



Entrevista a Mayte Casals ▶ With the school year just starting, the Ministry of Education asse

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With the start of the new school year just started, as always, after Meritxell day, the director of the Andorran school, Mayte Casals, addresses current educational issues. This year, health measures are being left behind, although some practices – mostly technological – will remain. She details the characteristics of the Andorran system, points out new developments and does not shy away from controversial topics such as the Islamic veil or school bullying.

–How is the new school year presented?

–At the outset, it is presented normally with respect to covid, which is already important. First, we started the management teams and then the teaching and non-teaching teams. The students came last Friday and we face it with great desire to do a course again without any health measures and also with the desire to go ahead with the projects we have planned and that we started working on in July, with the idea of implementing them during this course. Each center has its own project, but surely what they all want is to be able to carry them forward without measures.

–Could we say that this would be the first post-covid school year?

–I hope yes. It is difficult to move forward, because last year we thought we would start very calmly and in the autumn our world fell apart, but we believe that this year it will.

–In principle, it is not planned that any health measures will be maintained this year, right?

–No, anything. In principle, we start the school year as we ended it.

–Apart from concrete measures, is there any way to proceed from the pandemic that has remained?

–Schools have added telematics tools as an educational practice, even though they were used quite a lot before, because students have their iPads and high school students have a device. Perhaps the idea of creating forums by the students or leaving tasks posted on the web or in the classroom, so that they can consult them. Or if a student suffers from a long-term illness, being able to work from home and not miss school weeks. In addition tutorials that the teacher has prepared with material that the students want to review again because they struggled to understand. These are all practices that became normalized during the health crisis and will continue.

–Is it expected that digital media will increase in the future?

–We have been changing the projectors to interactive screens that give a lot of play, since they allow many tasks that can be beneficial for the students. There used to be static computer rooms and now we tend more and more to have laptop carts, so the student doesn't go to the classroom, the carts come into the classroom, as well



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Principal of the Andorran school

«A student who knows how he learns is more successful in his learning»

as the possibility of use mobile devices at different times. And interactive screens at a nursery and primary school level are also starting to be implemented because they are very powerful.

–You said that each center will present its project. What are they?

–There are many, each center has its own to develop and improve the different skills. They make an annual improvement plan based on the tasks and development that year. Thus,

with the teaching committee, they propose an improvement plan that includes different aspects to take a step forward in various elements in all areas. There is a project in the scope of all the centers, which is the plan to promote reading, since good reading leads us to better learning in the different areas.

–Although each center presents its own project, are there any general instructions from the management?

–The basic project we are carrying out

is for the student to be the protagonist of their learning in terms of metacognition. That is to say, helping the student to know what the educational practices are, how he learns, how he learns best and that he knows it himself and to give him the tools to learn better from the idiosyncrasy of each student. And this is a joint project of the Andorran school, since we see that a student who knows how he learns and knows what strategies he must use to improve his learning is a student who is more successful.



«We try to ensure that students who learn differently because they are different reach their maximum potential»

«The bullying' protocol works, but it is necessary to detect the cases earlier and for the children to know the tools to be helped»

–If each student learns better in different ways, how is the class cohesive?

–This is the fulfillment we have in education, since we have to work in such a way that our educational practice can respond to different students. If I prepare an assignment only on paper, there may be auditory children who will not do so well, or others who have dyslexia and need that announced to be done in a more schematic way. So, the idea is to work with students and teachers so that educational practice is presented in different ways, since students who learn differently because they are different can reach their maximum potential. The teacher must present the educational practice in the most diverse way possible so that everyone can get there. It is at this point that peer learning takes on an important role, as it is known to help them learn more and better. Therefore, we have to use various strategies to get them to learn. Co-assessment is also relevant, since it is believed that the teacher must correct everything, but if they are corrected between the students and the self-assessment of the same student, these are elements that we are working on.

–Thus, the assessment is threefold.

–In this way, the marks come from different points of view. It is good for the student to know how that activity was done, why and how it can be improved. It's also good to have your classmates tell you, because often you don't realize where you're wrong, but if a classmate makes you see it and the teacher too, then things change. In this way, learning is proactive.

–Is this system in the process of being implemented or is it consolidated?

–We are implementing it but each time we try to know a little more about it and try to find the tools, because saying it is very easy but doing it is more complex. Thus, we work with the teachers to find tools and strategies to help the students and make them more motivated to know their way of learning.

-What is the response of the students in these cases?

