School case study

École Notre-Dame Primary School

School name	École Primaire Notre-Dame (Notre Dame Primary School)
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City and country	Strasbourg, France
Website	https://notredame67.com/
Age of students	3-11 years old
Number of staff	21 including 16 teachers

This school case study is part of Output 4 by the Novigado project
"Guidelines in Learning Space Innovations", available at the project website.

Background, Context and Drivers to change

Two years ago, teachers were asked to think about essential knowledge and flexible learning spaces. This reflection about learning spaces is connected to research in neurosciences and to how the school-teachers want to teach and shape pupils' learning. It's also connected to a school visit in Barcelona where project-based pedagogy had modified learning spaces and classrooms. This reflection takes time, and these methods need time to be tried out. It is not only about fashion. In our school there were already teachers experimenting with new teaching methods, but it was required to be more systematic.

The Notre-Dame Primary School works with other schools in Strasbourg to get out of isolation and see how other teachers work. The teachers are also supported by experts at Réseau Canopé who guide them in their reflections and teaching methods.

Flexible/innovative learning environment

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the new school director of school, there are no innovative learning environments in place yet. However, one first-grade primary school teacher, who had inspiration from Aurélia Onyszko's book "Enseigner en classe flexible", has already made some changes in her classroom. There is also a project in progress between our documentation center and Réseau Canopé's experts. Moreover, some other teachers work using the island system.

The work will mostly be done by layers: first of all, with voluntary teachers hoping that their network will inspire other teachers. Secondly, another idea would be comparing this teaching method with traditional ones to eventually observe whether this type of pedagogy improves students' learning. Thirdly, everyone will engage with transforming common spaces. For example, there is a project in progress to find a way to store efficiently students' backpacks in a common area to free some space in the classroom. There is also a project on the schoolyard, a learning and common living space that we want to divide in play zones to prevent kids from bringing their own toys from home.

Student-centred pedagogy

From different exchanges with experts and those who are already experimenting with active learning, we realize that teaching and learning cannot be always student-centered. In a flexible class it's important to have a workplan but not all the time. The optimal scenario is to mix moments where students are autonomous working alone and where there are collective moments. Mixing both moments is important. Classrooms are like ecosystems. Teachers need to accept change and be aware of the preconditions for it. I think we will observe more changes in teachers posture than on the student level.

Use of technology

There is a fab lab in our documentation center that gives students access to some tools allowing them to create projects. It makes it possible to go a little bit further by constructing and making concrete things. This fab lab was created in the project "Fab lab in school" and is a part of a network. It's also a space where teachers come together and share their

experiences. During the COVID-19 pandemic we realized how important this kind on physical spaces are.

There can also be some use of ICT in primary school, but students should mainly interact and manipulate things. The punctual use of ICT during specific projects seems more appropriate. The school equipment will also be renewed to have efficient, mobile and pedagogically appropriate tools.

Impact

Benefits

- Being at the beginning of the process, there are some benefits we would like to achieve. In terms of autonomy, there is a need to make students acquire fundamental skills and knowledge to become autonomous. In terms of student's learning goals, there is a need to query who is the future citizen and learner that we are contributing to create. Someone who is capable of adapting, being autonomous, a critical thinker, someone who is able to find information. What needs to be done to achieve this? These basic skills should be delivered to primary schools to prepare students for middle and high school with appropriate learning methods.

Challenges

- It's necessary to give the voluntary teachers the tools they need: what are their teaching objectives, how to implement them and what are the success criteria. Teachers must be able to say what worked efficiently, why and what is to be improved. This is a great challenge. It can be achieved with trainings, exchanging with peers in a network and by accepting that there is no ready-to use solution written in a book.
- Are we capable of changing teaching methods without buying expensive furniture?
- Today we speak about flexible classrooms which is only the beginning. Maybe there could be flexible levels where 2 teachers work at the same time together. Change can also concern time: for example, a first-grade student advanced in mathematics would be able to learn with second-grade students, but in French needs to stay in first-grade.
- Maybe the greatest challenge will be the capacity to accept that in certain conditions or places it does not work. The society must also be ready to accept those changes in teaching and learning methods.
- Capacity to involve parents in those change is also a challenge, but Covid situation has improved the relationship between the school and families.

Images provided by the Notre-Dame Primary School

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