The Full-Time School Program in Yucatán: The Roosevelt Secondary School

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This article focuses on the experience of The Roosevelt Secondary School, in Yucatan, México, which joined PETC (Programa de Escuelas de Tiempo Completo) in the 2012-2013 school year. This experience focuses on eight aspects of the implementation: Users: students and parents, Principal's leadership, Strategic School Planning, Information and Knowledge, Teaching Staff, School Processes, Social Responsibility, Institution Competitiveness, in order to detail the challenges faced in the extension of the school day. Some of the factors that influenced the school's success in implementing the PETC, were: the ability of the principal to direct the action of teachers towards achieving the goals; and the ability and willingness of teachers to take on the problems of education, educational outcomes, and actions to overcome them, as a matter for the whole school including parents and students.

Keywords: PETC, leadership, principal, teachers, Yucatán.

Introduction

Aiming to improve the learning opportunities of public basic education students by extending the hours of the school day, the Full-time School Program (Programa de Escuelas de Tiempo Completo, PETC) was created in Mexico on the 2007-2008 school year. The Full Time School Program is an educational initiative of the State, which responds to its commitment to tackle inequalities, providing better opportunities for human development and welfare through raising the quality of education (Gobierno Federal, 2012).

The overall objective of PETC is "to help improve learning opportunities for students in public elementary schools by extending the school day" (SEP, 2012). Schools within this program strengthen academic achievement through activities for the students to complement the curriculum and develop abilities and knowledge; they also focus on their health and diet, and on ensuring that students stay in school (Gómez, Flores, Alemán, 2012).

Within the PETC, learning and teaching strategies are framed by a pedagogical proposal with six work lines; they represent priority fields of knowledge to be addressed in a flexible and contextualized way: a) fostering learning of curricular contents; b) didactic use of ICT; c) learning additional languages; d) art and culture; e) healthy life; f) recreation and physical development (Gómez, Flores, Alemán, 2012).

Yucatán state, in México, started operating the Full-Time School Program in 2009 with 30 schools; by 2012, the number of participating schools increased to 70. In 2013, based on the educational accomplishment indicators of the Full-Time School Program, the 2013-2017 State's administration proposed to increase the number of schools enrolled in this program by 60% (Reporte Yucatán, 2013).

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The Roosevelt Secondary School

The secondary school Roosevelt in Umán, Yucatán, started to operate as a full-time school, with a schedule from 7:00 am to 3:00 pm, in the 2012-2013 school year. Among the challenges involved in joining the program, were: teacher's adaptation, organization of the food service and looking for education activities to encourage the kids to remain in the extended school day. In order to fully implement the program, the school principal had to make some changes in the school management.

The secondary school Roosevelt, during the 2012-2013 school year, had 9 groups: 3 for each grade; the student population was 330 students, while the staff was formed by 54 members. As a secondary school, the teachers were organized by hours for every group, and the head teacher didn’t remain the whole shift in the classroom.
Sol Kuhn, the principal of the Roosevelt secondary school, was aware that the PETC would improve the opportunities for a comprehensive learning in the students by strengthening the pedagogical and nutritional aspects, as well as the attitudes and values. She mentioned that the commitment and participation was necessary from all the possible actors in order to move forward; the PETC was adapted to the School’s Annual Work Plan 2012-2013 by providing educational support through all the work lines. For the teachers, the most important feature was the pedagogical proposal, which located the school at an equal or higher level as private schools, because it provided a better teaching for students, encouraged creativity and maintained them occupied to protect them from the risks of the streets.

The teaching staff of the 2012-2013 school year was formed by 39 teachers, 13 of them participated in the program from 1 to 3 in the afternoon.

