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Understanding Inclusive Education in the Basque Country

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12. UNDERSTANDING ISSUES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY

INTRODUCTION

Promoting school diversity is a goal shared by many countries, but actually achieving this goal in the day-to-day lesson is often difficult to do and each country attempts to achieve this goal by different means. Having reviewed features of the Basque Country and its educational system, the present chapter describes how this region of Europe is able to respond to the diversity of students in an inclusive way. Firstly, the evolution of the laws which make inclusion possible is considered; and secondly, the wide range of measures that can be applied in order to cater for students needs in the environment of mainstream education is analysed. Although there may be some aspects which can be improved, the data referred to in the chapter demonstrates the success of the Basque Educational system so as to give an inclusive response to students' diversity.

EUSKAL HERRIA

In order to understand education and moreover inclusive education in the Basque Country, it is important to have an overview of this semi-autonomous region of Spain. According to Collins (1990) and Watson (2003), the Basque Country or in the Basque language, Euskal Herria, is a region in the western Pyrenees that spans the Spanish-French border. The northern part, under French administrative control, is made up of the territories of Labourd, Lower Navarre and Soule, which forms part of the Department of Pyrénées Atlantiques. The southern part of the Basque Country (within the Spanish border) is made up of the provinces of Vizcaya, Guipúzcoa, Álava and Navarra. The first three constitute the autonomous region of Euskadi (Mansvelt, 2005). In this chapter, the term Basque Country refers to these three provinces.



Figure 1. Euskal Herria: regions and important towns (Mansvelt, 2005, p. 3)

In 1979, as a result of the Statute known colloquially as the Statute of Gernika, the Basque Country gained a level of self-government, becoming an autonomous community within Spain, and today it has, amongst other things, its own tax, health, police and education systems. However, in all these areas, Spanish laws must be implemented and then can be “amended” by the parliament of the Basque Country. This issue not only subordinates and limits the evolution of the legal framework, but also creates an educational reality different from other Spanish regions.

FEATURES OF THE BASQUE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The education system is organised in levels so that students progress from one to another each year. The main stages are Pre-school (age 0-6 years) and Basic education: Primary education (age 6 -12), and Secondary education (age 12-16) (Basque Government, 2007). Education is compulsory and free. Classroom groups

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are made according to the age. Students do not have to complete a test to progress through the educational system. After finishing secondary education, students can advance to upper secondary (necessary to enter the university) or to vocational training.

In the Basque Country there are two official languages, Basque and Spanish. As a result of this situation, an act of parliament (Decree 138/1983) was undertaken to address the issue and to regulate their use, three language models were established as follows:

- Model A: all subjects -except Basque itself- are taught in Spanish.
- Model B: some subjects are taught in Spanish and others in Basque.
- Model D¹: all subjects -except the Spanish language- are taught in Basque.

Parents are free to enrol their children in the model that best suits them. According to the Basque Statistical Institute (Eustat, 2016), in the school year 2015-2016, 221,904 students were enrolled in pre-school and primary education. The majority of students (73.2%) followed model D and 21% model B. This means that by the end of statutory schooling, nearly all students had become at least bilingual. It is important to say that the work of the education system in the training of Basque speakers has been fundamental. In fact, the last Sociolinguistic Survey points out that there are currently 223,000 Basque speakers more than in 1991. And that this increase starts from the youngest stages of the population, more than 7 out of 10 of young people between 16 and 24 years old are Basque speakers (Basque Government, Government of Navarra & Euskararen Erakunde Publikoa, 2016)

As the Basque country is an autonomous bilingual region with its “own legality” it has a special educational reality which differs from other regions of Spain. According to the Spanish government’s report entitled *Data and Numbers* (2015), in 2014 the dropout rate from compulsory secondary school education was only 9.4%, being the only region that reached the European 2020 target (the average of Spain stands at 21.9% and EU-28 countries at 11.1%). Additionally, it is the region with the highest percentage of the population with higher education qualifications (Spanish School Committee, 2017), and according to the Education First English Proficiency Index, the citizens of the Basque Country have the highest level of English in Spain. Finally, after analyzing inclusive measures which have been developed in the Spanish Compulsory Secondary School System, Martínez (2011) concludes that the Basque Country is one of the most inclusive region in Spain and a *Save the Children Report* finds that Basque Country presents the highest level of educational equity among Spanish autonomous regions (Assiego & Ubrich, 2015).

