

CrEE REPORT ON THE CEIP MONTFALGARS PRIMARY SCHOOL

GIRONA February 2003

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1. GENERAL RESEARCH PRESENTATION

1.1. Relationship with the School

The selection process for the Ceip Montfalgars differs from the channels marked by the selection of the sample studied¹: this school did not return the initial survey sent to all of the state primary and secondary schools in the districts of Girona, based on which the schools studied were chosen. The SER.GI Foundation, however, knew of the activities being carried out at the school in favour of improving the integration and reception of immigrant pupils and their families through the Parent's Association (AMPA). Given that these activities were organised by the Ampa, they were unaware of the existence of the initial survey as it had only been sent to the management teams of the schools.

The Foundation thought it interesting to be able to study an activity managed and promoted by the parents of the school and aimed not only at the pupils but also, more specifically, at their families. We believed that the activity provided a value of work with the community and the neighbourhood that would not have been found through the other activities studied.

Furthermore, we also believed that the activity met certain quality criteria that could be exported to many other schools that (as we had seen in the surveys) carried out activities with similar objectives and methodologies but that did not achieve the same levels of success as that seen in this school.

In August 2003, we contacted a representative of the Parent's Association and presented the CrEE research, its objectives and the steps and method of analysing the activities chosen. This representative then proposed the request of the Foundation to be able to study the activity "*Bringing Cultures Closer Together*", promoted by the Ampa since 1998, to the rest of the association. We received an affirmative response from the Ampa, who were interested and enthusiastic about taking part in the research and being able to disseminate their experience.

¹ The foreseen channel of selection for the four schools forming part of the sample worked was to choose these schools from among those involved in the initial survey with activities to fight discrimination and to promote equal opportunities (sent in November 2002) and that showed an interest in taking part in the research. The survey was aimed at the School's management team.

These initial steps took until early October.

During the first week of September, and taking advantage of the training conferences organised by the SER.GI Foundation (“Summer School on Interculturality in Girona”), the Ceip Montfalgars Ampa was invited to explain their experience in working to improve the integration of immigrant families into the school and the community. This introduction was also useful for the members of the CrEE to collect an initial description of the activity and the methodology used. Likewise, despite the lack of structure, it served to analyse the activity with an external audience (the participants in the conferences), experts in the field of education and immigration.

Parallel to this, during the month of November, we contacted the headmistress of the Ceip to introduce the CrEE and explain the idea of analysing the activity developed by the School’s Parent’s Association since the year 1998-1999, more specifically during the last year 2002-2003. It is worth noting that although the activity was proposed and managed by the Ampa, we believe the conformity of the School’s management to be vital before formally beginning the research, as the teaching staff was also involved in the activities and, evidently, we were to make an analysis that would involve the entire educational community. We therefore needed the conformity of the management. At first, it has to be said, they were somewhat reticent towards the research, as they did not believe it to be an activity that involved the teaching staff and that it could involve more work. Once certain doubts and parts of the process had been clarified, however, they agreed for the research to begin.

This entire process took longer than thought and the interviews and focus groups with pupils and parents were not carried out until January. This has meant that we have been unable to obtain feedback and go into further detail with the teacher/s, despite the school showing willing.

1.2. Methodological Process

The methodology used was based on the interview technique in group dynamics with participant observation.

It must be said that, despite having a plan in terms of the size of the focus groups and their duration, we have had to adapt them to the real situation of the school and the availability of the interviewees. Thus, the process was finally as follows:

Date	Technique	Agents	Duration
August-October	Contacts with the Ampa and the School		
4 September	Conferences where the Activity was presented to experts in the field of education and immigration		
10 November	Interview	With a representative of the AMPA	1 Hour
13 January	Focus Group	3 members of the AMPA	2.30 Hours
14 January	Focus group and dynamic observation	Groups of 6 th year primary school pupils	1 Hour

In terms of the group of pupils, information was collected through group dynamics. On the other hand, we applied the technique of participant observation during these same dynamics.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHOOL

2.1. External Context: Description and analysis of the Surroundings

Location of the Neighbourhood

The Ceip Montfalgars is located in the neighbourhood of Sta. Eugènia of the city of Girona, more specifically next to the neighbourhood of Can Gibert del Pla. Its pupils basically come from these two neighbourhoods. It is also worth noting that the school is on the border with the neighbouring city of Salt.