Results in the school management for the operation of the PETC

Users: students and parents

Alongside the principal, the Students’ Parents Association of the Roosevelt Secondary School offered their support to the school; they arranged periodic meetings to settle organization strategies, propose service improvements, and establish visit roles for open classes and strategies to raise funds and donations. The educational center involved all the groups who were interested in the achievement of goals. They promoted the long term relationships to stimulate the users’ sense of belonging, as well as the positive references. From the survey applied to the parents by the principal, before implementing the PETC, 70% accepted while 20% refused and 10% did not provide an answer. In a subsequent meeting, 66% of the parents accepted to participate. In this meeting with the Parent’s Association, 261 fathers and mothers signed the regulations and commitments within the PETC. Since the implementation of the program, the students have upgraded their attitudes and abilities in each work line. However, at the beginning of the school year, the young students complained about headaches, discomfort, stomachaches, and discouragement. At the end of the first school year as a full-time secondary school, they were perceived as integrated and accustomed to the program; they were joyful about the extended school day thanks to the sociability and ludic strategies of the workshops. Regarding the food service, adaptations were made in order to fulfill, in a contextualized manner, the needs of the school community.

Principal’s leadership

In the 2012-2013 school year, the principal took the initiative to maintain a close relationship with all education actors to implement the Full-Time School Program, especially with the Financial and Pedagogical Coordination of the PETC in Yucatán. She addressed the authorities to seek advice, gather utensils, teaching materials and to submit bi-monthly reports about the program’s operation in the school.

The principal believed that most of the success of the program lies in the relation among various municipal, state and federal agencies. Among these agencies, there is the coordination of the PETC, the Ministry of Education of Yucatán, the Umán’s Education Department of Development, the Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Youth, Scholarship Program, the Management of Culture, Sports, Health and Public Safety in the township of Umán, Health Center, The National System for Integral Family Development, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, National Forestry Commission, among others. She also looked for help in the private sector, local and federal deputies and managed to obtain great support and assistance for the community.

To choose the teachers responsible for the PETC, the principal equally distributed the workload among the staff of the center, benefiting those with fewer hours to deliver an afternoon workshop in exchange of an economical retribution. A teacher said: “We are ambitious in every project because we have the Principal leadership that helps us get things done.”

The leadership profile of Sol Kuhn describes her as an effective and efficient person who works under organizational rules, regulations, policies and procedures; she is innovative; develops visions, proposals and strategies focused on people and trust; emphasizes the philosophy, she has values, objectives; long-term vision; takes risks using the person-to-person influence; encourages others to follow her and does the right things. Teachers expressed that the principal maintained good communication, open mind and considers other people’s opinion before making decisions. They share the same vision to be a recognized school center for having good teachers and students, who are able to be keep developing in order to become good citizens.

Strategic School Planning

The goal of the school is to optimize all available resources, creating mechanisms that favor teaching and focused on the achievement of the students’ graduate profile to train competent individuals for life, a democratic society, lifelong learning and respect for nature. Also, the school’s planning established the processes and the responsible personnel. Both the Strategic School Transformation Program and the Annual Work Plan propose to meet the guidelines established in the current Operating Basis of the Full-Time School Program; that students remain in an extended school day; to develop the plan of pedagogical work and reorganize the teaching loads in terms of objectives, targets and actions for a better development of the program and its pedagogical approach; to meet the technical guidance, financial planning and evaluation of the Education Authority and Coordination of the PETC in the State of Yucatán to carry out the purposes of the program.

Teachers indicated that, as part of the strategic planning of the school, meetings and monthly and annual

reporting were conducted for each workshop, to establish the expected competencies, goals, activities, resources and forms of assessment. The activities carried out during the workshops were of interest to students, they sought to comprehensively enhance their training in a fun and meaningful way. In the open classes that teachers had each month, the parent attendance was low because most of them worked because they thought that teens did not need much accompanying. Every month, the principal called for a meeting with the teaching staff of the PETC for feedback activities observed during the open class and self-assessment. All reports were fed back; teachers thought this was a good thing to adapt their strategies based on by the Coordination of the PETC, the principal or parents in a structured way.

