



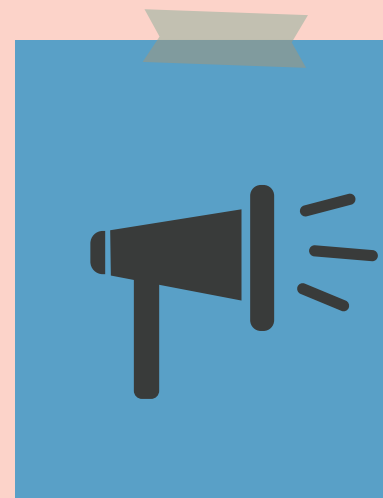
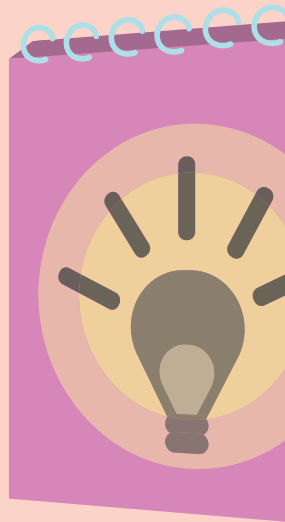
by Teisa Dalmau Xiqués

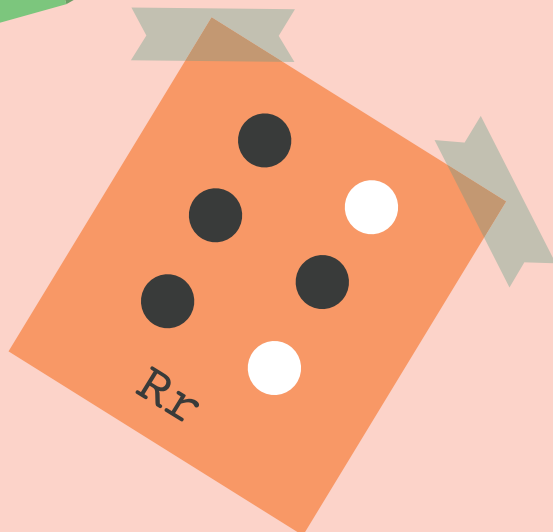
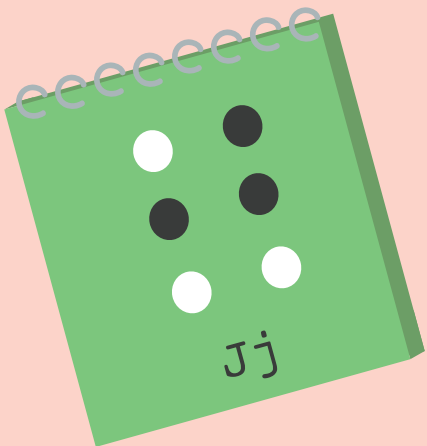
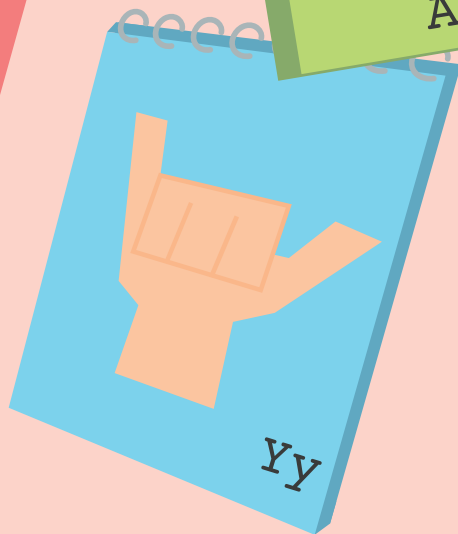
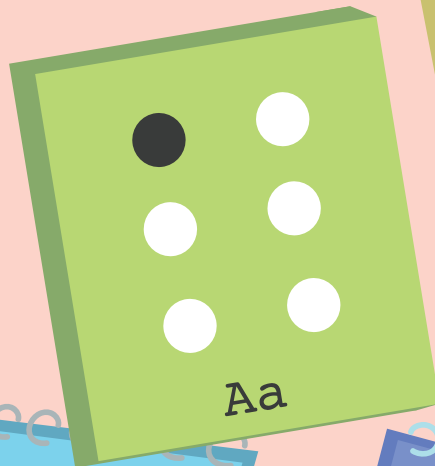
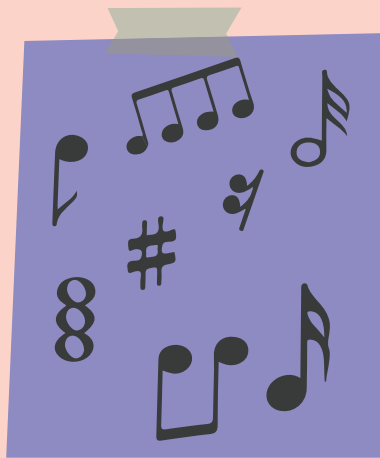
# The world will be more inclusive if the school is more inclusive

