



eLEARNIG INITIATIVE

PRAISE:

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Executive summary

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Partner: Institute of Sciences of Education, University of Barcelona

<http://www.ub.edu/ice/>

Organization: The Institute of Sciences of Education [ICE] of the University of Barcelona [UB] was created in 1969 and, although it is an entity with its own personality in the University, ICE usually collaborates with faculties and other UB departments, especially with the faculties and associated departments of Pedagogy and of Teacher. Although until 2003 ICE formed part of the Division of Sciences of Education, subsequently it has been an independent entity whose director is proposed to the UB Rector by the Board of Management, in which there are representatives of the different UB faculties. ICE has staff working in the following sections, each of which has different programs and projects: Infantile, Primary and Secondary Education; University Education; permanent education for Adult Education trainers and person involved in community social intervention; Educational Innovation; Research. Working permanently in this institute are 20 professionals as well as collaborators and external trainers, depending on the requirement of the projects. The target users are all UB teachers, as well as the other level teachers who are working in centres associated with the institute. It is important to point out that all the schools in Catalonia are associated to one specific university. Each university is responsible for the training requirements of their associated schools.

Aims: ICE was created to provide support for the intellectual and cultural formation of people work in educational tasks. ICE considers its purpose to design, implement, advise and to certify formative activities for educational action in each of its targeted domains.

Teaching/Training Activities: ICE carries out very wide formative activities in each of their sections. Although traditionally it had been dedicated to the formation only in the area of formal education, over the last few years it has opened new frontiers and created sections that are dedicated to the areas of informal education and of social education.

Supporting Activities: Throughout the years ICE has actively accumulated a document archive focused on formal education; this archive has recently expanded to support the areas of social and informal education. ICE occasionally makes different publications, sometimes in partnership with relevant publishing companies that specialize in educational sciences.

Project Role: In the PRAISE project ICE has worked with other partners to define the concept of virtuous circles. ICE has also worked on the PRAISE study of the characteristics of project formative modules.

Local Experience - University of Barcelona

Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to describe different aspects related to the constitution, the planning, the process and the results obtained in the implementation of the University of Barcelona [UB] virtuous circle.

The chapter begins with a general description of the area of social work in the context of Barcelona. The development of the experience will then be described and this description will include the following elements: the methodology used in the production of cases, the steps followed in meetings and the process of analysing a case. Subsequently, there will be a description of the design of the formative module. This module was implemented by the research team in order to apply the case studies database as an educational resource. Finally, there will be an evaluation of the experience.

Local Context

Barcelona is an open Mediterranean city, the capital of Catalonia, a community located in the north-east of Spain. Barcelona's location permits the entrance of a broad population of immigrants from around the world.

The city of Barcelona has a population of 1,582,738 people (January 2003) and the greater metropolitan area (which includes 33 municipalities) has a population of about 3,056,505. The urban structure of the city is composed of ten suburbs. These suburbs have autonomy with respect to a number of services including: urban planning, public roads, the maintenance of infrastructures and personal services.

There are many differences among the zones of the city. The upper class lives in the north, in a residential zone. The middle class lives in the traditional suburbs of Barcelona, the commercial zones. Problems of marginality, poverty and social exclusion tend to be concentrated in the suburbs in the historic sector of the city and in some surrounding areas.

Barcelona was founded 2000 years ago during the era during which the Roman Empire occupied the Iberian Peninsula. It is a city that considers itself to be open to all forms of innovation and regards itself as a welcoming, plural and diverse city. The foreign population has increased significantly during the last six years. In 1999, new immigrants made up 2.7% of the population, while in 2003, they made up 12.8% of the population. This is to say, there has been an increase in cultural diversity as well as all the related social problems that integration entails. Some of the immigrant population is distributed in ghettos depending on their nationality. They arrive at the city without social support and they quickly enter into a cycle of marginality. Although it is important to remark that there are some group of immigrants who are perfectly integrated into the city and its culture.