Sta Eugènia was an independent municipality and, upon becoming integrated into the city of Girona, has lost a lot of its village awareness. This has been favoured by the numerous arrival of people from other villages, from Girona itself and from other autonomous communities. It can be said that it was a village that has become a neighbourhood on a population, urban and political level. Various characteristics explain this process: the loss of its physical personality as a village, intensely chaotic growth (unplanned urbanism without any style), great infrastructure deficits, it is a place of passage without urban or shopping “centres”, a shortage of relational life and little associationism, along with the substantial arrival of the new African and Latin American populations.

The neighbourhood of Can Gibert del Pla is relatively new. It dates back to the year 1969 and was built, as were other neighbourhoods in Girona, to house a population of domestic emigrants coming from the south to the north of Spain. These migrations were primarily financially-based and involved people from the poor rural areas of Andalusia, Murcia and Extremadura.

It is a suburban development. Here are some characteristics: It was a peripheral neighbourhood and now forms part of the city. Uniform blocks with interior courtyards, the inhabitants have a certain awareness of the neighbourhood and other relationships. It is a neighbourhood with a lot of street life and many associations. There are a lot of community and commercial premises.

Despite all of this, it must be noted that the difference between these two neighbourhoods has progressively decreased. At present, the entire area that could be

called dead land is being built on or has been developed with garden areas. New building blocks are also being built within this area that have joined the two neighbourhoods on an urban level, leaving them separated by merely a main road. This leads to much greater continuity between the two areas. It is also important to note that, due to the availability of land, almost all of the new facilities for these two neighbourhoods are being built in the area of Can Gibert: Secondary School, Healthcare Centre and Parish church.

The Population

In 1996, 10,407 inhabitants lived in the district, which is the date of the last study we have available. Of this figure, 1,750 corresponded to the neighbourhood of Can Gibert del Pla and 8,657 to that of Sta Eugènia. The population in the neighbourhood continued to grow from 1996-98. If we take the last study at that time into account, 2,576 were aged below 20, i.e. 25 % of the population and 1,256 were aged over 65, 12 % of the total population. Therefore, we are talking of a young population – higher than the average in Girona – despite the tendency being the elderly (the range of retired people has doubled in %).

In terms of the origins of this population, 5,696 inhabitants - 54.7 % - were born in Catalonia. 23.23% were from Andalusia or Extremadura. The remaining 19 % were from the rest of Spain. It is important to underline the notable 3% to 4% of new populations, particularly of North African origins. The neighbourhoods of Sta Eugènia and Can Gibert del Pla housed the largest concentration of immigrants of the whole of the city of Girona (which reached a percentage of 2.42 % in 1996, above that of Catalonia, which was at 1.4%, or that of Barcelona at 2.3%). The new population aged from 0 to 16 reached 4.47% in the neighbourhood of Sta Eugènia.

These neighbourhoods are mostly made up of working-class families that primarily work outside the neighbourhood due to its lack of industry or other work centres. It has certain characteristics of a dormitory neighbourhood, although it must be noted that there is a great mixture of levels in all senses, due to cultural, social or financial aspects.

If we concentrate on the problems of children and youngsters, groups of youngsters and sometimes also children from the neighbourhood, particularly Can Gilbert, arise with certain levels of controversy from the different groups that spend a great deal of time in the streets.

