

**New trends in raising demand for learning
among adults at risk of exclusion**

Case Study:

**Escuela de Personas Adultas
de La Verneda – Sant Martí**

PROJECT: Supporting the development of New Learning Pathways for Adults

**CREA- Center for Social and social Educational
UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA**

**ERDI
Consortium of European Research and Development
Institutes for Adult Education**



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1. PRESENTATION

La Verneda - Sant Martí: A school where people dare to dream¹

The case study that we are presenting is the School for Adults- La Verneda-Sant Martí. We are centring our study on this project because of its contrasted excellence of methodology and the high level of involvement in the social transformation in its surroundings. It is also necessary to highlight its wide repercussions in the area in which it is situated: at the close of the “signing-up” campaign on the 19th of September for this academic year, 1510 new students had signed up, making a total of 3070 inscriptions.

The project is located in the neighbourhood of La Verneda, in the district of Sant Martí in Barcelona². The majority of people who live in this area arrived in the city during the mid 1950's. They were part of the migratory flows that through lack of work, forced many people to leave rural areas or cities with a low level of industrial development in Spain, to look for work in bigger cities, for example: Barcelona, Madrid, Bilbao or Valencia.

La Verneda is a neighbourhood that has been progressing through social movements (firstly neighbourhood movements and later through different entities that have formed over the years). They have been demanding improvements according to the funding of public infrastructures, and spaces for cultural exchange and development; in fact, the same school comes from the demands of a group of neighbours who “occupied” the then abandoned building, from the *Sección Femenina del Movimiento Nacional*³, demanding that it be converted into a space with public equipment. Currently, this six-floored building is the Civic Centre of La Verneda- Sant Martí, with a creche in the first floor, a day centre for the elderly on the Second floor, the Personal Services for the Local Council located on the third floor, a Library on the fourth, the School for Adults on the fifth floor (although this space is not sufficient for all the activities and they also have to look for places on the sixth floor, in the gym and other public spaces in the neighbourhood, for example Institutes and Cultural Associations) classrooms for workshops on the sixth and a Children's club on the seventh and eighth floor.

Therefore, the School is a space that grew from the demands of the neighbourhood, and that has as a fundamental principle the priority to always serve for the expression and search for ways to find solutions to the needs of all those who participate within the school, always giving priority to those that belong to groups at risk of social exclusion: illiterate people, those belonging to cultural minorities, women, unemployed people wanting to work, immigrants, illegal immigrants and people with physical and learning disabilities.

The school works from the interests of the *participants*⁴. They decide the present and future of all that happens in the school from the different organisms thought-out for the egalitarian and democratic management and organisation of the project. In the sections of this report we will describe decision-making procedures which make the school special, different, and worthy of the recognition through its appearance in spaces of great international merit, for example *Harvard Educational Review*.

¹ Taken from the title of the article by Montserrat Sánchez Aroca in *Harvard Educational Review*.

² Currently, the district Sant Martí is the second largest population in all Barcelona. It has 209.714 inhabitants and is an area in which more than half the population do not have a Secondary Education Certificate (Graduado en Educación Secundaria.)

³ El *Movimiento Nacional* was the only political party permitted by the fascist regime of General Francisco Franco, Spanish dictator from 1939 until 1975, the year of his death.

⁴ The Social and Educational Project at the School for Adults at La Verneda - Sant Martí defines *participant*, as all those who participate in the school without holding a professional position in Adult Education, or having a University qualification.



1.1 Objectives of the School

The educational project at la Verneda -Sant Martí distinguishes in two sections the objectives that are followed through the Social action of the School: Pedagogic Aims and Objectives:⁵

Aims

In the aims, the creation of training possibilities for all adults and especially for disadvantaged sectors is highlighted. From this, to work with other groups that fight with other groups for equality and to overcome racist, sexist, ageist, social and any other kind of discrimination. They are also opposed to all powers and groups that are responsible for inequalities and that are against the fight for a more equal society.

