



CrEE
**REPORT ON THE ACTIVITY OF "MEDIATION:
CONFLICT PREVENTION AND RESOLUTION" IN
NARCÍS XIFRA HIGH SCHOOL**

GIRONA February 2004

1. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

1.1. Relationship with the school

Although this school did not initially reply to the questionnaire, we contacted them after discovering that they were holding various consciousness raising activities there.

At the outset of this second phase, in the month of February, we contacted the Educational Coordinator in order to explain the project to her. We were told to take this information to the school's '*Comissió d'Atenció a la Diversitat*'¹ 'or Equal Opportunities Commission, so on February 21st we visited the school with the twofold aim of presenting the CREE project and getting to know the school more thoroughly.

The week after this first meeting, the school agreed to participate in the project and so we arranged the first interview with the same team of teachers and coordinators. The following interview was held with a group of two teachers and a professional who helped analyse the activity. The third interview took place with a group of pupils and finally, we held a discussion group with ten parents.

This school was more than willing to carry out each interview, although at times the length of the meetings was short, approximately one hour.

There was a very positive relationship between the interviewees from the educational community and the CREE project professionals, as the project was seen not only as something to participate in but also as a way of improving the educational tasks of the school. Along these lines, once the information had been collected, the SER.GI Foundation collaborated in the school's annual multicultural day.

1.2. Methodology

The methodology used was based on the interview technique and the discussion group. It was distributed in the following manner:

Date	Technique	Participants	Duration
14 May 2003	Interview	5 teachers	60 minutes
15 October 2003	Interview	2 teachers and 1 outside professional	60 minutes
22 October 2003	Interview	4 pupils	60 minutes
12 November 2003	discussion group	10 parents	1 hr 30 minutes

This methodology allowed us to collect extensive information about the mediation activity that we chose. The fact of being able to interview teachers, outside professionals, parents and students enabled us to discover the different attitudes to the activity and therefore compare each interview and /or discussion group.

¹ This commission is non-compulsory but recommended by the Department of Education. It is made up of a teacher on the pedagogical team, an educational psychologist, the 'ESO' (first 4 years of secondary schooling) coordinator, the Head of Studies, a teacher from the UEC (Unitat d'Escolarització Compartida, outside the school but containing pupils from the school)), and a member EAP, also outside the school but with links to the Education Department.

When selecting the interviewees, two aspects were considered. First, a willingness to participate in the project and secondly, the creation of heterogeneous groups. In the latter case, we refer to parents and pupils, whom we asked to be diverse in gender, age and race.

This was the case with the pupils, but not with the parents, as, instead of calling a meeting especially for the CREE project, we were obliged to form our discussion group on the day of the AMPA ('PTA') parents' meeting. Therefore the development of the discussion was limited by the large number of parents present and the fact that they were in a hurry to hold their next meeting.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHOOL

2.1. External context: description and analysis of the catchment area

Narcís Xifra High School is situated on the outskirts of the city of Girona, in a neighbourhood of some 2000 inhabitants.

To discuss the external context, however, it is necessary to go beyond this neighbourhood, since the majority of pupils come from elsewhere. The catchment area is made up of 4 municipal districts: Sant Gregori, Sarrià, Sant Julià de Ramis and Girona. The first three are neighbouring villages of Girona with their own local councils, while the pupils from Girona city come from specific neighbourhoods, such as Germans Sàbat or Pla de l'Horta.

The presence of a neighbourhood or village identity is very strong among the pupils, so that when they speak about themselves or their classmates, they place themselves geographically. This is directly related to the social and economic structure of the different neighbourhoods. Below is a quote from a pupil:

"..the most common type of conflict you can find in the school is instigated by people from Germans Sàbat, Pont Major (...) they bump into you in the corridor on purpose, to provoke you. Most of the Germans Sàbat crowd are like that (...) In Sant Gregori there are very few like that... only two or three, and I'm not just saying that because I'm from Sant Gregori, you know!"

Pont Major is the neighbourhood in which the school is situated. Like Germans Sàbat and other neighbourhoods surrounding Girona, Pont Major experienced a sharp growth in a very short time in the seventies in order to house an internal migrant population from the northern and southern Spanish regions. These moves were mainly for economic reasons with people coming from the poor rural areas of Andalucía, Múrcia and Extremadura.

