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A school for everyone

It is necessary to focus on the progress of each student to personalise the process

by Ana Moreno

INTERVIEW WITH SARAY GÓMEZ ORTIZ

One of the principles of an inclusive school is the personalisation of learning. What are the key aspects of effective personalisation?
The idea of personalisation means, in the first place, to clearly see that we must attend to differences. For it to be real personalisation, it is necessary to put on "glasses" to observe and analyse what each of our students' needs. In this way, we will be able to understand that Maria does not need the same as Fatima, but that, at the same time, Fatima does not require the same as Juan. And that, perhaps, there is something that Mary and John may share.

Let's imagine that we have to prepare a meal for a group of 6 people. We find that one of them is allergic to nuts, another one is allergic to gluten and lactose, somebody else cannot eat fish, and the other three can eat everything, yet there are some things they don't like. As a cook, how could you customise lunch? I could make gluten- and lactose-free pasta or pasta from a cereal such as quinoa or rice. I would also add meat and tomato without traces of nuts. That

way, everyone could like it. However, I could also boil a couple of different kinds of pasta and set small plates with tomato, nuts, meat, fish, etc. Everyone could personalise the dish as they wish. I wouldn't have much more trouble doing it that way than mixing everything without considering intolerances. In this sense, we personalise in two different ways, and we can also alternate them.

The idea of personalisation is also based on the UDL (Universal Design for Learning) model: it comes from the world of construction and architecture. For example, it is about a teacher planning a lesson and thinking as an architect building stairs. As teachers, we place ourselves in the situation of having the students walk up some stairs: out of the 25 students in the classroom, 15 pupils can do so perfectly well, some others will end up climbing them but needing extra time, and the rest will not be able at all. If you were already aware that not all the students could climb the stairs, you would probably add a ramp and a handrail so that, out of the 25 students, 24 would probably make it, and those who were not able would take the lift. This "lift" is what we call an

individualised support plan.

It is essential to think about different multilevel learning proposals. Putting this into practice could consist of giving some classes in corners, small learning spaces with a diversified proposal of activities. Three different circuits could be offered within a proposal: yellow, red, and green. Each pupil could choose the circuit they prefered. It can be used for a personalised work plan. And so, we will work on self-regulation of learning. If we have students with NESE in the classroom, they will be able to decide which circuit they want to do the same as the rest according to their own needs. In this way, a pupil with educational needs can do the yellow course, just as any other pupil in the class who needs it.

The idea is to be able to think about the needs of the students and try to have that UDL look. The UDL perspective is to think about

Personalising learning: observing needs, UDL programming and considering proposals

all those elements that can help students with specific educational support needs and the rest, too. For example, let's give a presentation to our students willing to reach most of them. Our proposal will also include images for students who need more visual support or for others with lexis problems, and they will all have better access to learning.

Therefore, personalising learning in education means: observing and knowing the real educational needs of students, programming taking into account the UDL, contemplating different learning proposals for students, having students make their own decisions to self-regulate their learning process and respecting different learning rhythms.

What methodologies and strategies can support personalisation and give everyone equal opportunities to learn?

Methodologies must be closely linked to the purpose of the school, i.e. if a school works through projects and this is its methodological preference, every teacher working there will need to learn to work through projects.

Methodologies or strategies must be able to be combined and diversified rather than using just one. There are indeed methodologies favouring more globalised, competent, and inclusive learning. Diversifying, using different methodologies and carrying out small free learning proposals allow students to be the protagonist and increase their motivation.

Methodologies such as project work, PBL (Problem Based Learning), cooperative learning or learning spaces/corners with multilevel proposals can be combined with each other, i.e. it is essential to alternate individual work with group work, project work with more systematic work...

For these methodologies to make sense, schools must reflect on their type of organisation in terms of

If competition is divided into degrees of achievement, there is no personalisation

space, people, and time. Furthermore, specific methodologies should be linked to the intentionality of the objectives to be achieved. It does not mean that content is excluded, but rather that it should be worked on in a more globalised and systematic way using "crutches" or learning capsules.

### What role does the evaluation system play in effective personalisation?

If we change the way we teach, i.e. the methodologies, or adapt the pace of learning for all pupils to achieve the objectives, then assessments should also change. In other words, assessment must also be personalised and serve to ensure that students learn what is expected from them. Current curricula are broad enough to do this, but they need to be well understood. One has to prioritise, select and decide what is most necessary. A meaningful and well-thought-out activity in a lesson can be more successful than ten class sessions with a book.

