

Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

The Netherlands case study 4 Helping Roma Families with Primary to Secondary School Transition

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Helping Roma families with primary to secondary school transition

1. Description

Country	The Netherlands
Title	<i>Helping Roma families with primary to secondary school transition</i>
Funded by	Amsterdam South-East Kerngroep Onderwijs Stichting Rechtsherstel Sinti en Roma
Action implemented by	Amsterdam South-East, local education policy
Partners	Network Amsterdam South East OWWZ (Onderwijs aan woonwagenbewoners en zigeuners, Education for caravan dwellers and gypsies)
Cost	?
Where did it operate? Local, regional, national ...	Local: Amsterdam South East
Target group (theme, or other)	school-age Roma children
Theme (of 7 strands)	
Duration from	1998-1999
to	?

1.1 Rationale for action

Flow-through from primary education to secondary education is very difficult for Roma pupils. Roma pupils lack confidence and their parents are not familiar with further education. There is a lack of a stimulating pedagogical climate aimed at successfully finishing school. The efforts that are made to get Roma children to go to school are seen by the parents as a limitation of their freedom and they have the feeling that they are forced to give up their identity. According to Roma tradition it is expected to marry young and have children early. For girls this means that they are being prepared for marriage from age 11 or 12. For boys this means that they should get married at age 13 or 15.

The bridge class ('brugklas') tries to get parents and their children to think differently about their future and to familiarise them with further education.

What are the aims of the Roma Project?

The aim is flow-through of Roma children of school-age to further education.

1.2 How does the Roma Project work?

The role of the parents is crucial. They have to have to believe in the project. Because of the difficult start the parents lost their trust and after the first week all the children were withdrawn from the project.

There was one teacher for the Roma pupils. The curriculum is divided in 9 periods of 4 weeks. Each time a different theme is dealt with and general subjects are linked with this theme. The method used is PrOmotie (PrOmotion). This is a method that was developed for practical education. The program *Ik en de Ander* (Me and the Other) is also used together with other (software) courses to develop social competence.

1.3 How is the Roma Project organised?

A Roma network for the Roma community and the Roma children consists of:

- a school doctor and school nurse
- youth care
- the official of compulsory education of Amsterdam South East
- a representative from Justice in the Neighbourhood
- a representative of the board of Child Protection
- a teacher and the head teacher of the primary school 'Achtsprong'
- a consultant of a school for special education
- a school guide
- a Roma expert

The project-co-ordinator organises the network and is responsible for the agenda.

The goal of the network is:

- bring all instances that are involved with the Roma community together
- make an inventory of 'bottlenecks'
- Search for solutions together
- Set out responsibilities
- Case and chain management

In 2005-2006 the network met only twice. This is mostly due to the school that did not bring forward difficulties with parents and children. So there were no cases to talk about.

2. Results

The role of the parents is very crucial. If they do not trust the system, they do not allow their children to participate in the linking class. Important factors to win the trust of the parents are:

- stability of the project
- broad professionalism of the teachers
- familiar faces (no job-hoppers)
- openness and honesty (no hidden agendas)
- being treated with respect and as an equal partner

The trust that was carefully built up during primary education disappeared when the project could not start immediately after the holidays. The start of the project stagnated and this had repercussions on the co-operation with the school as well. During meetings with a mediator the trust was re-established.

The Roma Project did not get the chance to prove its use because of the difficult start. But in the long term there should be better results. The children were keen to make the transition to further education but were held back by their parents. So winning the trust of the parents is very important.

The project has to work on several issues:

- Reinforce contact with parents. It is very important that there is continuity. The parents find it very important to be confronted with the same face at the same location. A new person has to be introduced very gradually.
- Truancy has to be dealt with. There should be a clear truancy policy.
- Pupils have to get to know the school for further education. They have to visit it and feel safe. Intensive guidance during the transition is necessary.
- A Roma educational assistant should be employed so the threshold for Roma pupils is lowered.
- Special attention for stimulation of development and preparation of pre-schoolers is necessary.