San Pedro School

1. Introduction

The San Pedro School is part of the network of the Sacred Heart schools, founded in France by Saint Magdalene Sophia at the start of the 1800s. This network of schools has since grown globally and today is present in more than forty countries. The school is located in San Pedro Garza García, Nuevo León, and it is approximately fifty years old. The school is a private school. Its mission is to educate students to be happy and fulfilled, living the values of the Catholic faith, and with the skills and competencies to be agents of change capable of transforming their reality.

Additionally, the San Pedro School has the mission of educating children of low-income families in the municipality of San Pedro. The municipality is one of the richest municipalities in Mexico and Latin America, but it also presents severe inequalities between its different populations. The school was born with the dual purpose of providing an integral and high-quality education to the more vulnerable groups within the municipality.

In spite of being private, the San Pedro School was chosen as a valuable case study for this research because of its overarching social mission to attend to students from a lower socioeconomic level and offer them the best educational opportunities. Additionally, the school has many specific mechanisms through which it fulfills this mission, including a variety of scholarships and financial aid in order to guarantee that it opens doors to students who otherwise would not have had access to the school. Finally, the school is also well known for its focus on quality emotional learning as well as participation and citizenship programs emphasize the importance of making sure, even once inside the school, that all students have access to the same opportunities. For these three reasons, though private, the school has valuable inclusionary practices worthy of study and observation.

The school operates full time and includes both elementary (1st through 6th grade) and middle school (7th through 9th grade) levels. The school currently has approximately 400 students. Approximately 90% of the students come from other municipalities. In most students’ families, both parents work. Students frequently stay with other relatives who live closer to the school than their parents. Even so, the school conserves its social purpose in opening better educational and life opportunities to people of lower socioeconomic levels in the state.

The school has conducted analyses to better understand its student population and position within the community. The school is considered one of the cheapest private schools in the zone, but its quotas still require important sacrifices for students’ families. Parents seek
the school because of its focus on values and emotional education that is promoted at all grade levels. They are not families that seek bilingualism or a stressful academic environment, but rather a focus on values and socio-emotional competencies, in addition to effective student learning.

The school has a principal who is in charge of the entire San Pedro School. Additionally the school has a principal specific for the elementary school and one for the middle school. The elementary school principal has under her charge a general coordinator for the lower grades (first to third grade) as well as one for the higher grades (fourth to sixth grade). In this document Principal from this point on refers to the person in charge of the primary school. Additionally the primary school has a school psychologist who provides specialized help to students and also aides in the contact and communication with parents. Recently a new position was added called Pedagogical Coordinator that has the responsibility of overseeing the design, follow up and support to teachers specifically for effective teaching and learning processes. The following table summarizes these roles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role / position</th>
<th>Years working at the school</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal of primary school</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
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</table>
The school has two classes per grade level for a total of 12 groups at the primary level of approximately 35 students. Most of the students from primary stay on at the San Pedro school for secondary education. Most teachers have approximately 5-8 years at the school, but there are some teachers that have been at the school up to 20 years, and also new ones who just arrived this school year. The following table presents complete information on students per grade level at the school:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Students in class</th>
<th>Teacher’s years working at the school</th>
<th>Teacher’s years of experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The school has three buildings. Additionally the school has one computer classroom, one auditorium for approximately 200 people, a library, a science laboratory, a play area, two shaded patios and two sport fields. It also has a small internal store that has been given as a concession to a school mother after a rigorous and impartial selection process where students can buy their lunch and snacks.

2. School management

Selection process

It is important to observe that in general the school has a vision of inclusion “post-selection”, once the student has been admitted to the school through a selection process. From that point on the school’s mission is to ensure the success and the integral human development of every one of its students. But before this acceptance to the school, there exist a couple of factors that limit de facto inclusion to the school.

First, the school is a private one and has a cost. Though this cost is meant to be symbolic, it often requires a significant financial effort for the families that attend and excludes those that cannot pay these quotas. Therefore the school is not inclusive toward the entire community that surrounds it. Second, the school utilizes a series of academic, pedagogical and psychological evaluations to verify that the school is the adequate place for every student. This is done mainly for academic and psychological reasons to verify that the boy or girl does not already arrive behind academically or that has a special situation that the school may not be able to properly attend given limited financial resources. It is important to note, though, that even if students do present an academic or behavioral issue, the school will often still accept them if the parents are committed to helping their child succeed at the school.