I really think we must continue to make progress with evaluation to achieve this personalisation, and rightly so.

Some advocate assessment without marks, but what are the keys to personalised assessment geared to the learning progress of each and every student?

I understand evaluation as a collection of information to make a judgement. It can be more social (accredits or does not accredit) or more pedagogical (progress or not progress). As a teacher, I am mainly interested in the second approach.

The key to personalised assessment is collecting information at different points of the learning
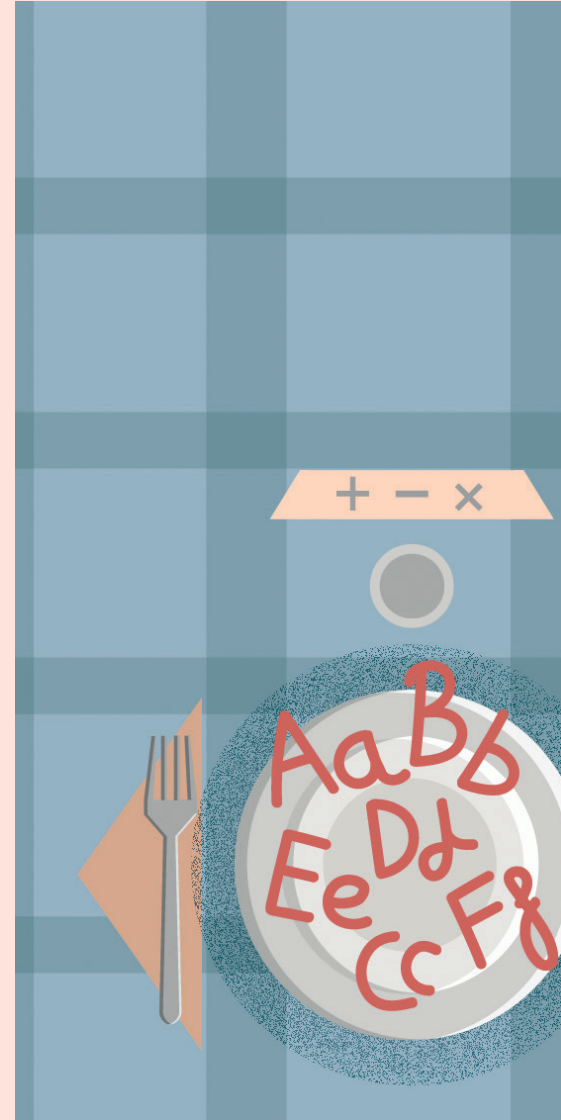
process to ensure an achieved formation and by using diverse assessment instruments or tools such as: thinking routines, learning diaries, rubrics, KPIs, action-oriented bases, concept maps, tests; and different techniques such as self-assessment, co-assessment or teacher assessment.

