



A Student, a Horizon: An Innovating Methodology of Learning

Carla Manuela Pimentel Fernandes Baptista

Colégio Vizela (Portugal)

baptistacarla@gmail.com

Abstract

A different way to learn at school

“A Student, a Horizon: an innovating methodology of learning” is a project that focuses on each student’s individuality and respects his rights and obligations, values the freedom of action and thinking. It intends to form autonomous, responsible, critical and supportive citizens, capable of implementing changes for the construction of a progressively better world. This methodology allows each student to be gradually more autonomous on his learning; provides skills to students to become critical, to be responsible citizens, to act in solidarity, with entrepreneurial skills. It gives students the necessary tools so they can build their learning effectively, respecting the pace of each student’s learning and promoting the taste for learning. It is also our aim to allow students to have access to real experiences of society, both at a national and European level. This will ensure that each student builds the foundations of his own life, in a safe and effective way, so he learns how to behave, to be, to know and to act.

Our goal:

- *Democracy and Social cohesion*
- *Learning process*
- *Evaluation system where no one is excluded*
- *Our scientific and pedagogical work is based on the idea that all students can be successful if adequate techniques are used*
- *Students must be involved in an interesting and significant learning process*
- *Respect the different learning styles and different cognitive functioning*
- *Work on team: Tutor/Students/Teachers/Parents/Community*

How?

- *We “rebuilt” the school organization.*
- *The student plans his own week schedule, choosing what, when, how to do the learning process, using an Agenda to plan and re-plan all work: the freedom to choose what to work allows the individuals to seek questions for which they are intrinsically motivated to develop.*
- *We organize the school taking into account the activities and not the school subjects. Therefore the classrooms/spaces of the school are the “mirror” of the specific work. Example: Da Vinci’s room - it is a room dedicated to the autonomous work. Each student has a Work Plan for each subject. This Work Plan, made by the teacher, has a set of objectives to be achieved and the tasks to achieve those objectives. Completed each task, the student asks the teacher for evaluation. In the teaching-learning process the student goes through three different steps: discover, learn and assess.*
- *We have created a tutorial system where a tutor is responsible for a small group of pupils having a closer relationship with each student, monitoring his work. It is the student who chooses his tutor.*
- *The students work during the week in different kinds of groups, according to the task they are doing. They don’t “belong” to a specific class.*
- *The rhythm of each student is respected, diversifying the learning situations.*
- *Students are responsible for managing their own learning.*
- *Cooperative learning / sharing of power.*

We can say that the project of our school, Colégio Vizela, “A Student, a Horizon”, is based on Aristotle idea: “There’s nothing harder than becoming equal what is different”.

Colégio Vizela (300 students aged between 3 and 15 years) is a humanistic school that focuses on each student’s individuality and respects his rights and obligations, values the freedom of action and thinking. It intends to form autonomous, responsible, critical and supportive citizens, capable of implementing changes for the construction of a progressively better world. Our school experiences a democratic organization between students and teachers.



Work places of school:

- Da Vinci: autonomous and individual work
- Kasparov: didactic games
- Fernando Pessoa: reading and writing by pleasure
- Martin Luther King: presentations/oral/discussions/ Philosophy with children/orientated classes
- Shakespeare: oral English
- Cervantes: oral Spanish
- Tutoring: plan /re-plan the weekly work
- Commissions: Project work according to a topic
- (...)

Students are distributed by different working groups and learning spaces: "Da Vinci" room, "Kasparov" room, "Fernando Pessoa" room, Foreign Language Lab: in each one of them, are developed different skills.

Da Vinci's room: it is a room dedicated to the autonomous work and each student, from a *Work Plan* made by the teacher, has access to a set of objectives to be achieved (contents) and to the tasks to achieve those objectives. Completed each task, the student asks the teacher for evaluation.

Kasparov's room: here, the students participate in fun activities developing different skills on a game environment. It's also in this space that are developed projects under the program "Comenius" platform or "E-twinning."

Fernando Pessoa's room – in this room, students develop reading skills.

Foreign Languages Lab – in this room, students are guided by their foreign language teachers. The main objective is to develop comprehension and production skills and oral and written interaction. Quarterly, students of all levels are submitted to an oral test of English and Spanish. To improve their written skills, students are also invited to write texts that can be published in the School Newspaper. (...)