Another different situation is the presence of the gypsy culture. There is a significant population of gypsies living in different suburbs around Barcelona. For the first

generation of gypsies born in the city, there are distinctive social problems related to their integration into the local culture, although there are others that are living in harmony with the rest of the population.

In 1979, the Social Services in Barcelona were consolidated to form a public network. Under Spanish law it is primarily the Town Councils who assume responsibility for primary care services, including social care and generic social work, for example, individual and family social care, juridical care, detection and prevention of truancy, and care of children and adolescents at risk. Primary care also includes programs for the integration of indigenous and homeless people as well as social emergency programs. The integration of homeless people is one of the weak areas of the social services as they presently stand.

The Social Services focus on a spectrum of intervention and resources. They are oriented at overcoming problems associated with both the disadvantaged and the excluded as well as assisting in the integration of individuals or families who, due to financial difficulties, lack of personal autonomy, disabilities or marginalization, are in need of help and social protection. In addition, there are a considerable number of independent social agencies and voluntary associations in Barcelona that carry out social service functions, making a significant contribution to the social cohesion of the city.

In summary, it can be stated that the principal social problems that occupy the social services are:

Homeless people;

Minors with social and health difficulties;

Health difficulties and problems related to immigration.

Development of participant experience

The virtuous circle [VC], instigated by the UB research team, was composed of professionals who were originally approached by the team. These members had an existing relationship with the team through previous experience established within the framework of the Diploma of Social Education (a technical degree).

In the beginning, the group was composed of twelve professionals from different sectors of the social area. The composition of the group has changed during the formation process of the circle for different reasons but, this said, it was always attempted to have professionals from different areas working together all the time. A stable group was finally formed by eight members from the following areas: external education units, street educators, university teaching in social-education, university teaching in socio-cultural animation, justice for minors, mental health, research in infancy and the urban world, secondary education teaching and community health.

To start the process properly, a short version of the project was translated into Catalan to give the members of the circle a general idea of the main goals of the project. We used the first session of the VC to introduce participants to the

vocabulary and ideas to be used in the project. This group expressed strong interest in participating, however, there were problems in coordinating the work group.

The principal problem was finding a common period of time in which to hold meetings. This was a problem resulting from the different schedules that participants worked to and the subsequent variance in their availability. During the first session, we offered the group different options in response to which the group fixed a single week date as the optimum meeting time. During the trial, some participants could not be present at some sessions. In these cases, the participants would attempt to find another person from the same institution who was able to participate in that meeting. An increase in the global vision of the project had also led to some professional participants transferring the responsibility of their participation to their organizations. This has facilitated the possibility in some cases of an organizational substitution being made for the participant who could not be present.

The circle was initially set up to analyze the intervention in socio-educational cases with the intention that the resulting analysis would serve as a formative resource. But in the development of this practice there has been an increase in the number of tasks and an amplification of circle objectives. Initially, the circle was intended to find guidelines for the analysis of the cases and the related key concepts. Subsequently, two more items of interest arose:

Comprehension of the objectives and the meaning of cases in the project's framework;

Consensus on the elements to be used to describe the cases in the VLE.

As the project idea became more evident during meetings, comprehension of the project grew in the circle. This led to the participants putting forward two more explicit objectives:

Formation of the participants in the circle meeting through a process of analysis and reflection on practice;

Participation in the design and evaluation of the formative pilot module through an analysis of the cases that would be described.

The methodology used in the circle was also modified during some sessions. This process of modification was iterated until a workable process was achieved. This methodology was maintained throughout the remainder of the project, modifying the degree of flexibility according to circumstances.

The methodology used to accomplish the circle objectives has principle four parts.

Case selection and distribution

For the selection of a case, one of the circle members offered to write-up the case that was to be analysed in the following meeting. This act was absolutely voluntary and depended on the availability of circle members. The cases presented by the members were extracted from real life situations.

