May 2006). Source: EURYDICE, CEDEFOP and ETF.

3.3. The Andalucía School in the Spanish Educational System

One of the features of the Spanish educational context is the little to active participation of families, civil society, students and teachers in the school life. This context is also defined by an insufficient and ineffective collaborative and cooperative work of teachers. This situation was completely turned upside down when the CEIP Andalucía's leader team decided to transform the school into a Learning Community.

The individualized academic work of students usually prevails in the Spanish schools. CEIP Andalucía innovates in this regard, promoting collaborative and cooperative learning of students by means of Interactive Groups, project work, workshops, dynamics and activities that take place in the school.

Although in Spain the official curriculum is quite flexible and allows adaptation to local cultural and educational needs of students, when it comes to the classroom practice, most of the time it only applies the use of rigid and biased textbooks, which are designed by publishers working far away from the real classroom environment. On the contrary, CEIP Andalucía introduces diversified resources, teaching methodologies and moreover, the school builds its own *classroom curriculum,* counting on the democratic participation of students, and taking their cultural reality (Gypsy culture) into account.

4. DESCRIPTION OF THE ANDALUCÍA SCHOOL

4.1. General information

The *Andalucía*[1] pre-primary and primary education school, opened in 1979, has a total of 269 students of the different educational levels, from pre-primary education (3-6 years old, ISCED 0) to the 6th year of primary education (6-12 years old, ISCED 1) (see fig. 1). There is one curricular line (group or classroom) in the second cycle of pre-primary education and two lines (A and B) in primary education. 92% of students belong to the Gypsy ethnic group and 100% are in risk of social exclusion. The teaching staff consists of 27 teachers: 4 teachers of pre-primary education, 12 teachers of primary education and specialist teachers (Therapeutic Pedagogy, Physical Education, Hearing and Language, Religious Education, Musical Education, English, Interculturalism and Compensation Support).

The school is organically considered an educational compensation school to cater for students with special educational needs due to disadvantaged social conditions. The Department for Education of the Government of Andalusia (educational) approved, in 2003/04, the school's educational compensation plan, which includes the different measures and additional material and human resources to meet the specific educational needs of the school.

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[1] http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/averroes/~41008571/

Public recognition due to the valuable educational work carried out by the school is also worth mentioning. Among others, the school has been awarded the following prizes:

- 2009 *Marta Mata* Award for educational quality of the State Secretariat for Education and Vocational Training.

- 2008 *Premio a la Acción Magistral* Award (for an action of great skill), organised by the *Fundación de Ayuda contra la Drogadicción* (Spanish foundation to prevent drug consumption), the Spanish Commission for Cooperation with the UNESCO and the *BBVA* bank.

- Honours plaque of the Civil Order of *Alfonso X El Sabio*, awarded by the Ministry of Education.

Fig. 2. External view of entrance playground and access doors.

Fig. 3. On the wall, framed, the different prizes awarded to the school.

4.2. Characteristics of the context

The *Andalucía* pre-primary and primary education school is located in the city of Seville, in the Autonomous Community of Andalucía (Spain). It is situated in the *Luis Ortiz Muñoz* Street, unnumbered, in the *Polígono Sur* district, popularly known as the *Tres Mil Viviendas* (The Three Thousand Homes), a marginal neighbourhood of the city suffering from social exclusion.

The *Polígono Sur* measures almost 145 hectares, in the South of the city, and has a high population density. It is composed of six areas, two of which belong to the area of influence of the school: the *Martínez Montañés* and the *Murillo* areas. 90% of the population of these two areas belong to the Gypsy ethnic group.

As the school headteacher points out referring to a recent study:

> '*The Polígono Sur is one the biggest pockets of poverty in both Spain and Europe. Some of its defining features are the following: reproduction of situations of poverty, Gypsy ethnic majority, area of conflict, coexistence problems with neighbours, lack of social skills, culture of impunity, lack of safety on the streets, family situations of social risk, drug consumption and dealing, insufficient hygiene and health awareness, high youth and adult unemployment rate and precarious and low-skilled employment, black economy, low academic level, high rate of school absenteeism, high rate of population without an academic or vocational qualification, siginificant rate of youth and adult illiteracy, little involvement of parents in the school life and education of their children, administrative abandonment, urban barriers and closing of educational installations due to a lack of response and solution to the problem of safety on the streets'.*

In areas where inequalities are bigger, the rate of poverty is higher and there are unemployment or drug addiction problems, there are more coexistence conflicts, school absenteeism is higher and parents' participation is lower, or almost non-existent, and 'normalised' families move to other schools outside the neighbourhood, so that their children do not share the same space with more disadvantaged or difficult children.

'The Polígono Sur has received a lot of investment, of many types and coming from different administrations, but there was a lack of coordination in investment, so there has been a lot of money but everyone has done their best in a very disorganised way' (María and Maribel, members of the Educational Team of the Commission for the *Polígono Sur*).

Fig. 4. Aerial view of the *Polígono Sur*, Seville, in 2009 and location of the school (shown in red).

Fig. 5. View of the *Luis Ortiz Muñoz* Street, where the school is located.

4.3. The Commission for the *Polígono Sur*

The Commission for the *Polígono Sur* is an instititution specifically established for the area by the Government of Andalusia. Its aim is to coordinate all actions carried out in the area by the different administrations. The words of some of the staff members of the Commission in charge of education constitute a very good presentation of the institution:

> *'The Commission came into being as a response to the demands of the neighbourhood (…) The idea is to be an interlocutor with the three administrations: national, regional and local, (…) And to develop a comprehensive plan which includes improvements in the neighbourhood by acting in all areas at the same time, demanding the administrations to carry out their task and assume their responsibilities, and, above all, trying to implement a different management model. (…) our work has a lot to do with accompaniment, rather than direct intervention, (…) our function is more coordinating, accompanying, proposing and, for that, it is essential to have a sectoral plan, so an educational plan for the area was drawn up, approved last year by the Department for Education. (…) we try to do our best to support them, within our possibilities, which does not mean that we do not have obstacles to achieve things we know they would need'* (María and Maribel, members of the Educational Team of the Commission for the *Polígono Sur*).

The **educational plan for the *Polígono Sur* area**, which aims at offering a comprehensive and community proposal, includes the following programmes and actions:

- **Programme 1: Development of processes and procedures to reduce school failure and eradicate absenteeism.**
    – Action 1.1. Plan for the prevention, control and monitoring of school absenteeism.
    – Action 1.2. Guidance and supervision plan. Inclusive measures.

- **Programme 2: Organisation of schooling and school provision.**
    – Action 2.1. Organisation of provision.
    – Action 2.2. Schooling zoning.

- **Programme 3: Optimisation, provision, improvement and maintenance of school infrastructures and equipments.**
    – Action 3.1. Improvement of educational equipments and infrastructures.
    – Action 3.2. Instrument to guarantee the stability of the teaching staff.
    – Action 3.3. Training plan.

- **Programme 4: Promotion of continuing education.**
    – Action 4.1. Adaptation of continuing education to the different groups that might require it and to the objectives for integration.

'It is very important to work with only one look in an area like this, which is the spirit of the educational plan: we all look at the same side, and not everyone looking at their school; that is also a great difficulty we have had' (María and Maribel, members of the Educational Team of the Commission for the *Polígono Sur*).

4.4. Analysis of the initial educational problem of the ILE

In order to understand the development of the ILE in this school, it is very important to examine the educational problems the school had.

Ten years ago, before members of the teaching team committed themselves to the transformation of the school, it was a school closed to the neighbourhood, teachers worked without taking the neighbourhood into account and, in turn, the neighbourhood had no thought about the school and was closed to it. There was a cultural conflict which resulted in a mutual rejection between students and their families and teachers, with serious coexistence problems. This was generated by the big antagonism, confrontation and lack of understanding between the social, school and professional culture and identity of teachers and the social and school culture and identity of students and their families. There was a frontal confrontation and a lack of will to live together.