Aspirational leadership of the principal paves the way for inclusion at the school level

The principal considers that the mission of the school is to develop the full potential of all students, not just the ones that already have competencies and skills well developed. She is very aware that the school is in a position to give those children a quality education
that they would have a hard time accessing elsewhere, and that this brings considerable moral responsibility to the school. Though it is a private school, a sense of social commitment and purpose is important to the school and is palpable in daily interactions between school actors. There are cases of students who come from marginalized families and the principal is well aware of the social purpose of the school in these cases.

The principal’s leadership is evident in crystallizing, communicating, socializing and living this social purpose at the school. She has been eight years at the school, and her team comments that she inspires general trust and a vision of the ideals of the school that is contagious, including the primary school principal and the two coordinators at the primary school.

“I would describe the school as one with very good academic quality that teaches values for getting along with others, for personal resilience, for personal values and ethics... with good installations and teachers with great human quality.” - Parent

Inclusive climate at the management level

Another important factor in school management has to do with the climate of inclusion that is lived at all leadership and management levels at the school. The primary school principal and the teachers coincide that the school is a place where they like to work and that is characterized by fluidity, friendship, dialogue, openness and trust between all team members. This is reflected in the low level of teacher rotation (most stay for around five to eight years) because it is an agreeable environment to work. They also comment that the school reflects and matches their own values and personal beliefs, which makes it easy and inspiring to work there.

“You feel like a family here, and this is promoted actively here... This is the case especially for those of us like myself who have been here the longest.” – Teacher

“I am here because I like it and it is part of my duty as a teacher. I am where I want to be, and I want to be here.” – Teacher

Effective management through adequate times and spaces for work

An important factor stressed by teachers is the importance of adequate spaces, both formal and informal, for collaboration, co-learning and constant training of the teachers. In particular teachers mention the value of the Technical School Council in creating an effective and efficient school management. The monthly meeting of the Technical School Council is mandated by the Ministry of Public Education at the federal level, and it requires the principal to convene with his or her team of teachers and supporting staff to establish educational goals for the school year, determine adequate strategies for accomplishing them, and monitor progress throughout the year.
The San Pedro School has made an important effort to make this space a valuable one for teachers. Teachers interviewed coincide that it is an important factor to the school’s success. This is due to several reasons. First, this time is of great value in creating cohesion and a sense of belonging among the team members. A special introductory moment of each session is dedicated to remembering the general vision and objectives of the network of school to which the San Pedro and provide a space for a spiritual reflection. This generates a sense of belonging to the team and to the school within the teachers that serves to motivate and align efforts toward the school’s goals.

Additionally, the Technical School Council is a useful space for analyzing the progress towards the goals of the school. It allows all participants to know the school’s advance towards the objectives it sets itself at the start of the year. In addition it provides a space for teacher training given that the pedagogical or psychology head usually takes some time in sharing effective pedagogical strategies. When necessary the school arranges to have external speakers on these subjects. Third and most important, the Council serves as a space to verify the progress of each student and discuss important cases, and understand what is happening when a student is having problems. Finally, the teachers also stress that this is a useful place to share good practices and give each other feedback, fostering co-learning between their different teaching styles.

It is important to note that having a fixed space (in terms of a date and a time) for the discussion of students (always avoiding making prejudices and preconceptions) invites and fosters that all students be treated as individuals different from the others, given that all teachers must think of them independently and not just as a larger group.

3. School climate

A safe and healthy environment: A perspective based on integral human development

One of the school’s priorities is to foster a good school climate. It is important to note that this is not done only to increase and speed up academic learning, but it is viewed as an end in itself of education. In this sense the activities and learning that strengthen socio-emotional skills are viewed and treated with the importance of part of the curriculum, and not just as “soft” skills or classes.

Peaceful and productive interactions are cultivated from the classroom, where the class of civics and ethics holds the same importance as classes such as math, English and Spanish. In addition the school implements specific programs for this end, as is Aulas en Paz, within the curriculum.

Aulas en Paz
A successful strategy identified by the school to foster this positive school climate has been the implementation of the program Aulas en Paz [Peaceful Classrooms in English] for over six years. This program comes from Colombia, where it was designed and evaluated by Dr. Enrique Chaux of the University de los Andes and the civil society organization Convivencia Productiva A.C. The program’s goal is to give tools to students, teachers and parents to foster a positive school climate inside and outside the classroom, and it includes different components. One of these is a curriculum in Civics and Language that is taught by a teacher who has been certified in the program, and that is specific to different grade levels in primary school. Another component is focalized work with students with exceptionally high or low socio-emotional skills through extracurricular clubs implemented at recess time or after school. A final component is the work with parents, which includes workshops and home visits in some cases. The program is implemented during the school year.