**The path to inclusion requires increasing the presence, participation and progress of all students on a daily basis**

“No country in the world has achieved inclusion in schools. Schools are becoming more and more diverse, with more cultures, languages, religions... Hence the importance of inclusion. The current education system is not designed to respond to every child. And this is the big challenge in schools: that all children are important, including the most vulnerable, the least advantaged, those with disabilities...”.

**W**ith these words, Mel Ainscow began his presentation at the 1st International Conference on Education and Psychoeducational, Family and Social Intervention at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria in March 2019. All education professionals who daily spend their lives in the “trenches” of the classroom know that this is absolutely





true, especially taking into account that attention to diversity, i.e. inclusion covers absolutely every student, not only those with a specific disability, because it is not only about working for a particular group of children, but to develop a pedagogical model that allows us to respond to each individual student and the educational community in general.

The roadmap set out by UNESCO in its 2030 Agenda is precisely to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. Undoubtedly, schools decisively need to move towards an inclusive pedagogical model. Still, we must recognise that putting it into practice is a complex path.

Inclusion needs to identify and remove the barriers it encounters by collecting and evaluating information from a variety of sources and planning the necessary improvements in inclusive policies and practices. Each society and its education system, and therefore each school, must make its own analysis and develop its inclusion model according to its barriers, needs and possibilities. Many schools that understand diversity as an enriching value within the educational process have risen very different pedagogical models.

In our experience, the analysis and planning process has been possible thanks to the countless students who have passed through our classrooms over many years, to the many teachers and families who have carried out numerous trial and error practices, and to ongoing teacher-training with inclusive education specialists. The result is a simple model based, among other methodologies, on cooperative learning, multi-level

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learning and personalisation of learning. Its target is to facilitate processes addressed to increase every single learner's presence, participation and progress, especially those with special educational needs or vulnerability.

### **SHARING DIFFERENT STUDENTS IN THE SAME SPACE DOES NOT MAKE A CLASSROOM INCLUSIVE**

For presence to be a real diver of inclusion, it must be accompanied by participation and progress. And for the pupil to be able to participate and progress, a personalised programme must be designed on top of the general classroom programme. Our model starts from a generic structure, and throughout the school year, continuous adjustments are made to the educational activities. This personalisation of learning aims to respect the content and curricular requirements and the student's profile, needs, interests, pace, and learning style.

Multi-level learning is a fundamental pillar of inclusion because it allows programming and planning for one and all learners in every learning unit. The content is mostly the same for everyone; we listen, see and talk about the same thing, practice with a common goal, and participate in what we learn. The difference lies in the progressive complexity of the objectives. This continuum of complexity accommodates all learners (from those with high abilities to others with disabilities, learning difficulties or disorders):



some will be asked to name or identify words/ concepts; others to make inferences and deductions (Bloom's Taxonomy), but the subject matter, the essential or minimum objective and the content will always be the same.

### **IN ANY INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGICAL MODEL, PLANNING AND ANTICIPATION ARE KEY**

The worst nightmare of a teacher who enters a classroom where there is a pupil or pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is not knowing what to do. It will be a long hour where guilt will make them hesitate between neglecting the pupil or the class group. It is necessary to determine in advance: what the essential or minimum objectives are, how concepts will be presented, the method procedure will be carried out and, finally, the form of evaluation.

We can guarantee progress with defined objectives, selected activities, appropriate materials and planned assessment. In this line of anticipation, it's critical to provide families with special educational needs children with the essential objectives of each learning unit before starting the subject with the class group. By doing so, the family will be able to do some preliminary work with their child: looking for information through books, magazines, websites, videos or even by attending museums, concerts,

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cities, etc. They will also have the opportunity to work on incorporating new vocabulary and facilitating the understanding of the teacher's explanations in class. In this way, the family will be able to collaborate enormously, and a potent tool for inclusion can emerge: participation. Thanks to this, a sense of competence and belonging is fostered, autonomy and responsibility are developed, the initiative is encouraged, and self-esteem is improved. Seeing the enthusiasm with which a student with a disability raises his hand before anyone else as the teacher introduces a subject for the first time in the classroom and asks a question is priceless. He knows that he knows and that motivates him to continue learning.

