School No. 3, Cristóbal Colón of Villa Lugano, Autonomous City of Buenos Aires

Brief overview of the school

Introduction

School No. 3 is located in the neighborhood of Villa Lugano, at the southeastern part of Buenos Aires City. It is a public primary school with more than 750 students grouped into 30 sections, divided in two shifts. Pupils that attend this school live in the surrounding “villas” or slums, and most of them are Bolivian immigrants who settle in the country looking for better living conditions.

Context and location

Villa Lugano has a low socio-economic status population and the largest number of villas and precarious settlements throughout the city (Cosacov and others, 2011). Between 2001 and 2010 the commune where the school located experienced a population increase that quadrupled the national average value (Di Pietro and others, 2013). This growth is a distinctive phenomenon of the district, which is mainly explained by the increase of villas (32.9% of the total population in the district).

One of the peculiar characteristics of villas at Lugano is the large number of Bolivian immigrants, textile workers, who work as seamstresses in independent workshops or factories. They now represent the 2nd or 3rd generation, so their children acquire Argentinian nationality and they constitute a large proportion of the students of state schools, as in the case of School No. 3.

Moreover, the urban infrastructure conditions have jeopardized health and environment of the inhabitants. Despite having the highest concentration of green spaces in the city (Cosacov, opcit), this neighborhood shows high levels of pollution due to the presence of open dumps and the “automobile graveyards” of the villas, visible on the sidewalks adjacent to the school. In addition to this, the area is characterized by a lack of options to access to cultural, artistic and recreational institutions, including theaters and cinemas.

The vulnerability of the socio-economic context from where the children come entails problems of many different kinds, such as lack of support of their families, domestic violence or illiteracy. Despite that School No. 3 tries to cope with those issues by providing opportunities for the improvement of school performance. For this reason, today this

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1 A villa is a type of shantytown or slum found in Argentina, mostly around the largest urban settlements.
institution is seen as a school of inclusive practices since it shows major improvements in academic indicators at one of the most difficult environments.

**Institutional conditions**

As usual in the country's schools, School No. 3 operates as two single-shift institutions: there is one shift in the morning and one in the afternoon. The building, large in size, is shared with a kindergarten and with a primary school for adults during the evening shift.

A panoramic view shows silent, spotless and clean corridors, harmonious colors, and decorations made with recycled materials. The school grounds are large, it has two floors (1st cycle and 2nd, respectively), a computer lab, a library, an art workshop, a small teachers' room, a canteen, two schoolyards where students do sports and recreate, and an auditorium which functions as a multipurpose room (for example, students watch films and dance tango there). The school went through some renovations to allocate students with limited mobility. Adequate sanitary facilities and a lift were installed.

The 15 classrooms are spacious and colorful, just as the Principal's office. The management team and the secretaries work in the same office and they have a separate space to meet with parents, supervisors or teachers. Their scarce materials and resources are always reused and recycled, and this logic is perceived in the whole school, from costumes for school events or materials for workshop tasks, to decoration and equipment.
As regards human resources, the school has a management team of four people: the Principal, the Assistant Principal and two secretaries. A retired teacher also collaborates with general secretarial duties voluntarily, and everyone respects her and treats her as an authority, even without having a post. The teaching staff consists of 57 teachers, who work in curricular and
special areas\textsuperscript{2}, and Support teachers, and caretakers for integrated students. The latters do not depend on Special Schools Directorate and on each student health insurance.

School conditions were improved over the years. In addition to the Integral Renovation Plan implemented by the city government that refurbished the whole building, the institution receives subsidies from the city government and the nation. For instance, resources of the Integral Program for Education Equality\textsuperscript{3}, the Education Promoters Program\textsuperscript{4}, the Swimming Program\textsuperscript{5} and the Schools of Pedagogical Innovation Program (Boston - OAS)\textsuperscript{6}.

**Recent history: a new management team and an art-oriented educational project**

For many years, the school was run by a Principal who prioritized assistance and support functions due to the needs and the high degree of vulnerability that affected the students. Therefore, gradually, the pedagogical role of the school was blurred. School No. 3 became the place to which repeaters around the neighborhood, and even teachers with conflicting histories, were drag to. Also, it was the place where the neighbors went to collect 2\textsuperscript{nd} handed clothing or to even reported claims for crimes in the neighborhood. The educational function was completely relegated and student’s learning was pushed into a 2\textsuperscript{nd} place. In fact, the only curricular areas offered were Language and Math. There was a widespread belief that only the minimum and necessary resources should be given to students: they should be able to write and read well and to do basic calculations. The academic level declined, and teachers lost enthusiasm.