Teachers have attended Aulas en Paz workshops since the first year the program was offered in Mexico, and Aulas en Paz has been implemented in the school every year since 2008. Today, all teachers in the primary school are certified to implement the program in their classes. Teachers carry out both the curriculum of Aulas en Paz in their classrooms as well as the clubs for focalized work, and workshops with parents are carried out as the school level.

Students as well as teachers and parents identify the program as one of the strengths of the school. Students mention concrete strategies that the program has given them in order to better handle conflicts and bullying, to take care of themselves and to interact with others in peaceful and productive ways. Teachers mention the great benefits in students’ behavior inside and outside the classroom through the program, and the principal and the support staff at the school confirm this perspective.

“Aulas en Paz was successful in fostering universal values that perhaps students already knew them at home, or were words that they were familiar with, but they were not lived out through actions or habits: They knew the concepts but they did not practice them. Upon using Aulas en Paz, students now know how to get along, they know how to respect each other, they now how to speak up when something is not right... [These values] have been turned into habits through strategies like an anonymous mailbox for bullying, through committees that we have per classroom for foster participation... Children feel like they are listened to and they are important, and teachers have felt the program as an extra help. Students have become that help: that help for the teacher, along with parents...” – Teacher

4. Students

Inclusion through the respect and attention to integral human development
The vision of the San Pedro School is of integral human development, including intellectual, social, emotional and physical capacities of all of its students. This vision implies the recognition of the emotions, attitudes and aspirations of each student beyond his or her academic competencies. Teachers comment the following:

“The great preoccupation of the school is for the integral human being.” – Teacher

“Quality here does not only mean technical quality, but warmth and care in the ways in which we do our work generally, with students, parents and personnel at the school. We worry about the person, not only about what the student can or cannot do (for example if he or she wins prizes or not, which is what we could do), but we seek the true development of the student, including the emotional and physical stability of the student... Our main strength is the formation in values education and in spirituality that connects all of the different parts of the human being...” – Principal

This is reflected in the behavior of the students and their enthusiasm for attending school. Teachers, parents and the principal echo the students' comments that affirm that they are happy to assist to the San Pedro School:

“Most students enjoy and like school, and this is obvious in the relationship between the teacher and the students. You see them happy, and we also know they are happy from the comments of the parents. There is the trust and the openness necessary on the part of the teacher for the child to ask for help, to trust you, to ask for help resolving academic issues, etc. In general there is a very good relationship between the students and the teachers.” – Teacher

“Our kids loving coming to school, even though the schedule is longer than at other schools they love to come here and they arrive at home happy and chatting, excited. They feel safe here, there is very little bullying. It is a space that educates them...” - Parent

“Our students are committed, participative, with a great ability to express themselves. They feel welcomed and warm in this environment and therefore they can freely express themselves, seek help when needed, help others, and seeking always to be well and be compassionate towards others. They are happy children.” – Principal
Developing democratic citizen participation

One of the strengths of the San Pedro School is its promotion in all students the citizenship competencies to be active and committed citizens in their communities now and when they grow up. This is part of the vision of the student as an integral human being and not just as a student, and who therefore must develop holistically and not just academically. Under this vision the school must educate in values and in preparation for a life in community in addition to academically. Given the Mexican context, the San Pedro School places additional emphasis in learning and practicing active democratic citizenship in order to develop and form future committed citizens for the community.

The San Pedro School has implemented a program without precedent in the Mexican context of democratic civic education called “Learning to Participate by Participating”. Since 2006 this program has allowed students to participate helping to improve their educational and community environment, and in that process develop capacities to design and implement initiatives, communicate assertively and effectively, search for the common good and democratically make decisions in a group.

The objective of the “Learning to Participate by Participating” program is to generate a paradigm shift in participation from passive to an active disposition and to develop a sense of agency in all students. This is achieved by empowering students with concrete tools and a
participatory methodology that allows them to design and implement a project, with an innovative pedagogical approach based on competencies, focused on improving the quality of their own lives and that of their communities.

The training includes the development of teacher competencies, where teachers, as facilitators, promote the participation of students. The participatory methodology applied in the classroom requires the teachers to guide their students in identifying a meaningful problem and designing a plan, in accordance with their own capabilities and context, that is implemented to solve that particular situation and is later evaluated. These efforts improve the conditions of the student’s community and allow the student to develop a sense of agency while practicing democratic decision-making. The methodology also includes a continuous reflection of their work and on the conceptual framework of democracy and civic participation. This program implies a change of paradigm in teaching and learning of what participation means and this change is not only in teachers but also in students.