On one hand, some of the main characteristics of students were: lack of motivation and interest regarding school, distrust in teachers and equals, lack of school habits, lack of expectations for their future, high rate of absenteeism (around 60%) and poor academic results. Behind the aggressive behaviours of students there are dysfunctions of interpersonal relations, based on the learning of aggressive standards in the family and/or environment. Risk factors are: limited skills to negotiate social processes with their equals, low self-esteem and little development of one's own concept, low tolerance to frustration, inability to accept rules or lack of control of impulses.

On the other hand, teachers showed great distrust in the students' social context and ignorance and contempt for the Gypsy culture, they had little or no relation with families, little coordination and work in common and there was a lack of analysis, reflection and debate, as well as instability of the teaching staff (two-thirds left the school every year, through transfers, unjustified sick leave, etc.).

Outside the school, families felt that the education their children could have at school was something unnecessary, their participation was non-existent and there was certain aggressiveness towards teachers. The confrontation between the school and the neighbourhood, between social and school culture, was clearly reflected in the border between those two worlds, the school doors: *'(…) years ago, every morning, when teachers were going inside the school, we had to quickly pass those porches with our heads down not to hear the daily insults. Apart from verbal insults, there were also occasional physical aggressions. And this relationship was the main reason for the school to firmly close its doors once the children were inside, so that nobody could go in to annoy us'* (Eduardo, headteacher of the school).

This lack of will to live together would not let them meet the important socio-educational needs of students, with a poor quality of the teaching-learning process and a high rate of school failure regarding both the school and the academic progress of students.

4.4.1. Deficiencies and difficulties of the education system and schools in the *Polígono Sur*

Deficiencies and difficulties of both the education system and schools in the *Polígono Sur* area, and partly shared with the rest of the State, are the following:

- Lack of adaptation of the education system to the real needs of the area: educational pathways which are not very flexible, lack of connection with the labour market, inappropriate curricula, etc.
- Lack of interventions in an open environment.
- Lack of support and administrative obstacles for the implementation of the socio-educational projects generated by schools.

- The non-compulsory nature of pre-primary education (from 3 to 6), lack of incentives, economic and administrative obstacles for the schooling of children aged 0 to 3 and small number of nursery schools.
- Economic, material and human resources are badly managed and/or insufficient, inadequate and/or they lack coordination and control.
- Students do not gain the knowledge required, but they can progress to the following level.
- Lack of curricula considering socio-cultural diversity (Gypsy culture) as a source of learning.
- Lack of indicators showing the relationship between the Gypsy community and the education system and explaining if difficulties come from cultural identity or the situation of social exclusion.
- Increase in absenteeism and vulnerability of schooling.
- An insufficient Educational Guidance Team for the whole area.

4.4.2. Situation and characteristics of teachers from schools in the *Polígono Sur*

Regarding teachers and their situation, they are characterised, in general, by:

- Lack of motivation.
- Lack of training to work with students with special educational needs due to socio-cultural disadvantage.
- Lack of work stability in the area.
- Lack of a mechanism guaranteeing the continuity of the staff requested by the school, as well as the departure of professionals who do not want to continue in the school.
- Lack of specific teachers (support teachers, therapeutic pedagogy, psychologists, social workers, street educators, mediators…). Schools stress the need to recruit and/or stabilise the presence of these professionals in the staff.
- Fear of threats and the violent behaviours of some families.
- Inconvenience caused by difficult students who are obliged to go to school and who interfere in the development of the class.

'It is important to stress teacher training, (…) since teachers in this area need to know exactly how to work beyond the traditional model; here there is no use in doing the same thing because that was already unsuccessful. A new model to work in network, in connection with services, which looks beyond itself' (María and Maribel, members of the Educational Team of the Commission for the *Polígono Sur*).

4.4.3. Models of intervention

Regarding the models of intervention of schools, there is no model (global, comprehensive, coordinated, innovative, sustainable) which is suitable for the area, which results in:

- Communication, coordination and information problems among social institutions, community social services and schools.

- Programmes are not adapted to the needs of the area.

- Lack of common criteria with regard to socio-educational intervention.

- Lack of planning, evaluation and monitoring of the administration.

- Lack of human, technical and material resources.

- Uselessness of bureaucratic actions.

5. OBJECTIVES AND HISTORY OF THE ILE

5.1. Objectives of the ILE

One of the main objectives of the school was the improvement of the practice of the Teachers' Assembly, aimed at increasing the quality and quantity of the learning of both students and their families. They link the teaching-learning process to the social context and the people involved: teachers, relatives, students and other educational agents of the environment, such as the Commission for the *Polígono Sur*. The ultimate transformation of the school has been the result of building a real educational community. Four general objectives were essential to achieve it:

- **Improve coexistence:** Assuming the importance of establishing emotional interpersonal relations among the different members of the educational communitiy and during the teaching-learning process.

- **Promote the participation of the educational community**, especially of families: Actively sharing all school aspects with teachers, students and families (building of the school curriculum, selection of new school rules, appearance of the school, academic activities, extracurricular cultural activities, evaluation and proposals for improvement, etc.).

- **Reduce and eradicate school absenteeism**: Encouraging a positive assessment of the school among students and their families and building a new school curriculum which includes the social culture of the neighbourhood (Gypsy culture), as well as a meaningful curriculum promoting educational activities and learning which are meaningful to students.

- **Increase school performance:** Implementing new teaching methodologies, based on students' characterictics and needs, which improve the quality of education and learning and keep school failure under control. Some innovative methodologies in Spain for the new Spanish curriculum based on basic skills are: project work, interactive groups, workshops (newspaper, radio, cooking, sciences, library, literary discussions), etc.

5.2. History of change in the school

Change in the school and the building of the ILE arose as a consequence of the will to live together of the different members of the school (teachers, families, students), although it was mainly an initiative of the teachers of the school, who decided they wanted to build a real educational community and integrate and bring social and school culture closer together:

> *'If you have a problem, you try to find a solution; if you do not see the problem, you do not look for it. When you are here and you bang your head against the wall every day and you see that they do not learn, that families do not respect, that every day you leave the school saying 'tomorrow I will not feel like waking up', that you come every morning and you think 'I need to find a solution to this', because, if I have to be here and this is my job, I need to look for a solution (…) but to do that one has to want to stay here'* (Inmaculada, teacher of the school).

It is therefore necessary to build cultural bridges which help generating a new school and social culture. This involves creating, first of all, a new professional culture and identity of teachers which reinvents teaching so that the school and, thus, the neighbourhood can also be reinvented, from a social and community approach which goes beyond the traditional school approach. It also requires teachers to be open to change, in order to generate change in the school, and to the social culture of students and their families (Gypsy culture and the socio-cultural idiosyncrasy of

the neighbourhood), in order to generate students and families which are also open to the school culture. For that purpose, teacher continuing training as well as teacher recruitment, with new criteria and procedures, had to be improved. The Commission for the *Polígono Sur* and the leadership of both the headteacher and the Teachers' Assembly played a decisive role regarding this issue.

5.2.1. Teacher training process and building of the ILE

Given their difficult situation in the school, at some point, teachers decided to stop and think about it. They were faced with the following dilemma: *'Either take the bull by the horns, roll up our sleeves and analyse the situation and study and be trained to establish coherence between our work and the situation we are in, and, as a result, go to work happy and with no fear, or ask for a transfer or a secondment, take sick leave due to depression… and leave'.[2]*

They chose the first option, so the Teachers' Assembly has been immersed, for ten years, in a continuing training process to improve the school's practice and its response to socially disadvantaged students.

During this process, teachers have formed different working groups and received training at different moments in the school. The objective of the first working group, during 1999/2000 and 2000/01, was to analyse the school project and draw up the guidelines for a new project in accordance with the context and aimed at achieving the school success of all students. Following this first working group, others were established. One of them had the aim of preparing teaching units to include Gypsy culture in the school curriculum, as most of the students belong to the Gypsy ethnic group. Another group focused on analysing the coexistence model they wanted to promote in the school and the measures to achieve it.

With all the thoughts, ideas and hopes arising from the different working groups, a project was drawn up and presented, in 2001/02, as an Improvement Plan, which was approved by the Department for Education. The basic elements of the plan were flexible grouping, the organisation of workshops and coexistence measures.