Pedagogic objectives

1. Encourage the integral development of adults
2. Favour the critical ability of each person.
3. Promote participation with the aim of promoting involvement in the surrounding area, (neighbourhood, community, work, daily life) because through community participation social transformation is progressively achieved.
4. Promote participation in the organisation of the management of the school through pedagogic dialogue.
5. Promote learning favouring the participation and collaboration in training through interactive groups.
6. Develop the acquisition of techniques, attitudes, abilities and habits that make a continual process of training and self-learning possible.
7. Encourage the development of communication skills and skills in processing and selecting information.
8. Influence the cultural, social and ideological recognition of oppressed sectors in order to work against inequalities of all types: social, cultural, gender-based etc.

1.2 Main activities

With the aim of facilitating maximum participation by adults, there is a flexible timetable: From Monday-Friday the school is open from 9am –10pm without closing.

The flexibility is marked especially by the timetable of the Punto Òmia⁶ from the Asociación Àgora that is open all day. The hours for the other activities are: 9:30h - 11:30h, from 15h - 17h, from 17:30h - 19:30h and from 20h - 22h. At the weekend, the timetable is from 9:30h - 13:30h and from 16h - 20:30h.

⁵ Pedagogic Aims and Objectives have been listed as they appear in the Educational and Social Project at the School for Adults at La Verneda Sant Martí

⁶ The project is explained in the report: *Innovative focuses for the promotion, management and administration of adult education and new trends in full participation for learning.*



Activities on offer from Agora and Heura Associations

Major components	Subjects
Initial training activities	Basic literacy, new readers and Qualifications
Basic training activities (Formal Education)	<p>Languages: Catalan, Spanish, English, French, German, and Arabic.</p> <p>Natural sciences: Biology, Human body and Chemistry.</p> <p>Sciences: Maths and Physics</p> <p>Social Sciences: Sociology and Geography</p> <p>Humanities: Contemporary history, Spanish history, modern history from Catalonia, Spanish literature and Catalan literature.</p>
Access (Non formal education)	A preparatory course for those who want to pass the test in order to access superior grade professional training or University
Workshops (Non Formal Education)	<p>Related to learning of languages and literature: Dialogic circles of classic universal literature; Circles of women writers; Catalan literary circle; Introduction to poetry; Cyber circles; music circle; Oral Spanish and Catalan; Portuguese and Galician; Spanish, English, Catalan, Arabic, German and French workshops.</p> <p>Related to music and dance: Ballroom dancing, Different folk and popular dances: <i>Sevillanas</i>, <i>Castañuelas</i> and <i>Sardanas</i>.</p> <p>Related to Arts and Crafts: Costume jewellery, Ceramics, Handicrafts, Lacemaking and 3D picture making.</p> <p>Related to keep fit and physical activities: Physical conditioning, Yoga, Relaxation and Physical activities for adults.</p> <p>Other workshops: Discussion meetings: <i>Trobades</i></p>
Training for work (Non formal Education)	FORCEM courses ("recycling" courses for workers, specifically directed towards Information and Communication Technologies)
Sociocultural and diffusion Activities (Non formal Education)	<p>Organised from the school and from actions co-ordinated with the neighbourhood co-ordinator of entities: VERN. Highlighting activities that are organised for the "<i>Sopar de Germanor</i>", "<i>Per Sant Martí s'estrena el v</i>". Neighbourhood Parties.</p> <p>They are also especially relevant to the Cultural Week, that is organised every three months in which participation by all the neighbourhood is encouraged.</p> <p>Creation and diffusion of leaflets.</p>
Activities for Introduction to ICT's (Non Formal Education)	Office'2000, Windows'98, Internet, Electronic Commerce, Webpage design (Dreamweaver MX, Flash MX, Photoshop e Image Ready 7.0, Corel Draw 10) Digital Video (Adobe Premièrè 6.0)

2. PEOPLE

2.1 Protagonism of participants

The project maintains that participants must always occupy representations and duties of La Verneda Sant Martí project. By not having the opportunity to access University or a professional position in the field of Adult Education, they are excluded from responsibilities of representation in society, including from the decision-making organs in social movements. As well as doing this from a basic principle of social justice founded in facilitating equal opportunities, it also encourages that the decision-making and managing organs in the School for Adults of La Verneda - Sant Martí, are working more with better quality in making and carrying out



decisions. There are increasingly more people that participate actively and enthusiastically in the management processes.

