

School Safety Net

Virtual Meeting on the Case Scenario Entitled "A World of Differences"

Minutes

Participants

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Date

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a) Main elements of the strategy presented

The online meeting focused on the analysis and discussion of the overall strategy that was presented in answer to the case scenario, including: the factual description of the scenario, the attitude and behaviour of the protagonist student, his classmates, his teachers, the school director, his parents, as well as other stakeholders involved. In general terms, the proposed strategy follows the suggestions encompassed strategy on SSN "Guidelines for immigration students".

The case scenario addressed the scholastic, social and cultural integration of Mahmud, who had come from Guinea in Africa to Portugal two years ago and had moved to a small town a year ago. Mahmud's difficulties are an evidence of the many obstacles immigrant students often face when they start their school trajectories in a foreign country. A better integration and school success require that Mahmud and the whole educational community work together towards common goals – this constitutes a strategic axis of the strategy.

Mahmud is in need of special attention from teachers and other educators at school, so that he may learn to express the cultural conflicts he is experiencing, as well as to cope with his physical disabilities. Teachers need to be aware of the double barrier Mahmud's school integration faces – besides his different cultural patterns, Mahmud also carries with him the additional burden of the physical handicap.

Teachers need to realise and accept that immigrant students have different values from those of the school and learn to get rid of their own prejudices and stereotypes, by trying to know and understand the other's culture, while thinking on how they could bridge the gaps between the school culture and the immigrant child's culture.

Overall, the different school actors should embrace more pro-actively the challenge of structuring and implementing a real strategy for empowering the different stakeholders to value diversity as a key resource for cultural and school inclusiveness.

The overall strategy thus tried to address three main scopes of action:

- a cognitive dimension, encompassing the variety of instruments the teacher, the special needs professional and the psychologist can launch to help diminish or solve Mahmud's learning handicaps;
- a relational dimension, which requires concrete steps towards an effective integration of Mahmud in his class and concomitantly work on his relationship with his classmates;



- a social dimension, bridging the cultural and mutual knowledge gap between the school and Mahmud' family.

b) Feedback from the teachers

Participants tended to emphasize Mahmud's social and economic background as the ultimate cause for his reluctance in attending school. He is caught in between his parents' cultural patterns and his views on school and what the school tells him.

Participants also underlined that teachers need to get specific in-service training packages about intercultural skills, as this would potentially be used to promote the academic, social and cultural integration of immigrant children; also that the school director should carry out effective actions towards the dissemination among the school community of the legal protocols of action that need to be followed in cases such as Mahmud's. A special emphasis was put on the need to construct school projects based on the value of cultural and physical diversity as a resource and as a teaching tool for school integration of immigrant students and handicapped students.

c) Conclusion

There was a very positive welcome of the proposed approach to this special case scenario. The strategy to help addressing this problem was, in general, subscribed by all the participants, who recognized it acknowledges, in overall terms, both the causes and the symptoms of Mahmud's integration process.