Information and Knowledge

Sol Kuhn reported a professional, friendly, and patient treatment by the PETC’s State Coordination, who answered all her concerns raised during the implementation of the program. A Technical-Pedagogical adviser from the PETC Coordination in Yucatán went to the school to provide initial training for the program; they read and adapted the Guidelines to the context of the school center. The principal and the teachers learned the path together; whenever they had doubts they consulted the material, researched and asked. They commented that in their case, the Coordination of the PETC in Yucatán required detailed reports about the activities planned for the workshops, which had to include goals, objectives, indicators, and self-assessment. This was an “extra” homework that the workshop teachers had to achieve, besides preparing the materials. The principal and teachers were willing to learn the strategies of other full-time schools to share ideas and improve their praxis.

Teaching Staff

The principal thought that all teachers of the school had the vocation and commitment to be excellent teachers. Before joining the PETC, she took a survey of school staff to see if they wished to participate in the program: 60% agreed, 25% were undecided, 10% said no and 5% did not meet the profile. Once they decided to join the PETC, a filter was made between the interested teachers, depending on their academic preparation, layout, professional history and management of teaching strategies. The most qualified and suitable for the characteristics of the pedagogical approach of the program were chosen. The principal adapted their schedules, distributed equally the workload, as well as the bibliographic and electronic materials to decide the club or workshop to participate.

In the training session, the staff that participates in the PETC read, analyzed and reflected about the objectives of the program and its features. The teachers were involved in several dynamics and activities and felt satisfied about the training. Since then there has been a lot of interest and participation by teachers.

During the planning process of academic and organizational activities, there was an environment of collaborative work, positive attitude, information search and inquiry of supplementary materials from various sources because the staff’s profile is taken into account to organize individual or group work; they promoted use of innovative practices among staff to achieve objectives, staff development through participation in projects or programs, teamwork and the exchange of experience, and staff participation in cultural activities, health and safety.

The teachers of the regular school day were linked to the extended schedule teachers to suggest topics and guide the training and academic course of the students. The decisions and agreements were always taken democratically reaching very productive consensus. Since March 2013, a psychologist attends on Tuesdays and Fridays, and remains during the extended school day to give workshops, coordinated with the head teachers, to observe and guide students and bond with parents.

School Processes

A strength of the school was that it identified and documented processes. The lines of the pedagogical approach of the program were developed in 10 workshops: 1) Creative writing, 2) Reading skills, 3) Let's play with math, 4) Science and Sustainable Development 5) Mental Health, 6) Multiple intelligences, 7) Life and Health, 8) Digital Skills for all, 9) Approach to the 4 abilities and 10) Sport and Health.

For the development of the workshops the suggestions of methodological work for each work line, organization and time management, were taken into account, as well as the program’s features, suitable learning environments, assessment, monitoring and the 2011 syllabus combined with the Toolbox for each line.

Social Responsibility

The center conducted permanent actions for the preservation and maintenance of natural resources with the community, and took actions to improve the community, contributed to learning in the school, in order to be relevant for the demands of society and provided support to solve their priority problems. The presence of authorities, institutions and parents was necessary to strengthen the school, so their participation and involvement were key.

The lunch menu was modified several times, in relation to the food culture and tastes of young people from the school, without neglecting the hygiene rules and nutritional suggestions. At the beginning the students ate in their classrooms, mothers served food and the desks and floors were constantly stained; those difficulties delayed the dining process service. Since the beginning, Umán’s System for Integral Family Development (DIF) offered their facilities for cooking. Later, the school requested the Mayor to build a lunch room, kitchen, bathroom and pantry to efficiently provide food service.

In February 2013 the school opened the kitchen-lunch room. The kitchen had a stove, piped gas, 2 refrigerators, microwave, pantry, 10 tables, 100 chairs, plates, cups and plastic cutlery. The students went to eat in two shifts: the 1st grade from 1:00 to 1:30 and the 2nd and 3rd grade from 1:45 to 2:15. Since then, the classroom are kept cleaner and the time for the meals was optimized. They
also acquired 24 sinks, built by the Parents Association and the Ministry of Education of the State of Yucatán, for students to wash their hands and teeth and for moms to wash the dishes.