Some days before the meeting, the person in charge of the draft of the case would send a copy of the case write-up by e-mail to the research team, who would then distribute the document to other members of the circle, also via email. This was done in order that the rest of the group were able to familiarize themselves with the case before arriving at the following meeting.

The case was presented as a narration. As practitioners gained more experience and confidence through participation in circle meetings they were able to take a more active part in suggesting how the case could be elaborated and described for inclusion in the VLE content.

Meeting development

The meetings were split into four stages.

Presentation of the case

This part of the session consisted of a formal case presentation from the authoring member. The author read the draft case and the remainder of the group commented on aspects of the narration that were considered to be important for the comprehension of the different dimensions related to the case but which were not included in the narration.

Questioning relating to case content clarification

As soon as the presentation of the case had been realized, it passed to a question and answer session during which the remaining members of the circle would communicate their doubts and worries to the author. The intention of this session was to comprehend both the context and the content of the case, and the aspects that were considered to be important. This was done to establish, for the whole group, a common base in terms of the relevancy of different elements that were evident in the case.

This point demonstrates the importance of the plurality of professions and fields of work. Each professional has his or her own worries, depending on their professional background.

Both the presentation of the case and the round of questions were recorded on audio tape, for the purpose of creating support material for the final evaluation.

Analysis of the case in small groups

Depending on the number of participants at meetings, those present separated into small groups for discussion, each group separately analysing the narration that had been presented. The intention of realizing this analysis in small groups was to provide for the possibility for each group to make an in depth study, with the intention of later sharing their conclusions with the other members of the circle. Each small group discussed in depth aspects related to:

Narration;

Information relating to the elements described in the case narration;

Guidelines to the analysis of the case.

Out of this discussion arose the following points: the relevance of the title in relation to the content of the case, the most important elements for the analysis and a first draft of the contents of the elements that would describe the case in the VLE.

Common discussion of the case

Once the period of discussion in small groups was finished, all the members of the circle would come together to put forward the ideas that each group had developed. This part of the session was also recorded to support the final evaluation.

For this discussion the following script of questions was developed as a reference:

Formal presentation of the case;

Elements and guidelines for analysis;

Key words and descriptive elements for the VLE.

During this part of the meeting, a group would begin by explaining the conclusions they had drawn from their internal discussion, presenting the aspects they considered to be important. Notes were taken and, in combination with the highlighted relevant aspects, became the basis for discussion involving the remaining members of the circle. In this way, the relevant elements of the case were established and possible modifications to the story were made. As soon as the initial group has finished their presentation and discussion, the remaining groups would repeat the same process.

Then all the groups presented their conclusions related to the more relevant aspects of the case. Following this they passed to a process of sharing of the elements of analysis that every group had selected for the case. This process was realized in the same way as the previous one, i.e., each group contributing to the list of elements from their analysis, which were then discussed by the circle until it reached a consensual list of elements. At this point, some aspects were mentioned that relate to the possible utilization of the case as an educational resource in a formative module.

Finally, a last round of discussion was held relating to the VLE case descriptive elements. It was necessary to emphasize that, in this part of the process, the investigators participated more actively, making suggestions based on the notes compiled during previous discussions.

Both the discussions conducted by the small group and this general session, were suitable spaces for shared reflection between different professionals, enabling the possibility of combining different perspectives that relate to their professional backgrounds.

It is important to emphasize that the participation of the group of investigators during the greater part of the meeting (during the second stage) had a secondary role. This role involved moderating the discussion and the recording notes. Additionally, the moderators would occasionally pose questions if considered necessary, in order to ensure an accurate recording of the VC's conclusions.

In the next table some cases discussed in the VC are presented.