After the departure of the historical Principal, for 6 years no one else managed to "survive" for more than one year at the school. This is how it sank in a cycle of continued deterioration at administrative, facility levels and pedagogical level. The school suffered of constant power cuts and lack of water service, so there were no available restrooms or appropriate conditions for students with motor disabilities, such as elevators. In addition to that, there were no records of students, enrollments were not carried out, and the school could not raise funds on their own because even the cooperative had been dismantled.

When the current management team arrives in 2009, they decided to put an end to the existing chaos. They put up a plan to eradicate the vision of a "containment school," by strengthening the teaching and learning processes. With high expectations, initiative and commitment, they managed to change the history of the school. Through strong leadership, they worked to rebuild relationships with teachers and to put together a guiding educational project that showed a new horizon: “The art of learning”.

On one hand, it has been used to deal with expression of emotions and affective needs by offering new channels and alternative languages to speak up and raise their voices. This has

\textsuperscript{2} Physical education, Music, Art, Informatics
\textsuperscript{3} “Programa Integral para la Igualdad Educativa (PIIE)” in Spanish.
\textsuperscript{4} “Programa Promotores de Educación” is the original version in Spanish
\textsuperscript{5} “Programa de Natación” is the original version in Spanish
\textsuperscript{6} “Programa Escuelas de Innovación Pedagógica (Boston - OEA)” is the original version in Spanish. It is a cooperation project co-funded by the OAS, between the Ministry of Education of the Government of the City of Buenos Aires and the Boston Arts Academy (BAA), which aims to deepen knowledge on the functioning of institutions that promote educational experiences based on art. (Official site of the Directorate General of International Relations and Cooperation).
helped to tackle low self-esteem and derangement of students, teachers and parents. On the other hand, working with art expanded the “possibility frontier” of the neighborhood's children lacking of cultural and academic background. It became a way to provide access to cultural goods that are often absent in vulnerable contexts. This project routed successfully teachers’ work towards the same horizon, inspiring and engaging them with a new vision of the school.

Thus, since 2012 School No. 3 is part of the "Schools of Pedagogical Innovation" Program (Boston - OAS) through which they receive training, and share their work experiences of combining art and education, with other schools. The incorporation to the Program enhanced the work that he school was already developing.

*Walls decorations and furniture with recycled materials at art workshops build by parents, students and teachers*
School Management: A Framework for inclusion

The philosophy of the school bears the hallmark of a true educational leadership carried out by Principal with the unconditional support of her Vice Principal that captivated teachers and students. Their democratic management style promoted a close engagement of the community towards inclusion and students learning. They managed to work with common criteria, requiring commitment to students’ learning of both teachers and families. To do this, they strengthened the management sector by implementing a distributed leadership, that’s focus on what is best for the children.

Strong leadership

When the Principal’s team arrived to the school, their main concern was to get to know the students in depth and to establish a close bond with their families in order to restore their trust. To do this, the Principal enrolled each one of the students herself, resetting the records and recording every detail: names and occupation of their parents, place of residence, vaccines they had received and by which means they got to school. This allowed them to get to know the conditions in which students lived, to understand their context, to outreach the community, and even to meet their needs beyond the pedagogical ones.

They also raised awareness of parents on the need to practice contents at home, keeping track the pupils homework, and on the importance of punctuality. They talked with parents on a daily basis about the need to apply for the National ID cards of the children, the importance of school having its own resources (by forming a cooperative). This is a clear example of how a committed Principal can lead a school that includes everyone in the world of knowledge, “we used to see that parents were blank on their children schooling, now we see how they approach the school worried because they did not read the communication notebook, for example.” (Principal).

In turn, another foundational strategy was to engage and motivate teachers with a common project, based on a new and more committed vision of the school. The Vice Principal said that a key step was to open themselves to others, leading by example. They showed concern about a delay, or an absence; they respected and enforced regulations in order to adjust the tasks and responsibilities that were required for the proper functioning of the school and academic achievement of students. The testimonies of teachers evidence the mark on the whole school team.