This improvement plan, with the support of the Teacher Centre of Seville (body for the continuing training of teachers), was presented as an Educational Innovation Project and subsequently approved by the administration. The innovation project was implemented during the 2002/03 and 2003/04 school years. They also continued with the working group on Gyspy culture, which used the school newspaper *Nevipens Andalucía* as one of its tools. At the same time, in collaboration with *Unión Romaní*, a Gypsy institution which works in the school, training courses were annually organised with contents suggested by the Teachers' Assembly: conflict resolution, Gypsy families in the neighbourhood, project methodology, teaching units, etc.

Simultaneously, in 2003/04, a course to go into project work methodology in depth and to efficiently introduce pedagogical change in the school started. With all the knowledge gained, a compensatory education project for four years was drawn up the same year and subsequently approved by the Department for Education.

Traditionally, the educational response in this type of schools, located in a context of social exclusion, was supposed to be adapted to this marginal reality, with the subsequent lowering of curricular requirements, so that students would feel comfortable and happy at school. In fact, the school developed projects with this philosophy from 1999/2000 until the compensatory education plan was drawn up in 2003/04. But the training received by teachers, together with the meditation

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[2] 2009 *Marta Mata* Awards. Ministry of Education, p.14.

and analysis of the practice and the results obtained, made them change their beliefs and, as a result, their work as teachers.

From 2001/02 to 2005/06, the Teachers' Assembly assessed positively the measures implemented to improve the educational practice, but they observed that flexible grouping, although increasing the curricular level of students of the higher level groups and reducing teachers' frustration by homogenising students and improving their performance, also caused damage to their self-esteem, who left their classes and joined the lower level groups, almost always supervised by Therapeutic Pedagogy or Hearing and Language teachers. The lack of solidarity in their classes and the little or no progress made by the students in the groups of lower level gave rise to disruptive conducts and coexistence problems.

Contrary to the idea that disadvantaged students need a slower learning process and an adaptation of the curriculum and methodology to their rhythm (happiness curriculum), the idea arises that accelerating their learning would guarantee school success in both compulsory and post-compulsory education and therefore improve their access to employment.

In 2005/06, they came into contact with the *CREA*[3] of the *Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona*, that let them know about learning communities, as well as with Manuel Gotor of the *Dimantino de Sevilla* secondary school, who told them about the interactive learning experience carried out in his school. During the second term, in some training courses organised for teachers of the area, they also had the opportunity of learning about learning communities from the expert on the issue Ramón Flecha.

Contact with different educational experiences made them think about the possibility of turning their school into a learning community, a genuine opportunity to offer quality education to their students and to use the training received to break their circle of exclusion and poverty. Considering the proposal of the Teacher Centre to deliver the first stage of the training on learning communities, the Teachers' Assembly voted in favour and, at the end of 2005/06, the training was organised. Apart from teachers, relatives, members of the different associations collaborating with the school, secondary education students and students and teachers of the Faculty of Psychology and the Teacher Training School of the *Universidad de Sevilla* took part in the training.

5.2.2. Creation of the learning community

The transformation process of a school into a learning community has the following stages:

- Implementation: 1) Raising awareness, 2) Decision-making, 3) Dream ('the school we want'), 4) Prioritising, and 5) Planning.
- Consolidation: Research, training and evaluation.

As previously described, the **raising awareness** stage took place in 2005/06. At the beginning of the 2006/07 school year, both the Teachers' Assembly and the School Council decided, almost unanimously, to initiate the transformation process of the school into a learning community. This commitment of the Teachers' Assembly was very positive for the viability of the project, since it meant teachers were both excited and motivated. The approval of families ended the **decision-making** process.

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[3] *Centro Especial de Investigación en Teorías y Prácticas de Desigualdades* (a special centre for research on the theory and practice of inequalities): http://creaub.info/cat/

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The stage of **dreams** took place in the middle of the first term of 2006/07. All sectors involved in the project (teachers, relatives, non-teaching staff, social professionals, associations, institutions, etc.) suggested dreams which they had previously discussed together to '*make the education we want for our sons and daughters accessible to all the children of our school*' and subsequently began to express their dreams. Students of the different classes wrote or drew, depending on the stage, the school they wanted. Some pupils, in representation of the different cycles, went to the classrooms with a wicker basket ('the chest of dreams') and collected the dreams students had prepared during the week. Teachers, volunteers, families and the administrative and service staff similarly wrote their dreams. The dreams of students, families and non-teaching staff started covering the walls of the school hall; those of teachers and volunteers were hung on the walls of the staffroom.

Fig. 6, 7 and 8. Meetings of teachers, families, students and external agents of the school during the 'raising awareness', 'decision-making', 'dreams' and 'prioritising' stages.

In the middle of the second term, the cataloguing, synthesis and **prioritising** of dreams started. Students of the different classes prioritised theirs. Teachers, through the teams of the different cycles, and families, through surveys and two meetings, did the same. Afterwards, a commission made up of teachers, families and staff members of the administration and the two NGOs synthesised, organised into areas and prioritised all the dreams.

Fig. 9. Some of the dreams of students.

In September 2007/08, the commissions in charge of establishing the tasks to be performed in order to make short, medium and long-term dreams come true, were set up. It was the **planning** stage. Some of the dreams of students, those which were easy to realise, were already fulfilled. Dreams which had already been realised would leave the wall and hang on 'the tree of dreams' (a column in the hall decorated as if it was a tree with branches). During this year, a new compensatory education plan for four more years, including the learning community project, was presented and eventually approved by the Department for Education. Up to the present day, the learning community project has continued being consolidated by repeating the different stages every year and therefore completing a participatory research-action process.

6. ORGANISATION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ILE

6.1. The improvement of coexistence. The coexistence plan

This was the aspect which was considered most urgent. Classroom meetings were held, where students took part in the formulation of coexistence rules for the school. 'Respected' adults (Gypsy matriarchs and patriarchs) were also present and told students about the rules regulating Gypsy relationships. Surveys on the rules for coexistence which should be established were conducted among the whole educational community (families, students, associations and teachers). The results of the surveys were taken into account when drawing up the plan. The **objectives of the coexistence plan** were:

- Improve coexistence in the school to prevent violence.
- Provide all members of the educational community with referents of positive interpersonal relations in the classroom and in the school.
- Provide students with resources to establish positive relationships.
- Improve the school climate by examining and implementing strategies for the negotiation, regulation and peaceful resolution of conflicts (Andalusian Education Plan for the Culture of Peace and Non-Violence).
- Promote the participation of all sectors of the educational community.
- Work with Gypsy associations and other NGOs by carrying out cultural actions.

In order to adhere to the coexistence plan, coexistence rules, both general and specific to each classroom, were established. These rules included offenses and the appropriate disciplinary measures and extenuating circumstances, as well as procedures in case of failure to comply with the rules by students, teachers, administrative and service staff and relatives.

Measures for students who transgress coexistence rules have an educational and rehabilitative nature and benefit the community. They also guarantee respect for the rights of the rest of students, aim to improve relationships among all members of the educational community and contribute to the improvement of the educational process. The school never uses expulsion, since they have reached the conclusion that this measure would mean reinforcing the type of conducts they want to modify, as it justifies school absenteeism.

There is also a section on the meeting and action plans of the **Commission for Coexistence**, as well as on its makeup, which is the following: the headteacher (Chairperson), the head of studies, two teachers and two relatives (one of them, a member of the School Council appointed by the Parents' Association). All members are elected by the different sectors from among their representatives in the School Council. There is also a full member of each of the institutions collaborating in the school, if institutions decide so, as well as the person in charge of the mediation programme. In addition, the number of teachers is increased so that there is a representative from each cycle of primary education and a representative of pre-primary education. The Commission usually meets every week and, if necessary, there are extraordinary meetings to tackle urgent and important issues. An action plan is also established to channel initiatives for the improvement and prevention of conducts affecting coexistence. The plan pays special attention to measures to prevent discrimination on grounds of gender and cognitive development. In two annual meetings, the Commission for Coexistence gives an account of the actions carried out to the School Council.

6.2. The participation of families and civil society in the learning community and the educational process

'The relationship established in a school is a 'dyadic' education where there are two elements, two main poles; teachers, and families and children. In this relationship, both are partly to blame, but, at the same time, it is nobody's blame. Considering this struggle between the two elements, we, teachers, decided to think about it. A way of destroying a relationship between two people is to set up a barrier which does not allow communication and that barrier was the school doors' (Eduardo, headteacher of the school).