The main challenge for some of the teachers is changing their teaching paradigm from a more traditional approach to a practical one in which they become facilitators of the learning process. However, the school staff explains how they have seen many teachers undergo this transformation, often inspired by the motivated students resulting from their participation in the elaboration of the project:

“We form student committees in the secondary and primary school. Each classroom elects its representatives to be on the committee. We follow certain steps in order to identify a problem they would like to work on. We consider things like positive impact and scale of impact... The students know the action steps we will take and that we will be evaluating our progress as we go and reflecting on what we have learned. A lot of the students’ participation has to do with them believing that they are able to carry out their ideas and plans, that they have an important role and that they were elected to fulfill a responsibility... We work with the selected kids after they are chosen.... We first do the work and then we also introduce the formal concepts to them: like democratically elected, social capital, etc. So we allow them to live the experience first. A lot of the improvements in the school have been done through these committees.” – Principal

Though this process, students learn and practice citizenship skills that will allow them to continue participative actively in their school, family and neighborhood communities beyond their years at the San Pedro School:

“There is a spirit of participation in the children, who live and are involved in this program every day. When we follow up with children who have participated in this program we observe that they do believe they should participate in their communities
more when they grow up. I see that they have the capacity to solve problems according to their age...” – Principal

5. Teachers and the teaching-learning process

Active student participation in his or her learning

The vision of the San Pedro school focused on integral human development also recognizes the student as an individual and inherently different from others, with capacities and strengths unique to him or herself. This implies that each student also has a unique way of viewing the world and therefore learning; this in turn means that the teaching he or she receives, if it will successfully tap into his or her potential, must necessarily take into consideration the different learning styles of all children.

Additionally, the same philosophy of the school recognizes in each student the competencies that if developed will allow the student to be fully self-actualized both professionally and personally. Under this view, all students have these competencies, but they must be actively developed in order to flourish. Therefore education must focus on the development on these competencies, instead of on the simple transference of knowledge from teacher to student. The implications in the classroom of this vision are of an education that allows the student to participate actively in his or her learning, not only as a receptacle of information, but interacting with the learning and in his or her process of learning, simultaneously.
This vision informs the perspective of the kind of learning and teaching done in the classrooms, which is a) based on involving the student actively in his or her learning, developing competencies instead of only receiving information and b) making different kinds of learning styles available for all children at all classrooms in order to foster true inclusion in the learning progress. One of the strengths of the school is precisely this capacity to foster inclusion at the most abstract learning level by making effective teaching and effective learning possible and accessible to all students:

“One of our strengths is constantly seeking the necessary resources, pedagogical tools, technologies... both traditional and innovative... to ensure that all students succeed.” – Teacher

One of the strategies used to foster this type of learning based on different styles is project-based learning instead of by topics. Students choose different projects as learning modules. This learning scheme allows the child to pursue inquiry and examine reality, research and discover the real world in order to respond, and examine actively instead of just reviewing content. The student review content and then must interiorize and dominate them into order to apply them in real life.

“We start from the reality of the children in order to add new knowledge. This is done through a variety of techniques that are always changing: through experiential learning, through reading, through class participation, through pedagogical material... Then we need to revalidate or review what was learned so that the child can know: I learned that, that is what I did...” – Teacher

Another one of the strategies used to foster this kind of learning is through technology. Teachers use a variety of technological resources such as a digital library, the computer room and iPads in order to have access to a variety of resources that allow them to better make their lessons accessible to different kinds of learning styles. These resources often also allow students to work on their own as with computers at a different pace from their colleagues, which allows general progress without leaving any student behind. Teachers emphasize the value of having these technological resources at their disposal in order to make their classes more effective.

* Aid to every student individually *

Teachers receive training and follow-up on behalf of the school psychologist in order to have the tools to give individual attention to each student directly. Teachers are taught that every student is different from others and that it is their job to observe, discover and respect these differences on an academic and personal level with the student. Teachers use this training mostly to connect and personally relate to all students and to help each one flourish and succeed by adapting classroom conditions such as sitting different students together,
identifying relevant material, making classes more interactive around specific topics that interest them, etc.