Da Vinci work: autonomous work

"I never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in witch they can learn." Albert Einstein

Stages of the student's work

- having access to the curriculum contents (objectives): "Work Plan",
- making the weekly plan: (School agenda - time tutoring);
- making the daily plan: (School agenda - time tutoring);
- students' individual work (classroom):
- Researching: search, understand, select and write down the information;
- Training: worksheets: developed according to the different rhythms, needs and interests of students;
- Checking learning: worksheets with solutions that regulate student's work;
- Asking for individual assessment: grids to request assessment to the objectives;
- Portfolio organization: registration of the most important information and most significant documents that show student's work.

Working in groups

Students work in groups of three or five elements.

Depending on the goals of the learning experiences they may work:

- individually
- in small groups
- or in large group / class.

Individual work can help students to develop self-confidence in their ability to solve problems, but should be only a part of their school experience.

Moreover, in some cases working in a small group or class provides students the opportunity to talk about their ideas and listen to their colleagues' points of view, developing their communication skills and reasoning.



Responsibilities in the space

Each group of students has one responsibility:

- Going out and going in;
- Calm atmosphere;
- Classroom cleaning;
- Material requesting;
- Audio visuals (radio, computers, etc);

In the beginning of the process, the group defines the regulation for their responsibility, then they read it to the class and it's approved. Therefore, the Class Regulation contains the documents / rules of the several groups. By the time of changing the responsibility (once each term), the students make an evaluation of their performance (good things/things to improve) and deliver it to the new group that will have the same responsibility. This new group draws up another document which is read and approved by the class. Thus, it's intended that pupils do their own management of the classes.

We believe we must teach in citizenship and not for the citizenship. Many methods were implemented to develop these ideas:

Democratic Students Assembly was created to develop social values such as responsibility and solidarity. It meets fortnightly to discuss all matters related to the school's community, in answer to students needs. Aims: democracy and social cohesion; students are involved in an interesting and significant process; develop social values such as responsibility and solidarity; All school meets fortnightly to discuss all matters related to the school's community, in answer to students needs. Every year elections are held. Lists are made until a certain date. The lists have the following members: President, Vice-President, 1st secretary and deputies. After the presentation of the lists is done a debate. From the day of the debate on begins the election campaign. After just a few days there is a day of reflection. After a day of reflection follows the expected elections. Results are reported and the winning lists, after a few days, present themselves as the responsible for the Students Assembly.

Commissions work

- The commissions are made up of students (who enroll voluntarily) and teachers (one or more).
- Students choose the commission they want, in order of preference.
- Each commission, with the support of the teacher, must make a plan of action per term. This plan should become public, in Students Assembly, at the beginning of the term.
- There are the following commissions: sport, citizenship, culture, health and environment.

We have also created a mentoring/tutoring system where a Tutor is responsible for a small group of students. He can have a closer relationship with each student, improving like that, once more, the practice of humanistic approaches. It is with his tutor that the student plans, evaluates and re-plans his schoolwork. Philosophy with children and youth: the "Philosophy with children and youth" (in partnership with the University of Porto, under the influence of the program proposed by Mathew Lippman) aims to contribute effectively to develop cognitive skills. Learning to think, from the moment the child enters school, is undoubtedly an advance in the quality of all learning, accomplished by our students. Developing autonomy of thinking, educating for citizenship is the ultimate goal of the sessions "Philosophy for children and young people." The methodology of these sessions (ask questions / listen to the other / contribute to the collective thought / substantiate what is said / relate knowledge / accept well-founded criticism / build your own thinking) develops the cognitive and emotional skills, which in a deep connection between thinking and speaking, contributes to the development of a critical and creative thinking, promoting attitudes of mutual respect, tolerance and self-esteem... This project aims to promote equal opportunity of participation without regard to race, sex, religion, political persuasion, or any other form of exclusion; orderly intervention guided by mutual respect from all participants and by the willingness to contribute to a "common good", that is, to make a difference in the community (classroom, school, city, country or family, etc.) where it is inserted. "I cannot teach anybody, anything, I can only make them think." Socrates

"A Student, a Horizon: an innovating methodology of learning" is, in my point of view, a unique and creative methodology because it provides students with different learning experiences. We respect the rhythm of each student, diversifying the learning situations We believe that there is an urgent need for a new school in the 21st century. The XXI century school cannot confine itself to prepare students in a



traditional academic way. The school guidelines should be based on the actual development of the core competencies of this new century society: citizenship, critical spirit, autonomy, creativity, entrepreneurship, initiative, learning to learn. Methodologies that give students the opportunity to develop these skills are urgent in school, in order to help them to prepare themselves to a changing society, to a society that urgently needs active and enterprising citizens, who have the will and the responsibility to take risks in this new world (quite different from the society where their parents grew!). Thus, practices, processes and school organization have been changed and rethought in College Vizela. "Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." Albert Einstein.