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Microsoft Partners in Learning
Innovative Schools Program

Microsoft Partners in Learning
Innovative Schools Case Study – Colegio Fontán

Innovation and productivity, which have a direct impact on the economic and social growth of a country, begin here

Overview

School: Colegio Fontán
Country: Colombia

Year Level: 4 - 17

Innovation Framework Focus

- Innovative pedagogical system

Brief Description of Innovation

This is a system where students have their own personalized plan. They develop autonomy and relate what they learn with their own reality until they reach excellence at their own pace.

Background

More than a single school, this educational innovation, called Colegio Fontán, began in 1957. This was the first innovation of its type to be approved by the Education Ministry of Colombia. The school was awarded the "Order of Democracy" by the Colombian Congress in 1985, and the system has been implemented in private and public schools in Colombia and Spain. There are plans to implement this system in Haiti in the near future (with the support of IDB, the Inter-American Development Bank), and in schools in Europe and South America.

Key Innovation and Areas of Focus

- SERF learning process
- Relationship between educators, students, and parents
- Intensive use of technology

SERF, a formal self-learning model, is used to design a personal educational project based on each student's abilities that works in tune with the student's individual learning rhythm. This drives the achievement of excellence in each subject and highlights each individual's potential. It also develops each student's intellectual, personal, social, and emotional competencies, which are essential for integration into and commitment to the student's community and his or her country.

Shared Vision

Colegio Fontán uses a whole new paradigm for education, a student-centred system that involves new pedagogical and technological tools.

Through academic work, students discover the importance in what they do, they learn how to research, and they develop intellectual autonomy and creativity. At the same time, they learn to solve problems, build knowledge, work to achieve excellence, and to self-assess. They work on projects that require creativity and critical thinking. In addition, they develop work discipline and they make decisions, are responsible, and plan ahead, manage their own time, and learn how to effectively work in challenging situations.

From their emotions, students build a meaningful life, develop the capacity to effectively manage challenges, increase their self-esteem, and go through a process of self-recognition, acceptance, and respect. Their social environment allows them to set common goals, develop leadership, make group decisions, be responsible for their groups, learn to be supportive, and to develop an ability to transform social environments.

A student can begin his or her school activities on any day of the year, complete the course at any time, and take longer or less time depending on his or her capacities (within pre-established limits.). There is considerable flexibility that takes in account the student's home life. Students who need extra time to dedicate to personal activities, such as family or sports or music, can do so without seriously affecting their studies.

With a clear vision of their responsibilities, and of the significance of their own realities and capabilities, students add value to today's society, regardless of their grade or age. Students have the skills to collaborate to solve real-world problems. Innovation and productivity, which have a direct impact on the economic and the social growth of a country, begin here.

The Model

The relational system, core to all programs, develops four basic competencies: Intellectual, Personal, Social, and Emotional.

Intellectual Competencies

After assessing the student's ability to learn and how their learning best occurs, the educator develops an individual study plan with the student. The student's capacities, interests, expectations, thought processes, and the way in which he or she learns determine the course of study. This plan also considers the legal requirements, which may vary in each country.

By using their natural learning capacity and following a normal process to develop their autonomy, students acquire the necessary content from each subject. Together with their educators, students seek out information and process it. They discover its logic and put it into context. The students work with the material until a level of excellence has been achieved, which allows them to continue to the next subject. When students complete all subjects in their study plan, they proceed to the next course.

Personal Competencies

Together with their educators, students learn to make decisions and accept the consequences of their decisions. This makes them responsible and capable of evolving as they decide how to build their daily, weekly, and monthly learning plan. The plan corresponds to their personal goals, and requires them to collaborate with their educators about due date for projects and when the course will be completed, for example. During this process, students develop autonomy and learn to manage their time.

Social Competencies

The workshop is the environment in which students learn to work as a team. They set goals, assume complementary roles, evaluate the process and transform it together with their educators. Students learn to collaborate, develop leadership skills and solidarity, are recognized for their strengths, and learn to be committed to their community.

Emotional Development

In this process students discover their limits, which allows them to develop the reality principle while increasing their self-esteem. By projecting themselves in time and adding value and meaning to their work, students discover the importance and the meaning of their own lives.

Microsoft Technology

Information and communication technology (ICT) is deeply integrated in all activities. Microsoft® Colombia supports the school in using technological tools and implementing customer relationship management (CRM) technology. Microsoft technology has linked the school with other institutions interested in implementing this innovative program, and enabled the school to introduce their program at many international events.

Outcomes

This holistic approach that integrates technology at all levels has been successful. The schools in Colombia have reached the highest scores on the SAT tests.

Students work in an environment where they develop their autonomy and sense of responsibility with an intensive use of technology within workshops where they share a working space with other students from different grades and the educators from the different subjects.

A public school where the system was implemented went from a low level in the SAT scores to become the best school of the region within five years.

The pedagogical process has been successful in all the schools where the system was implemented. We have a research and development system with short-, medium-, and long-term goals; for example, they are working now to use CRM in the cloud with the Microsoft Windows Azure™.

Future plans

Plans are to support more and more schools in adopting the SERF model, shaping the system so it can meet the legislation and culture needs in the countries where it is implemented. To overcome potential problems, they have introduced a model school in the country where the system is to be implemented to show that they can make changes to meet the requirements needed and measure the results.

Resources

http://www.fontan.com.co/