2.2 Organisations related to the School for Adults La Verneda-Sant Martí

In order to talk about these entities, we believe it is necessary to separate them into two groups. Firstly, associations of participants that act in the school, and those organisations that work in the project and have affinity with the project in terms of the ruling principles.

2.2.1 Associations of participants: actors and managers of the project

In the School for Adults La Verneda -Sant Martí there are two associations of participants that are responsible for carrying out the management of the project:

Heura is an association of women participants that fight to overcome difficulties derived from gender and social situation. It functions through commissions, and all participants contribute with their personal experiences. It participates in conferences and discussions about the rights and conditions of women and help to introduce in the school topics related to women. Currently, a lot of information about domestic violence and abuse is provided, offering points of contact and support. It is also a partner in a project financed by the European Union.

Ágora is an Association of participants in the school that act as representatives for the participants in all the processes of decision- making in the school. It began as an instrument for participation and diffusion and its objective is to encourage the acquisition of skills and initiative of management by participants. On one hand, it reinforces the training activities that the school has, and on the other, offers the neighbourhood a wide range of activities. In addition, like Heura, it participates in other activities, for example FACEPA (Federació d'Associacions Culturals i Educatives de Persones Adultes).[Federation of Cultural and Educational Associations for Adults].

2.2.2 Entities which have relations strengthening the social model with the School for Adults La Verneda - Sant Martí

FACEPA⁷

FACEPA is the Federation of Cultural and Educational Associations for Adults at a regional level of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia. It began with the objective to promote an integratory model where participation of adults is the fundamental axis. The participants in the School for Adults La Verneda-Sant Martí participate actively in the activities that are encouraged from the Federation, and are also cofounders of the Federation.

CONFAPEA

Is the Confederation of Associations of Participants in Adult Education at a national level, and works from the same principles as FACEPA.

⁷ <http://www.facepa.org>



AEPA

Is the *Asociación de Educación de Personas Adultas* [Association of Adult Education] and is formed by educators that defend a model of democratic education in which the participants take an active role in their own training process.

REDA⁸

Is the network of Democratic Adult Education in Spain. It includes participants, educators and university staff. In the *Trijornadas*⁹ run by CONFAPEA, a Code of Ethics¹⁰ was written that is the foundation for any action wanting to be carried out from the paradigm of Democratic Adult Education. The Code of Ethics shows the positions to be adopted by the participants, educators and University researchers.

2.3 European partners of the managing associations

Current projects from Ágora Association

Type of convocatory	Project	Partners	Role of the Association
e-learning	DIMELY (Digital Media Literacy)	1. Czestochowa University of Management (Poland)	Co-ordinator
		2. Tulossilta Ltd. (Finland)	
		3. Centre Socialiste d'Education Permanente asbl (Belgium)	
Minerva	ABE (Adult Basic Education) CAMPUS	1. Miercurea Ciuc. Soros Educational Centre Foundation (Rumania)	Co-ordinator
		2. Nr Nebel. Ed-consult. (Denmark)	
		3. Soderhamn. Centre for flexibel Learning (Suecia)	
		4. Plovdiv. Integra Foundation (Bulgaria)	
		5. Liège. Inforef (Belgium)	
		6. Graz:Bfi-Steiermark (Austria)	
Grundtvig 2	Guidance and Counseling	1. VUC. Holstebro-Lemvig-Struer (Denmark)	Partner
		2. Vilnius Adult Education Centre (Lithuania)	
		3. Labour Centre of Bekes County (Hungry)	
		4. VUC Glamsberg. Denmark	