Taking this into account, it is important to identify the legal framework that facilitates the Basque Country school system’s response to students’ diversity.

¹ The letter ‘C’ does not exist in the Basque alphabet

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY

According to Orcasitas (2005), the commitment to inclusive, quality education in the Basque Country dates back to the 1980s. In 1982, The Special Education Plan was published by the Basque Government that went beyond clinical and specialisation approaches to propose a radical (at the time) change: mainstream schools which would be designed to include all children. Although the separation and categorisation arguments have still continued to pervade education systems around the world (Boyle, 2014), the plan stipulated that there would be no parallel education systems such as that of one for mainstream students and another for students who were classified, at the time, as having disabilities. This plan was subsequently reviewed and the results and recommendations were set forth in the report by the Special Education Commission (Basque Government, 1988) entitled *An Understanding of the Integrated School*. This report stated that, "...the goals of education for children and young people with special educational needs are the same as for all the others" (p. 99).

Later on, the Spanish legislative act entitled Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo (LOGSE, 1990), enabled students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) to be educated in their local mainstream school. In line with international general practice this would now be regarded as an integrational approach and SEN mainly referred to those who have disabilities. The need to adapt the Spanish legislation to the autonomous region led to the Basque Government to develop the Basque Public School Act (Law 1/1993), which tried to go further and indeed recognised the need to take measures to help redress inequalities and integrate diversity. Furthermore, Decree 118/1998 (incorporating the LOGSE in the Basque Country) ensured that students with SEN would be integrated into mainstream schools.

In 2006, a new Spanish legislative act entitled, Ley Orgánica de Educación (LOE), facilitated a strengthening of the inclusive approach. The concept of SEN was replaced by a new one: students with Specific Educational Support Needs (SESN). This term expands the SEN term by including other groups of students who, without being classified as disabled, also require specific educational support (Table 1).

Table 1. Classification of Students with Specific Educational Support Needs

	<i>Students with:</i>
<i>Students with Specific Educational Support Needs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Educational Needs (SEN). • Disabilities and serious behaviour disorders • Specific learning difficulties

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(SESN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gifted • Have entered the education system late • Have special personal circumstances or school history • In circumstances of social inequality throughout the educational stages
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The aforementioned LOE (2006) was implemented in the Basque Country through Decrees 175/2007 and 97/2010. Later on, the Basque Government (2012a) edited the "Strategic Plan for Attention to Diversity within the framework of the inclusive school". This Plan sets out a series of measures, resources and guidelines for creating the correct conditions to ensure appropriate schooling for all students and removing barriers to learning and participation. The plan conceptualises and manages resources to cater for the needs of these students within the ordinary school setting. Due to the plan, students with SESN are present within the framework of the Basque school system. In the school year 2014-2015, there were 16,076 students with specific educational support needs. Table 2 shows the number of students with SEN arising from a disability or serious behaviour disorders and, Table 3 shows students in the rest of SESN categories (Basque School Committee, 2016).

Table 2. Trend in students with special educational needs across all stages (pre-school, primary, secondary and upper secondary 2-18 years old) by type of disability.

<i>Disability type</i>	<i>2014-15</i>
Hearing disability	398
Motor disability	791
Intellectual disability	2,070
Visual disability	215
Pervasive developmental disorders	1,904
Serious behavioural disorders	1,337
Multiple disabilities	245
Total students with SENs	6,960

Table 3. Distribution of students with specific educational support needs by educational stages

	<i>2014-15</i>
Language and communication disorders	1,442
Specific learning difficulties	1,292
Slow maturing	1,243
ADD-H	928
Borderline intellectual capacity	3,165
Gifted	379
Uncategorised	667
Total students	9,116

A final change of law happened in 2013 with the Ley Orgánica para la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa (LOMCE, 2013). There is still no clear evidence of the impact that this law could have vis-à-vis an inclusive approach, although some authors say that it could be a setback in the strive for an inclusive path (Hayas & Rojas, 2017) and coeducation (Fernández & González, 2015). In order to implement the new law in the Basque Country, and minimizing the possible negative consequences, in 2014 the Basque Government developed the Heziberri 2020 plan, whose lines are set out in Decree 236/2015.