"Here we note that there’s a whole coordination and that it’s going to a place. The Principal convinces us with her 'let’s go forward' enthusiasm. She pushes us forward and encourages us. If we do something wrong, she warns us. She does not want us to stand in formation because class minutes are lost..." (3rd grade teacher)

"She thinks about the children first. I see how firm she is. With her particular thinking, she is a coherent woman who does what she thinks, although I disagree with some things. She presents
her grounds and goes forward. I see that she is very idealistic and loves what she does. She is fully committed and she keeps moving forward. (6th grade teacher)

However, leading towards a common goal was not an individual task, and the Principal is aware of that. She has built a consistent management team, dividing the tasks of leadership and involving her colleagues in all decisions, "the management team consists of the 4 of them together; they are all leaders." (6th grade teacher). While each complies with a particular function, they are all involved. When secretaries have too much administrative burden, the Principals help them. They can often disagree on things, but decisions are made as a team; they respect each other, "they act as a unit".

In addition, decisions and tasks are also shared with teachers. A clear example of this is reflected in the production of school events. Teachers divide topics between them, prepare activities, seek resources and make the invitations. The Principals claim that they only comply with the time and date of the event and they support teachers so that everything gets done and works out, and they are not there for them to highlight what goes wrong.

Resource management: obtaining and prioritizing resources

Another feature that stands out in the leadership of the Principal’s team of School No. 3 is their ability to manage resources. Thanks to their persistence and perseverance, they managed to get the building refurbished, to implement different school programs, encouraging students and teachers to apply for every possible calling and contest. Their effort to participate in the "Schools of Pedagogical Innovation" Program is an example of this. Since 2011, the school participates in this program thanks to the insistence of the Principal, who even got to talk to the Minister of Education to make it possible.

Another prime example is what they managed to get through PROA Foundation\(^7\), receiving training for students of 6th and 7th grade in order to explore different thought current about contemporary art. Besides art projects, their aim is to increase the training options for other areas. Although this is not mandatory content, in 3th grade resources were processed so that Tango and Computer classes were provided. As a result, the Competition for Technological Innovation of Microsoft consecrated 3rd graders as winners with a project inspired by stories about Joan Miró.

The team also knows how to select which kind of programs are more suitable for students, and which are not. In some cases, they have decided not to get involved, as with a program of Natural Sciences. Thus, principals and teachers can focus their efforts on those projects they consider more relevant and adequate with the school vision. The professionalism of the management team is also highlighted in the way they make decisions, justifying with grounds each action and step they take.

Focus on the pedagogical matters

\(^7\) “Fundación PROA” is the original version in Spanish.
As previously mentioned, the community had been used to a kind of school with a supportive and patronizing profile, which the management team was willing to change. Efforts and willingness of the school were reoriented towards the improvement of academic achievement of all. In the same way, these vision increased teachers’ requirements, which led to the abdication of those who were not committed to work within a paradigm of an inclusive school.

**High expectations**

The Principal emphasizes that her goal is to educate autonomous, hard-working children who will not reproduce in their lives the conditions of their original context. The educational project they implemented does not intend to train artists, but to stimulate students to “strive further”. Students are expected to reach secondary level, something that is not usual in the community. Since 2010, they began a register of students who enroll and remain in high school in order to show students the importance of that, and to make clear that the school worries about them, that they do care.

“We work to drive school forward in order to provide real learning experiences, to make children feel good and provide them with opportunities. We want them to go outside the neighborhood, to get know their surroundings, to observe; nobody has a limited world; everyone should have access to the culture of the others. How do you motivate yourself to achieve something you never saw? We do not want to train artists; we want to show students the widest possibilities we can.” (Principal)

This is how the forward thinking and the importance of learning and attending school became the working axes of teachers and principals, and those axed encourage everyone to think of a bright future. The perspective of students on the school reflects the impact of this motivation.

“What I like most about the school is learning, meeting people and playing because when I grow up I want to have a decent job and learn to share with others.” (5th grade student)

"Of school, what I like most is studying, learning and playing. Because by doing that I will work better when I grow up.” (6th grade student)

“(What I like most about the school) are the Sports and Natural Sciences classes, because we do exercises and play while studying with the teacher. I like to learn to have a better future.” (5th grade student)

**Management centered on pedagogical issues**

Thanks to her strong leadership, the Principal has the possibility to delegate some bureaucratic tasks and to concentrate on the pedagogical ones. At her desk there are schedules and assessments, which are monthly reviewed together with the Vice Principal. After the entrance of each shift, they walk around the classrooms, talking to the pupils, checking their homework and sometimes even sitting with them to observe the class. While class observations do not take place regularly, teachers say their presence is constant. The goal is not to monitor, but to accompany them. They stress that the observations do not consist of looking at how teachers give lessons, as they do not want them to prepare master classes for them. They want to observe day-by-day progress, how children are doing, and in what situations they are
immersed. This how they identify which grades need adjustments. In fact, usually observations arise from teacher’s requests. They assure that teachers are used to consult everything with them, including strategies and activities.