⁸ <http://www.neskes.net/rede>

⁹ Presented in the report *New Trends in professional formation and updating in occupations associated with adult learning*

¹⁰ *Id. 13*



Past projects to be highlighted by Ágora Association¹¹

Type of convocatory	Project	Partners	Role of the Association
Socrates Grundtvig 1	<i>Gathering in the Cyberspace. Dialogic Literary Circles. Literacy learners read the classics</i>	1. FOF. Fof-rosing Raederska (Denmark)	Co-ordinator
		2. ABS WYDA, s.r.o. (Czech Republica)	
		3. IFADP. Peuple et Culture (France)	
		4. FACEPA. Federación de Asociaciones Culturales y Educativas de Personas Adultas. (Spain)	

Current project from Heura Association

Type of convocatory.	Project	Partners	Role of the Association
Grundtvig 2	European women. Image of interaction	1. ACCESS 2000 (Rep Ireland)	Partner
		2. Internationale Frauenakademie Budapest (Hungary)	
		3. Daghojskolen e Frie Fugle (Denmark)	
		4. Tübinger Institut für Frauenpolitische Sozialforschung (Germany)	
		5. Asociación Heura (Spain)	
		6. Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Wszecstronnego Rozwoju Kobiet Dakini (Poland)	
		7. Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education (UK)	
		8. Ardoyne Women's Group (UK)	
		9. Frauenakademie (Germany)	

2.4 Professional team of the project

There are more than 100 people, contracted staff and volunteers, that work together in the school on the Educational and Social Project La Verneda-Sant Martí. In this great team, 14 people are employed, 7 government employees (civil servants) and 7 contracted y the Associations. The remaining number are volunteers. It is important to highlight the variety of interests, training and backgrounds represented by all those involved in the project. This is because of the understanding at the school, that whoever wants to collaborate can, be it in the Secretariat, the Commission of Activities, modules for GES (General Education Certificate), workshop for folk dances "Sevillanas" or in the preparation for access tests. Therefore, we find a team of people that includes housewives, University staff, students of Professional training, retired people, immigrants and a PhD graduate from Harvard University making up a deliberative and egalitarian working team.

Training for collaborators

All those who want to collaborate in the project, have to get to know and share the philosophy of the project. In order to be able to ensure this at the time of entering and to support the school activities, we can divide the

¹¹ A project invited to the *Learning fair* carried out by EAEA in 2001. It was selected there as an example of "good practice"



training into three parts: an initial interview in which the participants explain the lines of action of the project; the “Route” in which the future collaborator “visits” different activities in the school for a month, and observes the methodology of functioning in the *interactive groups*; and the final phase offering support to other collaborators. Once joined to make up the team of collaborators with the project, a reference person is assigned from the day-to day professional team from the school. This person will be responsible to ensure that all the necessary information about what happens at the school reaches the “new” collaborator so they can be kept informed, and at the same time will be there to answer any questions or proposals as they may arise.

2.5 Organs for running and management of the School

From the beginning, the **participants at the school have decided what the project will mean for them**, and they will always have a central role in the functioning and the way of belonging to the school. In order that this is possible, a number of organisms have been created that make it possible for decisions to be taken openly, jointly in the assembly, and taking the main axis always the needs and opinions of the participants and not what the professionals decide for them.

General assembly

The assembly is made up of all those participants in the school activities, as well as representatives from the community and administrations. It is the largest decision-making organ, and is held regularly once a year or specifically when important decisions have to be made.

Central advisory board

“its where important decisions are made”. This is the description given to Central Advisory Board of the Association **Ágora**.

The Central Advisory Board is where all the representatives from all class groups from the School and decisions are taken that affect the project, always giving specific emphasis to those that ensure living together that does not exclude anyone, and that continues making the school a privileged place for shared living.