MEASURES FOR RESPONDING TO DIVERSITY

The Basque State School Act (1993, art.10) states that "wherever possible, all students will be schooled in mainstream units close to their home". In order to enable the inclusion of all students in ordinary schools, and preferably, in ordinary classrooms, different measures, which will be explained in this section, were designed.

These types of measures (general and exceptional) aim to respond to all students' educational needs and help them to achieve the objectives of the curriculum (Mendia, 1999). The measures are compiled in the 118/1998 Decree and in the last education Heziberri 2020 plan. The measures will be implemented gradually in a realistic manner taking into account the nuances of the school and moving towards an individualised response to each pupil.

General Measures

The curriculum (understanding curriculum as, not only but at least, the sum of objectives, competences, contents, methodologies and evaluation system) that have to be applied in schools of the Basque Country is quite open and flexible. That means that each autonomous region and, specifically, each school community have the chance to set the general framework established by the administration according to its own features. In fact, there are three documents that each school has to develop in order to specify the final curriculum that will be implemented,

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always maintaining the final objectives that students have to reach at the end of each stage. These three documents are:

- *The school-based education project* that contains the major guidelines that will follow the school in order to work in the community where it is placed. This document is designed by school direction team, teachers, parents, and other agents of the community. Among other things, it defines the measures of attention to diversity.
- *The school-based curriculum project (PCC)* that covers all the educational stages taught compiling, at least, the objectives, contents, methods, resources, and evaluation systems that will be implement in each subject or areas.
- *The school plan (and the final annual report)* that sets school year design for each year.

The general measures to respond to diversity are based on setting the general curriculum defined by administration to the social, economic and cultural context of the community where each school is placed. When this occurs the educational needs of the majority of students are attended. In accordance with the aforementioned documents, school departments draw up their teaching programmes where teachers specify their daily work taking into account that the ordinary classroom is the space that makes inclusion possible.

Ordinary Specific Measures

When the ordinary setting of the curriculum is not enough, the school considers running ordinary specific measures that are based in the idea of the reinforcement or support. There are different forms of collective reinforcement such as: to divide the natural group of students into two different groups in order to teach some subjects; to offer new optional subject so as to work contents that can be more complex for some students; to increase the rate of teachers per group in order to help students that struggle with achieving a level's objectives, etc. (Decree 175/2007).

From the school year 2012-2013 onwards when a student needs to receive an individual educational reinforcement a "personal educational reinforcement plan" known as PIRE (Basque Government, 2012b) is designed and implemented. Coordinated by the class teacher, the PIRE is drawn up by the teaching team, and it includes the most appropriate actions and strategies to cater for students' educational needs: the reinforcement measures planned, specifying rooms, times and teaching staff available. In addition, it ensures that parents are involved in the reinforcement plan, an essential aspect in student success (Ziomek, 2010).

This plan is appropriate for SENS students who are in any of the following categories: (1) Students who have repeated the school year; (2) Students who have some school subjects not passed at the previous level; or (3) Students who have difficulties in learning essential subjects. The aim of PIRE is for students to achieve basic skills and, thus, the objectives of the standard curriculum, as well as

students progressing without implementing more segregated measures such as those discussed in the next section.

Exceptional Specific Measures

When specific measures are not enough to achieve the objectives of the curriculum, the following exceptional measures are implemented.

Repeat a year. In primary education, at the end of each year, teaching staff make the relevant decisions regarding progression, taking into account students' assessment results. Students will progress to the next level only when they have attained the maturity for that level and also when the basic skills required in each level have been achieved. Whenever the above conditions, having enough maturity or achieving basic skills are not met, the students are not promoted and have to repeat their current level. Before implementing this measure, parents are informed by their child's teacher. This measure can be taken only once throughout a student's primary education. To be a productive and appropriate measure, the specific reinforcement and the support that the student will receive is carefully planned by drawing up the PIRE, so that the student can achieve the subjects in which she or he has previously failed.