Facilities and services of the sector

- Education: 3 state primary schools, 1 state secondary school, 1 private school, 1 state kindergarten.
- Social services - healthcare- the elderly: Municipal Social Centre, 1 private old people's home, 2 old people's clubs or centres, 1 Healthcare Centre
- Culture - associations– others: Sta. Eugènia Parish church, 1 Jehovah's Witness Hall, 1 Mosque, 8 Sports clubs, Santa Eugènia Leisure Centre Association, 1 Sports centre, 1 Football pitch, 1 outdoor sports court, 2 Neighbourhood associations, 1 Cultural association "La Bombeta", Civic Centre "Can Ninetes" (being built).

2.1. Internal Context

The Montfalgars Primary School is a state-run nursery and primary school. It teaches children aged 3 to 12 over three years of nursery education (0-3) and six years of Primary Education (1st to 6th). It is a dual lined school (two classrooms per year) with 450 pupils distributed among classrooms of between 20 and 25 pupils each. The school staff is made up of 26 teachers plus the PA (Psychopedagogic Assessment) team and the CREDAG (Speech therapy).

The Educational Curriculum of the school includes:

- Education as an integral process,
- An integrating and open school
- Promoting respect for the social and natural environment
- Educational action that considers methodological coherence

The School is associated to UNESCO. It publishes its own magazine ("Els Quatre Fulls") and takes part in the magazine of the state schools of Girona ("el Tarlà"). It has a varied range of out-of-school activities organised by the Parent's Association (Ampa).

Montfalgars School, together with two other schools (Dalmau Carles and Sta. Eugènia), are the educational centres of the neighbourhood of Sta. Eugènia. Its pupils, therefore, come from this neighbourhood. It has a large number of immigrant pupils and children of immigrant families, although this % is in line with and represents the real situation of the neighbourhood where they are inserted. It must be said that the

other schools mentioned have a much higher % of immigration. The Ceip Montfalgars maintains the number of local families differently to the others, where this number has decreased².

3. ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCHED ACTIVITY

3.1. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITY

3.1.1. Title: “Bringing Cultures Closer Together”. (Year 2002-2003: “Bringing Cultures Closer Together through Dance”)

3.1.2. Type of Discrimination worked against: Ethnic or cultural discrimination.

3.1.3. Objectives:

The Aim of the Activity is *“to bring the different coexisting cultures that attend our school closer together for greater awareness and enrichment of the entire educational community, arousing welcoming and caring attitudes while being able to prevent possible attitudes of rejection or conflict”*.

The objective of the Activity has been made aware and is known by all of the agents of the educational community: on one hand, the team of people forming the Ampa who began the activity by establishing an initial task of making their colleagues in the association aware of the need to work on reception and coexistence among the cultures at the school.

“... now, within the association, nobody questions whether this issue has to be worked upon as it has been assumed and everyone sees it as a need and, therefore, a resource upon which to devote our energies and resources...”

² This tendency is occurring in many areas of Catalonia where the local and more “standardised” families in the neighbourhoods are registering their children in private schools, promoting the idea that the arrival of immigrants to state schools has decreased the levels or that as of a specific number of cases with difficulties, integration is impossible. This, therefore, leaves state schools with very high ratios of children with Special Needs and, in turn, given that they have spare places, immigrant children arriving part way through the year only have places in the already overburdened schools.

On the other hand, the teaching staff know and share the objective of the activity and form part of the objectives of the centre's educational curriculum

“ Two of the principles of the centre's educational curriculum are: An integrating and open school

A school that promotes respect for the social and natural environment.”

It must also be underlined that the pupils we interviewed are perfectly aware of the objective of the activity and knew that:

“... the teachers involved in this activity want us to know other cultures, other ways of life and not to argue just because we think or feel differently...”

The remaining parents taking a more indirect part in the activity are also aware of the objective, as it was diffused through a leaflet where families were invited to take part in the Bringing Cultures Closer Together programme, *“with the aim of promoting mutual knowledge among all of the families at the school, all taking combined action to make integration into and coexistence in the school and neighbourhood environment easier”*.