Since 2005/06, the process of *'opening the doors to the ignorance of the other'* thus began. The idea was to break down the barrier between the two worlds, to open the school doors to the whole community:

> *'We had to find an excuse to leave the doors open (…) to give them some use (…). At the beginning, the excuse of the open doors, (…), was to create a space in the school where an NGO like 'Entre Amigos' (Among Friends), with a social worker and a street educator, could provide the families of our students with some services which would justify going inside the school. This was the first step in having the doors half open and families began going inside the school asking for other services apart from education'* (Eduardo, headteacher of the school).

6.2.1. The participation of families

The participation of families was a crucial part of the project:

> *'When it is 9 in the morning, like in any other school, classes start; (…) what makes the school different, (…) is that doors are opened for both students and their families. (…) families who want to go inside the school can do it, they can go with their son or daughter, grandson or granddaughter to the line or to the classroom, exchange some words with the teacher, and there is even some families, still very few, who stay inside the classroom as volunteers'* (Ángela, head of studies of the school).

The best description of the participation of families in the school is the one provided by families themselves during the field study, where a majority of mothers, as opposed to a symbolic presence of fathers, is worth stressing:

> *'I participate in the library (…) but, if they need someone in a classroom, we, who almost have the same authority as teachers, also go (…) there is theatre, workshops in the evening and now they are going to teach us how to drive, (…) they offer a lot of activities for parents to come round, although it depends on parents, and not only on the school (…) the nicest thing is the relationship between parents and teachers (…) a small thing you might do is very much appreciated here, the little mothers can do is more appreciated than what children do'* (Rocío, mother and former student of the school).

> *'In the morning I normally give a hand in the school, I go to the classroom to tell stories, we go to all the meetings we have to and we are there for everything which might be necessary (…) I collaborate in the cafeteria and participate in important meetings of the Parents' Assembly, I'm secretary of the Parents' Association (…) What I like most is that at home nobody appreciates what women do, while here they do, we are very much appreciated'* (Rafaela, mother of the school).

> *'What we have also learned is to treat our children, which we did not know, (…) what I like most, apart from the fact that our children learn, is the activities that are organised here for parents'* (Felisa, mother of the school).

> *'I also do maintenance work, voluntarily; we have to do our best to help teachers, (…) since we are unemployed, here one is no longer downhearted (…) at least we have their affection and esteem (…) we are all like a family, if they have to do something, they talk to us (…) more fathers should also become involved, since it is only two of us who collaborate'* (Rafael, father of the school).

6.2.2. Mothers' School

Apart from the activities for students, there is also the so-called 'Mothers's School', where a dressmaking workshop combined with a literary discussion is organised. Both teachers and volunteers take part in this activity, which takes place in a classroom suitably equipped and decorated with samples of work done by them. A group of mothers gather together to learn about an activity which is useful for them and for the school (the curtains of the assembly hall were made by them) and, above all, to share experiences, discuss and think about life in family, the involvement of families in the education of their children and any other aspect they might find interesting. While they do their manual work, a group of teachers and volunteers perform plays to introduce them to literature, since most of them are functional illiterate, and also as a tool to run a literary discussion and have some topics for debate and discussion arising. The day of our visit they were performing 'A Doll's House', by Henrik Ibsen. It seemed that mothers were not paying much attention, as they were very concentrated on their work, but then, during the literary discussion, they participated intensely, with lots of personal issues after the dramatised story. In their own words, *'the activity is like a kind of therapy'*. It all takes place in a very close atmosphere, in confidence and allowing free expression.

For the future, they have the intention of organising a workshop on road education to teach mothers and fathers how to drive. As it can be seen, extracurricular activities allow the school to continue the educational service provided to both students and their families and to have the school always open and available to the neighbourhood.

6.2.3. Parents' Assembly

'There is a Parents' Assembly in the school so that they understand the importance of education and that their children have the possibility of doing some other type of work different from the one they are used to and therefore facilitate their future integration into society' (Inmaculada, teacher of the school).

At the beginning of the school year, a first general meeting is held with the participation of around eighty families. The situation of the project of transformation of the school into a learning community is discussed, dreams are revised and/or new ones are included and mixed commissions in charge of the dreams planned for every year are set up. The Managing Commission of the learning community is made up of the coordinators of the different commissions and a representative of the Management Team, the Pedagogical Coordination Team, volunteers and the administrations. The establishment of this Commission guarantees the participation of teachers, members of the institutions working in the school, volunteers and families. Among other functions, the Commission calls the general meeting and coordinates the commissions for dreams and training for both teachers and families.

6.2.4. The participation of civil society

Civil society knows about the project and participates, together with the whole educational community, in the building of the dream.

The following associations collaborate with the school: *Entre Amigos* (Among Friends)[4], *Unión Romaní de Andalucía* (Andalusian Romany Union)[5], *Deporte y Ocio* 2001 (Sport and Leisure 2001), *Emisora Cultural Canaria* (a cultural radio station of the Canary Islands), *Mujeres Progresistas* (Progressive Women), *Mujeres Gitanas Akherdi Tromipen* (Gypsy Women Akherdi Tromipen) and *Mujeres Gitanas Universitarias Fakali* (University Gypsy Women Fakali)[6]. They deal with families, school absenteeism, the mediation of conflicts, the transition from primary to secondary education, etc., and coordinate with the school headteacher through monthly meetings.

> *'Our task in the school is the project for the area commissioned by the City Council, which specifically deals with absenteeism and work with families (…) We do a lot of (…) cultural mediation, we are a bridge between teachers, the headteacher and families (…) As regards the learning community, we try to go hand in hand with the school in all aspects (…). After all, we are just one, (…) we adapt to what is done in every school (…) we believe in the same philosophy: be open to what the other says, the participation of families, mediation inside and outside the school (…); without the school we would not be the same and, without us, the school would not either (…) we consult each other'* (Álvaro, member of the Entre Amigos association).

Other institutions, such as the following, also collaborate in different ways: the *Cajasol* Foundation (the Foundation subsidises part of the activities developed in the library), *RENFE* (the Spanish railways network finances the travelling expenses of some students to Madrid), the *Universidad de Sevilla* (teachers and students of the Faculty of Psychology do some hours in the school, in exchange for credits, and participate in interactive groups) and the *Universidad Pablo de Olavide* (scholarship holders of the *Flora Tristán* student residence and some teachers take part in interactive groups and in workshops, mainly in the radio). Placements of Social Work students in the school constitute another means facilitating socio-educational intervention.

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[4] http://www.asociacionentreamigos.com/presentacion.html

[5] http://www.unionromani.org/

[6] http://www.fakali.org/index.php

6.3. Actions carried out to combat school absenteeism

Absences are recorded on a daily basis. The street educator of the *Entre Amigos* association goes and gets the attendance records of every single classroom. Once a student has been absent five times in a month, the form teacher writes the family inviting them to a meeting to discuss the issue of attendance. If the answer is positive and there are no absences the following month, the form teacher sends the family a letter of congratulation. If the answer is negative or the family does not attend the meeting, a second letter, this time signed by the headteacher, is sent inviting them to a personal interview. These notifications are handed to families by the street educator. If the answer is negative again, there is another notification, signed by both the social worker and the headteacher. A new negative answer means a new notification and a meeting with the people just mentioned and the police for minors. Families are informed about how important it is for students to go to school and that, if absences continue, the record will be submitted to the municipal commission for absenteeism. In this meeting, families are asked to sign a commitment and they are warned that, in case of failure to comply with it, the Minors' Protection Service will intervene. The modification of this type of conducts is always rewarded with a letter of congratulation.

6.4. Equipment and organisation of physical space in the classroom

All classrooms have traditional blackboards, a table for the teacher, which is not opposite the students' tables, but on a side, perpendicular to the blackboard, there are also two or three computers in different corners of the classroom, since the school preferred to distribute computers in the different classrooms rather than having them all in a single room (as it is normally the case with Spanish schools and the so-called 'computer rooms'), a screen with a projector and a library and bookshelves for students' materials, since students, who do not use textbooks exclusively, have a folder with all the materials.