The result of this rapid and haphazard growth has been the division between already existing neighbourhoods, where people of Catalan descent continue to live, and whose standard of living has improved, and the new neighbourhoods, built in the sixties and seventies, where the immigrant population lives. At first, the population was mainly Spanish but currently there are also some new arrivals, mainly families of North African, Senegalese, Gambian and Latin American origin

The most visible difference in these Girona neighbourhoods and the above-mentioned villages is the language they use. In the former, Spanish is spoken and in the latter, Catalan is the native tongue. As for the types of housing, the neighbourhoods contain simple, council accommodation in the form of high blocks of flats or small two-storey houses. Some basic facilities and services can be found there, such as schools, a health centre, library and some shops.

2.2. Internal Context

Narcis Xifra High School is a state secondary school (12 to 16 years) of 726 pupils (273 boys and 453 girls) and 75 teachers. Of these 726 pupils, 49 are considered to have special needs, such as disability, physical or psychological problems or they may be late arrivals etc. In other words, all those, who, for one reason or another, need specialised attention. The percentage of pupils with immigrant parents is very small; there are 7 pupils of North African origin and 2 from Latin America.

When we speak about children with 'Necessitats Educatives Especials (NEE) or special educational needs, we refer to a defined categorisation published by the Catalan government's Department of Education, which outlines those cases requiring the most resources. This evaluation is carried out by the EAP teams (Educational Psychologist assessment teams) during the pre-term enrolment period. In theory, every state or direct grant school is obliged to accept up to 4 special needs students per class.

One characteristic of the internal context of this high school is that for many years there has been a teaching team working on the themes of coexistence, solidarity, non-discrimination etc. Thus, for example, from as early on as 1995, when the first pupils of non-Spanish origin were enrolled, the reception plan, el Pla d'Acollida², has been applied and these students are distributed in such a way as to create heterogeneous groups and facilitate their adaptation. Other activities which have been developed are the collection of text books (Recollida de Llibres de Text) which consists in compensating for the social economic inequality of those pupils who have been unable to buy course books. This activity is organised by the AMPA parents' association. The school also promotes A' level subjects in Technology among girls and Hairdressing modules among boys. Finally, Peace Day is celebrated every year.

According to the teachers interviewed, the fact that it is a large school, means that conflicts are more difficult to resolve. The teaching staff does not know all the students, let alone their parents. But in spite of this, the above-mentioned involvement of the teachers should be taken into account, as should the involvement of the Parents' Association (AMPA) and their concern with preventing conflicts in the school.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCHED ACTIVITY

3.1. ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

3.1.1. Title: Mediation Service, conflict prevention and resolution.

² Protocol for attending to new students at the school.

3.1.2. Type of Discrimination worked with: any type of Discrimination which may have given rise to conflict.

3.1.3. Objectives:

General objective: the main objective of the activity is for pupils to learn how to resolve conflicts peacefully, *and therefore improve coexistence in the school.*

Specific objectives:

- *Equip boys and girls with strategies to resolve their own conflicts and/or those of their classmates.*
- *Prevent conflicts which may emerge in the school in the future.*
- *Encourage coexistence and respect among pupils, teachers etc.*
- Make pupils aware that conflict can be resolved through talking, dialogue, coming to an agreement and listening to each other.*
- *Improve coexistence and promote dialogue among people beyond the school, trying to make pupils also apply what they have learned in this activity outside the school.*
- *Use mediation as an educational strategy instead of punishment..*

3.1.4. Origin:

This activity emerged in September 2002, as a result of a request from the 'Consell Escolar'³. For a long time conflicts had been increasing among students of differing ideologies. The solution of the teachers up to that moment had been to punish pupils who fought or insulted each other. Supporting the EAP (team of educational psychologists), the head of studies, as well as the parents' association (AMPA) were already of the opinion that punishment was being overused as a sole means of resolving conflicts. At this moment, the EAP team got in touch with the *Acord* association in order to hire their mediation service.

3.1.5. Methodology and Actions:

We should distinguish the methodology used in the school year 2002-2003 from that which was carried out in the current academic year.

In the year 2002-2003 the mediation activity basically consisted in sensitizing the pupils in the 4th year of ESO (16 years) with a twofold objective. In the first place they were told about the importance of mediation as a strategy for resolving conflicts without fighting. Secondly, they were told how the service functioned and were invited to use it.