I understand that the more sufficiently broad the criteria, the more inclusive they are, i.e. when competence is assessed, it is broad enough to give the same mark to two students of different levels. However, suppose competence is divided into attainment grades as the system says (satisfactory, outstanding, excellent). In that case, assessment tailored to individual needs becomes more difficult. For me, it would be great to
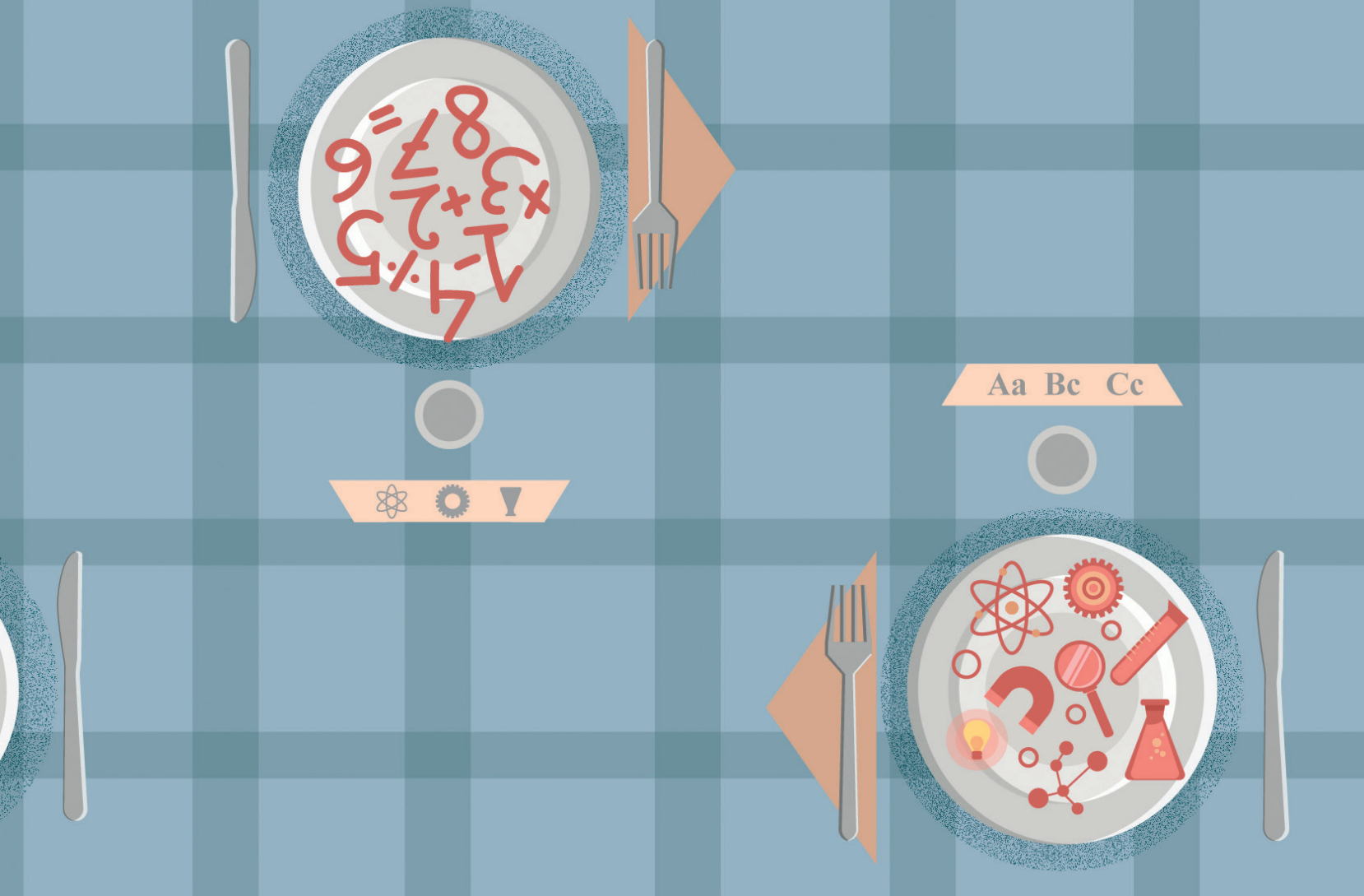
add a fourth line of grading to extend and personalise assessment.

A cooking example makes it very clear: Maria did not know how to cook and ended up preparing a first, a second and a third course; on the other hand, Juan made 10 first, 10 second and 10 third courses, but before that he had already made nine courses. Why should Juan get a 9 and Maria a 5 when Mary hadn't made a single dish before, and John had made 9? If there were personalisation, both could end up with the same mark.

As teachers, we are obliged to give marks. Still, it is also true that some schools are focusing on making a more pedagogical judgement. They specify the progress of the pupil in different areas. Even a self-evaluation made by pupils is one of the reports. These schools also give marks because the education system specifies this. Grading also provides information.

There is still a lot of work to be done, both in assessment and how we work. We cannot change evaluation if we do not carry out moments of reflection on the used methodologies.

What difficulties do teachers mostly encounter regarding inclusion and equity in the classroom, and how can they be solved or compensated for?
Schools must be very clear about their purpose as a school and, from there, orientate their actions. Once we know what we want as a school, we must be able to establish short-term action plans. If we really want inclusion to happen, we will need to train teachers to give them security; we will have to evaluate organisational aspects and assess the changes we need to make, etc. Change for the sake of change should not happen; we must change what is not working for our purposes.