“Sometimes I don’t know how to explain some topics to the group... or the children don’t understand me ... In those cases I directly ask for their help. For example, as in Maths we don’t have a manual, with the Principal we put together a booklet. If I need some assistance, they are there for me. (2nd grade teacher)

In general, all teachers had the same perspective on the role of the Principal. They feel supported, and they believe they can work in peace because they have someone to turn to in any situation.

“She is aware of everything, and she always helps us putting her best efforts, regardless of whether things go right or wrong in the end. She’s there for us when we need her. The ideal of a Principal should be like her. I wish she didn’t have to do administrative tasks.” (Interview with Art Teacher)

“I qualify the Principal with an A for the way in which she listens to us and gives us feedback. She is always there, and makes you feel supported and accompanied. This is evidenced in the results. For example, when we needed to hang posters for school events, I seek assistance from the team and they help us, when I needed to set up a meeting with families because of an inconvenience, she is there, with evidence in hand to justify what we were saying.” (Interview with 6th grade teacher)

**School Atmosphere**

Both during breaks and in the classroom prevails a friendly environment and a sense of respect. Violence or abuse among pupils is definitely not an issue here. According to teachers, situations of discrimination do not exist either. If that happens, it is not overlooked: respect is fundamental to promote learning and coexistence at school. Children love so much attending school that in fact, they even come on rainy days.

Teachers agree that the bonds with the children are very close and loving because of their willingness and openness. The support, advice and attention provided are consistent in their words. In fact, when asked about is the thing they most like about school, many highlighted the figure of teachers, ensuring that, they were the people they could trust.

“What I like most about this school is how good teachers are (...) because they always help us, make us smile. Whenever we need them, they are always there for us.” (6th grade student)

“(The person with whom I can speak in school) ... is my teacher or other special teachers.” (5th grade student)

What is more, collaborative work and solidarity are the main features of the school. Principals and teachers state that teamwork is spontaneous, and it does not need to be established as a guideline; it arises from the good relationship between teachers. Their fellowship and solidarity can be seen in the way they share documentation, teaching strategies and projects.
Their companionship is expressed in how they support each other and unite in order to address the vulnerability context. They have a common horizon and walk together.

“When you feel comfortable at work, you work well. You feel more like coming to work, having no conflicts with the Principal or your peers. There may be tensions, but the balance is always positive for me. Here, in the teacher’s room, we share a coffee, mate... it keeps us together.” (6th grade teacher)

**Teachers – every day models for inclusion**

“In some districts there are schools that teachers do not want to go to. This was one of those schools; students that nobody wanted were sent here, and teachers saw it as their last resort. This school was a jumble of everything and a lot of people...” (Principal)

Certainly, this situation no longer represents School No. 3; teachers choose to stay now. Stability and commitment are the two characteristics that best describe this team. Some have recently joined, others came with the current Principal’s team and others have worked for more than 20 years in the school. Most live in the area and share a friendship that goes beyond their work. Unlike other schools, here there is no teacher absenteeism.

"The teachers are excellent. All who have worked here try to stay; since the new Principal arrived, the situation changed and no one wants to go". (3rd grader’s mother)

According to the Principals and parents interviewed, the commitment of teachers is a strength element of the school. The importance given to learning is evidenced in their speeches and practices, especially in the work they do on the differences of students. They know the history of each of their students; they respect the different rhythms, and they are convinced that always, the goal is to level them up.

"The teachers are very dedicated; they check notebooks every day, they even care about how children look, if they are clean, if they are hungry.... As for the discipline... they are demanding but not in a bad way, they are not strict.” (4th grader’s mother)

"The teachers are demanding; they do not overlook anything." (2nd grader’s mother)

"We all agree that main goal are the children, everything we do is related to their wellbeing. And we are free to choose and make use any tools or projects to benefit their schooling " (Interview with Support Teacher)

**High expectations**

One of the major advantages when teaching at School No. 3 is the individualized monitoring of the pupils progress; teachers are aware of every single problem they face. This allows them to outgrow the origin conditions and to identify where action is needed most urgently and through what kind of strategies. As Freire (2005) states, knowing the context of students is essential to set goals and to improve their conditions. Likewise, high expectations are a crucial element for strengthening learning; the literature has shown the impact of the other peoples
view and encouragement to generate a good self-concept. This happens to be one of the main factors that enhance learning (Florian & Linklater, 2008).