Though teachers comment that their goal is to be able to give individualized attention to all students, they also comment that the high number of students per classroom which is frequently up to 35 makes this more difficult, and that often school infrastructure is also not adequate because the spaces are too small for such high number of students:

“A weakness of the school would be the quantity of student per class, where is could be somewhat lower... In some classrooms we need a change of space. Every class has 31 students and a maximum of 26... the ideal number to work would be 25 students so that we could give better attention to all students and in order to fit better inside the classroom.” – Teacher

“Even though we are taught to do it, I observe that it is difficult to really attend to all students with different teaching styles because there is sometimes an excess of purely visual material (because of all the technology we have) instead of more types of learning. We could do other things, but it is more complicated because of the lack of physical space we have available.” – Teacher

“Some teachers still struggle to adapt their classes to every student and to make a connection with that very difficult student, but in general they have been more open [to it]. We still need a little more work in this sense because we don’t have a lot of time in order to have activities like teamwork, personalized learning, etc.” – Principal

Use of “SISTEMA 1” System

One of the tools that teachers comment is the most useful for them in their planning is called “Sistema 1”. “Sistema 1” is a set of pedagogical materials integrated with technology for use in teaching Spanish, mathematics and reading originally developed for Ecuador and later adapted for other countries. It is comprised of a set of textbooks, a digital platform of material for children, a digital platform for teachers and a set of electronic tools including ready-made assessments and analyses of student learning, among other elements.

Teachers comment that the materials are very useful and make teaching much easier, and also help learning be much more efficient. One of its characteristics that teachers stress is that the platform allows students to take assessments and the system will automatically produce the results for the teacher, saving valuable time that then allows her to attend to students properly. Additionally parents can consult all results of the platform online as well with no extra time of the teacher involved in making results available.
Though data on the impact of the system on student achievement is not available, it is important to stress that all teachers interviewed mention it as an important and valuable tool in their planning, teaching, and communication of information to parents.

* * *  

*Aid in specific cases of academic or behavioral problems*  

When a student has problems learning he or she will also receive individualized follow-up. First the teacher will observe him or her in order to try to better understand the problem. He or she might seek to sit the student with other more able students in order for him or her to receive help from them without singling him out in front of the entire class. The teacher may also single the student out or call on him more in a respectful way, always being very careful to respect the student. If there are no results from these classroom actions the teacher will focalize the issue with the school psychologist in order to better understand how to support the student. Finally the parents may be called in order to ask for their special support as well. Results of the student are shared with the parents (as they will have been from the start of the year) and the school will seek to have more support and commitment from the parents in helping the child succeed. The school and parents will commit to various strategies. The vision is one of always empowering the student and of using the moment as an opportunity, and not as a problem to be solved.

“One of the specific strategies we use is the tutoring of the other children... For example we had a student who was going through difficult family situations: the student was very smart but his learning had dropped. We identified students who were his friend and sat him with them because we found that was an effective way of helping him work. They constantly include him in class activities. He is included. This practice is done across the school because it helps include all students and it has worked well for us.” – Teacher

When a student has behavior problems a similar process is followed. The teacher may detect a behavior or emotional problem in the classroom and she will contact the school psychologist. She will examine the case and if appropriate make an appointment with the parents in order to explain what is happening. A joint plan of work will be determined with the parents. If required, the school will suggest and may help in contacting the student with external support. Meanwhile, the school psychologist will visit the classroom regularly in order to examine the child’s behavior there and will make suggestions to the teacher in order to better support the student or to help the group better support the student. The school psychologist will give follow up by being in touch directly with the teacher and with the parents regularly.

One teacher shares how this focus of providing support for the student from multiple venues – the classroom and his or her peers, the family and the school – has been successful
in even very difficult cases. All of this is done always with the trust that the student will be able to pull out ahead and without victimizing the student, but rather empowering him or her to move forward:

“We had the case of a student who is now in the secondary school but who had a lot of trouble in primary school in terms of discipline and extreme violence. The fact that he didn’t leave the school, that we all had the hope and belief that he would improve, and that the parents accepted the problem as well helped the children transform... The entire family received psychological attention. The Aulas en Paz project was also very useful in helping him get better, as well as the citizenship project: they helped the student have all the elements to succeed...” – Teacher

Teacher selection and professional development

The principal and the school psychologist emphasize that in order to really foster integral human development at all levels of the school it is essential to choose the right teachers, give them proper teacher development and aid in order to continue to grow, and support them adequately within the school. All teachers are certified and have at least an undergraduate degree in teaching, and additionally go through a rigorous selection process in order to ensure that they are right for the school. They take a psychometric exam and then follow-up exams for emotional intelligence, professional competencies, and intellectual capacity. They also take more specialized exams including one so-called “caring test” that measures to what extent the teacher is an adequate caretaker which is usually applied to couples who wish to adopt children or for doctors in order to ensure that they have the skills to work with children. Then the teacher is invited to give a sample lesson and the principal
and school psychologist observes him or her. Finally the candidate has an interview with the psychologist and then the principal, and if found to be adequate an offer will be made. This careful selection process ensures that only the teachers with the adequate profile and the vision that matches the school’s will be accepted.