Certainly, this is a quite controversial and an unpopular measure. Research shows that repeating a level can increase the risk of school failure as well as the drop out rate (Cordero, Manchón & Simancas, 2014; Rumberger, 2011). For this reason, it is only considered as an exceptional measure and it is only applied when previous measures prove ineffective or if there are extenuating reasons e.g. long-term hospitalisation. In fact, the Basque Country has one of the lowest repetition rates (Arregi, Martínez, Sainz, & Ugarriza, 2009) and the suitability rate of students (which refers to the percentage of students who are enrolled in the course that corresponds to the age that are) in primary education is higher than the Spanish average. This may be as a result of the fact that before the repeating of a year, schools develop measures to help students at risk of failing academically (Arregi et al., 2009). Future research will be required so as to understand the effectiveness of repeating with PIRE reinforcement.

Skip a year. When a student is classified as gifted, as the Order of 24th July 1998 of the Basque Government states, one measure that can be taken is to reduce primary education by one year, enrolling the student in a higher level. Another option is to keep the gifted student within the classroom group, applying another two measures in any area that is required: (1) the curriculum of one subject/area can be adapted; (2) the student's level can be changed for the affected area. Whatever measure is taken, it must be the most appropriate for the personal and social development of the student. Despite the law, a study which focuses on identifying the best practices related to the organisation of attention to diversity in the Basque Country suggests that, there is no systematic use of any diagnostic or intervention method for gifted students (Intxausti, Etxeberria & Barbau, 2017), and international research shows that there are many barriers such as; the lack of classroom management skills, teachers' attitudes and beliefs about learning, or the lack of administrative support, to carry out a real adaptation of the curriculum (e.g.

VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005). It follows that some improvements are required in order to more effectively educationally respond to gifted students.

Curricular diversification program. This program can be implemented when students are at the end of their secondary education and are able to achieve the general objectives to achieve the certificate of education. There are some criteria that guide the implementation of this program e.g. limiting the number of students to create a small group that can receive more personal attention, the use of proactive methods such as Project Based Learning or grouping different subjects in order to create major areas so as to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge. Aramendi, Vega and Bujan (2012) point out that these programs could be an accurate way to reduce the drop out rate of students, and results reveal that the level of satisfaction amongst students that participate in this program is higher than would be the case if taught in the more traditional manner.

Individualised curricular adaptations. When the classroom programme is not sufficient to meet the needs of students with SEN, an adaptation of the curriculum is conducted. According to the 118/1998 Decree, there are two kinds of adaptations to respond to the specific needs of a student enrolled in a mainstream classroom:

- *Individualised curricular adaptation to access.* This type of adaptation is especially designed for students with motor, visual and hearing impairments that can achieve the general objectives of each level. When this adaption is launched specific materials (Braille books), tools (tablets, computers, etc.) and personal resources (specialist teaching staff, speech therapists or physiotherapists, occupational therapists, specialists in visual impairment) can be used in order to make possible the students work the ordinary curriculum. In any case, only non-prescriptive elements like teaching methodology, activities, resources, timetables or spaces can be adapted.
- *Significant individualised curricular adaptation (ACI).* This is the most exceptional measure for students that are enrolled in regular classrooms schooled in mainstream school. The ACI determines the accessible curriculum for students with cognitive disabilities, modifying not only methods, resources, times, but general aims, contents and assessment criteria as well. If students have significant cognitive disabilities, a global ACI will be implemented in order to support basic life skills. If the students have moderate cognitive disabilities the ACI will be based on the curriculum of the previous levels, and if the students achieve the objectives that the law establishes, they can get the certificate of education.

Different studies show the efficacy of this adaptation, for example, in students with autism (Brodzeller, Ottley, Jung & Coogle, 2017; Domingo & Palomares, 2013). But as this last study showed, to be effective, it must be combined with other measures such as a better teacher training, specific and sufficient material resources, and accurate coordination among teachers. According to Browder, Spooner, Wakeman, Trela and Baker (2006, p. 7) “collaboration with general educators is essential to creating

access to the general curriculum” and collaboration is possible through a good planning (Intxausti et al., 2017).

