

The sooner we raise expectations, the better.

escrito por Andrea Sala | 10 de abril de 2023



In my years as a teacher I have always been clear that my goal was to achieve the best learning and coexistence results with all my students without exception. I am a pre-school teacher (3 to 5-year-olds) and many times I have felt bombarded with dozens of «ideas», methodologies, practices or trends, but I didn't know if they were the best option to reach my goal or not.

A few years ago I attended a teacher training where they said things that I had never heard before. **There are educational sciences**, where researchers from around the world share what are the practices that are giving the [best results](#). More importantly, in that training they not only said it, but they [taught us to look for and compare information](#). Why had I never considered that such a thing existed? If you think about it, it seems clear that, just as there are hundreds of scientists researching cancer, there are hundreds investigating what works best in education, right?

Then I knew what things I could stop doing with complete peace of mind (because they don't give improvements) and, above all, **what things I had to guarantee**.

One of my priorities was to have a class in which all my

students were **included** regardless of their needs. Make no mistake: the fact that students with special needs are in the ordinary classroom all school hours is not synonymous with inclusion; in addition to being in class, they have to be a part, they must belong.

I am now at the 4-year-old level. **I am lucky to have a high level of diversity** in my group: a child with Williams syndrome and ASD and a child with ASD features and hyperactivity. If for all my students I was clear from the beginning that I was always going to have high expectations, more so with these. I wasn't going to settle for a curriculum of minimums, nor was I going to make any adaptation that would lower the level of the contents. I would invest all the [resources](#) and time available to guarantee quality education for these boys and girls, just like for the rest.

From the beginning I put into practice two of the [successful actions](#) (SEA) that are giving the best results in education: [literary gatherings](#) and [interactive groups](#). First we did **training for families**, something that seems essential to me when you want to put actions like these into practice; we need the families, and they have the right to know the advances in educational sciences and why we are doing things.

In the **dialogic literary gatherings**, for students with more difficulty, we add pictograms to all their books without removing the text or difficult vocabulary; they did dialogic readings at home and then prepared their intervention with the special education teacher. When we started it seemed that nothing made sense, it seemed that they did not connect and it was difficult to get a listening time greater than 3 or 4 minutes. **The effort, perseverance, joint work of the educational team and the**

family and, above all, the conviction that they were capable, made it possible and, little by little, things began to change. Now, although there is still a long way to go, the results are being seen. In the last gathering, one of the children made his intervention, listened to his classmates for 15 minutes and raised his hand to give his opinion. No one could have imagined this 4 months ago.

In the **interactive groups**, we provided support for each child with special needs, in addition to the 4 volunteers who drove the activities (without the involvement of all the families in the class, this would have never been possible). We tried to find ways in which they could always participate in the activity; we never did a parallel activity for them nor did we change the contents; we just adjusted **how** they could participate. At the beginning, there were sessions in which we couldn't make them participate. They got tired, they got nervous. But we never threw in the towel; session after session we tried to see where we were failing (the teachers, not the kids), until we succeeded. Now, they participate as one more, with the help of the class and the support person. Sometimes they need a few minutes to disconnect, have a specific role while they wait their turn or some adaptation to access the activity, such as pointing to the image if they cannot name it, but they participate throughout the session, maximizing their learning just the same as the others.

Another thing that was also clear to me was that, for these students, **instrumental learning is a priority**, the same as for the rest. I have never been carried away by the trend that «you have to accompany the students in their interests and let them guide their learning». From the beginning we have worked on phonological awareness, with different games and activities, in a fun, practical, functional way. Learning to read and write has brought about a great change

in them, **their self esteem has risen**, they see themselves capable, the rest see that they actually are and, in one of the children, **performance has improved significantly**, he is much more focused and asks for constant help to improve day by day. Last week we did a high level literacy activity in pairs; one of these children was connected doing the activity for 20 minutes with the help of the special education teacher, something that seemed impossible 6 months ago; the other, after managing to carry out the activity with his partner, came to me and, with a smile from ear to ear, told me «*seño, o e co-e-i-o*” (teacher, I made it). My hair stood on end; **I don't think I've ever seen him so happy.**

It has also been decisive, to ensure that the entire group advances, ensuring at all times the **interactions between students with different abilities** and mutual help, working most of the time in pairs or groups. In this way, the most capable students have drawn on the learning of their classmates and, in turn, have raised theirs, because different abilities are acquired and learning is assimilated in a deeper way when you are able to **explain it** than when you simply «know it».

Now I know and I have experienced it; when you apply science correctly in education you get results, just like when you apply it in medicine. I am proud of each of the boys and girls in my class and the unconditional support of their families and, although it is true that it takes a lot of effort and time, I will continue to invest it without hesitation to see those happy faces every morning when they feel that all of them can do it.

[Image: author's classroom]