



Good Effective School Improvement Practices in Spain¹

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the case studies of 5 effective school improvement (ESI) programmes developed in Spain. These case studies try to find those factors which foster or impede the implementation of these programmes, underlining the relevance of context to understand what is really happening in schools. The article offers a description of the characteristics of the Spanish education system which affect the way these ESI programmes are carried out and developed, the description of the 5 programmes analysed, and lessons learned from them.

INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest advances in research on school effectiveness and school improvement in recent years, is that the context is now taken into consideration, reflected in the development of multilevel models and their application in school effectiveness research (Goldstein, 1987, 1997). Everything external to school is usually considered context. But this description might be too general, as it includes a heterogeneous group of aspects: concrete actions by external agents, momentary policies decided by school administrators, and characteristics of the education system itself.

Policies such as the existence of national guidelines or a national system of testing usually appear in the different models proposed by school effectiveness

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and school improvement researchers. But it is more difficult to find in the literature characteristics of the educational system where the school is located. While the need for carrying out more international research is understood (Reynolds, 2000), it is also evident that research carried out up till now, generally centred on Anglo-Saxon countries, has not been entirely satisfactory (Morley & Rassool, 1999). It is clear that the characteristics of the educational system should be given special attention and appear in models of improvement and effectiveness.

Nowadays, when we are witnessing the appearance of a new theoretical-practical movement such as Effective School Improvement (ESI), it is especially important to learn from experience and to start working with the national context from the beginning. This was one of the ideas behind the investigation "Capacity for Change and Adaptation in the Case of Effective School Improvement." Research teams from eight different European countries have taken part in this project, all carrying out field work in schools. One of the conclusions reached by all the teams is the importance of the context of the education system in the successful implementation and development of effective school improvement programmes.

In this article, we will describe the Spanish education system that has influenced the development of ESI programmes (Muñoz-Repiso et al., 2000). The five Spanish case studies carried out in this international research project are then outlined, all of which have been aimed at developing an effective school improvement (ESI) programme. Finally, lessons learned from the analysis of the five programmes are presented.

CONTEXT: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SPANISH EDUCATION SYSTEM AFFECTING ESI PROGRAMMES

To locate the programmes and their interpretation in context, five differentiating characteristics of the Spanish education system are highlighted, as they have an impact on the development of ESI programmes (CIDE, 2000):

- *The new autonomy of schools.* Spanish public schools are starting to have some autonomy in the management of financial, material, and pedagogical resources. This means that schools progressively have more discretion to manage their own change. For example, in relation to economic autonomy, schools can manage their own budget. They also have relative curricular

autonomy. However, there is almost no autonomy in teachers' recruitment and organisation, because this task is the responsibility of the regional education authorities. While great change has taken place in the last few years, moving from a uniform education system to one characterised by increasing autonomy, this autonomy has not been completely exercised by most teachers and schools.

- *The culture of equity, rather than competition, among schools.* Spain has traditionally prioritised equality rather than diversity in its education system, with two consequences. On the one hand, educational authorities, to avoid favouring some schools over others, have not fostered improvement processes. On the other hand, a noncompetitive culture among schools in Spain has been generated, with co-operation between schools prevailing over competition.
- *The special kind of school leadership in Spain.* Research on school effectiveness and improvement has stressed the importance of school leadership. Spain and Portugal have a very particular kind of leadership. The Principal is one of the school's teachers, elected by the School Council for a 4-year period. This has both advantages and disadvantages. He/she is a leader in the school who can easily mobilise his/her colleagues, but the Principal is also one of the teachers who may not always have the necessary power to develop change processes (Murillo, Barrio, & Pérez-Albo, 1999).
- *The importance of parental involvement.* Great importance is given by the Spanish education system to the educational community's participation in management. Besides different participatory bodies at state, regional, and local levels, the most important collegiate board responsible for school management (the School Council) is composed of representatives of teachers, parents and, in secondary education, students. The Principal's election (for a 4-year period) and dismissal is in their hands.
- *Lack of an effective and improvement culture in the school community.* There is a tradition of teacher mobility. Teachers in public schools attain a permanent position after some years of temporary posting. The length of this provisional situation varies in different Autonomous Communities, and is longer in secondary education. Therefore, in some schools most of the teaching staff exist in an unstable situation, hindering the implementation and institutionalisation of improvement initiatives.

The objectives of this study are to understand the factors that foster and impede the development of successful effective school improvement

programmes, and to analyse the way these programmes are developed in Spain. A case study was carried out on the in-depth analysis of prototypical experiences representing successful examples, in which the characteristics of an ESI programme had been previously established.

DEFINING SPANISH ESI PROGRAMMES

One of the keys to guarantee the validity of its conclusions is the adequate selection of the programmes. The starting point was the elaboration of an operative definition of what an effective school improvement programme is in the Spanish context, and what are its defining characteristics. We would define effective school improvement programmes as a systematic, planned, and lasting process of change school-based, in order to achieve concrete educational aims in a more effective way by identifying, reformulating, and optimising basic school elements and their interrelations. Moreover, the majority of the educational community is involved in the programme.

