

## **END OF VISIT REPORT**

**Group Number: 170**

**Theme: Education and Training Educational Objectives 2010 – supporting active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion**

**Title: Intercultural Integration and the role of trainers**

**City / Country: Madrid, Spain**

**Dates: 9-12 June 2008**

**Group Reporter: Elizabeth Thomas**

**Course Description:** “Countries receiving immigrants have an increased need for including in their education and training systems the materials and pedagogical tools that help to sensitize, especially the young people, to cultural diversity. Education centres and teachers, in cooperation with other sectors, can be very effective in promoting equal opportunities, avoiding discrimination and in creating the foundations for a better integration in the new countries.”

The study visit, organised by the State Public Employment Service (SPEE), in Madrid, provided opportunities for participants to discuss the issues surrounding immigration and the integration of immigrants and to share experiences and good practice of the role of education and training in supporting this. Verbal descriptions of the situation in Spain were reinforced by visits to a variety of organisations where first hand experience and examples of how they responded to the issues related to immigration and integration was gained.

The participants, who were representatives of public authorities (national, regional, local), headteachers and teachers from education centres and training institutions from 10 different European countries, gathered in Madrid to discuss and share information about these issues.



L-R: Lidia Merlo, Borghild Drejer, Simonetta Leonardi, Kurt-Olov Sjöström, Liz Thomas, Elina Kumpina, Inna Pusikova, Malgorzata Sowicka, (Headteacher) Metka Malčič, Carolina Borrajo Villaverde (SPEE), Katalin Széles, Päivi Mäki, Malgorzata Wrotkowska

## **OVERALL IMPRESSIONS**

The programme of activities provided by the host organisation met with the description in the catalogue, with presentations and visits that clarified the way that these issues are dealt with in Spain. The Spanish experience as ‘the gateway to Europe’ has made them leaders in the field of intercultural integration and the challenges and experiences they have faced should provide ideas that other countries would be able to adopt and develop. Spain is in a unique position having experienced both inward and outward migration for centuries. It is now a major recipient of immigrants and the strategies that have been developed there are relevant for other European countries who are receiving or preparing to receive mass immigration.

Presentations from the host organisation provided good background information about the history of immigration in Spain and visits to a wide variety of organisations (government office, school, business, NGO) had been structured to reinforce this information and to put today’s practice into the historical context. The structure of the first day, which was used mainly to set the scene and describe the context, was quite heavy, perhaps more opportunities for group discussions could have been provided. Many of the presentations were given in Spanish and although excellent translation facilities were provided there were often long periods of speech in Spanish which were then translated although participants had expected that English would be the working language of the visit. The length of the day and the lengthy speeches sometimes made it hard to maintain concentration and focus clearly on the issues.

Visits to a variety of organisations (the Government office, Insituto de la Mujer – Institute for Women; a school, Real Colegio de Santa Isabel La Asuncion; a private sector business, Grupo Vips; an NGO, la Cruz Roja – the Red Cross; and a country wide training organisation La Fundacion Laboral para la Construccion – the labour foundation for construction, provided practical examples of intercultural integration from different perspectives, which were relevant to the participants according to their own job roles. Participants’ presentations also provided insight into different approaches to the topic and the ways that different local and national authorities throughout Europe were responding to the issues.



When asked how satisfied they were with the study visit 6 participants said they were ‘very satisfied’ and 4 were ‘satisfied’. In response to the question ‘to what extent did the programme of the visit meet your expectations? Was the agenda coherent to the description in the catalogue?’ 7 were ‘very satisfied’ and 3 were ‘satisfied’. When asked ‘did the presentations and onsite visits help you to get a clear picture of how the theme is dealt with in the host country?’ 7 were ‘very satisfied’ and 3 were ‘satisfied’.