The meeting is held in the following way: every month and a half and rotating between different timetables that exist at the school: 9:30-11:30am, 17:30-19:30pm and 20-22h

Monthly coordination

The monthly coordination or COME (*Coordinación Mensual*) is held the first Tuesday of each month, at 10pm. The meetings are held to serve as a nucleus of information, meeting and training for the collaborators of the project and all those people who want to participate. Normally, the topics that generate discussion are based on fundamental aspects in order that the project continues its course of progress at a pedagogic, sociocultural, and administrative level. Some of the topics are: how to improve Interactive Groups, how to adequately diffuse the possibility of obtaining the Secondary Education Certificate (Graduado de Educación Secundaria) or how to act in the interview for accreditation of previous experience.

Weekly coordination

Weekly coordination COSE (*Coordinación Semanal*) is to coordinate the day to day running of the school. Those who belong to the professional team of the school are obliged to attend, and any person linked to the school is also free to participate. It takes place on Wednesdays; the time varies between 12 and 22 hours, with the aim of making attendance easier and therefore facilitating participation.



Commissions

The commissions take on the responsibility of carrying out various tasks that have been recommended by the organs running and managing the project. There are two types of commission: temporary (that elaborate specific documents used as references for the school on how to act) or that appear monthly (they prepare COME). Secondly, permanent commissions (for example the Commission of Activities, the largest of the infrastructure/school, The Commission of Projects, the Women's Group, and the Multicultural Group.)

Class group

The project strengthens democracy starting in the classrooms. In these groups, the calendar is discussed, and topics of interest that each group can offer are discussed, through those people that appear as representatives for the Central Advisory Board.

3. PARTICIPATION

3.1 Mechanisms for diffusion of the project

The school participants are those in charge of carrying out the main weight of the diffusion of the project. They assist the University, and explain the project as one of the best and most prestigious examples of good practice interacting with university students in the country. They are also present in the coordination of entities in the neighbourhood relating with and giving information about the project, or setting up Cultural Weeks that are spread throughout the neighbourhood through leaflets. In the last course, the webpage for the school has been continually edited through a learning workshop on webpage design. The aim of diffusion is so that the information about what happens at the school can reach in particular those people that need it the most, for example those that form the Initial Level groups, immigrants or people with disabilities.

Above all, the way which works best and in which most people are supporting the project is through **word of mouth** by those people that already participate in the school. It is fundamental to be aware of the need to promote this communication, in order to reach everybody, in particular those that do not read or do not have sufficient understanding of the country's language.

3.2 Co-ordination with other entities in the delegation of specific cases

This task is addressed specifically by Associations. Starting from the aims and objectives agreed by the participants for the Social and Educational project at the Centre, all necessary efforts are made in order that increasingly more people can access the school through contact with those entities who work with groups at risk from social exclusion. Currently the school collaborates with:

- ONCE: Organización Nacional de Ciegos Españoles [National Organisation for the Blind]
- Fundación *Pere Mitjans*. [NGO for people with learning disabilities]
- FEMAREC. A special education work centre. People with learning disabilities and mental health problems use the centre.
- ASPACE: Association for Cerebral Palsy.
- AREP: (Association for rehabilitation of mental illness).
- IRES: Institute for Social Reinsertion
- CÁRITAS: "Proyecto Alcántara". A project directed at young immigrants (16-17 years old). They look for Occupational Training courses or literacy courses while assisting the processing of immigration paperwork. The School for Adults collaborates especially with language teaching.
- There sometimes arrive at the school people who are on probation from prison.



3.3 Welcome for those people that arrive at School for the first time

During the inscription campaign at the beginning of the course, and throughout the academic year, all the people that arrive for the first time at the school are attended by the participants in the school that collaborate with the management of the secretariat. This welcome means that the first impression is informal and friendly, helping to change the ageist, sexist and racist prejudices that adults can experience when first accessing a school, particularly those who have experienced previous prejudices and therefore have a lack of confidence in that different types of treatment may exist.

4. NEEDS

4.1 Work for social inclusion

To specify one of the things that we have explained previously, the centre has a series of criteria outlined in order to ensure that no-one can feel excluded from the dynamics of the school:

All activities are **free**, and therefore no-one can be excluded for economic reasons.