Case study	Key concepts	Practice themes Could include practice knowledge or lack of knowledge, informing practice, reforming practice, organisational context	Learning themes Theoretical and/or research work applied Relevance to learning, module development
Diagnostic from demand to support labour/work insertion	Demand, socio-labour insertion, diagnostic, autonomy.	Demand of social service, labour/work insertion process, coordination among social services, confronting failure, intercultural relationship (gypsy and <i>paia</i> cultures).	Models of social-educational intervention for the labour insertion, models of understanding in multicultural situations, street educators.
Problems in the relationships among adolescents in a residential centre.	Adolescents, social relationship, residential centre, sexuality, tutorship, immigration.	Adolescence conflicts, institutional mistreatment, sexual abuse among teenagers, the influence of referents change, protection and security of the minors in a residential centre	Internment of minors
Cultural conflicts in the resolution of a problems associated with the protection of a child in the area of the social services	Intercultural conflict, absenteeism, guardianship, social services, gypsy culture.	Intercultural conflicts (gypsy and <i>paia</i> cultures), process of guardianship, coordination of social services in the process of social intervention	Social service centres, professional roles, coordination. Intervention by legal imperative.
Educational intervention and minor justice	Transgressive behaviour, judicial measurement, centres of juvenile justice, internment.	Perspective of the improvement implementation, minor protection, importance of the psychiatric diagnostic in the decision making, relation between the juridical framework and the socio-educational intervention, relation between institutional itinerary of a minor and his or	Residential theory Minors internment

		her story life.	
Familiar context and school problems	School failure, family, adolescence, external assistance for the school.	Intervention process of a shared school unit, influence of the parents relationship on the behaviour of a young adolescent.	Intervention to prevent failure school.

Summary of the session

Once the discussion finished, the group of investigators made a summary of both the session and its conclusion. Additionally, information was provided in relation the project events that might occur before the following session.

Lastly, it was confirmed which participants would be available for the following meeting and a specific person was made responsible for the presentation of the next case.

Document elaboration prior to VLE upload.

During the meeting, the group of investigators took notes on the process and documented the conclusions. In addition, the common points of the session that arose during the meeting development were captured in audio recordings

From both the notes and recordings, the group of investigators compiled a document that included the content of the elements found in the VLE and the guidelines for the analysis of the case. To this purpose, the first session was transcribed but later it was decided that consultation of the audio recordings would probably provide sufficient scope for reviewing the session content.

In the beginning, the meetings were also recorded on video, but it soon became clear that this was not necessary. From this point onwards only analogue audio recordings were made.

Parallel to this exercise, the member of the circle who presented the case took charge, making the modifications related to the narration agreed by the group, modifications which arose from the relation that must exist between the aspects mentioned in the narration and the guidelines for case analysis.

Presentation of the documents for final reflection

The documents developed both by the research team and by the author of the case were presented for final reflection in the first part of the next session and were approved by the VC members, before being introduced into the VLE.

The clarification of the project has allowed for the restructuring of the VC task in the formative module context. This began a process of participation that goes beyond the strict study of cases, even though much time was invested in this task. VC meetings have dealt with both this subject and the general approach of the formative pilot module. In the next section, the design of formative module to be implemented will be described.

Formative need

For the purpose of the pilot module implementation, the UB research team designed a non-compulsory course, entitled *Training for the social and socio-pedagogical actions arising from the study or real cases*, intended for the students of the pedagogical and socio-pedagogical programs. This course has a duration of fifteen hours

The principal topic of the course is social accompaniment in situations of social vulnerability. This is a central activity of both social educators and persons whose work is in the field of conflict and situations of social vulnerability and exclusion.

The objectives of the course are:

To learn how formative modules should be designed for social and socio-pedagogical action from the study of professional world cases;

To learn about European projects of training for social action based on the study of cases;

Acquiring concepts and reflecting on socio-educational accompaniment in situations of social vulnerability through the analysis of real cases;

Assessing a formative module based on the study of cases and generating new proposals for the design of these types of modules.

The strategic methodology used to achieve objectives one and two mentioned above, was to consult documentation related to the questions arising during a face to face session.