## **CONTENT OF THE VISIT**

The content of the visit was relevant to the interests of the group members. Although they had a variety of backgrounds and work situations there was something provided for everyone and all participants felt they could draw relevance from each section of the visit, even when not directly comparable to their own situation. There was a good combination of background information about the history of immigration in Spain and descriptions of good practice in different Spanish organisations, companies and schools. In the course of the visit the participants heard descriptions of a variety of practical examples of intercultural integration both in Spain and in the countries of the group members. This enabled them to develop an idea of the 'big picture' in Spain and see the issues from a wide variety of perspectives. However, it was felt that there could have been a greater emphasis on 'education' and an opportunity to see/hear about *how* the different actors approached the issues, there was too much theory and too much description of good practice, it would have been useful to see the practice and *experience* it first hand. For example, we were told about a tool kit that was being developed at the Institute for Women, but were not able to see it, or to try out the resources.

The imbalance between theory and practice was especially apparent during the visit to the Red Cross training centre, where plans had been made to join a group of immigrants who were undergoing training and to have the opportunity to talk to them and share how they felt, unfortunately due to overlong and sometimes repetitive presentations (made longer by the need for translation) we ran out of time and this part of the visit was abandoned.

There were some common themes and ideas that were cited by all the organisations we visited in Spain which were also reflected in participants' practice. Most common were:

- Language: immersion in the language of the adopted country was vital to achieving integration. This was clearly reflected by the 'link classroom' approach at the Real Colegio de Santa Isabel La Asuncion, where pupils were helped to achieve fluency in Spanish before attempting any other educational activities and was also a common theme in the participants' own work. However, this is only a first step and is not the answer to integration.
- Welcoming tools: host countries must learn to welcome immigrants and to help them solve the problems they face when moving to a new country as well as to find work.
- Importance of the labour market: immigrants need to find work if they are to achieve successful integration. There was concern expressed that organisations such as Grupo Vips and the Red Cross appeared to have very low expectations of the immigrant labour force and were using them to fill menial jobs rather than offering employment that would help them to achieve their own potential and integrate successfully. (Grupo Vips' marketing sounded good, but the practice appeared to be exploitative.) This contrasted with the approach of the Fundacion Laboral para la Construccion, who recognised that many immigrant workers were better educated than their Spanish counterparts and who have developed the 'Professional Training Card' which lists qualifications, training, work experience etc of all workers enabling them to achieve equal employment status with native workers.
- Women – female immigrants often face double discrimination and need extra support, to help them into the labour market, to take care of their children and to integrate into the new society.
- Families: need to be supported, especially if they have children in education, so that everyone can learn and develop in the new country.

Participants felt that there should be some further exploration and study of the issues that had been raised, especially:

- How the subject can be handled and how the problems can be solved. It is important to learn by doing so it would be useful to explore how organisations approach the issues, with real examples, case studies etc to make the subject real rather than just a narrative of 'what we do'. Interviews and dialogues with the people involved would be invaluable,

- for example how do the children feel about being uprooted and moved to a new country? What problems do they face? How are they really adapting?
- What are the roles and targets of the State? Is there a hierarchy of need? Who should fund activities to encourage integration? How do the organisations working in this field fit together?
  - If movement is encouraged by European policy who should be offering help and support to immigrants? Can the construction industry (where mobility has always been inherent) provide lessons for the rest of society? Is the PTC card transferable to other areas of the labour market, throughout Europe?
  - How to do things – PRACTICE NOT THEORY. The group was *told* a lot about good practice in Spanish organisations but was not given the opportunity to see it in action, even when we visited the school and the classrooms we were told that the children had learnt Spanish in a very short time but were not able to see how they were taught, what methodologies were used or the work that they had produced.

Many of the issues that were identified are already being addressed throughout Europe within education and vocational training systems (as well as by Governments, businesses and NGOs) and participants were able to share some of this information by giving presentations showing the situations in their own countries and workplaces. However, there was not adequate time to share all information and to compare and contrast the different approaches. Presentations were squeezed into the gaps between talks from the hosts and visits to organisations. One participant was not given the opportunity to deliver a presentation due to a lack of time. It was felt that a dedicated session for the presentations should have been set aside and that participants should have been given clear guidance as to how long their presentations should be in order to ensure that everyone was able to give their talk and for the group to reflect on it. This would have enabled participants to consider more how policies and practices could be transferred and developed in different parts of Europe to create a coherent approach to intercultural integration.

