

Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

Spain case study report 1 City Educational Project (PEC): A transversal programme to address educational inequalities

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Introduction

Instead of choosing five different policies to be developed in this section, the Spanish team has decided to focus its attention on one “macro-project” – **City Educational Project (PEC)** - as our first case study. The project is an umbrella-type project that encompasses a series of interesting, semi-autonomous sub-projects, some of which will be analysed in more detail as four separate case studies.

The decision to focus first on one “macro-policy” was based on the following factors:

- 1) The project is a clear example of a general, transversal social pact aimed at compensating social and education inequalities and to improve education in general.
- 2) It affects, basically, all “at risk” groups selected to be outlined in this research, through the development of eight ‘thematic work areas’ (*ámbitos temáticos de acción*) (including, for example, immigration and academic success), from which specific actions are derived.
- 3) The project includes both general educational policies based on a theoretical framework about education and social actors, and specific, local actions that are materialised through the macro-project’s lines of action (some of which will be further described in detail). These elements of the macro-project are regularly assessed and revised for continual improvement.
- 4) The whole project counts on one fundamental base – full implication and participation of the social actors, thereby involving the target groups and/or related communities in the design, management and/or delivery of the actions.
- 5) It represents a good example of local and transversality of educational policies, based on the advantages of giving educational competences to local administrations (city councils and schools) due to their proximity to the community and knowledge of the specific needs of community members.

City Educational Project (PEC)

The philosophy of City Educational Projects (PEC) lies in the idea that the city must evolve from being just a scenario to being an educational agent who is implicated in and actively influences the education of its citizens. Within the PEC framework, two new educational realities are currently taking place in parallel: one within the formal educational environment, and one that extends its educational action beyond the classrooms and takes advantage of the territorial resources from the city, thus producing educational opportunities for continuity of the learning process and a chance for coherence among the diverse educational possibilities and situations. This premise of relationship between the city and its school revolves around four fundamental axes: 1) the model of a school rooted in its community and social reality; 2) a concept of learning that departs from children’s experience and daily life; 3) the collaboration between school and community associations in order to promote city-school programmes; and 4) the will of the local administration to be co-responsible for education of its citizens

http://w3.bcn.es/V45/Home/V45HomeLinkPI/0,3698,60797962_60807355_1,00.html).

City Educational Projects aim for the creation of an integrated educational network, based on a process of participation and joint responsibility that involves society as a whole, bringing together local administrations, schools, families, cultural organisations and recreational associations. Childhood and youth education are continually more conditioned by what happens outside school hours and by the relationship between what happens during “formal” education periods - activities developed within the classrooms - and those that are offered to them during “free hours” (extracurricular activities). Starting from here, and aiming to give an integrative and communitarian answer to the multiple educational needs of children and youth, different local institutions (city councils, recreational organisations, parent and cultural associations and even

corporations) have started educational programmes and projects from the above-mentioned co-responsibility framework. These projects are based on three pillars or basic principles: social co-responsibility in education, transversality and proximity, meaning the implication of all the territory's community and educational agents to transmit educational values, not only in the school but from a wide range of contexts.

In the words of an expert: "If it were possible to measure the degree of educational power of a city, the amount and quality of schools would not be the only indicator, but also the rest of institutions and tools that generate formation, as well as the way all these agents interact and harmonize" (Trias 1993, quoted in Bertran Coppini 2006).

This new, inclusive educational paradigm in which the concept "education" goes beyond the school and includes all the educational typologies (formal and informal), converges in a commitment between the diverse organisations and city association and groups and the local administration. Local administration is understood as the appropriate agent to guide and coordinate the implementation of educational policies due to its comprehension of the specific social needs and realities of the community. Moreover, due to their proximity, city councils can continuously assume more responsibility as the suitable channels for responding to the situations that occur in the daily life of the community. They are also the ideal agents to extend and improve the educational system's ability for adaptation to diverse situations and to ensure that the decision-making process is flexible and agile, while at the same time guaranteeing participation of community members.

It is not always easy to coordinate these different themes. Although Spain has experienced a clear decentralisation of legal responsibilities towards the regional governments, the Spanish educational legislation does not provide a lot of resources to local governments. Furthermore, the central government still controls in the arrangement, organisation, operation, planning and management of the overall educational system. Nonetheless, this legal framework has not stopped the implication of many city councils in developing a wide range of educational programmes and services such as early childhood, music and art schools, educational support programmes, education-labour world transition programmes and immigrant children integration.

Schools also become a fundamental node in this integrated educational network. The current evolution of the social context, the attention to diversity, the adjustment to the immediate context and the democratisation of education also supposes the autonomy of the teaching institutions to provide fast answers to the impositions that the changing socioeconomic reality raises.

School (...) has to find, in its city, the essential frame in which to integrate its work and project all its formative power, taking advantage of the great educational potentials of local and community surroundings. We cannot understand the future of the city without considering its schools, nor will we be able either to plan the future of the school if we separate it from the future of the local communities in which it is inserted (Subirats 2003, quoted in Bertran Coppini 2006).

Finally, the framework of the City Projects (PEC) also promotes equality of both individual and group opportunities so that all pupils and citizens have the same opportunities and accessibility to these new educational tools and spaces thus improving everyone's chances of success at social and labour levels. In this context, City Projects consider that it is necessary to reframe what is taught and how it is taught, followed by reviewing and redefining the educational contents and programmes in order to ensure that concepts like fairness, social justice, coexistence and sustainability are the main axes of the programme.

Educating Cities: Its first stages

The concept of “Educating Cities” is the theoretical framework from which City Educational Projects (PEC) arose as a means of materialising the ideological framework. First conceptualised in 1990 in Barcelona, four years later this movement became the “International Charter of Educating Cities”, an important network which is made up of more than 330 cities in 34 countries in five continents. The charter expresses the commitment of the cities to the following principles and actions (for the charter text, see the Annex).

Looking back, the analysis of the first City Projects shows, as a common feature, that they have become spaces for public debate, with a focus principally on schooling and all matters related to the relationship between formal education and the city. A first conclusion points to the need of new and future actions to strengthen the participation of other educating agents apart from the schools. The implementation that each micro-project has had is quite different, according to each individual project. Whereas some of them are being successfully implemented, others (a significant majority) have outlined possible actions to be developed but are only in a preliminary stage so that some of the mini-projects of the City Projects are still only a social debate. It seems that the biggest challenge lies in developing the diverse themes without diluting the overall impact of the macro-project.

Still, in general terms, the first generation of City Projects has helped create and reinforce educational social networks in the local community. It must be noted that the implication of some city councils has not always been 100 percent, often leaving the management and responsibilities to the schools. Therefore, the execution of many projects – especially those that require more complex actions - has not always had the support of strong executive structures, nor benefited from specific aid or programmes specially aimed at their implementation. This is why Barcelona (different from the other cities in the worldwide network) has created a “Technical Office” (Oficina Técnica) for this purpose.

Barcelona’s City Educational Project (PEC-B)

As explained previously, the case studies presented below fall within the penumbral of Barcelona’s City Educative Project (PEC-B), now in its second phase. (For a more detailed explanation of the different phases of the PEC, see Annex 2).

In the following pages, we will describe three projects from the thematic area “Academic success and access to employment”, that have been broadly documented, positively evaluated and are still in effect.

- “Éxit” (success) project
- Occupational training and job placement plan for youth
- Learning communities

References

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Subirats, J (Ed) (2003) *Més enllà de l’escola. Transformació social i noves dinàmiques educatives i professionals* [Beyond the school. Social transformation and new educational and professional dynamics] Barcelona: Mediterrànea