

## Integration in Spain: Process, Results and Controversies

Since 1985, legislation has been enacted in Spain that provides for the integration of special educational needs (SEN) children. A qualitative analysis of the situation in Malaga provides a framework for evaluating the process of integration so far.

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### GENERAL OVERVIEW

Many educational reforms (in the educational system, the curriculum and in teacher training) have been made in Spain in the decade of 1980-90. It can be said to have been a period of change in both social and educational fields.

Programmes integrating children with special educational needs into mainstream schools began following the 1985 Act which aims to achieve the following ends:

- a) to give all pupils equal opportunities within the educational system in an integrated environment;
- b) to improve the quality of normal education;
- c) to prepare the schools to detect all kinds of problems in the pupils, including those that arise from the curriculum and social, physical and cognitive factors;
- d) to make a full range of resources available to all pupils, giving them support and access to the main curriculum.

At present there are difficulties in the way of obtaining a general picture of how integration is developing in Spain. These are due mainly to two factors:

- a) Spain is made up of 17 Autonomous Communities, self-governing from the point of view of education, which can implement this law and allocate funds for its implementation at very different rates. There are great differences not

only between one Community and another but also within the same Community.

- b) The law of integration is fairly recent (1985) and has not yet produced a sufficient number of reports or publications on the subject to allow us to have a real idea of the present situation.

It can be said however, that due to the impetus of this law, many children are transferring from special schools to ordinary ones all over the country, and each year more funds and personnel are directed towards aiding these children and more and more schools are accepting this integration.

On account of the difficulties mentioned the focus of this article will be on the study of integration into schools in a specific, concrete context in the hope that it is a reflection of similar situations in other parts of the country.

### **THE CONTEXT OF THE INVESTIGATION**

Malaga is the capital of the Costa del Sol and one of the most important cities in the autonomous region of Andalusia. Different civilizations have left deep marks on the city and these marks today go to make up the great cultural heritage of tolerance and cosmopolitanism in the city. This cultural wealth forms the basis of a culture of integration which supported integration experiments of children with Down's Syndrome, visual impairment etc., long before the 1985 law of integration which extended the experiments to those children with other special educational needs and also to many other schools.

In order to understand the impact that the law of integration has had in this context one must consider two complementary dimensions: the qualitative and the quantitative.

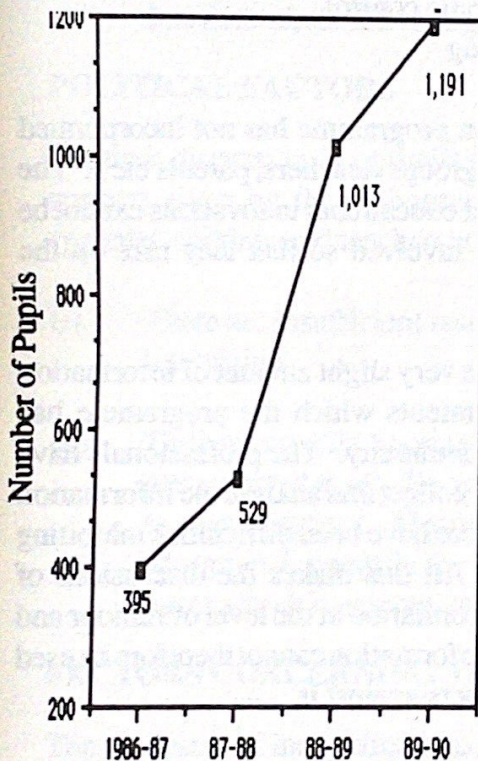
### **THE QUALITATIVE APPROACH**

Perhaps the best way to describe the qualitative approach is to concentrate on a particular school which gives pre-school instruction and primary education in a district in the suburbs of Malaga. At this school 31 children with special educational needs (Down's Syndrome, cerebral palsy and other special educational needs) have been integrated. These children are in both special classes and regular classes with a support system. The integration has been presented to the school as an Educational Innovation Programme, and thus assessment of it is from this point of view.

