

## **AN APPROACH TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

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### **Summary**

If we have to point out a characteristic of the public school of last years, and being aware of the information and communication technologies increasing impact, I am sure we all agree that the students diversity is one of the best ways of describing the school situation nowadays.

When immigrants from the whole world arrived to our country, also high heterogeneous students arrived to schools, so these institutions had to face up new educational challenges, as they were not prepared for such changes.

Despite abroad students do appear in our context, at least by now, it is in a lower intensity and some years after than in other regions of Spain. This fact forced the regional Administration and other teaching institutions to take the necessary legislative and organizational urgent measures to receive this type of students.

### **Immigrants, indigenous minorities and compensatory education**

Some of the reasons because the schools are quite alarmed and they perceive these students as a problem for the normal development of the school are: the lack of initial teaching development, the general lack of interest to admit an incipient multicultural society, the reciprocal lack of language knowledge, and the different schooling levels of foreign students.

It is not strange that, in this situation, the schools immediate response was to create different types of transitory-classes, with compensatory reeducational programs. It was also established a maximum period of stay in these programs, and some time for the students to be with the autochthonous students during the school day.

We must point out that in some schools located in the outskirts of big cities, there is an organizational structure since ten years ago: "Supporting classes for the integration of ethnic minorities", with different number of teachers depending on the number of students. These classes were mainly attended by gypsy students, who received compensatory education based on the assumption they have a poor integration in school and in society. The teaching staff carry out the teaching and they also monitor the students' development by contacting their families.

Related to this work, some teachers started to think in a new challenge in teaching, according to the immigrants' needs and the new multicultural society. Because of this, the traditional schools should be transformed, to avoid segregation and discrimination

of students from other cultures (including the autochthonous): the *intercultural education model*<sup>1</sup>.

### **The intercultural education and the inclusive school**

During the last years, the concept “integration” was substituted by “inclusion”. This change is much more than a change of name; it motivates a continuing search of ways to respond to diversity with the participation of the whole education community. In the inclusive school differences are not considered deficiencies; and they are based on each students’ potential, with or without special education needs, with the aim to achieve the participation of every student. The individual differences (personal, cultural, ethnic...) are something interesting, because diversity provides the best opportunities to learn.

The educational response to the inclusive model, should avoid segregated groups in the curricula, in time and space, keeping the commitment that all students will take profit from every methodological and organizational change.

The intercultural education model, starting from the acknowledgement and respect for diversity, favors cultural enrichment through the exchange of experiences and the dialogue, in the active participation for the development of a democratic society based on equality, tolerance and solidarity.

For applying intercultural education in school is needed: to promote educational processes which present the cultural interaction in equal conditions; the explicit recognition of cultural diversity in all projects made by the school; to adopt methodological strategies of learning, based on collaboration or on cooperative working; and to develop proposals and curricula materials which give value to the contributions of all different cultures present the school as, for example, oral traditions, different languages, other people’s history and arts, or other skills from the science or from the general knowledge.

Often, we do make the mistake of thinking that we are applying an intercultural education when we celebrate parties in which different cultures present their gastronomy, traditions, dances, music or other symbols. We agree with Francésc Carbonell that these initiatives, despite normally they are well-intentioned, they hide conflictive relationships between the majority and the minorities.

An intercultural school is inclusive when all the actions above mentioned do not only constitute a list of isolated measures, taken as a quick solution for the problem of the diversity of students, but they take part of a whole structure in teaching. So a deep transformation is needed in education if we want it to develop according to the XXI century society.

As a conclusion, we share the idea of Auxiliadora Sales who states that an intercultural education means *to adopt a holistic and inclusive educational approach, based on respect and recognizing the value of the cultural diversity, which looks for a school reform as a whole so the educational equity can be increased, to overcome the*

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<sup>1</sup> *Asociación de Enseñantes con Gitanos (national)* <http://www.pangea.org/aecgit/> and *Asociación Chavós (regional)* <http://www.terra.es/personal2/chavos/home.htm>

*discrimination/racism/exclusion, to provide better communication and intercultural abilities, and to support the social change according to the principles of social justice.*

## **Present and future of professional development**

During the last years many institutions have organized different professional training activities (courses, masters and/or meetings) in the field of intercultural education.

