

EPASI Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

a programme of observation, analysis and innovation supported by the European Commission's department of Education & Culture, SOCRATES programme 2.1.2



Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

Czech Republic case study report 4 The Safe Classroom: Addressing bullying and interpersonal conflict

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December 2008

The EPASI project is a programme of analysis of educational programmes in fourteen European countries, designed to address various forms of social inequality. The project analysis was conducted in the period 2007 – 2009. This report is part of the overall project, details of which are at <http://www.epasi.eu>.

The analysis is intended to be used within the overall framework of the EPASI programme.

The project has been funded with support from the European Commission. Each report within the overall project is the responsibility of the named authors.

The EPASI project was conducted by the following institutions:

- The Institute for Policy Studies in Education, London
- Metropolitan University (UK) (Coordinator)
- Katholieke Hogeschool Zuid-West-Vlaanderen (Belgium)
- Univerzita Hradec Králové (Czech Republic)
- Montpellier III - Université Paul Valéry (France)
- Panepistimio Patron ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΠΑΤΡΩΝ (Greece)
- Universitat Autònoma of Barcelona (Spain)
- Malmö högskola (Sweden)



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The project Safe Classroom is a contribution to social pathology prevention, in particular school bullying and serious interpersonal problems prevention at Basic Schools in the city and region of Hradec Králové. The project focuses on socio-economically disadvantaged pupils who often become victims or aggressors of school bullying.

The project is realised by Civic Association Salinger Hradec Králové in cooperation with several other institutions and educational centres, especially with Children's Diagnostic Home and Centre of Educational Care Hradec Králové. Other project's partners are Hradec Králové Magistrate probation officers. Another key side of the project is represented by directors of Basic Schools. As for funding the project, the main financial sources include Czech Government, Magistrate of Hradec Králové, private organisations and firms.

The incentives and stimuli for the project come from various levels and reasons:

- Firstly, the project appeared necessary to be prepared and realised because of schools' low ability to detect in-class interpersonal difficulties and aggression towards disadvantaged pupils effectively enough,
- Secondly, in the city and region of Hradec Králové there were several school bullying oriented centres (subjects) that provided rather uncoordinated efforts. The subjects' services were fragmented and unclear. The project was started as a platform to coordinate these kind of activities, at least partially.
- Thirdly, it appeared necessary to pay more attention to social pathology within school classes in the form of direct therapeutic work with school classes.

From the initial stages the project has been trying both to eliminate the lack of complexity and fragmentation, and to maximise the cooperation and sense of team work within the subjects and initiatives.

The principle of team-work is applied by common agreement that individual subjects will be specialised and oriented on a specific field of assistance. However, all the project's organisational matters and expert interventions in the classes are consulted at common meetings at regular one-month intervals. There are also common seminars for school delegates. These seminars are aimed at providing information about the project's sense and functioning. The seminars also facilitate better and more open communication between schools.

The principle of complexity is reflected in the variety of possible interventions offered by the project. The project offers diagnostic aids and consequent assistance, primary, secondary and in some cases even tertiary prevention.

After entering into the contract about cooperation within the team and after articulating basic principles and aims in 2002 it became of crucial importance to persuade basic schools' directors to accept the offered assistance. The persuasive process revealed to be an evolutionary and continual process dependent on three correlating principles: directors' expert knowledge, directors' professional approach and both directors' (in)tolerance and (dis)ability to admit potential occurrence of bullying at their schools.

The project started in the year of 2003 and is still ongoing. The project's main aim is to realise social pathology diagnosis and prevention and in-school social relations intervention. The project tries to resolve interpersonal defects in school classes. All of this functions on the basis of cooperation between in-service teachers, psychologists and social workers. Another key factor is the school management and parent supervision.

The most important part of the project undergoes in school classes and focuses on pupils' own activity and accepting the initial help from outside. As for types of activities provided within the project there are included:

- preventive interactive discussions,
- counselling service in cases of school bullying suspicion,
- expert intervention and individual approach to persons and classes,
- open interpersonal communication,
- sociometric surveys,
- outpatient, inpatient and follow-up care using either therapeutic or restrictive techniques.

The project's effect might be differentiated into several levels, according to prevention types: primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. The case study focuses the project from the perspective of these levels and types of prevention.

