

MINUTES OF THE VISIT TO MALMO, OCTOBER 6-9, 2003.

TIMONEDA ASSOCIATION, ALICANTE

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1. PARTICIPANTS:

Guests: Maria Jesus Martin, Timoneda Association
Natacha Palomo, Timoneda Association

Hosts: Per Horney – Sofielundskolan
Tommy Sjolín – Nya Stenkula Skolan

2. RECORD OF ACTIVITIES

Sunday, October 5.

The Spanish delegation was picked up in Copenhagen around 5:00 p.m. by the assistant director of the Sofielundskolan school, Per Horney, who accompanied us to the city of Malmo and left us at the hotel.

Monday, October 6

Our day began at 9:00 a.m.. Per Horney provided us with information about the city of Malmo and then took us to the school, Sofielundskolan, which is located in an area that has a mainly immigrant population. This explains the fact that 98% of the school's students are children of immigrants.

We were then received by the administrative team at the school who explained how the school is run. We then visited the school cafeteria or dining halls.

In Sofielundskolan, meals are a very important aspect of school life. Teachers accompany students to the dining halls and stay with them while they eat. In addition to making sure that the food served is nutritious, work is done on developing other relational and social skills such as responsibility, autonomy and team work.

After lunch, we visited classrooms that the students called "zero year." These groups are taught Swedish, which isn't their home language, and the goal is to get them proficient enough in comprehension and expression to be able to start first grade when they are 6 years old. It is interesting to point out that in the Swedish educational system, much effort is put on teaching languages, including the child's maternal language, Swedish and English. This approach is based on the belief that only through becoming competent

communicators can the students begin to study other subjects, since in order to be successful, students must have a solid understanding of basic communication skills.

Another fundamental aspect in these first years of school is the attention that is given to the spaces in which the children take their classes. The areas which would be equivalent to pre-school education in Spain are usually separate from the rest of the school, and classrooms and classroom furniture are designed to make the room look as much like a home as possible. The children eat lunch in these classrooms, they rest after lunch on comfortable rugs and sofas, and the architecture favors group work and varied activities.

In Sweden, education is totally free, from the very first years of school up through university. Additionally, the state provides free meals to students up through ninth grade (16 years old). Schools are open outside of class time, and working parents can leave their children at school from 6:30 a.m. until 6:30 p.m.. Some of these realities prompt us to think about the way in which developed, Western societies are organized. What may seem like a Utopia for some, has been a reality for others for many years.

At 2:00 p.m., we were met by the Resource Team which brings together all of the staff that work with special ed students (in groups of 10 students each). These groups are equivalent to our diversification or adaptation groups in Spain. The program is directed towards students who have learning difficulties and cannot function well in ordinary classrooms. There are four of these groups at this school. Coordination sessions for the team of teachers who work with them is built into the day's schedule and participation is obligatory. Once a week, there is a meeting to assess each student's progress and situation.

This was our last visit on the first day of our stay in Malmo, which was full of information and interesting experiences.

Tuesday, October 7.

At 9:00 a.m., we attended a class taught by Ivanka, the biology and math teacher. We were taking notes while she gave a biology class for 8th graders. A couple of students arrived late and came into class with no problem. We later found out that they are required by law to go into class. The teacher can make them wait outside of class if they arrive while she is explaining something, but as soon as there is a break, they are allowed to come in. All of the students sat wherever they liked. The school buys the books and gives them to the students. This is also true of notebooks, pencils and all other necessary school materials. This class was only 40 minutes long. When it was over, the students went to their lockers to get the materials they needed for their math class. They had a ten minute break between one class and the next. The students were allowed to choose between doing exercises from their book or supplementary exercises that were kept in individual student files. The teacher asked the students to work individually today so they could concentrate on their exercises. The students got up from their desks whenever they wanted to sharpen their pencils at the teacher's desk, and this was not seen as a problem. When class was over, the teacher told us about her grading system. Grades are not