These talks, which brought the boys and girls nearer to the subject of mediation, lasted for 4 sessions and were given to every ESO class in the high school.

The specific methodology employed by the service allows a person who has a conflict with another to fill in a form and post it in the Mediation Service postbox. For mediation to start, however, the other party is also required to submit his or her form, thus if there is a request from both parties, the mediator comes to an agreement with them and starts mediation.

³ It is made up of teachers, pupils, parents i representatives from 4 town councils who have pupils at the school.

During the 2002-2003 academic year, 30 hours of the mediation service were offered, held for one hour per week. Normally there were two people involved in the conflict, but in some cases more than two people attended. It must be stressed that the service was only used once except in specific cases when the same pupils used the service again.

The rules laid down during the use of the service are: to tell the truth, to be willing to do something to settle the dispute, to show respect for the other and respect the confidentiality of everything that is said.

From here, each party gives his or her version while the other listens. Then the mediator helps them to find their own solutions according to their needs. The mediator simply controls the speaking order and the dialogue process and enables them to think about what the other is saying.

During the 2003-2004 school year, as well as continuing this service, training sessions were organised for those pupils who had showed an interest in learning the mediation technique. The aim of these workshops was to teach the pupils how to resolve their own conflicts without the need of a third person.

These sessions were held outside the school time-table, for an hour at midday and were attended by nine girls from the 2nd, 3rd and 4th year of ESO (13-16 years)

Thus the work carried out since the beginning of the activity are as follows:

- a) *Informative talks about the workings of the Mediation Service at the high school. One talk for each 2nd, 3rd and 4th year group.*
- b) *Informative talks about the subject of mediation. Four one-hour talks for each 2nd, 3rd and 4th year group.*
- c) *Mediation sessions. During the 2002-2003 academic year (from 18th October 2002 to 10th June 2003) 23 sessions of mediation were carried out, attended by a total of 61 people.*
- d) *Mediation workshops. Since October 2003 a total of 13 sessions have been held for pupils who signed up on a voluntary basis.*

3.1.6. People involved:

This activity involves people from inside and outside the school community.

- *The teaching staff.* Their involvement is twofold. Firstly, they can use the service themselves and secondly, when they see a case requiring mediation, can advise the pupils to use the service.
 - *The educational psychologist.* S/he intervenes when conflict arises.. She advises the pupils to use the service, although the final decision must be with the pupil. The pupils can also go to her and ask her if she thinks they need mediation. She is the intermediary between the people who require mediation and the mediator.
 - *The pupils.* The activity is mainly aimed at them so that they may use the skills involved both in the school and outside it.
 - *The parents.* From the beginning they have supported the activity, both in idea and financially. They are not directly involved as they have never used the service or know how it functions.
 - *Other external professionals.* The *Acord* association, in charge of the activity, is totally external to the school. This distance is important when mediating and resolving conflict.

3.1.7. Resources:

On the financial side, this activity is subsidised by AMPA, the school's parents' association and by the town councils of Girona, Sarrià, Sant Gregori i Sant Julià de Ramis, which belong to the school's catchment area. On the human resources side, one person from the *Acord* association, the educational psychologist and the teaching staff were all involved.

3.1.8. School assessment:

The activity is assessed by the educational psychologist, and the mediator at the end of each school year. This report is sent to the educational psychologist team.

3.2. OBJECTIVES IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST DISCRIMINATION AND FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES.

3.2.1. What is the “problem situation” present in the school which requires anti-discriminatory activities?

Although it describes itself as a quiet school, some interviewees pointed out that there had been an increase in conflict in the last few years.

Some factors which could influence this increase are:

- *Ideology related to the social background and catchment areas of the pupils.*

As explained above, the catchment areas are diverse. Thus some young people live in villages around Girona, where there is a strong Catalan identity, while others come from neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the city, where the cultural and linguistic reference is Spanish. This can lead to ideological differences. On one hand there are some pupils with a strong Catalan identity. They want Catalonia to be independent. On the other hand there are pupils who feel Spanish and maintain that Catalonia is part of Spain. This difference polarises the groups of young people and despite taking cultural identity as group identification, each option is linked to aesthetics, ideologies and different behaviours. It should be stressed that this trend is present in other schools.