“Teachers have a great human quality to them: they know how to handle kids, they pay attention to getting to know each child, they know how to tell them apart and they worry about each one individually...” – Parent

“I would just ask teachers to continue to be as they are: incredibly human, never letting anger or frustration surpass you in your work with our children.” - Parent

Second, the school actors emphasize that it is important to have a specific space to foster a good working environment and the collaborative efforts between the teachers and the principal. This space is given through the Technical School Council, described previously. This space helps align all of the teachers around the school’s goals, share experiences and questions, and learn together. Both teachers and the principal stress that the Council is a valuable space to keep improving their practice:

“Monthly in the Council we make evaluation of the progress we have done, the program we have ahead, reflections about work. We register what we have worked on with each student whom we have identified as having issues in Spanish or math. In some ways we did all of this before we had the Council, but now we do it with more precision and we record everything...” – Teacher

“The Technical Council gives us a sort of light at the end of the tunnel. We know that there are kids who are sometimes behind or who have family trouble... The Council is an opportunity to examine these cases and analyze then in order to give proper follow-up at the school level...” – Teacher

Finally, school actors emphasize the importance of constant training and improvement as teachers, and in having the support of their supervisors for this improvement. One of the successful strategies implemented at the school for this have been class observations on behalf of the coordinators of the upper and lower grade levels. These are not done to check up on teachers but rather to understand their strengths and potential, and to have the teacher feel recognized and with the trust and support to carry out the work. The coordinators observe pedagogical aspects, such as the structure of the lesson, if it builds on previous knowledge, if students are actively involved and if adequate learning is achieved, but also the class environment and the style of teaching. Feedback is given to the teacher during a private interview that has the objective of making the teacher grow, and always focuses on the actions, and not on the person. This space also serves as one where the teacher can give feedback to the supervisor, and can provide ideas for ways in which the supervisor can better support the teacher in the classroom.
6. Student-teacher relationship

**Trust and a personal connection**

The principal, the school psychologist and the teachers emphasize the importance of developing students as integral human beings. This implies recognizing the student as an individual and seeking to connect with him or her individually before collectively. Part of this connection is based on the trust and the mutual respect between the teacher and the student:

“All of the students see the teachers as normal human beings who can also make mistakes, who have family at home, etc. And the students and the teachers respect, tolerate and value each other.” – Teacher

This is why all of the teachers, the principal and the school psychologist speak of this relationship of trust and mutual respect as the basis for the academic work. It is important to emphasize that at the San Pedro these relationship are not viewed as by-products of the academic work that teachers and students do together, but rather, as the foundation that allows the academic work to be successful:

“We have worked a lot on the topic of establishing a personal connection with all students, not just through a workshop once a year, but through daily and weekly work with our teachers. We speak to our teachers about the fact that all techniques to improve learning or behavior will not be successful if there is not a relationship between the teacher and the student...” – Principal

“I am always thinking about how to connect to each student. I think this is part of our personality and yes of our duties as a teacher, and so I think that it is my job to build that student-teacher and teacher-student relationship every day, with all children.” – Teacher
The school psychologist even gives specific training and workshops to teachers to help develop and cultivate that relationship. The principal checks up on this element when she sits down with teachers to review their performance regularly.

7. Parent-school relationship

The San Pedro School has cultivated a close relationship with the parents at the school, and the school regularly carries out activities in order to involve them. This is because the family is considered essential to the success of the child in school, on the one hand, and also the vision that the family itself is an actor that educates within the life of the child. A teacher summarizes this vision in the following manner:

“It is about coming together with the parents and understanding that they are not our rivals, but our team. These words gave me light because I used to be fearful and anxious about the relationship with parents; now I understand that we have the same goals but we use different strategies.” – Teacher

Aid from parents essential to success

The vision of the school is that the aid of the parents is indispensable for the children’s success. Without help at home in encouraging children to do their activities and in providing moral support, it is difficult for the school to be successful, according to relevant school actors. Both teachers and the principal stress this view:

“We promote and talk to parents frequently about the fact that they are part of the team that is needed for this child to be successful and to have the best education possible.” – Principal

