

# **LESTONNAC in Badalona, a Place of Welcome**

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## **1. Introduction**

From LESTONNAC School in Barcelona, we want to present an education model based on the need to respond to a more concrete reality according to the educational style of Jeanne de Lestonnac,. The “humanism,” in which our educational tradition is deeply rooted means that we are call to extend a hand in raising the dignity of persons, such as the Gospel values teach us. Thus our school directives and the specific experience we present, is centered on four elements: **the students**, as active subjects of education, called to fulfillment through the development of all their potentials; **the educators**, as companions and guides of the education process that takes advantage of each situation and work that is capable of transformation; **the family**, the immediate environment of the student and part of a complex world called to each one’s home; and **the school** as the place that allows one to see and accept reality with astuteness and hope enabling one to convert the challenges into educational opportunities for the school community at large.

Our reality consists of a population of poor and disadvantaged people, namely a large number of immigrant students, dysfunctional families, marginalized and precarious socio-economic conditions. In the strictly educational environment, we find ourselves with a lack of study skills, a limited hygienic and social dexterity; conflicts in the classroom, lack of future educational and work possibilities; very little personal discipline, values very different to that of the majority of society; belonging to a culture that is frequently unknown nor accepted, and at times difficulties in communication due to the absence of a common language.

In the face of a society that fosters the individualism, the constant arrival of immigrant families, the cultural isolation experienced by the minorities that we work with, and the frequent difficulties of getting along together livelihood proper to an environment of exclusion are characteristic of where the center is located. We try to keep in mind the various factors: the implication of an educational community in the transmission of universal values, attention to diversity, the family role-models, a lack of autonomy and the capacity to be critical, the lack of values such as peacefully living together with others, tolerance and acceptance, etc.

Following in the thinking and ideals of Jeanne de Lestonnac, all this has led us to see the school as a transforming agent of society, based on a philosophy that is expressed in certain maxims.

## **2. The person as the backbone of the experience**

This is a universal experience that attempts to response to a reality in which we are immersed to transform and improve it. For this reason the practice addresses various aspects of the school life.

In the different elements considered, the fundamental one for us deals with personal attention. It attempts to reach, primarily, each student as the focus of the educative action. If the student does not stretch to reach his potential, if he/she does not recognize his/her capacity for growth, if he/she does not awaken to new dimensions in life, it will be difficult for him/her to become an active agent in society.

Another fundamental element regarding personal attention is that of the educators. Each one of us is open to continue growing in the interrelationship with other persons, but this requires center determining dispositions and sensibility. Thus, our permanent formation and ongoing self- evaluation lead us in knowing the cultures of each of our students and creating an environment in our center where each person can have a place to learn from the actual experiences of complementarities and communication.

And finally, our focus of attention is centered on each family. The understanding of some common values, the involvement in the life of the School, the desire for their sons and daughters progress, help them to work together with the School so that success can become a reality for everyone.

### 3. Objectives

Our overall objective at this time is to **empower the principles of an inclusive school: identity, equity and diversity; making the students conscientious of the importance, necessity and benefits of a peaceful getting along with others.**

In the schools Educational Project the first element that we state is that of reinforcing the **process of identity process** for all the students because for us this process signifies: *contributing to growth of mature and responsible personalities, with roots and a sense of belonging, and with criteria that help to be deal with the complexities in making decisions freely.*

Ensuring **equity** within the school and in all aspects of the curriculum, is the second element present in the Educational Project.

By equity we understand: *to guarantee a basic and quality education for all, having all the necessary resources (methods, material and human resources) to meet the needs of a new society in constant transformation.*

**To educate in and for the diversity** is the last link that we develop in our Educational Project.

We define education in and for the diversity as *a process that will allow the students to understand that the society in which they live is pluralistic and complex, and will give them direction in participating in a shared future project.*

Understood in this way, from three structural guides for this process of education some **specific objectives** immediately appear:

- Create the conditions necessary so that the school becomes for the school community a caring place that belongs to all.
- Create a climate of trust among all in the school community.
- Encourage a school that is inclusive, centered on the fundamentals of identity, equality and diversity.
- Know and respect the different cultures present in the school through the students themselves and their families.
- Foster a pleasant and respectful dealing with others.
- Encourage respect among all the persons so that nobody be discriminated for reasons of sex, culture, religion, language, national or social origin, economic status, birth or any other condition.
- Open the school to all educational entities.
- Plan strategic methodologies that will allow different simultaneous educational models, such as: flexible and responsible organizations, work on projects, communities of learning...

- Support certain models of intervention in which we are involved, based on fundamental principles of a Christian humanism.

#### **4. Activities**

Make real the option and preferential commitment for the most unprotected in the educational space in which we find ourselves. Creating an educational process in which each person feels loved and valued for who he/she is, and at the same time that he/she be moved to continue growing in all their potentials. It is here our concrete action point: to create a preventative education that helps to form criteria, channel emotions, make timely decisions on time and establish interpersonal relations that help recognize the dignity of the other and prevent attitudes of superiority, racism or xenophobia.

In all, our reality obliges us to encourage a healing education that addresses the constant wounds, fragilities, eradications...that arise all around us and that make of each educator more than a teacher. We frequently have to function as social worker, psychologist, or interpreter and role model of the values of a society that is not always upright in its plans nor in its structures.

Doing all of this from the perspective of a Christian humanism means having an attitude of constantly learning so that we do not impose but rather offer, so that we do not ignore but recognize, so that we do not place limits, but empower.

We have divided the more recent activities into three areas: families, students and faculty. We provide a simple outline to give you an idea of what has taken place in the school and the impact it has had on the life of the school.