Teachers from this school have this clear objective, and focus their work on designing teaching strategies according to the needs of each student. They argue that, in many cases, barriers to learning are not cognitive, but emotional, and often emerging from the lack of family support. Here lies the importance of counting on stimulation and positive expectations.

"For me it is all one unit, perhaps I'm very involved in the school, because I want it to. I could have change to another institution, instead im still here. I do not separate family-school-student. I take them as a core; if I don't get involved with their family issues, I could isolate the pupil, I can't leave them in the dark, alone; I need to bring them back to the class." (Plastic arts teacher)

"I like that teachers provide a lot of attention to students. For example, the separation from my wife affected my son a lot, and teachers realize this; I see that they pay more attention to him." (6th grader's father)

The context of adversity were students are immersed are not a challenge to teachers. They are constantly working to shed the student’s stigma of "being villero", convincing them that school is their place to learn.

**Meaningful learning**

The influence of context in cognitive abilities has been recognized in recent decades as a key factor in the generation of learning processes (Aubert et al, 2011). Social and collective dimensions are incorporated to account for the formation of meanings and construction of knowledge on individuals. Thus, through social interactions students can establish a dialogue with the environment surrounding and strengthen the construction of significant knowledge. This becomes an essential tool to promote learning. Far from being overwhelmed by social reality of their students, teachers engage and incorporate different situations an issues form the neighborhood in their strategies, activities and contents.

**Open planning and contextualized content**

The adequacy of the strategies to children’s realities, and the subjects that are seen in class, say much about the flexibility of content and methodology that teachers implement. While they respect the existing Curriculum Design for subjects, the openness with which they handle content constitutes one of the keys to motivate students. Although sometimes these may be inappropriate topics for children, everything that they bring to the classroom from outside is taken into account, from murders to thefts, demonstrations for gender rights, among others.

In addition to this, contents are introduced according to the interests of the children. Their aim is to make pupils express their views and opinion, provide hypothesis, draw conclusions, always respecting the opinions of others. Among the topics used in Social Sciences to work on coexistence and civic responsibility they used the case of recent events of violence at football

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8 “Villero” means someone who lives in a “villa”.

games. Other topics of everyday life are introduced into other areas such as in Mathematics. By using different concepts like financing, debt, loans, fees, which are common topics in low-income households, the contents become more clear and intuitive to speak about and understand.

**Alternative methodologies and projects**

In School No. 3, methodologies and teaching strategies also vary. They emphasize the importance of providing different perspectives, roles, and activities. An observation of a 2nd grade math class proves this. The teacher uses fake money to practice addition and subtraction exercises. He offers different challenges, asking for amounts of change in coins to each student according to their level of difficulty.

"We don’t teach everyone the same way, there is a different methodology for each kid."

For their part, to encourage reflection and discussion on our surroundings, teachers often use mechanisms such as round tables or debates. Thus, they settle the conditions for dialogue, which, according to Freire (1997) is a key element to promote curiosity for learning and knowledge. Expression and communication skills become crucial.

These skills are also worked through artistic expression. Working by areas, teachers carry out projects as an alternative to conventional teaching methods. For example, when they work with tales, students provide characters a voice, a personality and an attitude. They build and design, reinvent and recreate in the Art workshops, and then they rewrite the tale in Language. In subjects such as Music or Computer sciences, where they summarize the stories in Word adding pictures and sounds, thus enriching the work.

"They built great models based on the characters of the tales we worked with. Their models can move and exchange parts of the animals as they desire. After playing with them, they had to describe them. I liked it because in this way pupils express their imagination building characters and they also express through words at the moment of describing it." (Support Teacher)

"We plan without writing the story. We sit and see... we have these characters, these tales, the school, and they proposed what each character could do if they would fly in time and spend a day with us here. The pupils wrote different kind of stories about it and we even got the chance to get dress as the characters and visit the school for real! I enjoyed every moment, watching them with their costumes, seeing how parents took care of it, the laughter, the assembly of the video and photos... it was all fantastic." (6th grade Language Teacher)

**Students in focus**

Both the Principal’s team and the teachers have highlighted that School No. 3 works towards the same goal: student’s learning. To ensure that no child is left out of school, they provide pedagogical support. In addition to this, teacher set aside time and resources to offer emotional containment to children in order to motivate them and strengthen their connection with school content. Moreover, the school carries out a consistent supervision of those with frequent absences and / or behavioral problems.
Motivation a key strategy to promote pupils learning

Student’s motivation is a permanent guideline at this school. Teachers emphasize the importance of strengthening self-confidence of students. They affirm that students’ difficulties are not necessarily associated to lack of capacity. They assume, instead, that there must be some emotional or personal conflict blocking their learning, and they seek for alternative ways to reach them. There is a general consensus to avoid judging pupils skills and to encourage children in different ways to find their own potential. This is especially important as literature indicates that confidence and self-concept building is an element that directly affects students’ ability to learn (Florian & Linklater, 2008; Include-ED, 2012).