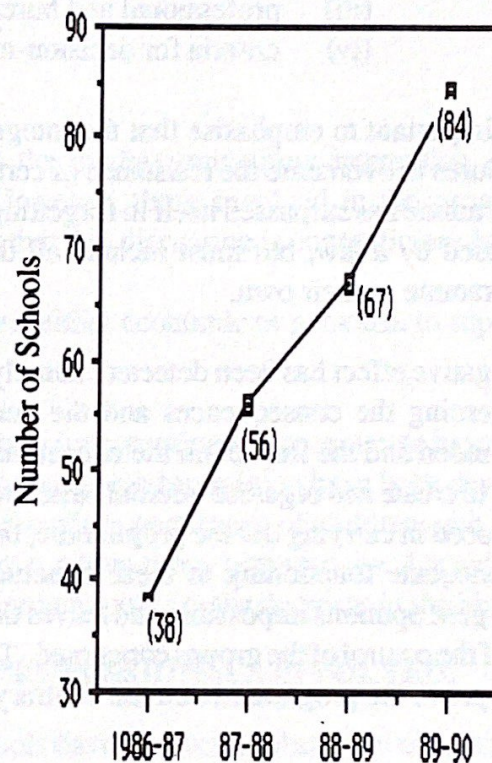
## THE QUANTITATIVE APPROACH

The following graphs aim to show some significant data on the movement of integration in our area in recent years.

**Graph 1:**  
**Implementing the 1985 Act**  
**Increase of pupils with SEN**  
**in the ordinary schools**



**Graph 2**  
**Implementing the 1985 Act**  
**Increase in the number of**  
**integrated schools**



## FACTORS RELATED TO THE CONTEXT

Important differences have been observed between the ways that integration has taken place in the school studied and schools in rural areas, with the latter suffering as far as the availability of resources is concerned. One important aspect is whether the school, both as an institution and as a staff, is prepared to accept and develop the integration of these pupils (Hauser, 1979). In general it is accepted that the integration programme has neglected this dimension and has not taken sufficiently

into account either the expectations that it produced among the different groups involved or the relationship with other similar programmes.

### **FACTORS CONCERNING THE BEGINNING AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROGRAMME**

There are various important aspects to these factors:

- (i) support/rejection of the programme
- (ii) information about the above
- (iii) professional and bureaucratic control
- (iv) criteria for decision-making

It is important to emphasise that the integration programme has not incorporated measures to overcome the resistance of certain groups (teachers, parents etc.). The programme has surpassed itself in forgetting that educational innovations cannot be imposed by a law, but must include all those involved so that they take on the programme as their own.

A negative effect has been detected; namely, the very slight amount of information concerning the consequences and the commitments which the programme has demanded and the impact on the educational community. The professionals have tried to create and organise internal structures to collect and analyse the information produced in carrying out the programme, but there have been difficulties inhibiting the adequate functioning of these structures. All this makes the discussions of divergent opinions impossible and leaves the information at the level of rumour and out of the control of the groups concerned. This information cannot therefore be used to improve the programme; on the contrary, it acts against it.

### **FACTORS RELATED TO THE CHILDREN AND PARENTS.**

The rights which these SEN children have to be integrated into the ordinary schools have been fully recognised by their school-mates. Nevertheless, these rights are limited by different factors which are illustrated by these three situations:

- (i) The law concedes the right of the school to choose whether it admits children with special educational needs or not. In accordance with this freedom of choice on the part of the school, very few schools in the district have admitted children with special educational needs into the classes. This means that

many children have no access to a school near their homes and the school which does accept them becomes saturated with children with special educational needs.

- (ii) The architectural barriers of the school limit access to the classrooms, especially in the cases of children in wheelchairs.
- (iii) There is minimal participation of the children with SEN and their parents in the questions which affect them, especially in the diagnostic process, the decisions about schooling etc.

### **POLITICAL FACTORS**

Political discussion is optimistic (in the media) concerning integration and the support given by the authorities. However, those involved in the programme (parents, children and teachers) think that this discussion is contradictory because:

- (i) There are insufficient resources, either economic or personal, to support integration.
- (ii) The benefits which were promised for accepting this programme have hardly been granted at all. No priority measures for training have been developed as were promised. The reduction of the percentage of children with special educational needs in the classes, where it has occurred, has been due to a factor which is external to the programme, i.e. the decrease in the birth rate.