- **Plural Centre.** As well as being against any kind of discrimination, the project believes in plurality in terms of people: ethnicity, age, gender, people with learning or physical disabilities sharing the same training space, strengthens the quality of the Centre.

In a book based on the experiences of the School for Adults at La Verneda – Sant Martí, presents those participants in the activities of the centre. They are concerned that so called “antidialogic” barriers are not produced, so that real participation can exist starting from egalitarian dialogue. These barriers are:

- **Cultural:** They dismiss the majority of the population as incapable of communicating themselves with the dominant knowledge. A selected minority group build theories of deficit in order to dissuade society as a whole from the attempt to assume a cultural leading role.
- **Social:** They exclude many groups from the evaluation and production of valuable knowledge. Classism, sexism, racism and ageism involve that certain educational experiences are only aimed at some sectors of social position, gender, ethnicity or age. The rest remain excluded.
- **Personal:** They keep apart many people from enjoying the cultural richness of their environment. Many people’s life histories and, mainly, how they relate this stories generate self-exclusion from many training practices.

4.2 Spaces where participants express their needs

All the described till now lead us to affirm that the school is a space where the needs of participants are always listened. From the first day, in the inscription, until the last formal day of the academic year, with the *Evaluation Days*, and including all the organs of management and direction of the centre, there are opportunities for everybody to express what they want from the school.

On the other hand, there is a space specially thought for expressing what people want the school to get as an entity that belong to all its participants. They are the *Reflection and Dreaming Days*. It is a special week in which all people who want to can contribute with their wishes and dreams to improve the school. Attendance is free in order to assure that nobody is excluded because of economic reasons. At the end of these Days, it is established an order of priorities among all attendants. This proposal will work as a strategic plan from this very moment and until the *Reflection and Dreaming Days* of the next year.



5. PEDAGOGY

5.1 School, dialogic learning¹² and deliberative democracy

The participatory model of La Verneda – Sant Martí adult school is based on deliberative democracy. This fact responds to the objective that all participants can take part, on an equal foot and through egalitarian dialogue, in all decision-making processes by means of information, deliberation and consensus opened to everybody.

The methodology of the school depends on carrying out the principles of dialogic learning¹³, the motor of the *daily democracy* we quoted above. The way of developing this methodology consists of preparing classes always thinking in the possibilities to foster *interactive groups*. This methodology lets working the seven principles of dialogic learning, thus promoting a communicative and egalitarian relationship during the development of the pedagogical action that, in this case, is developed by all the actors in the classroom. The relationship between Educator-Learner and Learner-Educator¹⁴ becomes a continuous process conducted by all people who compose the class group.

Interactive groups are fostered in classes and workshops in order to develop educational activities. They are small groups of participants in which people help, teach each other and collaborate together. These groups favour solidarity, dialogue among equals, the expression of implicit knowledge and everybody's abilities and cultural intelligence, and that the class do not be so focused on the figure of the person in charge. Interactive groups are not defined according to similar academic levels, but precisely, because of being different, people can help each other. Therefore, those who have more difficulties also receive more help.

5.2 School and Adult Education

The thoughts of Paulo Freire are one for the basis for the educational activities of La Verneda – Sant Martí adults school. Its Educational Project says that education is a way towards freedom, that people are "beings for transformation and not for accommodation" and that "the assertion that things are like this because they can not be any other way is hatefully fatalistic, because it decrees that happiness only belongs to people who have power¹⁵. <<In this school, nobody is superior to other and everybody learn from each other and this ways, as Paulo Freire used to say, we learn to transform difficulties into possibilities>>.