Physical space and furniture are not immovable but flexible, as they can be arranged in different configurations to suit the needs of the moment. Students' tables, provided by the administration, were initially individual, but they were grouped in three or four to work in groups. This facilitates cooperative work and increases the space in the classroom.

The walls are decorated with samples of work done by students, posters with information or classroom rules agreed by pupils (such as, for example, have a healthy breakfast in the morning and eat sweets and pastries only on Fridays), pictures of students, prizes awarded to some pupils for their behaviour, educational messages, symbols of different cultures of the world (included the Gypsy), presents from schools of other countries they are twinned with, leaves falling from the ceiling where students express their dreams for the year, etc. The result is a warm physical environment encouraging cooperative work.
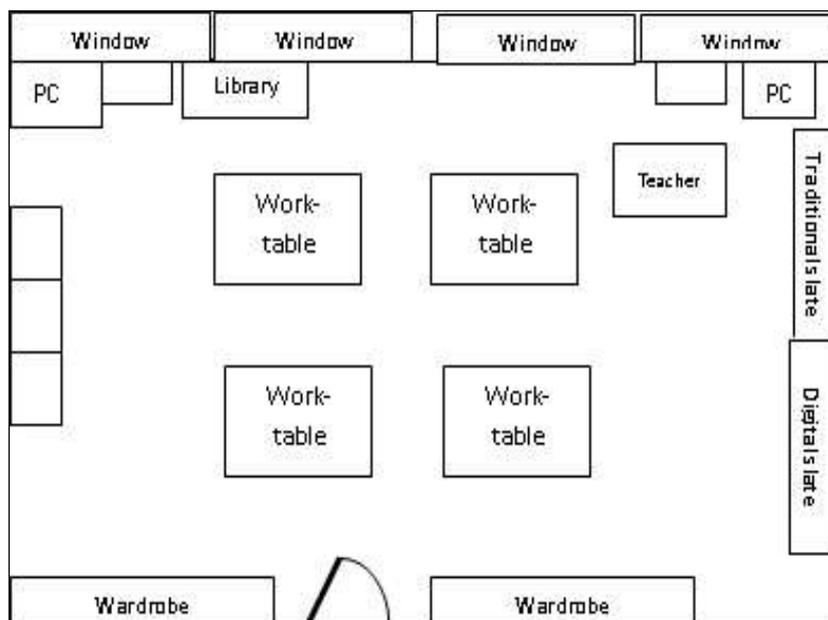
Fig. 10. Organisation of the classroom.

6.5. Prevention of school failure

Considering the needs students had, they could not wait two years for the school to be transformed into a learning community to adopt measures to improve curricular aspects which were outdated. Organisational and methodological modifications began therefore to be introduced in order to correct this imbalance.

6.5.1. The development of interactive groups

As already seen, the previous reflection on flexible grouping had made them reach the conclusion that, although results were better, students in the support classrooms of the lower level groups did not improve and differences were increasing. They had been developing an educational method which was rather oriented towards exclusion, with the subsequent conduct disorders and little motivation for learning. In 2005/06, they therefore started excluding one of the classes (6ºC) of the flexible groups of the third cycle and began developing an **experience of interactive group with cooperative learning**. In this case, instead of taking students out of the classroom, another teacher joined the class during the two daily hours where flexible groups were organised. An improvement in results was evident in the end-of-term analyses of that year: conduct disorders decreased, coexistence and the academic performance of students of the lower level groups improved and knowledge was consolidated.

This group was flexibly organised to carry out the educational work in the classroom. The aim was to intensify learning through the interactions established among all the participants. Interaction among equals was encouraged and teamwork was stimulated. The **basic principle** was therefore to **increase knowledge exchange through a set of interactions among students and between students and adults** in the classroom. The learning to learn and the autonomy and personal initiative skills were thus exercised.

Fig. 11. Interactive group.

Since October 2006/07, **interactive groups in the classroom** were organised. They consist of having students of the different classes in groups of four or five –depending on the number of students in the class– and dividing the total time of the lesson by the the number of groups, so that every planned activity has a duration of 15 or 20 minutes. Once the time devoted to an activity has finished, adults (teachers, volunteer families and volunteers from the institutions collaborating) rotate to another group, so that they spend some time with all the groups. Activities are therefore diversified and motivation is maintained. Each group carries out a specific activity and is supervised by an adult. Although activities are different, they have to be related to each other, since the general subject matter must be the same.

One of the premises of these groups is that they are formed by heterogeneous people (regarding ethnic group, gender, motivation, performance, etc.), so that help among students is encouraged and the learning generated is much more motivating and understandable. The form teacher organises interactive groups, regulates the activities conducted by adults with the differents groups and controls the timing of each activity.

At the end of each term, participants of the different classes jointly carry out an evaluation of the functioning of interactive groups. At the end of the year, a general evaluation is also conducted, where teachers –in the final report of the year–, scholarip holders of the *Flora Tristán* student residence and their coordinators, volunteers and university students, etc. participate individually. In the different evaluation sessions, they prepare reports, where good decisions and mistakes, with the corresponding proposals for improvement, are included.

6.5.2. Project work

With this methodology, mainly contents of the Knowledge of the Environment area are examined, although, due to their global nature, objectives and contents of other areas are also developed. Teamwork, both among students and teachers, is promoted, encouraging an active role of students in their learning process, increasing motivation towards curricular contents and implementing the curriculum in a comprehensive way.

How is it carried out? Project work (research) is an organised and flexible process which consists of a series of actions and activities in the classroom, level or cycle structured into different stages:

a) **Planning:** The topic of research is agreed over a brainstorming session. Once the proposals are put forward, the class (students and the teacher) chooses. Dialogue, the search for consensus and respect for all the proposals make the topic of research interesting for almost all the class, encouraging participation and enthusiasm as activities are developed. After having chosen the topic, a first analysis is carried out and the initial knowledge, hypotheses and interests of the class are established. These questions constitute a referent for the subsequent research and they are useful for students to choose on which aspects they are going to look for information.

At this stage, the task of teachers is double. On one hand, they have to structure and give shape to all the questions formulated by students through the creation of a big class mural with a network of questions to be completed as research progresses. On the other hand, a set of concepts for their reference is also established to organise the contents to be examined, taking always into account the level of students when determining the depth of research. The set of concepts is flexible, since new ones can be added. The last phase of this first stage is planning, where both students and teachers participate.

b) **Search:** The main objective of this stage is to gather information by using different sources, formats and procedures. They are not only interested in the result, that is, students' answers to the questions posed, but also in the process developed and the way students use the different resources for the obtaining, selection and use of that information. Formative assessment is being used in every stage of the process. There is also place for students' initiative and the use of new sources and methods discovered as they progress in their research. If the information they have obtained makes them formulate new questions, these are included in the initial network of questions, always taking the field of research into account.

There is a variety of resources inside and outside the classroom for this stage: the classroom library with books for consultation, textbooks, magazines, newspapers, wall charts, posters and other written information, a computer with an Internet connection and computer materials and manipulative and audiovisual materials such as DVDs, videotapes, CDs, etc. Trips outside the classroom or the school are also considered resources, as well as talks and visits of people from outside the school or the information provided by families, friends and classmates, teachers and any other person who is part of the students' close environment.

c) **Structuring:** Once the information has been obtained, students structure it and give it shape, so that conclusions are drawn and answers to the questions formulated at the beginning of the project are provided. It is very significant to contrast the results obtained with the previous ideas students had included in the classroom mural. The comparison of 'what we knew' or 'thought we knew' and 'what we know now' gives rises to new learning and the formulation of new questions and hypotheses.

The aim of structuring activities is to examine all the information in order to give an answer to the questions researched, as well as to consolidate and increase the functionality of learning, by applying what is learned to other situations and establishing new relations. The purpose of communication activities is to promote that students express the results obtained, by informing other people or institutions about them and being expressive in actions. Productions in paper format become part of the library collection, so that they can be consulted by other students.

d) **Evaluation:** In this stage, activities to understand and assess the different tasks and moments of the process developed are carried out. Everything that has been done is revised, not focusing only on the final product or the knowledge acquired by students, but analysing the process, successes and failures, difficulties, etc. It is essentially a formative assesment.