Institution Competitiveness
The school project aimed for the construction of a school recognized by the community for their respect to the social and natural environment, its high levels of educational achievement that allow students to access to higher studies or job training and establish positive life projects that benefit themselves and their community, with optimal knowledge and skills, attitudes and values of Respect, Tolerance, Equality, Justice, Solidarity and Cooperation with adequate, relevant and safe spaces to allow them to have a high quality teaching supported by an updated, organized, committed to education and responsible participation and caring community of parents and school personnel.

The school carried out reforestation activities in the community; an example of the competitiveness of the organization was the school garden, which had the dual function of producing vegetables for student consumption and to diversify the range of opportunities for a comprehensive training of students. An expert gardener was invited to guide teachers about sowing.

Challenges faced in the extension of the school day
During the first months of the program, it still did not have dining room or kitchen; the food was prepared in the kitchen of DIF, moved to school and eaten inside classrooms. No doubt, getting more efficient food service was a challenging task.

After managing the construction of the kitchen and toilet area, the challenge was to maintain good organization between teachers, students and volunteer parents to serve food family, wash the dishes and clean up after the food service shifts of the groups. The construction of the kitchen in Roosevelt school cost approximately $ 500,000, funds raised thanks to the efforts made by the principal’s relation with several institutions.

Regarding the academic challenges, the teachers who were responsible for the workshops were committed and it was a challenge to conduct afternoon activities, so it was necessary to gather feedback and to plan new strategies. For the teachers of the PETC, meeting all students of the school was nice, but also a challenge as they had to understand the dynamics of each group, their tastes and interests to implement educational strategies that resulted interesting in each particular group during the workshops.

About to successfully conclude the first school year as Full- Time School, Roosevelt school still had areas of opportunity for continuous improvement. The principal said the school grew based on experience, positive attitude and commitment of the entire educational community. Overall, the stakeholders were very happy with the results in the formation of the students, the social cohesion of the community and the recognition and prestige enjoyed by the people of Umán.

For the principal, the main area of opportunity to confront was to generalize the social commitment of teachers to their community for students and parents also get involved; to take the position of agents of change.

Conclusions
Among the factors that influenced the school’s success in implementing the PETC, were: understanding the objectives set out in the plans and programs of study and commitment to achieve team teaching; the ability of the principal to direct the action of teachers towards achieving the goals, to establish a suitable climate for the different actors of school life; the ability and willingness of teachers to take on the problems of education, educational outcomes, and actions to overcome them, are a matter for the whole school including parents and students; increased time for teaching with the extension of the school day and implementing workshops; and the skill and conviction of teachers and principals to channel participation and enlist the support of families to the educational task.

The school planning established areas for improvement and commitment of the school community, educational actors and communication mechanisms for accountability. They chose the most committed teachers, who worked harder and had that conviction and professional ethics as advisers for the afternoon workshops; the main motivation of the teachers who participated in the PETC was that they could increase their hours and make more money. However, they commented that the principal greatly influenced by her example and awareness; she invited them to get involved for the planning based on the needs of the school.

According to the teachers, since the implementation of the program the school and family environments improved. Additionally, the registry applications, academic performance, parents’ participation and collaboration among teachers increased.

Among the benefits perceived by the principal and teachers, was the decrease of bullying due to the promotion of social harmony among students through the educational activities; moreover, the program allowed the students to participate in activities they could not access before. The extension of the school day decreased the laziness of students and increased the participation in the community; teachers reported to be more in contact with the parents than before.

The principal was aware of the role that each one can have as an agent of social change. Everyone from the influence environment can help transform themselves, then the people, the country and the world, she said.

References


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