### **COOPERATIVE LEARNING IS ANOTHER FUNDAMENTAL PILLAR OF ANY INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGICAL MODEL**

It is probably the only way to attend to different students in the same space and at the same time. Thanks to this methodology, we can offer personalised teaching: by respecting the individual characteristics of each pupil, encouraging pupils' autonomy over their learning capacity (self-regulation) and offering a cooperative learning structure in which each student learns from one another since classroom work is organised in such a way. This modality enables the acquisition of learning through coexistence.

Individualised attention or attention to homogeneous groups is another tool we have to deal with diversity in school. The use of these strategies at certain times has its value. For the sake of inclusion, we should accept the benefits they also bring by rather skilfully combining both approaches to give the best response from each of our





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students.

Any inclusive school is in a continuous process of enquiry to best respond to the diversity of the classroom.

We know that inclusion is a challenge in the classroom. This ongoing daily challenge requires constant self-reflection and self-questioning. Joining the efforts of each of the teachers who strive to provide an inclusive response in their classrooms is undoubtedly the way to allow the educational community to continue advancing in the process of inclusion. Initiatives such as this magazine are essential to creating forums and exchanging knowledge and experiences: this will enable us to make come true that Chinese proverb that Pere Pujolàs, a great promoter of educational inclusion, liked so much “if you walk alone, you will go faster but if you walk accompanied you will go further”.

We are many education professionals working in the same direction and with the same goal. Suppose the most successful schools, and where innovation is most frequent, are places where people work cooperatively. In that case, by spending time planning together, sharing resources and solving problems together<sup>2</sup>, what could we not achieve as an educational community if we were connected, shared knowledge, planning, resources, and solutions...?

### STORIES OF INCLUSION. THEIR PROTAGONISTS SPEAK OUT

The schools of the Institució Familiar d'Educació have a model based on educational personalisation, in which, for the entire academic community, “each pupil and each family are unique”. Having this approach incorporated at all levels (organisational, pedagogical and social) means that the inclusion of pupils with special needs occurs naturally and only requires the specialised and technical help associated with each particular need. There have always been barriers to overcome, and of course, there are still some to be detected. Still, the road travelled provides good experiences that encourage us to continue improving to offer our families the best care and education for all their children.

What better than the “voices” of the protagonists to narrate our journey towards inclusion for all.

### Our daughter was born with a Down syndrome

We have indeed gone through many difficulties and suffering, as her life has been full of hospitalisations and various incidents. Still, she has also brought us many joys and happiness. After studying in-depth what the best way to meet her educational and social integration needs was, we decided to place her in the same school as her siblings. For us, she had to receive the same education as them. The centre has experience in inclusion and a personalised model that makes things much more manageable. In addition, children with this disability imitate a lot; they are very sociable, favouring their integration and development.

She is a year older than her classmates, but her integration is excellent; the whole educational community has received her well. She wakes up every day looking forward to going to school. She has a picture of her classmates in her room and has quickly learnt their names: she enjoys playing with them, the group welcomes her and loves her, often goes to birthday parties, etc.

As parents, we want her to receive an education consistent with our values, socialise well, and progress her learning. The school makes it easy for her speech therapist to come to the centre and coordinate with external specialists. In addition, she has the opportunity to leave the class and spend a module with another student and a caretaker. It is crucial since they learn content at their level. It guarantees their progress and is an opportunity for socialisation, beneficial for both. It is also suitable for them to learn about organisation and functioning, such as the timetable, calendar, teachers' names, assignments, menus, etc.

There is good coordination: the class tutor gives a weekly report to the speech therapist, and we have the “travelling notebook” for weekly communication, e-mails, etc. We are especially grateful for the evaluation reports with observations in all areas and the effort to make learning accessible to him. At Christmas, they used pictograms to help her learn her poetry, which was very nice.

We are excited that she is happy and enjoys working with peers. We want her to be helped but not overprotected, to contribute to the group, to learn to be generous, participate and improve.

### For me, the most important thing for me is that the student makes progress and that the classroom environment helps them

As an inclusive teacher, one tries to introduce a special educational needs student (SEN) to the colleagues in the teaching team: explaining the content they can work on, the more complex content for them, and the help that might be needed or when to be more patient. If the pupil can do it, the pupil himself should explain it. In cases

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of pathologies with physical manifestations (diabetes, epilepsy, etc.), basic instructions are given on what to do or how to act. If necessary, an external expert is invited to provide a complementary explanation.