6.5.3. The reading plan and the library

Another important aspect is the use of the library. The 'Reader and Use of the Library' project considers reading and writing a school priority and the library is regarded as a resource centre for the teaching-learning process.

a) The **Reader Project** becomes an instrument for social cohesion and compensation which complements other school actions, already mentioned, such as interactive groups, project work methodology, the opening to the community, etc. The project, within the framework of the transformation of the school into a learning community, aims at achieving the school and social success of students so that they are able to deal with the information and knowledge society. The development of the linguistic skill is among the knowledge and strategies acquired.

b) The **Library Project** is coordinated by the Library Commission, made up of ten teachers and the librarian. The Commission meets weekly, outside working hours, although six of these teachers are assigned some hours for the management, planning and supervision of the different actions organised by the library. The main objective is to keep the library open for as long as possible. To this end, one of the institutions collaborating has hired a librarian who is responsible for the coordination, supervision, cataloguing and organisation of activities from 9 to 12, during school hours, and from 12 to 2, on a voluntary basis. The Library Commission designs activities such as the Book Week or a market, an exhibition on tale characters, support for the celebration of anniversaries of events which took place on a specific day in history, as well as any other which might be planned in accordance with both the school and library projects. The Reading and Library Plan has the following objectives: getting people closer to the school library as a resource centre for teaching and learning, the development of information and research skills, the promotion and encouragement of reading and writing, offering curricular support and advice, the compensation of inequalities and becoming a cultural extension centre. From among the activities developed for the promotion and encouragement of reading the following are worth mentioning:

c) **Activities to encourage reading with books:**

   – Reading out loud: With a duration of thirty minutes per day, it introduces the teacher as a model of reader. During the activity, a poster asking not to disturb is hung on the class door.

   – Library notebook: To practise reading comprehension and writing expression, but, above all, creativity in an interdisciplinary way.

   – Dialogic literary discussions: With a weekly session of an hour or two hours every two weeks. Every class chooses a book and agrees the amount of reading. Students participate by underlining everything that has attracted their attention in a paragraph because they agree or disagree, they like it or dislike it from an aesthetic point of view, it reminds them of some event in their lives or in their environment, they feel identified, it reflects some social problem, etc.

   – Meetings with authors and illustrators, such as the ones held with Lola Casas. In 2007/08, students got signed copies of her book Tú acabas los poemas (You finish the poems), which they did finish and sent to the author. In 2008/09, the school published a book with the same title and sent a copy to the author so that it was her who completed the poems.

d) **Writing activitities to encourage reading:**

- Creation of books: The objective of this activity is to turn students into authors of books the school is going to subsequentlty disseminate in the whole educational community. This activity has been organised during the last three years and the following books have already been published: Sepa y sus extraños amigos (Sepa and her strange friends), a school collective book; Mi ciudad, Sevilla (Mi city, Seville), with the Planeta publishing house; El libro de nuestros nombres (The book of our names), by students of the 3rd year; Cuentos por la igualdad, niños y niñas que quieren construir juntos (Tales for equality, boys and girls who want to build together), also a collective book, and Tú acabas los poemas II (You finish the poems II), by students of the 4th year.

- The school library supports the publication of the school newspaper, Nevipens Andalucía. 'Nevipens' means 'news' in Romany. The idea of the newspaper is to get students closer to the press and make them assume the role of journalists. They prepare the different sections of a newspaper: leading article, pieces of news (of the school, the neighbourhood), culture (with a section on children's literature), reading and library, citizenship (on values education), puzzles, dedications, positive pieces of news, etc. In addition, the school newspaper opens the way for the communication and participation of families and other educational agents of the neighbourhood. Among others, linguistic communication and social-citizenship skills are developed.

Fig. 12. Front page of the newspaper.

e) **Oral activities to encourage reading:**

- Storytelling: Adults and students of the last years become, one day per term, storytellers. Each storyteller prepares a poster to introduce the tale. Posters are placed in different areas of the school, where there are also box-office clerks who distribute the tickets. Each poster is displayed in the classroom where the tale is going to be told and students have to go inside the classroom of the tale they have chosen. Different activities take place afterwards.

Fig. 13. Logo of the radio workshop.

- Radio workshop: The school has a radio station, 'Radio Abierta Sevilla 99.1FM'. 'We also do a weekly programme with the students of the 6th year, which is called 'OndAventura' (WaveAdventure). The idea of the radio programme is to have a participative space where students can develop the linguistic skill: they express themselves, they have to prepare it, write the script … and it is supervised by a teacher. The radio workshop takes place in a radio station located in the school; which is here, like all the school premises, available to the neighbourhood'. (Ángela, head of studies of the school).

f) **Other means to encourage reading:**

–   Creation of comics workshop: An interdisciplinar (Language, Plastic Arts) comic workshop is also organised. The different aspects involved in the creation of a comic are developed: the plot, the technical script, page composition, the development of the story, the drawing of the characters, the drawing of emotions and movement, etc. Among other purposes, the comics created help increasing the library collection.

–   'Authorised' library: It consists of having the school library open outside teaching hours by teachers who collaborate, families, volunteers, etc., so that specialised attention can be offered to students with reading and writing difficulties who might require it. Former students and their families can also use the library to read a book, do their homework, look up for information, etc.

–   Classroom library: All classrooms have a small library for students to use it during class activities.

–   Playground library: There is also a small library, run by a teacher and several students, in the playground porch, where books and short stories are available for students to read and draw during the break. This playground library, part of the plan for the promotion of reading, is an initiative which arose from one of the dreams suggested by a student. The promotion of reading thus continues during leisure time.

6.5.4. Other extracurricular workshops and activities

Apart from the radio, school newspaper and comic workshops, there are many others, both during school hours and as extracurricular activities organised by the school during the evening:

> *'Another interesting activity we carry out is workshops. Once per week we do workshops with the students of the third cycle; there is an **art workshop** for them to have access to universal culture (…) and they make reproductions of paintings of prestigious artists, create their own designs and organise some exhibitions. We have a small corner in the school which is the school museum. (…) Apart from these workshops with the oldest students, there is a **cooking workshop** for the 3-5 year-olds, where they experiment with food that contributes to a healthy diet. A **science workshop** is also organised in the school. (…) In addition, there are extracurricular workshops for students and families'* (Ángela, head of studies of the school).

The *Entre Amigos* association, which offers social-community attention in the *Polígono Sur*, is responsible for organising extracurricular activities for the school through an official tender process of the City Council of Seville which is renewed every year. This association has its own office in the school, although they also can use other spaces they might need. Before classes start, from 8 in the morning, they are in charge of the 'Morning Classroom', where activities are organised for students whose parents go to work early in the morning (most of them in street markets) and have to leave their children in the school before lessons start. Evening extracurricular activities start at 3 and finish at 5, although the school is normally open for some more hours. There are school support activities, study techniques, theatre, a toy library and sports activities, run by members of the association and school volunteers. There are also some teachers who collaborate outside their teaching hours.

6.5.5. Educational inclusiveness, attention to diversity and special educational needs

Since there is a great diversity of educational needs among students (several who are deaf and some with schizophrenia), the school provides an inclusive education and students with some disability are totally integrated into the classroom. Additional supports are provided in the classroom to cater for the diversity of pupils as well as to use the same curriculum with all students. As regards continuing teacher training, one of the teachers of the school teaches two hours per week of bimodal language (oral-aural and visual-gestural comunication, simultaneously, for people with hearing impairments) during school hours. These courses are also taken by many students. Communication barriers are thus broken and no pupil is excluded. In fact, during the field study conducted in the school, a student told us the story of 'Little Red Riding Hood', which will be performed at the end of the school year, by using bimodal language.

The educational methodology used (interactive groups, workshops, project work) favours educational inclusiveness and facilitates attention to the diverstity of special educational needs of students: '*One of the things I like most about the school is that it is inclusive, and all students feel well, (…) and also the cooperation there is, they do not want a competitive school, (…) help among students and effort are encouraged*' (Olivia, teacher of the school).