5.3 Innovation

The school's way of functioning, constantly gathering contributions from the Commissions, the different organisms of co-ordination, the class groups, the diverse conferences held, and from the relationship with other groups related to university through the REDA¹⁶, the participation and co-ordination of European Projects, and from the intention of offering as much quality as possible to participants, makes that the school always contribute with new knowledge and work in the vanguard of Adults Education. Some aspects that demonstrate this character are:

¹² *Id.* 11

¹³ Explained in the document *Innovative focuses for the promotion, management and administration of adult education and new trends in full participation for learning*

¹⁴ Freire, Paulo (1972) *Pedagogía del oprimido*. Madrid: Siglo XXI Editores

¹⁵ Freire, Paulo (1997): *A la sombra de este árbol*. Barcelona: El Roure

¹⁶ *Id.* 13



1. The activities of the school are based on the capacities of adults for improving their training and developing their capacities, always starting from the psycho-pedagogy, the Communicative Abilities and the Cultural Intelligence¹⁷ of the adult.
2. Dialogic learning as a pedagogical methodology.
3. The school aims to offer as many educational possibilities as possible. this is why it is open from Monday to Sunday, from morning until night, and also in Summer, so that as many people as possible can take part in its activities. Participants decide the timetables of the school.
4. Basic instrumental training and Catalan and Spanish as second languages are always priorities for the planning of activities in the school, since people who participate in these activities are those who suffer more danger of social exclusion.

5.4 Curriculum

The curriculum of the school is always defined through the consensus of all the participants that take part in each class. The process differs depending on it being a Formal or non Formal Education activity.

In the activities that do not correspond to formal education ruled by the government, the co-ordinator of the activity propose a curriculum and it is openly agreed with the people enrolled. They talk about the possible contents of the activity and agree on doing the most interesting things for the people who is going to participate in that concrete activity. The co-ordinators, who propose an initial curriculum, do it with the intention of using it as a guide for the discussion among participants.

In the cases of formal education, at the same time that people take into account the curriculum stated by the administration, they go on starting from the premise that the contents and the distribution of the calendar should be agreed. Degrees are given according to the evaluation criteria of the centre.

5.4.1 Usefulness of training at the School

The contents that can be significant for learners are always present in all the training given in the school. By this reason, all materials are selected carefully according to their suitability for adult learning. In some cases, if a suitable material can not be found, it is foreseen by the pedagogical co-ordination of every *major component* and it is elaborated in the same school.

The objective of assuring a high academic quality is always present. The results of the exams for accessing superior vocational training or university are a good example. More than 80% of participants passed the exam for superior vocational training. The percentage of passed in the university access was much higher than the rest of school and private academies that give training for this exam.

Another good example of good practice in this centre is that there are an important number of entities in the neighbourhood composed by people that, previously to the creation of their association, have formerly lived a participatory experience in the school.

There is not any formal evaluation about the exact percentage of people who have been able to find a job as a result of their participation in the school. However, participants explain thousands of examples of people that have underwent an improvement in their professional, personal and even familiar situation as a result of their former or even current participation in the activities of La Verneda.

¹⁷ See the seven principles of *dialogic learning* in the document *Innovative focuses for the promotion, management and administration of adult education and new trends in full participation for learning*



People who have carried out this case study agree on the point that there is one more datum that demonstrates the excellent results of the activities developed in the centre. In 1978, the group that started the school counted with 27 personas. In the first decade of the 80's, there were more than 400 people. The last year, the number of participants was around 800 and 1000, since there were counted more than 2300 inscriptions. This year there are 1510 new enrolments, so that there is a total of 3070 inscriptions. People rely more and more on the project of participants in La Verneda – Sant Martí Adults School.

5.5 ICT and School for adults La Verneda – Sant Martí

Since the appearance of the first computers, the school have had the clear intention of acquiring as many resources as possible in order to offer a space for digital literacy to the adults in the neighbourhood. Currently, all the classrooms on the fifth floor are connected through a network that, in addition, provides access to Internet. The purpose is that this network, together with the *Omnia Point*, allow ICT's to become more and more present in all activities at the school without exception.

The methodology used for the teaching of TIC is the same than in the rest of activities: dialogic learning, and always starting from the capacities that all adults already have to learn about the TIC.