published in a grade report until students are in the 8th-9th grade cycle. In 5th grade (when students are 10), students take a national achievement test in order to see how well they are doing in general and to identify the subjects that are proving to be the most difficult for them. Thus, in 6th grade, students are given extra help in the subjects they are somewhat weak in. These are often Swedish, math, and English. When students finish 9th grade at age 16, they must take another set of national exams which will help determine they will go on to the university or to a vocational training program of some sort. Statistics show that approximately 20 – 25% of all students do not pass this exam. We also talked about how students are disciplined. Here, incident reports are not used. What we were able to observe was that the teacher deals with students who are not on task. If these attempts do not prove sufficient and students have to be reminded to get to work a second time, their names are put on the blackboard. If the inappropriate behavior persists, the student is asked to leave class for whatever amount of time the teacher feels is appropriate. A decision will then be made as to whether or not to call the student's parents. Normally, when a call is made home, the parents take the teacher's side in order to get the student to behave correctly or improve his/her attitude. When a teacher cannot solve a problem with a student, the following steps are taken: The teacher asks for help from the team of teachers who work with the group the student belongs to and the mentor or counselor that each student has. If this doesn't work, the next step would be to contact the resource team which is made up of teachers who work with special needs children as well as social workers, educators, social agents Finally, if all of this fails, the assistant director of the school is brought in. On occasion, if a very serious incident takes place, the process jumps almost immediately from the teacher to the police. This is the case, for example, when a student has some sort of weapon in class. We also spoke to a teaching assistant who was assigned to a child with specific health problems. Her job was to go to every class with the student and to follow the teacher's instructions, repeating or explaining them to the student as often as was necessary until the student was able to understand.

In the afternoon we met with two teachers from a special education school called "Lilla Soklan" (Small School). They explained how they went about their work and showed us their facilities. The school serves students up to 6th grade from four of the schools in the area. There are 8 students and 8 teachers at this school. The students are hyperactive or have mental problems. They are often very aggressive, cannot recognize their feelings or emotions, get angry often and very easily, and do not really understand what is happening to them. These students come to this school with a very complete dossier of information because before being accepted, they all attended other schools where efforts were made to meet their needs. It was when these attempts did not prove fruitful that the students were referred to a special school of this type.

Wednesday, October 8

At 9:00 a.m., we attended a weekly meeting of the administrative team. They explained their functions and we did the same. These administrators do not teach classes, but they do visit them, sometimes to deal with attitudinal problems that some students have.

In any case, we saw that the assistant director was known and greeted by many of the students. We mustn't forget that Sofielundskolan has some 800 students. Per Horney explained the VAKT program to us.

VAKT means that having a responsible adult present gives a sense of security. This program was implemented by educational authorities. The method was developed by a Norwegian teacher named Olweus who has used it for several years in North America with a good deal of success. The method is divided into three levels of work: Individual, Class and School.

Keeping this approach in mind, the team must decide what content will be included. Everyone should be aware of the situation. At the individual level, meetings are held which bring together an adult and the student who has caused a problem and the person who was affected by the student's acts. Strategies that are often used in mediation are also used here. Creative thought is required because each situation is different.

At the class level, strategies related to consensus building are used. In other words, class rules are established and reviewed every week with an adult. The most important thing is that ALL of the adults at the school share the responsibility for the school's situation, not just the teachers. Sometimes one student tries to bully another one and the class should know that this is happening and that there are consequences. At the individual level, the same is true. Whoever hits or beats up a classmate must confront the fact that his/her behavior has consequences, including pain and harm.

At the school level, surveys are done which show where there is the most need. This makes it possible to design certain thematic days such as Peace Day, Health Day and so on.