- *Age.* Age is an important factor that teachers and parents believe contributes to the analysis of the problem situation. During adolescence young people look for references of identification and in Catalonia, language is a key element in this process of identification. They need to be different from others and to do this, they often use confrontation strategies to oppose the other group. There is no attitude of understanding or of dialogue.

- *Educational reform.* One of the reform's tasks was to increase the school-leaving age to 16. This means that although there are people who see no need for study and who, before the reform, would have started work at 14, are now obliged to attend school until the age of 16. These boys and girls often have a conflictive attitude towards the school which makes working with these youngsters on an individual basis very difficult.

3.2.2. Are these activities adequate to foster anti-discrimination and equal opportunities in the school?

With reference to ethnic origins, although there are very few immigrant pupils, the Reception Plan (Pla d'Acollida) integrates and teaches these pupils the language successfully.

At the same time, the text book project favours those pupils from financially disadvantaged families or those whose families do not prioritise education. This activity consists in an annual recycling of text books so that pupils in need can reuse them. The fact that AMPA, the parents' association, is at the forefront of this activity shows the willingness of parents to promote equal opportunities.

With reference to gender discrimination, although there is no specific activity, there is an attempt to encourage boys and girls to take similar A' level subjects, in order to avoid the concentration of boys in technological subjects and girls in Nursing and Hairdressing.

With reference to the mediation activity, we feel it promotes anti-discrimination because it aims to improve coexistence among the different people in the school.

Moreover, we also feel the activity fosters equal opportunities among pupils as it gives them strategies to channel any personal conflict they may have and to be able to use these strategies outside the school context. In some ways this activity also favours the personal growth of pupils and iron out any inequalities in attitude and behaviour they may have acquired in the family.

We see it as an activity that may compensate for and educate in non-discrimination, although it does not deal with the root of the problem, which may be the theme of identity or the lack of motivation on the part of some pupils to attend class.

We feel, therefore, in theory, that these activities successfully allow us to work on the anti-discrimination objectives, to foster equal opportunities to a certain extent and we must now analyse the results of these activities to see if they are producing any changes.

3.3. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS OF ACTIVITY

3.2.3. What are the assessment criteria used to collect the results of the activity and their relation to the anticipated aims of the activity?

The assessment criteria which enable us to analyse the success or failure of these activities and which we have looked at in the research, are as follows:

The aims and results:

- Teaching staff's view of the relationships among pupils at the end of the activity.

- Pupils' views and assessment of the usefulness of the activity's information sessions.
- Girls' and boys' view of the mediation sessions and their usefulness.
- Pupils' attitude to the neighbourhood and the school.
- Professionals' satisfaction with results.

The methodology:

- Awareness and clarity of the professionals involved in the objectives of the activity.
- Participation of the various educational professionals in the decision-making phase (design and evaluation) of the activities.
- The number and diversity of professionals involved.
- The importance of the activity within the curriculum and the Education Plan (Projecte Educatiu).
- The involvement of the management team and the Department of Education.

3.3.2. What are the results of the Activity?

a) General assessment

The general aims and objectives of the activity are, firstly, to enable pupils to resolve conflicts peacefully and, secondly, improve coexistence in the school.

Although the activity was directed at all the members of the school, the main users of the service were pupils, and for this reason, the pupils themselves are able to express an opinion on the usefulness of the activity. The parents are the least knowledgeable of the activity and the teaching staff see it mainly as a way of appeasing conflicts among pupils, rather than a learning process for them.

Generally the majority of interviewees are satisfied with the activity. It can be noted that coexistence has improved in the school, although it is difficult to assess if this is a temporary situation or if pupils have really interiorised the mediation techniques. The teaching staff, families and outside professionals believe that these objectives should be worked on in a more global manner, tied in with the education of the family, the neighbourhood, and at nursery and primary school.

The more general opinion is that this activity helps to sensitize pupils to the importance of relating peacefully to others, in mutual respect and tolerance.

In general, the Activity has been seen as a success by the professionals involved in it. Two criteria are taken into account when making this assessment:

- The number of pupils taking part.
- The personal learning process of the pupils themselves.

b) Evaluation of the meeting of objectives

According to the measures described, and the agents interviewed, the results of the activity are as follows:

- Relations among pupils improved during the activity. The teaching staff and, to a lesser extent, the pupils, feel relationships improved among those who used the mediation service. Thus, discussing and reflecting on the problem helped to resolve conflict.