6.6. Transition to secondary education programme

'*Concerning former students, we monitor them, we have a transition to secondary education programme, we keep an eye on them*' (Inmaculada, teacher of the school)

The programme consists of monitoring students who complete primary education and start secondary education. They go with pupils to the new secondary schools, visit them and coordinate and exchange information with the new teachers, counselors and management teams. They also invite the new educators to visit the school and interview the new students.

6.7. Teacher continuing training

Regarding continuing teacher training, '*teachers who join the school have to do some initial and continuing training on learning communities and the educational approach we have here*': interactive groups, project work, constructivist methodology, communicative approach, dialogic learning, learning by discovering, knowledge of the school context and population, sign language, etc. This training takes place during and outside school hours and both in the school premises and outside the school. '*Training courses are not compulsory, but everybody takes them because we need to be trained to use the school methodology and teach this population*' (Olivia, teacher of the school).

> '*We work with the Teacher Centre and, in the Polígono Sur area particularly, the training plan is quite consolidated: at the beginning of the school year, there are always welcoming sessions for the new teachers, which are also for schools, institutions, social services (…) a final course, on a different topic every year, for the exchange of experiences and training on different thematic areas, such as coeducation, during the year are also organised (…) apart from the specific training of the school. I believe that what we do during the year is self-training (…) with the aim of changing our methodology, our thought, (…) we develop a research-action model' (*María and Maribel, members of the Educational Team of the Commission for the Polígono Sur).

New teachers are supervised by veteran teachers, by getting them into pairs: 'A veteran teacher supervises a new one, (...) there is a new one and an old one in the different levels. (…) In addition, all school teachers have some support hours in the first cycle in order to implement the communicative approach, since all of us will have to do it some time. (…) we are being trained all the time' (Inmaculada, teacher of the school).

6.8. New teacher recruitment process

In view of the precariousness and instability of the teaching staff, since 2010/11, a new and innovative teacher recruitment process has been introduced in compensatory education schools in Spain:

'one of the measures the plan envisages is a specific teacher recruitment process because (…) they thought it was necessary to implement a recruitment system (…) last year the Office for Education of the province of Seville announced positions for pre-primary and primary education (…) and there was a recruitment process. Teachers had to submit a project dealing with some specific objectives and go through a recruitment process through a commission made up of members of the Office for Education, the Commission for the Polígono Sur, headteachers of schools outside the Polígono Sur area, (…) it was very complicated to achieve this (…) teachers of all Andalusia are eligible, (…) the commission was very clear that they had to set very high standards, that they had to select the best (…) vacancies in the schools of the Polígono Sur area are 'blocked', no teacher can be transferred here.(…) we do not want teachers who come to Seville and want to leave in fifty days (…) we want people who want to stay in the area and get involved in the projects, (…) bonuses or at least incentives for teachers who do extra work in this area are necessary (…) substitute teachers were hired for the vacancies which were not filled' (María and Maribel, members of the Educational Team for the Polígono Sur).

7. NATURE AND QUALITY OF LEARNING

7.1. A school open to the world: culture of participation

The most significant feature of the ILE of the school is the culture of participation the school has generated at all levels. More than an innovation, it is a real educational revolution in an educational context like the Spanish, characterised by a very poor participation of families and civil society, a lack of participation of students and a limited participation and personal and active involvement of teachr.

The school has a horizontal internal organisation, which guarantees, through a management team with a democratic leadership style and a Teachers' Assembly with a mature democratic culture, the democratic participation of everybody in every single school aspect. The fact that the school, all the institutions collaborating and the Commission for the *Polígono Sur* have the same educational philosophy is also important, since they all promote the participation of the different groups.

7.2. We live together, in peace and happiness: social climate

Members of the educational community of the school have become a big family. Students seem happy to go to school every day. There is dynamism, communication, cooperation, creativity, respect and freedom in the atmosphere of the school. Pupils are free to use the space and to develop an intrinsic motivation towards learning as well as an active participation in school activity. Students seem satisfied and enthusiastic about what they do in class and there is a lot of collaboration and respect among them. Confidence and affection between pupils and their teachers, who always try to get the best of them, is perceived.

Families feel at home in the school: they go in and out, ask, express their opinion, decide and participate in the education of their children whenever they want to. To many mothers, teachers and volunteers are part of their families. Every year, families trust, appreciate and become more involved in the school, precisely because school professionals have also trusted, appreciated and become more involved with families.

Teachers have gone from the constant worry of going to work to the school every day to joy and personal satisfaction at the end of the school day. If there is any conflict or problem, the school intervenes immediately, by mediating and promoting understanding, from a perspective encouraging social skills and emotional intelligence. In addition, the school organises a course on emotional intelligence for all the educational community and there is also programme through which students mediate in conflicts. This initiative uses mediation among equals as a tool to build school coexistence and to educate for peace.

7.3. Collaborative and cooperative work and learning: dialogic learning

Another important aspect of this ILE is the collaborative and cooperative work of both teachers and students. Adults in the school (teachers, families and volunteers) are organised into working groups, commissions, meetings, the Teachers' Assembly, etc. This teamwork culture is also present inside the classroom, where it is frequent to find several adults working together in the same class. This is a totally innovative practice in the Spanish education system, where most teachers work according to a strict internal hierarchy and as real 'islands' in the classroom. This way of working is also used at other levels: with other institutions, schools or the administration. As they admit, what they do is not only work, but training and professional and personal learning in group.

Students' collaborative and cooperative learning becomes also evident in interactive groups, project work, workshops and every dynamics and activity developed in the school. This also constitutes an innovation is Spain, where individualised academic work dominates. In the classroom, different basic skills are developed in parallel, through both learning based on real situations and meaningful learning experiences. The teacher develops a role of designer and organiser of constructivist learning environments regarding the preparation and development of each class. In addition, by assuming a role of guide of learning, the teacher supervises the activities of the different groups, solving conflicts and doubts and guiding students' actions whenever it is necessary. However, it is supervision among equals which is actually a priority: *'students know perfectly well the difference between helping and copying'*[7]. As a result, pupils play a leading role in their learning process and each group works autonomously. Students who finish are encouraged to read a book of the classroom library or help a classmate who might need it.

7.4. Everybody's culture for everybody: inclusiveness

A curriculum open to the social culture of students is another distinctive feature of the ILE: *'Gyspy culture is treated as another culture. They do not attach more importance to this culture than to others, but it is not hidden or forgotten'*[8]. In Spain, the official curriculum is quite flexible and facilitates its adaptation to the cultural reality and educational needs of students. However, the curriculum seen in the classroom is quite rigid and biased, as it is normally the curriculum of textbooks designed by publishing houses that is used in the classroom. The school has got rid of textbooks and educational resources and methodologies have been diversified, designing their own classroom curriculum with the democratic participation of students.

In addition, both the the additional supports provided in the classroom and the cooperative and constructivist methodology used favour an inclusive education, which meets the educational needs of students and guarantees access to cultural goods, learning and academic and personal development.

7.5. We take care of our school: physical space

The urban environment of the school reinforces the idea that it is an island in a sea of social exclusion and poverty called *Polígono Sur*. When going inside the school every morning, students and their families leave a dirty, ruined and hostile urban environment of social exclusion and go inside a school with a welcoming, clean and cheerful atmosphere. In order to get into the school, one has to go through a main gate and a small playground where teachers park their cars, until reaching the main door, which gives access to the school hall. The doors are always open to the educational community.

The school is surrounded by a wall and a fence, all windows have grilles and the main door is made of solid and totally flat iron. Seen from the outside, the school looks like a walled fort built to avoid the hostility of the outside (especially the theft of materials and the entry of unwanted people). One of the mothers interviewed expressed her interest in reinforcing the school fences to prevent thefts. However, when approaching the main door, posters with different messages and information on workshops and activities to encourage the participation of students and families can be seen.

Once in the building, the atmosphere improves radically. The entrance is designed to make a good impression on students. The hall is decorated with pictures of different school activities, posters with positive messages, murals, drawings, literary and artisitic pieces of work, messages encouraging participation, information on rules and activities for students and families, etc.

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[7] Inmaculada, teacher of the school.

[8] Ibidem.