1. Primary prevention – educational lectures and seminars in classes with no bullying related problems occurrence

This part of the project aims to improve children's legal awareness in particular. Children learn to identify signs of bullying at the very beginning, they learn both to recognise when this phenomenon starts to influence their class and ways of protection against this phenomenon. The information must be transmitted in an attractive way that stimulates children's concern and is sensitive to children's various socio-cultural disadvantages.

This part of the project is guaranteed by two subjects:

- Civic Association Salinger (this association works in different prevention fields and employs mostly Hradec Králové University students and graduates),
- Police of the Czech Republic (to be specific, two prevention specialists).

Both parts complement one another very well. Civic Association officers and lecturers address adolescent pupils informally, during interactive discussions while the Police officers focus on younger children, on primary education pupils mainly. Officers and lecturers participating in this part of the project represent a kind of 'antenna' looking up school classes with markedly unhealthy atmosphere. These colleagues also initiate further work with the class. The further work succeeds to other constituent parts of the project.

2. Secondary prevention – diagnosis

High-quality work with classes with already detected bullying related problems must be based in detailed class-data analysis. This maxima is valid with the exception of open and evidence-based aggression with necessity to apply restrictive procedures rapidly.

Sociometric diagnosis of interpersonal relations between pupils and of class climate is realised by specialists of outpatient Centre of Educational Care as one department of the Children's Diagnostic Home and Centre of Educational Care Hradec Králové. All employees of the outpatients' department (two special pedagogues, two psychologists and a social worker) participate in the work with classes

The project applies two sources of information and data:

- Information from pedagogues (teachers and their subjective views) and anamnestic data (including key points in the life of class and implying etiology of the class problems),
- Information from children (children's subjective views of their class collected non-directly by sociometric questionnaires (SORAD, Braun B – 3, B – 4 and the test *Colours of Life*).

3. Secondary prevention – direct in-class intervention

Effective intervention in school classes is considered to be an optimal way to influence interpersonal relations between pupils generally as well as in relation to socio-culturally disadvantaged children. Secondary prevention is a way to activate positive, so far inactivated,

potential of classes. The advantage of this approach is that children are given a chance for new experience, which might bring desirable changes. This experience is based on pupils' discovery of their own potential to direct the group towards positive development, growth and to minimise the occurrence of bullying in their class. This approach does not aim to suppress pathological setting of the class by power and restrictive techniques. This approach is oriented on supporting the children to find power for the fight against social pathological evil, often directed at socio-cultural groups, within their inner world.

Every involved person is guided to self-responsibility for the state in which the class has occurred. This knowledge is a basement of positive future development. Children are supported to talk about possible ways of children's contribution to positive changes. A very important factor which must be taken into consideration is the desire to imitate manners represented by models among teenagers.

4. Secondary prevention – individual care for the aggressor and victim, teachers' work oriented counselling

The individual care for the aggressor or victim is based on basic job description of the centre of educational care and if this kind of care is possible to realise it is a notable supplement to in-class direct therapeutic intervention, at some other times irreplaceable alternative, depending on the state and level of pathological development of the class. In the conditions of the centre children might be provided not only outpatient (in the centre *Domino*), but also residential inpatient care (in the centre *Návrat*).

Teachers' work oriented counselling substitutes another very important domain. First of all, the centre informs the form teacher about diagnostic conclusions of sociometric investigation. What follows further is a set of recommendations as for the approach and procedure to support the centre's effort aimed at class climate recovery. As far as it is evident that the form teacher supports the recovery process, as far as the recommendations are real inspiration for the teacher, then the form teacher's gradual participation in the direct class intervention work is worthwhile. Only in this way not only the recommendations and advice, but also teacher's personal experience will have a bearing on later development of the class.

5. Tertiary prevention – restrictive intervention

The restrictive part of the project is realised by delegates of Police of the Czech Republic and probation officers for the youth. Police is represented by two criminologists focusing on children's and youth delinquency. The role of the police is notable in the following situations:

- open, evidence-based forms of violence between schoolmates,
- prevention and intervention failed,
- diagnostic conclusions indicate that in the prevailing structure of the group social relations recovery is unworkable,
- advanced stage of bullying with one and only solution: dismembering the class by for example splitting up the pathological system of relationships, rearranging the parallel classes, expelling the aggressor etc.

After radical solutions and interference into class relationships the class members are given the opportunity to accept this event emotionally, mostly by means of therapeutic approach.

The project concerns 8,000 recipients, primary and lower secondary education pupils. As for the evaluation of the project, the project is evaluated unofficially only. The project is also presented in two special pedagogy master diploma thesis research projects.