##### **a. Families**

- Specific attention given to the families of new students
- Guidance and orientation in administrative management, scholarships, etc.
- Translation services in order to communicate with families from foreign countries
- Home visits when it is difficult to have contact with the families or it is better to obtain more details of the family environment
- Flexible schedules for interviews and or meetings
- Participation of the families in activities or school celebrations
- Attention and follow-up of the families that need it
- Personal delivery of bulletins, information, diplomas and communications from the school
- Facilitate the payment of school materials and other charges in installments
- Language classes for the families of the newly incorporated students

##### **b. Students**

*Classroom assigned to reception of new students*

- Accompanying the new students in their integration
- Welcome reception programmed for each of the students
- Individualized schedules and materials according to need
- Formation of the teachers responsible for this activity
- Flexibility and adaptation according to the need of each moment
- Special attention to social-affective aspects
- Elaboration of the ACIs

### *Tutoring*

- Personal accompaniment of the student
- Detection of problem areas and the potential capacities of each student
- Family visits to the school or of the teaching personnel to the families' homes if the situation requires it
- Specific tutoring to encourage the getting along among the different cultures
- Academic, professional and post-academic orientation
- Special attention to the personal growth, reflection and self-esteem

### *Contact with other institutions*

- Encourage extracurricular activities in the School (free play, football teams, study hall, ...)
- Encourage activities outside of school ( public library, play areas...)
- Ongoing contact with:
  - Social services
  - Counselors, psychologists,
  - Health services for the schools
  - Translator services
  - Resource Center for hearing deficiency
  - Pere Closa Foundation for attention to gypsy students,
  - Municipal institute for the occupational promotion (IMPO,)
  - Other educational centers,
  - Teams for the attention of infants (EAIA,)
  - Neighborhood planning

### *Methodology*

- Flexibility in programs and calendar
- Development of significative learning skills
- Shared external unity (UEC) in their own Center
- Curricular adaptations taking place in the classroom
- Building intellectual development
- Maintaining the pedagogical directives of a school based on the Educational Project of a Company of Mary
- Adaptations and flexible grouping of the students
- Individualized attention for specific learning
- Scholastic reinforcements
- Creating an inclusive school environment in all aspects.

#### **c. *New faculty members***

- Acceptance by the director and by the titular
- Tutelage to accompany new personnel: teacher-accompaniment, teacher-referent
- Weekly follow- up of each person, by the department head throughout the first year
- Work in teams in a systematic manner
- Periodic meetings with the director and coordinator of the level

#### **c. *The entire Faculty***

- Attend courses on the cultures and nationalities present in the school

- Overall planning of the way to present the religious dimension in the school without losing the proper identity and opening up to the students of diverse religions
- Preparation of material for the teaching of Religious Culture

## **5. Evaluation**

One of the most important aspects of our educational philosophy is networking. We believe that the school needs and should collaborate and work with the different entities from the area so as not to be isolated and to overcome its limitations. At the same time, we understand that our contribution is frequently in a contrast in some official instances. This is due mostly to bureaucracy and to perceiving the target groups of specific social action as mere “users” of these services. Thus, the relationship with organizations such as is fundamental: Social Services, EAP, health services for schools, service of translators, waking-up services, CREDA, Closa Pear foundation, IMPO, other educational centers, EAIA, neighborhood planning, etc. All of this facilitates an interaction with the reality and a capacity for analysis and constructive criticism leading to a personal and group commitment beyond the limits of the school.

At the same time, and in spite of being the only Company of Mary School in Cataluña with these characteristics, we participate in the Directors Team Meetings in our area (Valley of the Ebro) and in the Inter-centers Structure Plan with the conviction that when we contribute our own vision of reality we are enriched with the various visions of the different groups. Moreover, this participation helps us to maintain our connectedness between a specific practice and the Educational Project of the Company in which we want to educate.

We consider that the exercise to evaluate and reflect on our reality, so that we can later adapt the educational project to some concrete actions and practices, is most important. It allows us to offer a quality education, to maintain a school with a specific line of direction, and to give an adequate response to the needs of our students. All this is contemplated from the globalization of the educational task and the integral education of each person.

Along with this, we see as a great richness, the need for an ongoing formation that requires our participation. The reality of the geographic area in which the school is located is constantly changing, so much so, that by the time a program has taken place, it is necessary to revise and adapt it to the new circumstances that are taking place on a daily basis.

There are numerous difficulties that are influenced by the magnitude of the social problems and the heterogeneity of the students. Mainly, it is an educational challenge to integrate in a positive manner, an immigrant society (with very diverse origins) in an area where marginalization is a given and where the native group presents a series of problems at the social and educational level.

In general, we are dealing with difficulties outside of the school ambience, as such. We are trying to respond with the involvement of all the school personnel, who collaborate way beyond what is required of them in a strictly professional relationship.

The constant need for formation is, perhaps, simultaneously a stimulus and a difficulty because of the time commitment needed in a reality that changes like this one. To remain updated in order to give the response that is required at each moment frequently entails that we work beyond planned events, and thus overload the schedules of each of the members of the educational team.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, we want to emphasize that it was more interesting to present to you the exposition of LESTONNAC School in Badalona, as a welcoming Center, with all the activities that we carry out in the different areas we've mentioned, than to explain a specific practice.

We want to particularly emphasize the importance of reflection on the part of all (from the Administrative Team to the entire faculty). It has been an indispensable tool in improving the educational practices that require a vigilant attitude so that the daily circumstances not always relegate to second place the essential times of deepening and constancy in the pedagogical renovation.

It also seems fundamental to us, to maintain a dynamic of constant listening to the needs of the area and the desire to address those needs from a global and integrated action. Only thus, do we feel capable of giving viability to our dreams, that are none other than the ideal of wanting a different world, more humane and more worthy for all of humanity.