Some years ago, the Professional Development and Resources Center of A Coruña started to include intercultural education in their Annual Plan. For example, in A Coruña in 2001 there was the meeting “Intercultural Education and Integration of Minorities”, and its objective was to prepare the teachers for receiving and understanding students who come from other cultures. This same activity was offered in the Annual Plan of the Teachers Centers from Lugo, Ourense and Vigo in 2002/2003.

From that moment on, and increasing in number and from different approaches, we can nowadays realize that all Annual Plans, from the Teachers’ Centers of Galicia, from Central Services and from Institutions of distance learning (Platega), offer a wide variety of training activities on this topic, for example: “Cultural diversity in education”, “Arts in intercultural education”, “Guidelines for designing plans to receive immigrant students”, “Literacy teaching for immigrants: classroom planning”, “Integration of minorities and diversity”, “Promotion of intercultural teaching from different aspects of the curriculum”, etc.

The schools depending on the Teachers Center of A Coruña organized some training activities about international education and/or immigrant/foreign students

| <b>Chart 1. Training activities organized by the educational centers depending on the CFR of A Coruña</b> |             |   |                       |
|---|-------------|---|-----------------------|
| <b>Academic year</b>  | <b>Type</b> | <b>Title</b>  | <b>N. of Teachers</b> |
| 03/04   | SP          | Students who came from abroad: Linguistic Stimulation                             | 4                     |
| 04/05   | SP          | Introduction to Galician Language for immigrant Students: materials and resources | 3                     |
| 04/05   | GT          | The Cooperative Work: the basis of the Integration of Immigrant Students          | 6                     |
| 05/06   | PFAC        | Educational Attention to Immigrant Students                                       | 30                    |
| 05/06   | PFAC        | Educational Attention to Immigrant Students                                       | 15                    |
| 05/06   | SP          | To Welcome Immigrant Students. Interculturality                                   | 4                     |
| 05/06   | GT          | Galician Language for Immigrant Students  | 3                     |
| 05/06   | GT          | Welcome Plan for Immigrant Students   | 6                     |
| 06/07   | SP          | Introduction to Galician Language for Immigrant Students: materials and resources | 4                     |
| 06/07   | SP          | Galician Language Immersion for Immigrant Students                                | 6                     |

**SP:** Permanent Seminar; **PFAC:** Training in Schools; **GT:** Work Team

## Conclusion

During the last six years there were about fifty training activities on Intercultural Education and related to Immigrant Students, organized by the Central Services of the Regional Government and by the seven Professional Development Centers (CFR) of Galicia.

We must also point out that the attendance to all these training activities was very high; and that means that teachers find this topic interesting, and that they are aware of this new reality.

However, from the chart 1, can be noticed that the number of teachers or centers which take the initiative is quite low. The information we have at the moment is about the CFR of A Coruña and during the last four years, but we think it can be generalized to the whole Autonomous Region.

Imbernon said *there was a lot of information, but few changes were made in the schools*, and it seems to be true. We think that a reason for this is that teachers were not involved in these training.

We think that the teachers should not only look for an interesting training activity in a list of courses, and to attend to a course or activity without being interested. We would like to make a reference to a Spencers' quotation which states that you must develop yourself, without expecting others to do it. Teachers should be involved in the initiatives related to new methodologies for learning, or to design new materials and resources to support other cultures represented by immigrant students.

Aware of the diversity within teachers and contexts, we would like to suggest some measures which will help the professional training:

We think that the Administration should give teachers more possibilities for decide their own development. This way the centers would have time and resources (both material and human) for developing training activities which will help to teach and to work with diversity.

We think training is not effective when it does not consider the context. This means it is not worthy to develop a training activity if it does not take part of an innovative classroom, level, department or school project. Training should not be an objective itself, but a step in a full innovative and interesting process which help the school to improve.

As the school transformation is a long and complex process, which has to be done step by step, we think teachers' motivation about intercultural education should be improved if the Administration supports specific projects, created by teachers, and relates them with the intercultural exchange; by reviewing the curriculum and the textbooks; by participating in European intercultural projects; by improving the attention to immigrants from the PROA program; and by the collaboration and organization of workshops about cultural diversity with NGOs, etc.

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