This is why the school seeks to involve the family in all school activities, from getting to know the teacher, knowing and helping provide follow-up to what children are learning in the classroom, and feeling at home at the school and attending its activities. Within the classroom, teachers promote the idea of learning communities together with the family and of collaborative work between the family and the school. Teachers offer informative sessions so that parents can come in and get a sense of what children are learning in class, and the teacher will follow up with regular communication through phone calls and emails with parents. This effort is also done through the school psychologist, who provides an extra link with families:

“From the start of the school year, the psychologist speaks directly to the families and tells them that she is there to support and help them connect with the school. The parents know they can make an appointment with her to speak about their needs and can share whatever is troubling them about their child so together they can come up with solutions as is possible within the school, or suggest outside resources
otherwise. Additionally the school psychologist will be in touch with all parents through e-mails and phone calls in a more general manner.” – Principal

Additionally the teachers receive special workshops designed by the psychologist to help train them in effective and firm communication techniques for their relationship with the parents. The school psychologist works with both teachers and parents in creating a culture of shared work, in which on the one hand there is great respect for the work of the teacher but there is also great respect for the vision and work of the parent in the education of the child.

“Communication with the school is very good: we regularly get bulletins and special announcements through my child. All school events are planned ahead and we now when they are happening....” - Parent

At the school level, there is a policy of “open doors” for parents in the sense that the principal always seeks to be available to attend to their comments, questions and concerns about anything related to the school. Additionally the school carries out activities such as festivals, parties and special events where parents are invited to participate and assist in order to stay connected with the school environment.

It is important to emphasize that in spite of these efforts, one of the elements that school actors recognize needs to improve is the support of the parents. They stress that some families do not help students at all because they do not provide any follow up to the work that needs to be done at home, they do not motivate the children, they do not attend meetings or answer messages, and in general they do not get involved in supporting their child’s development and educational success. Teachers and the principal observe that this is worsened in families where both parents work, because the parents do not have time to take care of their children adequately after work:

“What most worries is me is the lack of attention of some of the parents toward their kids: they don’t give any follow up and they don’t stress the importance of following the rules. The mother frequently does not even notice the specific needs of their kids: for example some kids arrive with a swollen eye, or without shoes, or we don’t know if they showered, etc. These parents focus on work and don’t attend meetings with teachers; they are not interested in their children’s success...” – Teacher

It is important to note that the principal and the teachers stress that this is a consequence of bad economic situations in Mexico, and not the fault of the parents directly.

It is also important to note that in spite of the efforts of the school and of these comments about the parents, both teachers and the principal also identify that the communication with parents remains one of the school’s weaknesses. The school actors comment that this is particularly true in terms of communication around discipline of the children:
“One of our weaknesses is the communication with the parents. Last year we had a couple of cases where situations of discipline were not properly dealt with or should have been handled differently had the teacher spoken to the parents on time or earlier on in the development of the problem...” - Principal

The family as an actor that educates: We all learn together

The efforts to involve parents in the teaching-learning processes at the school are complemented by efforts where parents can also share and teach what they know at the school. The principal and the teachers promote a variety of activities where parents are invited to the school not only to observe, but to actively participate. One of the most successful of these activities is the reading program, where a mother or father is invited to the class to read a story. This activity was originally difficult to implement because parents believed they needed to be teachers in order to get involved. With time, however, it has become a popular tradition at the school and both parents and students enjoy it very much.

“We participate a lot in school activities. For example in the Aulas en Paz clubs, and through organization of events like school festivals and other recreation activities... and in the reading program where we come in to tell stories to the kids...” - Parent

Another activity that involves the family as an educating factor are the workshops directed at the entire school community – teachers, family and students. These workshops are about different topics but function under the assumption that we all can learn and discover things together and from each other. One of the most popular of these workshops concerns sexuality, and it has specific sessions only for parents, only for students, and then for all actors together. The workshop builds communication and respect by fostering discussion about these topics between parents and children.

Finally, the school actively involves parents in children’s learning through the Aulas en Paz program. As mentioned, the program seeks to give socio-emotional tools for peaceful interactions inside and outside the school, and has a component specific to parents. They receive workshops and material in order to foster peaceful values and respect at home. Parents can also be program volunteers, leading small focused groups of students in another program component. This program reflects the vision of the school of involving parents actively in children’s learning, and in also providing opportunities for their own development.

Parents in school decision-making

In spite of the efforts of the school to involve parents in activities and in student learning, parents are not involved in school decision-making in an active and systematic way. Parents mention that there is a parents’ association that helps the school organize relevant festivals and fairs. But this association has no decision-making power nor can they gather the
school actors for other purposes. Parents do not have a formal space, other than the “open doors” policy of the principal, to affect changes at the school, debate the use of the school budget, models of teaching and learning, or the needs of the school environment.