### **FACTORS CONCERNING THE PROFESSIONALS INVOLVED.**

The processes of integration into schools have produced substantial changes in the teaching activity since the teachers are involved at different and complex levels. The following variables, related to the professionals, have been identified as having great importance for the development of the integration programmes.

- \* Professional development and teacher training.
- \* Teachers' roles and functions.
- \* The change of attitude through experience.
- \* Teachers' permanence in the classroom.
- \* Improvements in multi-professional teamwork.
- \* Professional role assignation, including that of the parents.

How does the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the class affect the professional teaching activity? Three broad dimensions of the activity of teaching can be considered; teacher's beliefs and values; teaching plans and decision making; and professional support and development.

### **BELIEFS AND VALUES**

At this level, the children with special educational needs affect the practical way of thinking of the teachers, involving their personal thought systems (ideological and axiological) and their professional beliefs. These beliefs and values, which are historical in origin evolve in the context of integration according to:

- (i) The specific experiences with the handicapped and the type of handicap.
- (ii) Individual factors concerning the teacher (increase in personal responsibility, excess work).
- (iii) Institutional factors eg lack of the promised support, (Hegarty, 1988).

These different ideological and axiological attitudes appear clearly; Budgell (1987) has conceived three views of them as shown by the integrating teachers:

<b>Humanistic/Romantic</b>	-	emphasising the importance of effective relationships and a happy environment for the child.
<b>Cognitive</b>	-	the teacher puts emphasis on the teaching strategies to achieve a total integration of the child and not just some specific parts.
<b>Interactive</b>	-	this emphasises the framework of the social system in which the child lives and where he/she builds a world of meaning which may provoke standardising behaviour in other people.

To these, one must add the view of rejection to the integration.

### **TEACHING PLANS AND DECISION MAKING**

Teaching planning is a solitary activity which scarcely receives any institutional support (Clark and Lampert, 1986) but which constitutes an extremely important period of time for the union of thought and action on the part of the teachers (Perez Gomez, 1984). It constitutes a basic space of time for curricular adaptations through additions, subtractions, interpretations and decisions about the place, the sequence, the emphasis and the articulation of the support systems necessary to be given to the

pupils with special educational needs (Hegarty, 1984).

When this planning is not carried out, we are simply fostering a centralised teaching about the child with special educational needs, making his/her integration difficult and increasing the routine academic tasks which are proposed in the classroom or in the support room.

One peculiarity of this decision-making is that the teachers do not receive sufficient information from the integrated children themselves in the process of carrying out their academic tasks, or the information which they receive is "weak in meaning" and this makes it more difficult for teachers to adjust their actions to the new information which reaches them in the development of their teaching.

### **PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT**

The integration has consequences insofar as the teaching planning must be shared with other colleagues (giving support) and this means a shared responsibility in the management of the class and in the pupils' progress, especially the assessment of this progress. For all this an adequate level of satisfactory personal relations with other professionals is necessary - relations which are often based on areas of the curriculum and which need institutional space for their implementation.

This accumulation of demands makes the teacher think out his/her professional beliefs so that he/she can deal with:

- (i) provoking the critical contrasting of the knowledge with which the child arrives at school;
- (ii) forming methodological strategies which favour diversity and taking organisational and curricular measures which may provide the diversity and attack the inequalities (Perez Gomez, 1988);
- (iii) diagnosing these situations.

In this sense the teacher is more of a clinician than a technician, and therefore tends to be an autonomous professional who investigates, reflecting on the practical and involving him/herself in the activity of criticising his/her teaching performance.

### **CONCLUSION**

The main problems which have arisen are:

- (i) The limited provision of resources (professional, economic etc.)
- (ii) The training, both initial and in-service, of teachers and other professionals.

- (iii) Curriculum reform so that it is adequate for these children and their special needs.
- (iv) The need for a re-conceptualizing to detect and identify special educational needs.
- (v) The evaluation of the integration programme.
- (vi) Ensuring that the parents' attitude is one of collaboration.

There have been many controversies of different kinds (ideological, methodological, practical) among the different groups (teachers, parents, politicians etc.) in Spain during recent years. However in the midst of these difficulties the process of integration is making more and more progress.

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