When we detect that the centre needs to make changes to serve the students better, to make it sustainable, we cannot do it in the whole centre at the same time. As the axes of educational transformation say, it is necessary to carry out a

The delivery of a more pedagogical judgement focused on student progress

"tractor project", incorporating small changes and then making this grow. For example, if we want to introduce project work in a primary school, it may not be done in all grades. We can start with the 3rd and 4th grades. Once assessed that this worked, we can take the "tractor" to other groups and do it.

It is necessary to rethink school organisations to reduce ratios, improve shared teaching, encourage peer learning, think about autonomous activities on the part of students, and so on. We will always feel that things are missing, but we must never stop moving forward.

What are Individualised Support Plans and Personalised Itineraries? How can the school assume an "inclusion of all without exception"?
When we talk about personalised itineraries, we refer to each student's work plan. It is necessary to carry out a series of daily activities which will enable us to reach other specific objectives. The work plans, the activities, and the achievement of the goals set by oneself will form part of a personalised pathway.

In contrast to personalised pathways, individualised support plans (ISP) are documents that set out the stablished measures with these students. It works with the students required to guarantee their progress, participation and presence. In this sense, it should include the used measures and the evaluation criteria for the areas that need so.

If that student has objectives and achieves them, they should have a grade. The fact that a pupil has a PI does not mean that he always gets a 5, but they should be assessed according to the PI; therefore,

Change for the sake of change should not happen; we change what is not working

If a student has an ISP he should be assessed according this and can reach excellent

they can achieve an excellent. This is reassuring for the teacher because pupils who have more significant difficulties, are assessed on their progress and receive the corresponding grade according to their individualised support plan. Ideally, each pupil should have their own work plan and therefore, a personalised pathway.
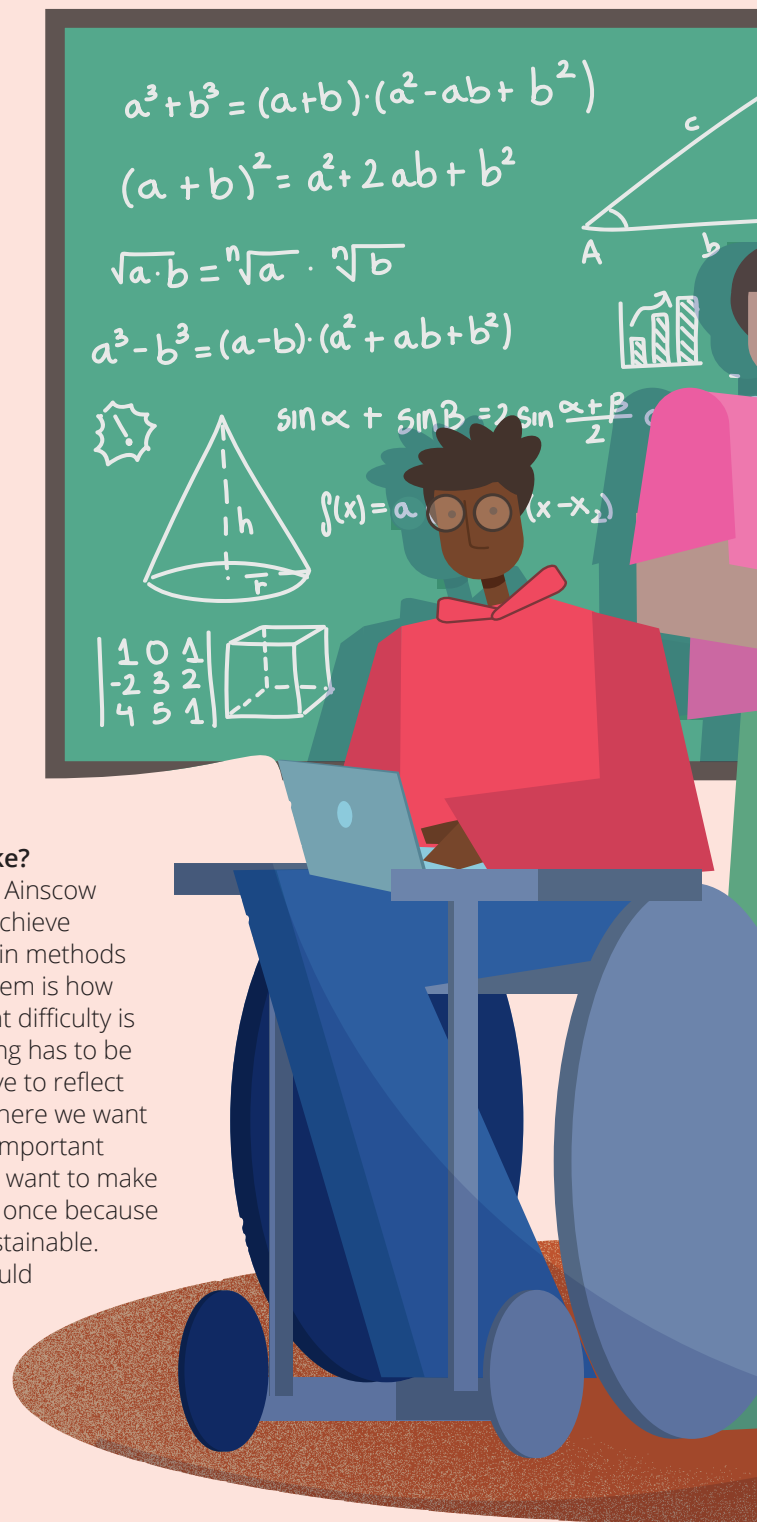
Mel Ainscow states that "proper inclusion and equity require a revolution in teaching and learning methods". Can you tell us some changes that a school that wants to start on a path towards sustainable inclusion should make?
I absolutely agree with Ainscow when he says that to achieve inclusion, a revolution in methods is necessary; the problem is how we make it. The current difficulty is sustainability, everything has to be shaken up, and we have to reflect on what we need or where we want to go as a centre. It is important that these changes we want to make mustn't be made all at once because it then becomes unsustainable. Small action plans should be created.