- The information sessions were extremely useful, according to the pupils, as they enabled them to become familiar with the activity and they now feel they can put it to use.
- Satisfaction with the activity. The teaching staff show the highest satisfaction as they feel it is an excellent resource to be used when there is any conflict inside the classroom that they are unable to resolve themselves. They maintain that sometimes they have neither time nor space to help settle a dispute or a fight, and that having a third party dedicated specifically to this is a great advantage to them. They also feel positive about the fact that this third person is neutral, from outside the school and, as they hardly know the boys and girls, this helps to prevent prejudice towards the parties involved.
- The students feel positive about the activity but they feel it does not enable them to resolve larger conflicts and that this goes beyond the school. They feel the activity helps them resolve small conflicts, such as misunderstandings and rumours, but if, for example, they have a problem with a teacher, this service is of no use.
- The number of people involved. We have been able to show that all the school community was involved, mainly the pupils and teachers. Although the parents do not directly participate, they are aware of the activity, support it and view it as very important:

"The basic aim is to learn the different ways of resolving conflicts and to learn that having a different opinion does not mean you are enemies. They approach the conflict in a reasonable manner and are shown that shouting and fighting is unnecessary and that talking can lead to a peaceful agreement. This is important."

- Importance of the activity within the school curriculum and the Education Plan (Projecte Educatiu) and its implication within the management structure: The activity can be seen as part of the Education Plan and the policies of the Department of Education. It is now taking place in other schools in Catalonia.
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4. CONCLUSIONS

With reference to discrimination, we can conclude that Narcís Xifra High School contains a number of problems concerning the different ideologies of polarised groups, although the interviewees did not give this much importance.

Firstly, it is felt that for some years in the past there had been more discrimination due to ethnic origins as it was a very recent subject. Firstly, there was a language difficulty, which made these pupils very visible, and in the second place, there was a group of indigenous pupils, who refused to accept them. This has now changed because they have been at the school for a while and have become integrated.

Secondly, we can conclude that over the last few years ideological conflict has increased. The origin of these pupils is the same but they are more likely to openly sport symbols, such as the swastika symbol or "Viva Espanya" (Up With Spain) slogans. This leads to conflict, which is already latent and can be felt in a tense atmosphere or in displays of fighting, insults or threats. Although this involves a very small group of people, they make themselves very obvious, according to the teaching staff.

The position of the parents in relation to the subject of discrimination varies. Some feel pupils who create conflict should be removed from the school but the majority feel that the school is low in conflict and that it promotes equal opportunities.

The analysed activity attempts to:

- Give strategies to boys and girls which will help them resolve their own conflicts and those of their classmates.
- Prevent the potential conflicts which may occur in the school in the future.
- Promote peaceful coexistence and respect among pupils.
- Make pupils aware of the fact that conflict can be resolved by talking, in dialogue, reaching a common agreement and listening to each other.
- Use mediation as an educational strategy, instead of punishment.

With reference to the methodology used in this activity, we must emphasize its importance as an educational strategy. It now remains to prevent conflict rather than resolve it.

The fact that this was an initiative in which all school professionals were involved and that everyone knew how it worked, enhances its effectiveness.

However, it must be added that the objective of this activity is not to combat discrimination, but to prevent and/or work with conflict. The fact that these conflicts are mostly provoked by a specific group with particular socio-economic determinants (low educational level of parents, working class, low income etc.) indicates a structural discrimination towards these pupils and that in some way they manifest this behaviour because they are not integrated into the school. In this way, the role of the activity is not to combat this structural discrimination, but it is limited to resolving specific conflict. We see a certain confusion between “discriminator” and “aggressor”. It is more a question of aggression coming from structurally discriminated pupils.

On the other hand it can be seen that most conflicts taken to the mediation service take place among friends or are due to misunderstandings etc. However, when it comes to discriminating against a person because of his/her physical appearance, ethnic origins, behaviour etc., pupils are less likely to go to mediation, as the self-confidence of the victim is so low that s/he does not have the personal means to ask the service for help. In this way, we believe that the activity would improve if if the school were assessed and this reality were taken into account (relationships established etc.). This could be done with personal questionnaires, for example, so that discrimination could be worked on more thoroughly, and taken beyond cases of aggression.