3.1.4. Origins:

The activity: “BRINGING CULTURES CLOSURE TOGETHER THROUGH DANCE” forms part of the “BRINGING CULTURES CLOSER TOGETHER” programme. This programme, promoted by the School's Ampa, began in 1998-99.

This programme was proposed when, during a talk organised by the Ampa to make parents aware of certain new cultures, one of the attending parents, an African immigrant, said: *“my daughter is happy at the school and says that she has friends, although I am worried about her saying hello to her friends after leaving school and going home and them not answering, particularly if the mother of the friend doesn't tell her child to say hello either”*.

It was then that the Ampa realised that although there were no explicit conflicts of discrimination within the school between the children of different origins, in more informal areas there was certain isolation and a basic lack of contact: *“we realised that immigrant children are not invited to birthday parties or to play at the houses of other*

classmates, that immigrant mothers stand all together in a corner when waiting at the entrance for their children to finish school and do not even greet the other parents...”

As of this time, a proposal is made for that same year 98-99 to work on the relationship among parents at the school, among the parents of all groups to promote the informal relationships of the children and the families: *“for which people had to be made to contact each other and stereotypes broken”*.

The need to begin work to promote the relationship among all of the groups in the educational community to enrich ourselves with diversity and to avoid isolation, ghettos and conflicts was particularly detected by the Ampa. Several extremely sensitised parents in the association, who already formed part of the Ampa welcoming committee (responsible for welcoming and informing new parents to each year), proposed the need to work on bringing parents closer together, for them to get to know each other and to gradually involve the entire school.

The Ampa is, therefore, the driving force behind the organisation of the activities and who try to involve other the parents, teachers and pupils.

3.1.5. Methodology and Actions:

The programme (designed in the first year 1998-99, although taking shape over every new year) foresees work in three stages:

1. Bringing cultures closer together and comparing: **TO KNOW EACH OTHER**
2. Bringing cultures closer together : **to EXCHANGE**, TALK AND BUILD COMMON AREAS
3. Bringing cultures closer together : **to DO THINGS TOGETHER** and to BUILD A NEW EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY.

First Stage: Years 1998-99 and 1999-2000

The first stage undertook the work during years 1998-99 and 1999-00: *“The aim was basically to offer areas for them to **get to know each other**. To do so, we proposed different talks and debates open to the parents”*.

The focal points were: “*Daily Life*” and “*The Family and Education*” (during year 98-99) and “*What Do We Mean by Integration*” and “*Integration from School*” (during year 1999-2000).

*“From the very start we proposed work on a **Plan of Equality**. We did not want to indoctrinate immigrant parents as to how the culture here worked but to exchange the knowledge of everyone on common issues of interest. We therefore sought people from the groups of reference who could take an active and full part and, in some cases, contacted organisations working with immigration to act as mediators and ensure equal conditions”*

Second Stage: years 2000-01 and 2001-2002

The second stage took place over year 2000-01 and 2001-2002. *“We proposed that although we know each other and had been able to break down certain apprehensions and concerns, it was now time to begin forging a friendship and, therefore, had to do certain things together”*

The focal points for the third year were: “*Our Festivities and Traditions: Christmas and Ramadan*”, which continued with the formula of talks for parents as during the previous year. “*Our Languages*”. This began to involve the entire school and, as well as talks for parents (where the different sub-Saharan languages were explained, for example), posters were designed with greetings in all of the languages of the school and the teachers worked on them in class.

The second year of this second stage focused on “*Our Cuisine*”, which attracted a great deal of interest and particularly brought together many mothers:

“It ended with a conference with food from around the world, which was really nice but, furthermore, the process and preparation encouraged a great deal of contact. We called on all of the parents from the school and began to look for food that could be shown by nationality. Furthermore, each one brought items to represent their cultures and decorate the walls on the day of the party.”

