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## Pilot program allows gypsy students to improve school performance and integration

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Scholars from the University of Granada, Spain, and the National University of Comahue, Argentina, designed an educational intervention programme that achieved the integration of 100% of gypsy students in their Secondary School Centre, in the province of Granada. The programme ran for two academic years and was proven to be successful in improving gypsy students' school performance and in attaining full integration with their schoolmates.

The research was conducted by Prof. **Sonia Cristina Iguacel** and supervised by **Leonor Buendía Eisman**, from the Department of Educational Research Methods and Diagnosis of the University of Granada. As mentioned above, the author worked directly with 1st-year ESO teachers and low-performance gypsy students with school absenteeism and discipline problems. These students -who are the target of a Centre's specific educational plan, Plan de Compensación Educativa- had the performance level of a 7 or 8 year-old pupil.

During the study, Iguacel employed different information gathering methods: a field journal, thorough interviews, photographs, videos, analysis of documents issued at the Centre, etc

### More Inclusive Classrooms

The general purpose of this research was to promote inclusive policies within a Secondary School Centre in the province of Granada. To accomplish this goal, a research-action process was implemented for two academic years. Researchers started assessing and evaluating the status of an intervention programme that was being applied in the above-mentioned grade. The researchers found

that all the students attending the intervention-programme classes were gypsy children. Therefore, during the first academic year, the experience focused on gypsy students.

The reference framework of this experience is based on "inclusive education" theories. Consequently, it is essentially aimed at preventing education centres from excluding part of their students due to their cultural or ethnic background. Additionally, this intervention is intended to hinder centres from creating specific classes on the grounds of students' ethnic origin and avoiding the application of exclusive educational methods. Excluding policies perpetuate school and social inequality and obstruct the integration of gypsy students into society.

### **Active Attitudes**

This pilot experience made 1st-year ESO students who attended the centre's intervention programme participate more actively in the classes and in the centre. Socio-linguistic underperformance was significantly reduced. (If it read: Social-linguistic performance was significantly increased. It sounds less confusing.. but that might be changing too much..) Discipline problems and sanctions decreased. Attendance was regulated and several families became involved in their children's learning process as well as in the activities of the centre.

The effort made by the intervention programme teacher and the management team was a determining factor in achieving students' integration in ordinary classes.

### **A More Respectful School**

The expert stated that it is necessary "to create a different school where diversity among students is respected and considered, not only through politically correct statements, but also through appropriate practices."

An innovative conclusion from the study is that pro-integration educational policies should not be limited to assigning students from different backgrounds to the same class. Thus, the author states that "integrating policies should implement shared learning processes among these students fostering the skills that will allow them to actively participate in the school and in the society. This can only be achieved by educating the students from a very early age in a democratic and egalitarian environment".

The results obtained from this research will be fully reported in a number of scientific articles and in a monograph that is soon to be published.

Provided by University of Granada

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