Classroom dynamics vary according to needs. It is essential to carry out group cohesion activities from time to time; they encourage pupils to get to know, respect and help each other. It is imperative to transmit normality because each person has difficulties and must be respected and cared for in any situation. It is clear that only if they are happy they will be able to improve maturely and academically.

The daily life of a pupil with a behavioural disorder is very irregular. Some days one tends to be overprotective, but on others, too demanding. And so, sometimes they don't understand what is expected of them and react a bit out of control. You need to have a deft touch and be patient, but at the same time, demand a minimum. It is a question of accompanying the pupils to be well and progress in their habits.

The aim is to get them to do as many activities as possible with the other pupils. If necessary, the activity is adjusted. It is also handy to have methodological resources such as cooperative learning or projects. It helps to be creative and flexible to offer learning experiences in all areas, playground, classroom, dining room, etc. and dimensions: emotional, social, intellectual, physical, etc.

The keys to success are good coordination between all the external professionals, the Psych Pedagogical Counselling Team (EAP), the family, the tutor and the teaching team. It is necessary to work as a team for the benefit of the pupil, to specify objectives, and the person responsible does whatever is required to ensure that they can be achieved. For example, in one year of ESO, we have a blind student with an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). It was difficult for him to work in a cooperative team initially. Still, his team had to make a presentation. He was asked to introduce the group and say the parting words: he experienced it as a success and explained it enthusiastically to everyone.

As an inclusive teacher, I can say that my experience has been beneficial both professionally and personally. It is a professional challenge in every way: discovering different learning rhythms, becoming more flexible, learning from the students and adapting to them, and also applying different methodologies and strategies to reach all students. You grow as a person in empathy, resilience, flexibility, creativity, etc.

Having pupils with SEN has many benefits for the group pupils and the whole school. The balance is always positive. A pupil with SEN helps us be more sensitive, tolerant, and patient; they make us aware that we are all different and there are others with significant difficulties in life, so we can always find a way to improve ourselves and be more creative and progress as a person.

From an educational point of view, it is very enriching for the pupils, who learn to see diversity as something positive in their life. For example, S. is an SEN pupil attending one of our class groups: she has a great desire to excel and a high enthusiasm for everything she does, which helps her classmates.

### **The teaching staff and administrative and service personnel must be prepared**

Informed and resourceful teachers feel confident as they know what to do and when they better understand the learners. It implies asking for help from outside experts to see every pupil on their behalf and not so much on their difficulties. The school's response needs to be adjusted at every step, bearing in mind the pupil's evolution in every aspect and at all stages of their life, from year to year, from stage to stage, etc.

It is essential to work together with the family, share expectations, settle the reality, and review and update actions according to events. It is necessary to be very clear about what can be done from the school, what other help is available, how each family should be helped, etc. The tutor must have a good understanding of the family situation to be able to guide, welcome anxieties, show empathy and at the same time be realistic.

It is also key to have time and flexibility to deal with each case according to its needs. You often get an immaterial reward that encourages you to continue looking for proper pedagogical avenues without expecting it. For example, a pupil with considerable cognitive difficulties recognised once her teacher's car parked in her town; therefore, she waited for more than an hour to greet her and tell her she



had grown up and was doing well: six years had passed since she left school.

### **Colleagues talk about N., a friend who is always happy**

N. is very funny, always smiling, cheerful, pleasant, and friendly. Sometimes, she gets angry but quickly gets over it and makes up without any problem. She is also a hard worker, and even if she has a hard time, she does it. She always tells everything that happens to her. She is very cheerful. "On an excursion one day, I went with her all the time," said one of her classmates, "and I had a great time. She is very playful and helps me smile about everything. When someone is sad, she always tries to cheer them up. Just looking at her makes my day.

**Teisa Dalmau Xiqués** is a psychologist and expert in neuropsychology, educational inclusion and attention to diversity. She has dedicated more than 25 years to improving education by training and guiding teachers. She has implemented innovative projects such as the Early Learning Guide program or the "Troia program", an adaptation of the "Axerros project" for emotional education at early ages.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> <https://es.unesco.org/themes/liderar-ods-4-educacion-2030>

<sup>2</sup> Effective Schools: Interpreting the Evidence, Susan J. Rosenholtz. American Journal of Education, Vol. 93, No. 3, (May, 1985), pp. 352-388