It is true that to attend to students from an inclusive point of view, it

must be done based on difference and co-responsibility to compensate for inequalities.

We must not forget the issue of teacher training. As teachers, we always want to improve constantly. Therefore, specific changes are

$$a^3 + b^3 = (a+b)\cdot(a^2 - ab + b^2)$$

$$(a + b)^2 = a^2 + 2ab + b^2$$

$$\sqrt{a \cdot b} = \sqrt[n]{a} \cdot \sqrt[n]{b}$$

$$a^3 - b^3 = (a-b)\cdot(a^2 + ab + b^2)$$

$$\sin \alpha + \sin \beta = 2 \sin \frac{\alpha + \beta}{2}$$

$$f'(x) = a \quad (x - x_2)$$

$$\begin{vmatrix} 1 & 0 & 1 \\ -2 & 3 & 2 \\ 4 & 5 & 1 \end{vmatrix}$$

necessary, but they must be made in a consensual manner, accompanied by the corresponding reflection and not change for change. Once we know what these changes are and focus on our objective, we must collaborate to make it possible for the teaching staff to be trained and feel accompanied.

From your experience in inclusive education, can you tell us about some of the most rewarding experiences you have had and some tips for beginning inclusive teachers?

For inexperienced inclusive teachers, the best thing to do is to act towards their students the way they would like to be acted towards. Training is vital, but they must have the desire, involvement, and attitude.

As an experience of educational inclusion, I can say from the heart that the projects that have had the greatest impact on my students have been projects that have been linked to the common good of the rest. This is very significant for inclusion because there ends up being this whole part of co-responsibility.

One of my experiences as a prison teacher was the story of a twenty-three-year-old student who was diagnosed with ADHD. When he was in high school, he was disengaged from the education system and didn't want to do anything at all. He showed a lot of resistance. I spent some time observing him, I touched a bit on that emotion, and at some point, I said to him: "What would interest you?" And he answered: "I would be interested in telling my experience so that other teenagers or children don't have the same thing happen to them". Finally, we wrote a story; it meant a lot to him because he had the instrumental level of a sixth-grader. He ended up writing a story in which he offered his whole story. I looked for an illustrator for the drawings, and it turned out that she had been his secondary education teacher. The pupil apologised in one of the meetings the three of us had: he was very aware of what had happened to him. With this story, I want to say that we managed to get this student to learn, get involved, and get excited, which is the aim of education.

As a reference point about inclusion, I could see how centres did everything they could to attend every student while I was in the Department of Education; I would encourage them to continue doing so despite we will always have the feeling that we will not accomplish everything we would like to, that we could do more. But this is part of being concerned and being good teachers.

The projects that have the greatest impact are those linked to the common good