The high rate of inclusion in the Basque Country mentioned in the first part of this chapter leads us to suggest that applying this exceptional measure only when it is needed could help SEN students to access and participate in the general education curriculum. However, further research should be conducted in order to evaluate the applicability of the ACI in the ordinary classroom, specifically the designed education programme planned to address the needs of a particular student. These studies could complement others, which consider strength of various individualised education programs (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Zeitlin & Curcic; 2014).

ALTERNATIVE FORM OF SCHOOLING FOR SEN STUDENTS

The Basque State School Act (1993, art.10) also states that, where necessary only, students should be schooled in special education units within mainstream schools. This option is only chosen when all other measures have not met the needs of the student and the school does not have enough resources to cater for SEN students with complex needs in ordinary classrooms. These special education units are known in Basque as "gela egonkorra".

The special education unit is a separate class, within the mainstream school, for no more than five students with severe disabilities. It has specific, permanent resources, a physical space and is made up of a stable group of students, with a special education tutor and specialists in educational support (ancillary staff). On the basis of the group programme, an Individual Education Plan is developed for each pupil. This allows individualised attention tailored to any student's particular support needs, and at the same time facilitates socialisation and inclusion as the special classes are part of the mainstream school. These special classes cater for students up to 16 years, exceptionally they can stay until 18 (Sainz, 2000). After completing this schooling, there are two possibilities for these students. (1) If their needs derived from limitations on autonomy, they can continue in mainstream school in a Task Learning Classroom where they perform a basic apprenticeship (16-18 years) and on the job training with placement in companies (18-20, 21 years) (Ruiz, 2008). These classrooms aim to promote work preparation and the transition to adult life (Ugarriza & Mendia, 1997). (2) If the students have a severe disability, Social Services make up the priority regulatory reference framework for them. The role of Social Services is to promote personal autonomy and support the family in ensuring that professional support is provided as is necessary.

In the whole of the Basque Country, during the 2014-2015 year, 737 students were in special rooms and 475 in Task Learning Classrooms (Basque School Committee, 2016). These numbers are in line with the six European Union countries (Italy, Greece, Portugal, Norway, Cyprus, and Iceland) with greater rates of educational inclusion (López, 2009) where the percentage of the number of students in specific centres is low (0.53%). However, in recent years the number of students in these centres has increased and López (2009) states two reasons (that this departure from full inclusion practices could affect the Basque Country if the

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correct decisions are not made): the clear irreversibility of these special measures which almost never refer students back to the mainstream school and the issue with some mainstream schools not wanting to receive some students who have severe behavioural difficulties.

Currently, to avoid these risks, legislation in the Basque Country facilitates the enrolment of SEN students in mainstream schools chosen by their parents (in ordinary classroom whatever this is possible). However, research in this area has demonstrated that students with Down syndrome have more chance of being placed in a mainstream school and to continue their schooling there (Fernández and Benitez, 2016; Gaztelumendi, 2002) than students with some medical conditions or difficulties (Aróstegui & Gaintza, 2014). Intxausti et al. (2017, p.12) state that “there may be a certain kind of hidden selection agenda in some schools”. In the near future, that risk of a shift towards special placement as an alternative to mainstream schooling should be faced in order to maintain the high level of inclusion in the Basque Country. With this aim the Department of Education, Language policy and Culture of the Basque Government will evaluate the success of the “Strategic Plan for Attention to Diversity within the framework of the inclusive school, 2012-2018”, and will update the priorities for successful inclusion in the “Strategic Plan for a inclusive education II - 2018-2022”.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the response to diversity in the Basque Country has been, and continues to be, a gradual and continuous process. The aim is to both improve and promote inclusive schooling where the participation in the educational process of all children from the community is supported. The different approaches and measures used to ensure diversity have been detailed in this chapter.

Despite inclusive education being a fundamental component of the Basque government’s general education policy, there still remain some gaps. One of them, is the need to establish new legislation for children with special needs in education. Although there have been significant improvements in recent years concerning children with special needs in the school, the legal changes have not been completed and the Decree 118/1998 is still in force. New legislation could significantly and relevantly effect the schooling of SEN students and attempt to increase and improve the diversity in a wide range of settings without the need to resort to the perfunctory labelling of children. Nevertheless, in the Basque Country educational inclusion is stronger now than it has been in the past.

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