“We want them to feel they can. With a simple ‘come on, you can do it, I’ll help you,’ for example. In occasions I would go to a class, and sit down and read with one of the kids who couldn’t read. At first I would mark the pace, but when I went the next day, he would ask me to mark it himself. That is what we want to strengthen: the ‘you can do it’ attitude.” (Principal)

According to the investigations, besides self-confidence, being accepted and the feeling of belonging are revealed as other elementary keys that stimulate learning, mentioned earlier. The support teacher believes that in 60% of the cases students achieve their goals because of their will to belong, to be accepted. She agrees with the Principal that one of the most important factors of the learning progress is encouraging, and she gives the example of two students reading the first time by themselves. A 2nd grade student reaction made this teacher understand what the girl was feeling. Alarmed, she saw the girl covering her eyes, crying nonstop. The teacher at first did not understand why. "I'm like everyone else" the girl explained. She could also read. The teacher suggests that this made her notice how the student excludes herself. She was different since she did not know how to read. Now she was crying with joy because she was like the rest. They emphasize the importance of providing opportunities for all students to develop their skills and enjoy successes; situations that were previously thought possible only for academically gifted students.

"It is also encouraging that we are thete physically present, a pat on the back encouraging them to keep going, words of support ... They like that, is the taste of feeling part of it, not to be discriminated, being part of a group." (Support Teacher)

"They surprise us all the time with unexpected answers that arise when talking to them. What strikes me the most is how they handle color. Regardless of living in a vulnerable context, they have the ability to use colors like all the children; it’s about waking that ability up. Everyone can do it, sooner or later, but they all can." (Plastic arts teacher)

"In 7th grade at Math classes, it amazes me when they realize they are reasoning or when they argue with concepts they have worked on previously. You ask them and they say “No, I don’t want to answer... I know nothing...” But they know the answers! In some point they realize they are reasoning or doing abstractions; they become aware of it and it's wonderful." (Math Teacher)

The stimulus is expanded to every details. In their annual school reports, teachers are expected to provide meaningful feedback for each one of their pupils. Motivation is
transmitted to students and the results are recognized in their willing and their intentions to spread what they live and learn to others, and in the way they know they can succeed.

“(At school I learned...) another way of looking at things, not everything is that bad.” (5th grade student)

"(I like the school...) because I like playing and learning, and also to become someone and show people that they can do it as well." (Student 6th grade)

**Pedagogical support for those who need it most**

A major element in the educational work of School No. 3 is the continuous monitoring of students’ learning, especially of those who have more difficulties. It is particularly interesting that this analysis is performed not only by teachers, but by the coordinator of each area, to better apprehend the issue. This is a concrete example of how the teachers of this school do not work in isolation but in cooperation and with the support of the team.

Besides the work in class, where the teacher focuses on those with more difficulties while schoolmates work in other activities, the school offers Support Teachers for the School Trajectory. The work focuses mainly on reinforcing teaching of reading and writing, but these teachers also work with Mathematics content if the need is detected.

Pupils who receive this extra support are detected by teachers immediately after the diagnostic test. However, instead of removing the student from the group class, the support teacher works in the class, and watches how the student acts in the group. Eventually, spaces are taken to work on specific issues individually.

"My work is to support and leverage the kid to the grade’s level, I work with the entire grade, not just with the ones who have problems. So I don’t take out the kid from the grade. I don’t want to contribute to the typical “they take me out because I’m stupid, they punish me.” By working with various resources I see how the kids can develop, and which are the difficulties that undermine their learning. Therefore it’s very important to see how they work in groups, and to be in constant communication with the teacher of the grade." (Support teacher)

To achieve this, the relationship with the students changes. The Support teacher tries to connect to them from a different perspective, shortening the distance and trying to avoid students to see her as the person who evaluates their performance. In contrast, she approaches students creating a bond of complicity and setting up commitments. She speaks honestly, and positions students as rational individuals and responsible for their own learning, and with whom she can cooperate.