“It is worth noting this year how cooking has made communication easier from an area of equality: everyone, particularly the women, knew how to cook and there was a very

fast exchange of knowledge. Over 50 different dishes were presented. Everyone was extremely enthusiastic and very willing”

Third Stage: Year 2002-2003

It was at the end of the school year 01-02 and positively appraising the activity when one mother said: *“we now know each other, we have cooked together and eaten together ... now all we need to do to get closer together is to touch each other”*

Thus the idea arose for the focal point to be music and dance. The objective of this year was also to involve the school in a much more active manner.

During the first term, the idea was organised and designed: *“we called on all parents and made them, in contact with the Head., look for dance and music to prepare the choreography”*.

They looked for dances from every country of origin of the families in the school and each year was given a dance. It was ensured that there were children belonging to that culture within the year in question. Thus, dances were prepared from: Catalonia, Morocco, Romania, Gambia, Andalusia, Aragon, Chile, Argentina-Bolivia and Russia. Each dance was taught to the children by the parents and the Head. During gym and music class: *“As dance formed part of the school curriculum, it was easy to bring it into the subjects and organise it”*.

The parents also came into the classroom to explain things about their countries and the place where the children were learning the dance. They also explained the most typical instruments.

Parallel to this, the clothing for each group was prepared. The mothers did the sewing, creating and new area of relationship among them.

The activity ended with a day when each class group danced the traditional dance of a the country they had been allocated. The parents were invited. They also offered an afternoon snack where each family brought typical dishes. There was a dance at the end for everyone.

3.1.6. Resources

The activity had never received any financing and was organised using the human resources of the Ampa and the families involved. During 2002-2003, a subsidy was requested for the activity from the “La Caixa Foundation” and was approved. This enabled us to purchase the material for clothing workshops and to organise the end party, as well as certain aspects of dissemination.

3.1.7. Appraisal

The appraisal of the Activity by the Ampa team was carried out in the following manner:

- A CD and video of the end party (“dances from around the world”) was recorded and distributed among the families. This initiative was positively appraised, given that particularly the children had made the dance and the tradition “their own”.
- The parents were called upon to appraise the day somewhat, although only those involved in its preparation attended.
- A report for the organisation to have assisted in financing the activity is currently being prepared.

3.2. OBJECTIVES FOR FIGHTING DISCRIMINATION AND PROMOTING EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES.

What is the “problem-situation” of the school in the promotion of anti-discriminatory activities? Are these activities adequate for fighting discrimination and promoting equal opportunities in the school?

All of the agents interviewed have highlighted the fact that there are not problems or discrimination or exclusion within the school, or at least there are no explicit conflicts with the new population. They do, however, highlight an attitude of “no contact” among the families from different ethnic cultures who form the community. In fact, this is the situation that the described activity was to affect.

It is not, therefore, an activity that explicitly affects discrimination, although we believe that it is working directly against the discrimination experienced by immigrant families when “integrating” into the receiving communities.

We therefore realised that there are families who “are not integrated” into the school community and by this we mean that there are families who do not have enough information to be able to evolve confidently in a school, who do not have the informative or effective resources to approach the school and enter its community and who, therefore, cannot take part. We also realised that any relationships with these groups are often more marked by fear and stereotypes than by real experiences of relationships and friendship ... which obviously leads to the weaker group being excluded.

“Integration” is understood as being a process of ALL groups and people in a community to adapt to the new reality, to become aware of it and to make it their own and we believe that this is precisely what the activity should influence.

We believe that this activity promotes the fight against discrimination because an improvement is sought in the relationship and coexistence among the families of different cultural origins in the neighbourhood. We believe that this is a form of breaking stereotypes and creating an integrating social network. The strategy proposed by the school for these objectives involves cultural exchange among the different groups represented in the school and awareness among the different people belonging to these cultures and the members of the neighbourhood.