The walls of the corridors are covered with murals, paintings, multicultural motifs, posters, pictures and pieces of work of the different projects developed in the classroom (on the day of Andalusia, peace, the Gypsy people, environmentalism, etc.). The school canteen is decorated with a series of murals which tell the history of the Gypsy people as an illustrated tale.

Fig. 14. Mural in the hall.

Fig. 15. The main entrance.

The 'tree of dreams', one of the columns at the entrance of the school, is worth stressing. The leaves of the tree are the dreams of students, families and teachers about the school they want. As dreams come true, the leaves are hung in the branches of the tree, so everybody contributes to having a more and more leafy tree. The tree is a declaration of principles which symbolises the wish and commitment of the educational community to improve the school.

Fig. 16. The tree of dreams.
"I dream of..."

"... animals in the school"

"... a school where majorieties and minorities are not discriminated"

"... a tolerant and conciliatory school".

"... a prince bringing sandwiches to school"

8. IMPACT AND EFFECTIVENESS

8.1. In coexistence and participation

–   Families: The active participation of a bigger number of families has made it possible to build a relationship of trust, as they have a better knowledge of the way the school works. Families adopt a positive attitude towards conflicts and appreciate the figure of the teacher as a referent. They see education as a tool for the development of their children and school as an opportunity.

–   Students: They now have a relationship of trust and affection with teachers, a bigger interest and motivation towards education and also a bigger internalisation of rules and habits. Their self-concept and self-esteem have improved and they use personal resources and skills for the resolution of conflicts. They think of the future ('want to be').

–   Teachers: This evolution has a lot to do with the transformation teachers have undergone during the years. Nowadays, they have a bigger empathy and a total involvement, a better knowledge and recognition of Gypsy culture (as opposed to the previous idea of 'marginal culture') and a better and bigger relationship with families. Coordination and teamwork make training, analysis and debate possible for the transformation of the school.

8.2. In school absenteeism and academic performance

–   School performance: School performance: An evolution in school performance can be seen in the results of the Diagnostic Evaluation tests[9] carried out by the regional Departament of Education of the Andalusia Council ("Junta de Andalucía"). Between the 06/07 and the 08/09 school years, the results in the Competence in Mathematical Reasoning improved from a competence level 1 (Insufficient level of competence development in the information organization, understanding and interpretation, mathematical expression and problem posing and solving) during the 06/07 school year, to a competence level 3 (ability to pose problems, selecting the appropriate strategies, and some competence for ordering information by mathematical processes) in the 08/09 school year, on a scale competence level from 1 to 6, gradually increasing the level of competence in every level. In turn, the Competence in Linguistic Communication (Spanish language) went, respectively, from a competence level 1 (Insufficient development of competence in oral and written comprehension, and in writing.) to a level of competence 3 (Including basic vocabulary of oral texts, and a certain ability to write texts paying attention to presentation, order and calligraphy). At present, all students coming from the school.

–   School absenteeism: The decrease in absenteeism has been gradual. The initial percentage was 60%. In 2006/07, it decreased to a 30% and to a 22% in 2007/08. In March 2008/09, the percentage dropped to a 19%.

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[9] Evaluation of the competence level in key competences (Competence in Linguistic Communication (Spanish language), Competence in Linguistic Communication in foreign languages (English), Competence in Mathematical Reasoning and Competence in Knowledge and Interaction with the Physical and Natural World), aimed at students having finished 4th year of Primary Education and 2nd year of Secondary Education of any publicly-funded school in Andalucía. In this school this can only be applied for students in 4th year of Primary Education.

8.3. New management model of educational administration and school organization

This ILE could not be understood without the new management model of public administration which represents the Commission for the *Polígono Sur*, a 'pilot scheme' with the prospect of becoming widespread in the future. The Commission has achieved a bigger coordination among the different administrations at all levels (national, regional and local) and a better planning, monitoring and evaluation of the actions carried out, from an comprehensive intervention model characterised by intersectoral work (employment, health, education, security, housing, etc.). The school has moved from a traditional to a social-community school management model.

On the other hand, the model of organization and management of school as Learning Community is the key piece that has built this innovative learning enviroment.

9. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis of the characteristics of the ILE of the school, some key aspects have been identified as final remarks. We believe they answer to the main question of the ILE Project of the OECD-CERI: *"How can today's schools be transformed so as to become environments of teaching and learning that make individuals lifelong learners and prepare them for the 21st Century?"*

We also consider these elements are vital aspects that all proposals for improvement from any school or educational system should pay attention to:

1. **Leadership, commitment and involvement of the educational community:** A strong pedagogical leadership of the school's management team, a democratic leadership style and pedagogical optimism are essential: a leadership which promotes dreaming together the school they want and believing that it is possible to achieve it, as well as commitment and personal and emotional involvement of all members of the educational community. The school has moved from a 'culture of complaint' to a 'culture of transformation', overcoming the fear of new things, change and mistake.

2. **The school's opening-up to the community:** The school's opening-up to the outside, as well as the presence of families and other agents of the immediate social context, is also important. A culture of active and democratic participation based on mutual knowledge and respect is encouraged. They are all open to others and there is a will to live together. The horizontal organisation and way of working of the school is very important too, as it promotes the establishment of spaces for an active democratic coexistence and channels for a constant communication among members of the educational community, favouring coordination. The provision of social-community services for families, apart from the the academic services for students, is also worth stressing.

3. **Continuing training of the educational community adapted to its needs:** There is continuing training for teachers and all the community which is based on daily action and shared reflection (community research-action). Teachers receive a specific training to be able to work with a socio-culturally disadvantaged population and educational methodologies favouring attention to diversity.

4. **Education for coexistence:** A positive working atmosphere has been created in the school: teachers are passionate about their work. They pay special attention to emotions and affectivity and emphasise interpersonal relations, the development of interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence. There is a model for the prevention and resolution of conflicts which is based on dialogue and consensus of all parties involved in the

educational process: mediation among equals, classroom meetings, etc. As a result, one feels a sensation of happiness in the school.

5. **Educational teams instead of 'island' educators:** Teamwork is vital, collaborative and coordinated by the adults who participate in the school's educational process, both inside the classroom and in other aspects of school life (teachers, families, volunteers, etc.). The school also stresses the importance of a bigger coordination among the different administrations at all levels, as well as a better planning, monitoring and evaluation of the actions carried out, from a comprehensive intervention model characterised by intersectoral work.

6. **Quality and equity: educational inclusion:** Teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve and an inclusive perspective of education to achieve educational quality for all students is adopted. This involves:

   a. Basing education on the development of skills, paying special attention to linguistic communication, mathematics and learning to learn as instrumental skills, without detriment to the rest of basic skills.

   b. Including students' culture in the dynamics of the school and in the curriculum to favour educational inclusion.

   c. Implementing the curriculum from an interdisciplinary and integrated perspective.

   d. Promoting creativity, innovation and students' personal autonomy and initiative from an intrinsic motivation towards school activities.

   e. Encouraging to overcome frustration due to failure by considering mistakes as learning opportunities.

   f. Diversifying educational methodologies and resources beyond textbooks with a use of ICT in the classroom which is coherent with the methodology used.

   g. A critical methodological approach, a dialogic conception of learning and essentially cooperative work, based on a flexible organisation of space, time and student grouping (interactive groups, dialogic discussions, mediation and supervision among equals, project work, participatory research-action, etc.).

7. **Continuing, formative and participatory evaluation:** A systematic, continous, participatory and formative model of evaluation and self-evaluation of all aspects of school life: organisation and running of the school, teachers' work, academic results, etc.

8. **Monitoring of transition from primary to secondary education:** An exhaustive monitoring of the transition of students from primary to secondary education to give continuity to all the work carried out.

9. **Teacher recruitment process adapted to the school needs:** A new process which helps recruiting teachers who suit the qualifications and experience required by the school.

10. **Material resources, funding and staff:** It is vital to have the necessary material resources, funding and teaching staff to be able to work with educational methodologies favouring attention to the educational diversity.

To summarise the keys for success in the ILE, we conclude with three aspects one of the teachers of the school stresses:

'Commitment, collaboration and respect of all members of the educational community" (Inmaculada, teacher of the school)

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