“We want to prevent the ‘Oh-oh, here she comes to call me down.’ I changed that image in their minds. The goal is to create a special complicity with the student. They even seek you with their eyes. And they answer. They consider you as a kind of lifeline.” (Support teacher)

Another strategy that has worked in support classes consists of checking on a daily basis the progress of a student who has problems. In Language, reading only two lines can be beneficial. If the student fails to make significant progress even with support, he/she is derived to the
District Orientation Team. That was not the case of Martín, since teachers managed to understand him before referral. While he had severe trouble reading, in Mathematics he achieved major advances. At no time teachers doubted about his ability. When inquiring his parents, they discovered that not only they were illiterate, but they they spoke a Bolivian dialect. The teacher says that Martín is currently in third grade, he is receiving support, and he has overcome all his obstacles.

"If I hadn’t implemented this Support action, the student would have been a hopeless repeater." (Support teacher)

This analysis on how to tackle the low academic performance of students is what allows the school to implement teaching strategies that are necessary for students to achieve the required learning. Teachers avoid categorizing children with difficulties and reducing their expectations, and they prefer instead to be open, accessible and loving with all of them.

The same way teachers have expectations on children, students expect teacher to respond, to appreciate them. Teachers perceive what children expect from them. Students make them notice when they are not checking their notebooks, or ever not greeting them with the usual hug.

(What would you ask the Principal?) “To come and see how we study and to see how we behave.” (And to teachers?) “To always talk with us about how we feel.” (5th grade student)

(What would you ask the teachers?) "To never change, to never miss classes and to keep doing what they know." (6th grade student)

(...) “To be just like they are, to never miss class, and to teach us the way they are doing now.” (5th grade student)

“What I like most about the school is to explore things and to learn from them (teachers), I like when they focus on me and give feedback n my work.” (6th grade student)

Alternatives to deal with learning, behavior and attendance difficulties

School No. 3 deals with students with all kinds of problems such as insufficient learning, overage, frequent absenteeism and repetition. To help students overcome these barriers, the school seeks alternative ways to address the problems through collective cooperation and by eradicating punitive measures.

One example is the intensive work carried out with a group of pupils who were at risk of losing the year. To address this case, they dared to experiment with a different strategy. It was a group of students with recurrent absences, behavioral problems and overage. The Principal said that the problem did not lie in their ability to learn, and in fact they were clever children. The students had repeated the 6th grade, but since the beginning of the year, it was agreed with the parents that students would graduate with their group only if they attended to 7th grade classes as listeners. They worked hard to level them up with classes in both grades making sure they had the minimum contents to graduate with the group of their age; thus,
they did 2 years in 1. Teachers and Principals say they achieved great results by working with throughout the year and not only during periods of content compensation.

A similar case occurs with a 5th grader who had severe discipline problems. She was a physically challenged girl, who attended school in a wheelchair. The difficult relationship she had with her teacher hindered her attitude towards learning, and the teacher’s capacity to “reach” her. However, there was a dramatic change when they decided to give her a different role. The teacher gave her central position in different activities that enable the girl to show and her leadership skills. In Mathematics she coordinates the curtains manufacturing project for the classrooms.

“When we went on a school excursion last time, the activity required a lot of walking, because of her condition, she couldn’t do it, but her schoolmates named her coordinator, and she took the role of taking notes; she took over a kind of work according to her possibilities. She is very satisfied now, she learnt that this school is also her place.” (Teacher of arts)

Furthermore, another way of dealing with discipline problems was through different activities such as practicing mosaicism, painting school benches and helping teachers with diverse tasks. Instead of "punishing the student" for their bad behavior, this methodology seeks students to redirect their energy in an alternative way.

Moreover, absences are also a factor that undermines academic achievement. In School No. 3, this situation is contemplated, and therefore the institution implements a rigorous monitoring of students who miss classes. What matters most is the reason behind their absences, so teachers and principals insist on the presentation of the certificate to justify it. They work closely with a social worker, who goes to the homes of the students and contacts the parents to check that the arguments of the certificate match with what actually happens.
School-family-community relationship

Building a sense of belonging

Since the arrival of the new principals to School No. 3, they carefully planned a mission to strengthen the relationship with parents. This took shape through the work of teachers that were committed to foster and boost the empowerment of parents. The Principal stresses the need to show them that they have capacity and dignity and that they are valued. Thus, their bond improved and got more stable during the recent through a more dialogical relationship with the community (Includ-ED, 2010).

As previously mentioned, learning processes depend on the coordination of all interactions and activities carried out in different areas of the life of the learner, such as school, home, or workplace (Include-ED, 2010; Aubert et al 2010). It is therefore essential that all community members are involved in the education of the children. School No. 3 works in this line emphasizing the importance of sharing the responsibility of learning with parents. When parents are given a place in the school, they really work for it; they feel important and want to contribute.