8. School-community relationship

Though the school has cultivated a strong relationship with the students’ parents, this has not translated into a close relationship with the community around the school. The principal and other relevant school actors comment that they view the community as the community of parents, and not the community immediately surrounding the school.

It is important to note that the city of Monterrey recently witnessed a wave of violence related to organized crime that significantly increased insecurity in the city given elevated levels of organized crime-related homicides but also burglaries, kidnappings and muggings of civilians of all socioeconomic levels. Society’s reaction to this wave of violence was one of contraction and a retreat from public spaces. Though activities and initiatives to foster a relationship with the community that do not involve venturing too far out are possible, it may be that this factor significantly affected the school’s view of its relationship to its community.

The lack of relationship of the school with its community could also be due to its location in San Pedro. It is located in an area that is almost entirely commercial with a lot of movement and with very residences around it. The neighborhood itself does not identify as a “neighborhood”. This could impede the generation of a proper relationship with the surrounding community if the latter does not have a clear self-identity.

9. Conclusions

The San Pedro School is useful as a case study for analysis in understanding inclusive education processes because while it is very advanced in some elements of its school culture, it is less so in others. In general, the school has strengths in inclusion of a quality education for all students at the school and in guaranteeing effective learning for all of them through participatory learning strategies. It does, however, also present important weaknesses in terms of “de facto” inclusion in access to the school. It is precisely because of these conditions and not in spite of them that the school is valuable as a case study, as it presents interesting lessons for other private schools in Mexico.

The school’s institutional policies in terms of student selection and the fact that it is a private school do not allow it to practice true inclusion at the institutional level. As commented previously, the payment of quotas makes the San Pedro School accessible only to a small part of the population of the state. Additionally, their entrance exams exclude other students who would like to join the school but who are not accepted.
On the other hand, the great strength of the school is the inclusion of all students for high expectations of achievement and learning within the school. This is based on the belief intrinsic at all school levels that all students are capable of success and it is the job of the school to create the necessary conditions for that. The selection, training and promotion to teachers, the inspirational vision and the leadership of the principal, the agile and organized school management through moments like the Technical School Council, and especially the use of technology and effective pedagogy allows students to live this inclusion every day.

A second key strength of the school is the inclusion of the student in his or her learning through participatory techniques and through the acceptance (and even promotion and development of) all of his or her capacities, not just the academic ones. This is lived every day at the school through its focus on integral human development, the stress on creating peaceful school climates, and projects such as “Learning to Participate, Participating!” among others.

Finally, a key strength of the school is around teacher selection, development and performance at the school. The San Pedro school has a rigorous selection process for its teachers that is complemented with a strong professional development program in the form of mentoring, class observations, spaces for collaboration and co-learning like the Technical School Council, and a friendly and caring environment at the management level. This ensures that the teachers are given the support necessary in order to be true leaders in their classrooms and inspire the kind of learning and development the school envisions.

10. Good practices

Based on the previous analysis five main good practices in the San Pedro School are identified:

- **Focus on inclusion in the learning process through technology**
  a. Commitment to learning for everyone
  b. No use of “streaming” policies
  c. Commitment to searching, learning and being trained in the best resources in terms of technology and pedagogical tools
  d. Use of “SISTEMA 1” program

- **Focus on school climate**
  a. Focus on school climate as an end in itself, not only to increase academic learning
  b. Use of program “Aulas en Paz”
  c. Inclusion of parents in efforts to improve school climate
d. School climate reflected in the way teachers and principal interact with each other as well

✓ **Selection, training and promotion of teachers**
  a. Rigorous teacher selection and hiring processes
  b. Continuous training to teacher through CTE and external trainings as well
  c. Cultivation of spaces for collaborative work such as CTE
  d. Aiding teacher through pedagogical area specialized in learning and teaching processes

✓ **Inclusion of the family in activities at the school**
  a. Participation of the family in school activities
  b. Participation and follow-up on behalf of the family to work in classroom
  c. Active participation of parents in learning processes of students
  d. Vision of “learning together”: the school, the student and the family
  e. Focus on creating a team between teachers and parents to ensure student success

✓ **Focus on the integral human development of the student**
  a. Focus on personal and socio-emotional development
  b. School is careful not to create a competitive environment
  c. All strategies are designed to protect the dignity of the student
  d. Focalized and direct help from the pedagogical area