5.6 Evaluation and accreditation of learning

5.6.1 Evaluation

The main role in evaluation is for the people participating in the activities and for co-ordinators, who should promote participation and favour the expression of critical sense, self-evaluation and the search for consensus in the actions for improvements. Although there is a constant evaluation by means of the daily revision of each groups' work, there are also concrete days in which special attention is paid to the issues related to the functioning of the school:

- **Three-monthly evaluation in the workshops and official groups.** Individual and collective evaluation is done every three months. Individual evaluation, specifically in those courses that end with an official accreditation, is focused on a self-evaluation according to three fundamental criteria: attendance, participation and work done.
- **Evaluation of activities and general functioning of the school.** The Commissions of activities, the boards of associations and the Council of the Centre make an evaluation of the activities in progress. Every end of year, in June, it is held a two-days meeting in which they value the whole of the year and make proposals for the next one.

5.6.2 Accreditation

La Verneda Sant Martí Adults School is an official school of the *Generalitat de Catalunya* (Catalan Government), so that all official training offered have a formal accreditation. In the case of the GES (Graduado en Educación Secundaria) [Secondary Education Certificate] , the school itself, according to the methodology of evaluation previously explained, provides the official degrees to the people who have passed all the learning stages.

In some moments of its history, the particular form of evaluating in the school –without exams- caused the appearance of criticisms and distrusts, doubting that adults could acquire learning through the evaluation tools used in the school. Some time later, it was demonstrated that the course contents learnt by participants



involved a high level of exigency, as is confirmed by the annual inspections made by the government on the kind of evaluations conducted in La Verneda – Sant Martí Adults School.

6. FOUNDING

Apart from the relevant participation by the European programmes detailed above, there are also close relations with local administrations, Local City Council-Personnel Services (Ayuntamiento de la ciudad-Serveis Personals), Autonomous¹⁸ (Generalitat de Catalunya- *Conselleria de Benestar Social*) and in some cases with Central Administration (Ministry of Education, Science and Sports).

Àgora and **Heura** also participate in some projects with private foundations that have as objectives to support educational projects that aim to combat social exclusion and work for a fairer society. Caja Madrid and Fundación SM are some of the bodies that collaborate with the school.

7. THE FUTURE

Another of the characteristics that describe the way of working in the School for Adults, La Verneda Sant Martí, is that the objectives to be met are agreed at Workshops of reflection and a dream that are held once a year. The workshops are held each academic year for a weekend, in which all the participants who want to contribute their ideas are guaranteed a place. They are also prepared in a way in which they are always free for everyone, the expenses being covered by the association.¹⁹ This assures that no one is excluded from these Workshops for economic reasons.

During the weekend, and always starting from the reality that is lived in the centre, all those people that participate in the Workshop (participants and collaborators) dream up the school they want together, with the full intention that those dreams once made are a key priority agreed by all, and are the key objectives to be considered throughout the course until the following workshops.

With all of this, every year, it remains very clear that there is still a lot of work to be done, many activities that can be improved and areas of the neighbourhood in which the project can always be more present. Some of the themes-dreams that the project establishes as future lines for development are: To achieve new and bigger places to carry out the activities, do more training activities, particularly related to training for work, training for immigrants and the Information Society; Achieve a closer relationship with all the entities in neighbourhood: neighbourhood associations of neighbours, etc; Energise overall with VERN in the Civic Centre, taking away the protagonism of the municipal administration and giving the management of the centre to the locals in the neighbourhood. Above all, to consolidate and deepen the participative democratic model for adult education in our school, and collaborate in its diffusion an expansion throughout all of Catalonia, the country and the world.

¹⁸ In Spain, there is a configuration of territories divided into “Autonomous regions”, and others called “Regions”. The school for Adults la Verneda is in the Autonomous Community of Catalonia. The autonomous regions have separate competencies in diverse fields for example, Education.

¹⁹ The necessary inversion to be obtained through funding from the Autonomous or national administration that is dedicated specifically to this type of associative activities.



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