-There are many type of students. There are some who complain that this is a lot of work. The teacher may tell you that you did this wrong, but the student doesn't quite understand either. We think that if we start with this system with 7- and 8-year-old children, when they reach adolescence, the age that makes them laziest, they will already have an internalized educational practice that will be part of their day-to-day life.

-With around 4,300 students, the Andorran school continues to lead the three systems. Do you want to remain first?

-What we wouldn't want is for the other systems to disappear because I think it's good that we have three, as it enriches us all, we do activities between the teaching groups of the three systems to learn from each other.

-The goal would not be to be the best, but to offer a different model?

-The goal is to do the best possible within our educational model, without competing with others.

-Would more centers and teachers be needed?

-No. We have a primary education center in each parish, including in Pas de la Casa. In other words, we have eight centers in seven parishes. In addition, three secondary education centers and one high school. For now we're fine, we can't complain. We finished the improvements to the Santa Coloma school last year and expanded with six new high school classrooms.

-Changing the subject, at what point is the problem of school bullying? Is there concern? Are you implementing any protocol?

-It is a complex fact, which worries

us a lot in schools and which we work on, both in primary, secondary and high school. In all tutorial action plans, self-affirmation and emotional skills are worked with the students. We also do this with the teachers, so that they are able to quickly grasp a case of harassment and apply the protocols. The moment we see that a student, parents or teacher warns us of a possible case, we take the measures we have in the school to detect if it really is a case of bullying or not. All the schools are very aware of the protocol, and when they think they should start it they let me know.

-Have these protocols served to stop cases in time?

-The protocol works because different reports have been opened in the schools to see if it was a real case or not. Some have been closed because there were none, and others have continued. I don't have the number, there aren't many, but we have to keep working because sometimes we can overlook a situation. It is important that children can have the tools to verbalize that they are being bullied, as it is complicated, because it is not always as obvious as it seems. We all have to put together all the tools to detect it and be able to solve it, both for the victim and for the aggressor, because it's not all that easy. We must put in place all the measures to detect the cases as soon as possible and that the students know the tools available to be helped.

-In another order of things, are you a little worried about the collapse that can occur at peak times in public transport, caused by the implementation of the free pass?

-We have been worried and that is why we have been working all summer with the department that has taken over the transport. We have reported the number of students who



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start each day and they are also pending. We're worried but we've worked hard on it and we think we'll get through it. It is true that from now on there will be a lot of traffic, especially at specific times, from a quarter to eight in the morning, and we have already been told that services will be doubled. It was an issue to keep in mind, we have given it a lot of thought, we have worked with the ministry and we think we have it under control.

-What is your relationship with the SEP?

-We have had meetings and, although I am not the director of human resources, most of the teachers are in my schools. We had a good understanding, the information flowed. They have shown us aspects that we could improve.

-Has the amendment to the civil service law helped you?

-Yes, sure. With this modification, we take forward a concern that both the ministry and the collective of interims had about being able to present themselves to the edicts in the internal phase. Work has been done and we are satisfied and the SEP is sure to be too.

-Do you plan to reduce the number of temporary people or is it already what you want?

-We take them out every year, both the last legislature and the current one, to try to reduce the percentage of the interim group. Due to the pandemic, we had to extend the call process that we had started, but every year we have been able to issue an edict. In those educational departments where we have more than 15% of temporary staff, we want to issue an edict to reduce them.

-Do you need to improve their conditions?

-Everyone wants to improve their conditions. What we want is for temporary workers to be as equal as possible to civil servants, and in terms of training and the annual contract this is already quite the case. We want temporary workers to have the same conditions as contract staff.

-How are the regulations for the professional career of teachers?

-We have a first version done. From here, the minister will explain it to the cloisters, and we will hold the sectoral tables so that all groups can participate to close the proposal.

-Changing the subject, is the issue of the Islamic veil solved?

-I wouldn't want to talk too much about this topic because the more you talk about it, the more complex everything becomes. Following the approval of the law, we have a service that responds to students who, for whatever reason, cannot go to school. If we have to offer help to this girl from this service it is offered without any problem. But the important thing is that the girl, like any other child, is schooled and receives learning.

-In the case of Ukrainian refugees, how is the adaptation process going?

-This year we had quite a few children from Ukraine in the schools. Some have left and others have stayed, while others are arriving new. What we have done is to support the teachers and accompany the children, so that they feel at ease. They came in stages and we adapted to the families' needs. This school year, we are going to include them as a late incorporation to give them the maximum resources in order they learn the Catalan, French, and Spanish language, due to this they will feel part of the center. ≡



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