On the other hand, and in a much less explicit manner, we also believe that it promotes equal opportunities among the pupils as the treatment of the cultural guidelines of the families of children at the school as a part of the curriculum values the cultures of origin and, therefore, the self-confidence and recognition of that belonging to the children.

3.3. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OF THE ACTIVITIES

3.3.1. What are the results of the Activity?

In general, the Activity has been valued as a success by all the agents involved and particularly by the parents’ association who valued the results and the process of this work extremely highly.

Of the agents interviewed, the following appraisal of the results can be highlighted:

- The activity to assist in “normalising” immigration and diversity in the school and the neighbourhood. The “local” parents think of immigration not as a phenomenon that affects others but as something close to them that affects acquaintances and also involves them.
- Meetings, talks, greetings and exchanges among the participants has also increased. Unforced relationships have been encouraged.
- The activity has always been based on the valuation of all cultures, on understanding the situation of the school and the neighbourhood as a source of wealth. More details about the life and history of our neighbours and our colleagues have been learnt.
- The very diversity of the country has been shown, which is often hidden: “which dance would represent the culture from here, from Catalonia?” Families from other parts of Spain also met and enjoyed being able to show their cultures.
- Immigrant parents have placed more trust in the school. They know it, they have come inside knowing who was there, who would welcome them, with more confidence. The school has opened its doors to them. They have encouraged relationships with the teachers.
- The parents “have felt like a school”. There has been a community feeling.
- Gradually, the teachers have also become more involved. *“Although this is still a point to work on as they still feel that the school is very much theirs and you sometimes get the impression that you are violating “their space“, when the school belongs to everyone and the more people working along the same lines the better”.*
- An improvement in the opinions of many parents in terms of immigration: *“now the idea of receiving or having immigrant families in the school is no longer a problem for the Ampa. Everyone is aware, for example, that the different delegates must welcome the new families³.”*
- The children end up feeling that the dance they learnt was their own: *“they have felt like the other culture was a little more their own”.*
- The high participation and involvement of all families was extremely highly valued (*“in terms of both time spent and in spirit and willingness, all this providing what we needed”*).

³ This action forms part of the School WELCOME PLAN, where different parents are responsible for welcoming new families to the centre in an effective and informative manner.

3.3.2. Conclusions

The SER.GI Foundation believed it interesting to include the “Bring Cultures Closer Together” programme by the Ceip Montfalgars in the CrEE, particularly because although it was a specific action that many other schools carried out in a more or less similar manner, this programme had certain variables and a potential for success that made its results differ from those of other schools that treated diversity in a more folkloric manner.

We believe that “Bringing Cultures Closer Together” and the promoting group have been able to agree on and sensitise a way of understanding immigration and integration away from paternalistic or discriminatory concepts and attitudes and to begin a project “for everyone and by everyone”, focusing on the community, the school and the neighbourhood.

The variables we highlight taken into account at methodological level and allowing for the good results have been, both for ourselves and for the agents participating in the research:

- To work towards the sensitisation of “local” parents and thus create a debate and a favourable and positive opinion of the welcoming and acceptance of immigrant families into the school and the neighbourhood.
- To involve the groups in equal opportunities. It is not based on the idea that “nothing is done for them” but on the fact that the responsibility is also theirs, as it is everybody’s.
- To create areas to allow for exchanges under equal opportunities, where everyone can contribute and feel as knowledgeable and receptive as the other participants, whatever they know and whatever they show being valued. This “daily life” activity (cuisine, language, music and beliefs, etc.) has allowed for this area to be created.
- To seek the “normalisation of relationships”, with an emphasis on the most “normal” areas created by the activity.
- To try to involve the entire educational community: parents, pupils and teachers, on the understanding that we all seek a common, explicit and known objective.

We would also like to highlight the following as important factors of success: The existence of a driving and dynamic force within the Ampa that is sensitive to the issue of immigration and the difficulties of immigrant families to integrate and participate in this community and, particularly, the enthusiasm and willingness transmitted by the project and its participants.