In the afternoon we visited another special education school called Axeltorp. There were 10 students at this school and students can only remain in this program for a total of three years. They then must return to a conventional school. As was the case at the "Lilla Skula", parents must agree to send their children to this school. If the parents don't support this effort, work cannot be done and the student is not admitted. There is great demand for this program and only one third of those who request admittance are accepted. The school is located in a house that was originally built as an orphanage and was later adapted to the needs of the teachers and the students. In this school, all adults are responsible, not just the professors. The day begins with students and teachers having breakfast together. The day's program of activities is written on the board. There are three work groups. Teachers meet periodically with the school psychologist to ask questions, express doubts, and seek information on a certain subject or situation ... Once a month, parents are invited to information sessions. The teachers work together with social services and social workers but these meetings have not yet been institutionalized. Teachers express a need to improve this type of collaboration with social agencies.

Thursday, October 9

On the final day of our stay, we visited the “Nya Stenkula Skolan” facilities. Unlike the Sofielundskolan, which is 50 years old, this school was completely renovated just two years ago and space has been redesigned to comply with new projects. The school has 400 students and 60 professors. There is a pre-school area for 70 children from ages one to five, divided into three groups. There is also a youth center, which is where students when school has finished. This center is run by youth educators, not by teachers. The administration is currently studying how to best use this youth center during the rest of the day, for example, during the lunch period.

We visited the part of the school that had been adapted to work with students who had some type of severe brain damage such as brain paralysis or Down’s Syndrome. Some of these children are confined to wheelchairs. This area has good human and material resources.

There are also three classrooms for children with some type of mental retardation and two classes for students who recently arrived in Malmo. These last two classes are basically used to teach these new children Swedish.

Malmo is divided into 10 districts. In this district, educational authorities have decided that a parent should head the administrative team. This is similar, in some ways, to the school boards that we have in Spain. They are also working on what we might call student council. From 6th to 9th grade, two students from each class are chosen to participate on the student council and they are taught how the school is run. They can express opinions and make suggestions. The goal is to make them feel that they are an important part of the school and that they have some impact on what is done. This is a national educational objective.

After lunch, we went back to the meeting rooms and said goodbye to the assistant director, Tommy Sjolín, who was on his way to a classroom where they were experiencing some problems so that he could evaluate the situation and decide what measures were to take. This was the end of our visit.

3. CONCLUSIONS. ASSESSMENT

The objectives of the Swedish national educational plan seem to be similar to those we have in Spain (known as the L.O.G.S.E.). However, Swedish schools are very independent when it comes to deciding how to achieve the goals set out in their plan. Teachers are able to schedule activities for their students in a fairly independent manner. The concept of team teaching is fundamental as an autonomous approach to organizing teaching activities.

The Swedish schools have adopted the slogan “Without good relationships, there can be no instruction.” Teachers are close to their students. Rules are very clear to everyone. Young people are the same the world over, but the way in which professional rigor was conceived in Sweden was a very pleasant surprise. The first thing we noticed was the enormous distance between the Spanish and Swedish educational systems as regards all

types of resources. This welfare society, the foundation of Social Democracy, is something that all of the professionals with whom we spoke were very proud. In Sweden, schools work in collaboration with social services, and this helps improve the situation of students who are socially disadvantaged. It is very possible that Sweden might encounter some serious integration problems in the future when this generation of immigrants demand their rightful place in society. It is only fair, however, to mention that Swedish society has not yet been able to successfully articulate foreigners and the native population.

The work teachers do in Sweden is challenging, but society understands that and teachers are held in high esteem. Quality in education seems to be a priority in this country along with other principles such as democracy and especially equal opportunity.

This visit was exceptionally full and interesting. Through this experience we were able to envision what Spain might be able to achieve if sufficient resources were available and the guidelines set out in the LOGSE were really implemented.

As regards how to deal with violence in schools and how to integrate students from different cultures, we were surprised at how much their ideas coincide with the ones we have discussed in our Association. If participation in the two phases of the Hippocrates Program has taught us anything, it is that team work and educational responsibility are the two cornerstones of success in this profession.