The acquisition of concepts and reflection on the subject was achieved on-line through the formative module. This work was divided into four activities:

The first activity required students to respond to a self-evaluation questionnaire in relation to their subject knowledge. Once the questionnaire was completed, each answer was associated to different documents. These documents were made to assist the student to reaffirm their knowledge and to clarify doubts. The teachers did not assess this questionnaire, since its aim was to have the student self assess their knowledge and consider the issues raised.

Once the questionnaire was completed, the students worked in groups to select a case. These groups were formed during the last face to face session. The goal was that they should revise different cases from the database and that they should select

one case to be analyzed in greater depth. At the end of the activity, the student should put together a document to explain the reasons for their selection.

The next activity was the analysis of the selected case. In the module, a series of guidelines for very general analysis was presented to the student, but the students had the freedom of carrying out the analysis according to their own criteria.

Finally, once the analysis of the case was complete, the students revised their course knowledge, consulting the initial questionnaire and evaluating their progress. This activity was done individually.

The students worked autonomously with the on-line module. During this period, the research team, who were also the course tutors, had limited participation both in the monitoring of the activities of the students and in offering orientation when it is considered necessary. At the end of each activity the students recorded in the diaries a brief evaluation of the educational design, which was used in the final session to analyse the formative module design.

At its conclusion, the course was transformed into a face to face session for the purposes of discussing conclusions in relation to the aspects related to both social vulnerability and to the design of formative modules.

Evaluation of the experience

UB created only one VC, the members of which have worked deeply with the research team on the subject matter, with the intention of encouraging the full cooperation of all participants. It was very difficult to find professionals with enough available time to be fully involved in the project.

The participation of members of the VC was always very active, not only in the study of the case but also in the global aspects of the project. Attendance was regular enough but some individuals had problems in being able to attend the entire three hours, due to incompatibilities with their work responsibilities. This was despite the fact that the meetings were held on a schedule to which the majority had agreed. The meetings were evaluated by participants as being very interesting.

Those who participated longest in the project demonstrated greater authority with the narrative methodology and a significant aptitude to detect the elements of the analysis

During virtuous circle meetings, some difficulties arose that impeded the meetings from proceeding with greater speed, e.g., the need to wait for questions to be clearly articulated before calling for a new meeting. The research team dedicated approximately a third of the available time in the meetings to both describing the state of the project and to tasks related to the needs of the project. But the greater part of the meeting was dedicated to discussing the aspect related to both selection and analysis of the cases.

Some problems or dilemmas, on the other hand, which appeared during the discussion, were considered interesting. For instance:

Problems related to the terminology: even in the same cultural context a lot of terminology can be used in a different ways, the degree to which depends on the background of the professional;

Problems related to the structure of the case, for example, description, narration, structure;

How to identify an intervention. Some people suggested that it would be interesting to add an intervention map.

The relationship between the cases and the course was not clear to the members of the VC. Principally there were two aspects to take in account, namely how to use the cases in courses implemented in other countries and how to add information that assisted the understanding of the intervention of the professionals, which are inevitably different whatever the context. For the members of the VC it was important to establish this relationship in order that they were able to facilitate the benefits gained from working with diverse cases.

The formative function was accomplished both implicitly and explicitly by participants via the selection of the educational methodology, the shared construction of formative modules and the interchange between professionals. The formative function of the virtuous circles related to teaching and training professionals was the result of the exchange and the reflection on practice.

The VC methodology is a dynamic process that changed and was improved throughout the project. New VC members had to learn the methodology and understand the decisions that were taken by the other participants. Therefore, in some cases the level of comprehension of the case analysis (the methodology, some parameters considered by older members and their implications) was not the same for all the participants of the VC. In such cases, the older members helped new members with their learning process.

The reasons for taking part in the VC described were:

The need to participate in the European discussion on social work;

The desire to work on a practical project;

The free nature of the formative modules;

The interchange with other professionals;

Self-formation;

The need to share different perspectives on practices and to reflect on the interchange of ideas.

The involvement of the participants was a progressive process and all members were highly committed to the project.