It was felt that language was the most immediate challenge facing immigrants and that the link classroom idea could be developed to help children but also to include parents and families.

Co-operation between different bodies and systems between countries and governments could and should be developed to assist movement of people – Spain has introduced a law (2007) to encourage training in countries of origin and this was felt to be a useful and transferable approach to successful integration.

## **NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES AND ORGANISATION**

As well as sharing examples of their work and practice participants were given many opportunities to network, both formally and informally, with each other and with representatives of the organisations that were visited. Many ideas for possible future projects and cooperation were discussed:

- Malgorzata Wrotkowska is considering working with the Spanish government offices to arrange exchange visits for Spanish students to Poland
- Borghild Drejer and Simonetta Leonardi discussed the possibilities of school partnerships between Italy and Norway
- Elizabeth Thomas and Päivi Mäki are interested in how education for sustainable development and global citizenship is approached in Wales and Finland.
- Elina Kumpina and Kurt-Olov Sjöström wanted to look at the support for Somali people in UK and Sweden from an adult learners' point of view.

The group was a good size to enable such links to be made and to share thoughts and opinions with others. There was a good mix of nationalities with participants coming from all over

Europe. It was a good mix, although there was a slight tendency for those from the same countries/areas to 'stick together'. There was a variety of backgrounds and professional roles. On the whole the group was well balanced, but there was a definite gender imbalance with only one male, in practice this was not a problem but it may have been difficult or uncomfortable for him if the group had been different.

The group would like to thank the organisers, particularly Carolina Borrajo Villaverde and Leticia Rodriguez Gomez, for their hard work in arranging the study visit and for their warm welcome to INEM and to Madrid. We received clear information about the visit in advance and felt that the day time activities were very interesting and well planned, although there were some issues with time keeping and with the length of some of the presentations. It was wonderful to be given the opportunity to visit the Prado and the Thyssen Museums and to have some free time in Madrid, but it might have helped the group to bond more had at least one evening activity for all participants been planned, particularly on the first night of the visit, or the Sunday evening when participants arrived at the hotel and did not know each other. There was an informal arrangement to meet which helped participants to break the ice and begin to get to know each other, but not everyone was involved. It would also have been nice to spend time with our hosts on an informal basis.



## **SUGGESTIONS**

- More practice less theory
- Case studies and interaction with real people involved in projects
- Time limits on presentations and talks and adherence to the time table
- Shorter sessions where translation is required
- Use of 'working language' where possible
- Whole group commitment to final report, use of any European language, or accept individual reports from all participants instead of group report<sup>1</sup>
- Evening / cultural activity/ies for the whole group
- Coffee at start of day and regular coffee/comfort breaks!

<sup>1</sup> There was some difficulty in co-ordinating the writing of the final report, the scheduled sessions were reassigned by the hosts and participants assumed that I, as the only native English speaker, would take responsibility for the report. I would like to thank Borghild Drejer and Päivi Mäki in particular for their support and assistance in gathering information and compiling the final report. (Elizabeth Thomas, June 2008)

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## GENERAL COMMENTS

It was a useful study trip and I have got some new ideas and I can use them in my every day work

excellent study visit and wonderful company, I enjoyed it very much. Madrid is very beautiful and special thanks to Carolina and Letitia

a rich and rewarding week's work. We came to this unique cultural venue, we brought such differences in backgrounds and opinions and yet got along so well and made such good friends and companions



I have learned about different systems of education that exist in other European countries and what works in other contexts and what can be adapted in my context

it was important to learn about the Spanish immigration system, to share the good practices and to build friendships and partnerships with others in the group

when we met on Sunday we did not know each other, now we are good friends and can work together

I think it is important to have this kind of experience because we can see and live the similarities and differences and we get so many new ideas for different fields where we work

it was well organised by our Spanish friends and we felt very welcome

a very useful and well planned visit which provided opportunities to develop new ideas and practices

we have a problem we have a project!