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The Shared Societies Project:
Leadership for Dialogue, Diversity and Social Cohesion

Building a world safe for difference

Replicable example of practice

Commitment IV

Ensure the legal framework protects the rights of the individual and prohibits discrimination based on ethnic, religious, gender or cultural difference

Suggested Approach:

- Introduce programmes of affirmative action that include the equipping of members of groups, disadvantaged and discriminated against, with the skills necessary to function confidently in work and other social and economic contexts.

Commitment VII

Ensure an education system that offers equal opportunity for developing the knowledge, skills, capacities and networks necessary for children to become productive engaged members of society and that demonstrates a commitment to a shared society and educates children to understand and respect others.

Linking Classrooms (Aulas de Enlace) in Madrid

Country: Spain

Background

- The education system in Madrid has experienced a growing socio-cultural diversity derived largely from migration. Growing number of students are of foreign origin. In a few years the educational system has gone from having 50 thousand children of foreign origin in schools to now over one hundred thousand foreign students.
- Students of foreign origin sometimes encounter more difficulties than other schoolchildren due to several factors, among the most important being ignorance of the language of instruction, where Spanish is not the mother tongue. Adapting to a new culture and being seen as different are other problems they face.
- Teachers have identified one of their major difficulties is how to include in their classes students who are new to the country and do not understand the language of instruction. They need extra help but then the majority of the students are neglected.

Goals

- Facilitate foreign students with no knowledge of the Spanish language or with other disadvantages in fitting into the existing school system.
- Support the acquisition of language and communication skills, and adapting the existing curriculum as appropriate to the needs of the students.
- Provide an introduction to the culture and norms of Madrid and Spain.
- Facilitate and accelerate the incorporation of these students into the Spanish education system.
- Encourage the development and strengthening of both the personal and cultural identity of the student.

Method

- The education authorities created a system of *aulas de enlace* or special classes for immigrant children who needed extra help and were not ready to fit into the normal classroom.
- There are normally a maximum of 12 students in each classroom. There is a mixture of ages.
- Each *aula* has one and a half teachers at primary level and two teachers at secondary level. One concentrates on language and the other on general pedagogical issues
- The programme has four main aspects:
  - Immersion in the social and educational context of the community
  - Respect for cultural diversity of each person
  - Active cohabitation with the rest of the school
  - Training of teachers in teaching Spanish as a second language and understanding the characteristics of the pupil's country of origin
- The main activity is language teaching but the students also learn other subjects through the medium of Spanish and are introduced to the Spanish culture, sometimes through extracurricular visits to places of interest.
- The approach is pupil centred, taking account of differences in capacities and learning skills, motivation, level of existing knowledge and using different learning strategies according to their cultural origins. Collaborative work in the classroom is encouraged.
- The *aulas de enlace* are attached to local schools and the pupils are linked to the class they will eventually join. They do some activities with that class were language is not so important, such as physical education, music and school outings. Originally the *aulas* were separate from the main school.
- There is coordination with the teacher from the normal classroom through regular meetings and *aula* staff also take part in the school staff meetings.
- Parents are encouraged to participate in school activities and they may accompany the class on outside visits.

- The maximum period a child stays in an *aula de enlace* is 9 months. Some children would prefer to stay in the special class but from the beginning the teachers prepare them for the move. Children can be given ongoing support when they leave.
- In the first year of the scheme there were 132 *aulas de enlace* and in the second year 152 *aulas*.
- Training of teachers is a linked activity through regional training centres. Teachers wanting to teach in *aulas de enlace* must have done this course.

Impact

- The scheme is very much accepted and supported by the education community. At first their interest was to have support in dealing with a problem but now they see it having real benefit.
- The rate at which the children learn Spanish is impressive. They begin very quickly to begin to speak Spanish with classmates outside the classroom
- Integration with the mainstream class is usually fairly easy because the children have had contact throughout the time they have been in the *aula de enlace.*
- The approach has been taken up by other education authorities.

Enabling conditions

- In January 2002 the education authorities launched the programme "Welcoming Schools" to facilitate the reception of new students and promote mutual understanding and respect among all students.
- Initiatives included provision of support teachers, specialized care services, interpreters and translators.
- Linking Classrooms or *Aulas de Enlace* arose in the context of this broader ongoing programme.
- The demand by teachers for help to cope with the challenges of having immigrant children in their class rooms created a greater urgency for a scheme to be introduced.

Contact / References

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