To make them take part in the process of monitoring their children's learning, teachers often make agreements with the parents of students at risk to ensure their commitment. For example, students are offered the possibility of not losing the year only if their parents take them to do the required activities at Open Annual School Report9. It is a program of the Directorate of Evaluation of the City Government that aims to offer students with low

9 “Boletín abierto” is the original version in Spanish.
performance more opportunities for the appropriation of contents. It consists on the provision of lessons ten days after the end of the school year and ten before the beginning of the following school year to strengthen contents. These lessons involve functions and specific tasks to be performed by the coordinator of the cycle and the teachers, together with the families (parents, guardian or person in charge).

"That contributes to the necessary complicity between teachers and parents. The mother realizes that you are interested in her kid to improve. You create a bond in which you show that you're doing your part, so why wouldn't you want to receive something as well?" (Support Teacher)

**Open classes and workshops**

Another measure proposed by the school to involve parents is to make them participate in open classes, to observe how teachers give their lessons, how their children react, to learn together. Storytelling workshops are very frequent, and they also have a central role for particular celebrations.

In Language, students have worked on the conceptualization of nouns, verbs and adjectives. When teachers sent home assignments, they noticed serious errors in some students. When they realized that the problem did not lie in children, but their own parents had difficulty differentiating these concepts, they designed a collective activity. To make the activity meaningful for parents, they designed a strategy linked to the occupation of most: seamstress. Since students were reading a fairytale, they decided to involve parents in making puppets based on the main characters. The puppets were made to be sold.

"If you have to make the suit for an elephant, what do you need? - Material, fabric. Good, here we have the nouns. What feature should the animal have? - Gray, big, fat. Good, we have the adjectives. Then think as if you were going to sell the product. What do you need to do first? - Checking the model, cutting, and sewing... we wrote everything on the board. There we got the verbs."

This activity had such an impact that the experience was repeated in other grades. For example in 2nd grade pupils were beginning to work in addition and subtraction and the task required the performance of certain operations that their parents could not help solve. Following this situation, they generated a Math workshop around a kiosk to incorporate the operations of addition and subtraction representing the sales activity.

Another way to invigorate the bond is through school events. These are not performed in a traditional way, but also in a workshop mode. Parents concoct costumes, make models and in the decoration of the walls. The school tries to generate an alternative space to foster sharing a space for dialogue in school. In addition to national holidays, other non-national holidays are also celebrated, such as the day of the Bolivian Mother and the birthday celebration in Bolivian style in order to generate recognition of the culture of the students.

This is a particularly important aspect. According to Veleda and others (2011) this recognition is configured as a central dimension for the construction of educational justice. The authors emphasize how the injustices derive largely from the order of social status and consist of no respect, esteem and prestige of certain groups compared to others. Thus, School No. 3
succeeds in improving the sense of belonging of parents, gradually engaging them in the education of their children.

"Teachers have a very humane manner, they respond with humility and they try to understand us. Whenever there is a problem, this is solved speaking, they are always there whenever we need them; they never fail to be present." (3rd grader’s mother)
Wall decoration and costumes created by pupils and parents for national celebrations.
Contact with the community

As mentioned above, the school tries to provide more opportunities, and that makes the relationship between the school and the outside world particularly important. The school wants the children to go out of the neighborhood, to make excursions, to visit museums, and to have contact with other cultures and forms of expression. It is especially significant for children to be seen both by others and by themselves differently and capable of learning and to improve.
Moreover, they try to work closely with the resources available in the neighborhood. Since the educational project focuses on art, they often invite artists of the neighborhood to chat with the children and tell them how they work, the meaning of their art and how they get inspired.

"We invited a painter who is also from the neighborhood and came to show her works. She explained to the children what they meant... they had never seen anything like that, they were impressed. We didn’t know if they were going to engage or not, but they did."

Also, we try to build networks with institutions that surround the school. School support work provided by the church also has a significant presence, like other neighboring, private spaces, where children receive assistance on their school homework after school. Finally, the neighborhood’s first aid center has regular contact with the school as well, and it provides a lot of help. They have immediate contact with the children and children are a priority for them, but they also provide assistance when the school needs a lecture on personal care, hygiene, among others.

Therefore, School No. 3 has come close to achieving the objective proposed since the Principal’s team arrival in 2009. They look for experiences that, as recounted by teachers, further strengthen the image of a school that promotes education for all.