From this definition, we have extracted the defining criteria of ESI programmes:

1. It is a planned change. It comprises the following phases: vision, identification of needs or previous diagnosis, planning, development and implementing, monitoring and evaluation, and institutionalisation of the changes.
2. It is a long-term action, not a short-period effort. Therefore, we cannot consider ESI programmes that have a fixed length in time or no continuity (for example, 1 or 2 months, a school year).
3. The process of change occurs in a systemic way: that is, it affects the whole school.
4. The impulse, development, and co-ordination come from the school itself.
5. It is oriented towards educational objectives: that is, it is aimed at the improvement of academic results (acquisition and control of basic and higher instrumental skills, and metacognitive skills), socioemotional development and satisfaction of stakeholders.
6. It is implemented by identifying, reformulating, restructuring, and optimising the input, process, and the output of the school's elements as well as their interrelations.
7. Different actions are undertaken to modify both teaching-learning processes and organisational and relational ones.

8. The majority of the teachers are actively involved in the programme.
9. The involvement of students, parents, and other members of the educational community is an aim.

METHODOLOGY

To select the programmes, databases on Spanish educational innovations and other innovations were examined. Experiences included in specialised literature were also explored, and experts on this subject were consulted. This search highlighted a great number of innovations developed in Spain, but scarcity of effective school improvement programmes.

After a preselection of ESI programmes aiming to have a representative sample, five cases were selected according to the following three criteria: both primary and secondary schools should be included, as well as private and public ones; finally, they should be located in different environments and geographic areas. The final sample consists of five effective school improvement programmes carried out in the following schools: Secondary Education School Rosa Chacel, Ikastola Ander Deuna, Rural Grouped School Teruel I, Primary Education School N^o Señora de la Vega, and Educational Centre Padre Piquer. The schools' characteristics are summarised in Table 1.

The case studies have been guided by the ESI evaluation model (Hoeben, 1999). The basic elements of this model are:

- student outcomes, giving the effectiveness criteria on success or failure of the programme;
- improvement results, constituting the improvement criteria;

Table 1. Sample Characteristics.

School	Ownership	Educational level	Environment	Autonomous Community
I.E.S. Rosa Chacel	Public	Secondary	Semi-Urban	Madrid
Ander Deuna Ikastola	Private	Primary and Secondary	Semi-Urban	Basque Country
C.R.A. Teruel I	Public	Primary	Rural	Aragón
C.P. N ^o Señora de la Vega	Public	Primary	Rural	La Rioja
C.F. Padre Piquer	Private	Secondary	Urban	Madrid

- the pupils' position, understood as their cultural, living, and learning environment, motivation and curriculum adaptation;
- self-regulative classroom curriculum, in terms of planning and development of teaching and learning, evaluation, feedback and reinforcement on students' learning;
- self-regulative improvement cycle, referring to planning and development of educational contents and evaluation, feedback and reinforcement on learning achievement to support classroom curriculum;
- school organisation, the way in which the school community and the school elements fit together to make the fundamental task of the school easier;
- parental involvement;
- learning organisation, referring both to the organisation of self-regulative learning and the development of human resources that stimulate the achievement of intermediate outcomes; and
- the position of external change agents.

Previous studies have shown institutional climate and leadership style as crucial for Spanish schools. So, data on these two elements have been collected as they are considered to have a maximum impact on the development and success of the ESI programmes.

A range of techniques and instruments have been used to collect relevant data on these elements, including: analysis of documents written by every school on the improvement programme and the school's pedagogical organisation, as well as different external evaluations already carried out; a semistructured interview with the school management team on different aspects relating to school organisation, the programme being carried out and its assessment of the core aspects of its success; a questionnaire on leadership style to the school principal (Bass & Avolio, 1995); a questionnaire to the teachers on the programme's development and their assessment; a questionnaire on institutional climate and leadership style to the teachers, elaborated from the questionnaire on leadership style to the school principal; and a semistructured interview with a school teacher in every school to make some comments on the questionnaires and to ask for a general assessment of the ESI programme. All these instruments gave an holistic view of what is happening in these schools.

In February 1999, a first contact visit was made to every school, to collect documentation on the school and its effective school improvement programme. During May and June 1999, a second visit was made. Ten days

before that visit questionnaires to the management team and the teachers were sent by mail. During the visit, interviews took place and the questionnaires were completed. Each school report presented below was also validated by the people responsible in each school.

ESI PROGRAMMES DESCRIPTION

Learning Improvement of Students in the First Cycle of Compulsory Secondary Education. Secondary Education School Rosa Chacel (Colmenar Viejo, Madrid)

What happens when the number of students in a school increases from 400 to 900 at the beginning of the school year? Moreover, what if many of the new students have problems in basic skills? It may be that the school falls into a deep chaos. Alternatively, it may be able to react and start on an improvement process (Instituto de Educacion Secundaria [IES] Rosa Chacel, 1997; MEC, 1998). This is what happened in the Secondary Education School Rosa Chacel in the school year 1996/97.

The school is located in a 30,000-inhabitant village near Madrid and its pupils' sociocultural background is medium to low. As a consequence of the reform's reorganisation of schools, the school took in 1st, 2nd and 3rd years of the Compulsory Secondary Education, enrolling 350 new 12- and 13-year-old pupils. In addition to the problems caused by incorporating so many pupils and new teachers and by the need to enlarge the school's facilities, many students had not achieved goals of previous educational levels, and the basic skills of some were at a level lower than expected for students at the end of primary education.

Nevertheless, the extent of the problem was not really noticed until 1 month after the beginning of the school year, when the initial diagnosis was concluded. This initial diagnosis was focused on curricular competence, individual working habits, and the acquisition of instrumental techniques, as well as on students' learning progress. It showed a large number of pupils whose development would indicate not only difficulties in achieving the goals of Compulsory Secondary Education, but also that they were in danger of abandoning the school system too early. Improvement areas were identified and prioritised, based on results of the initial evaluation. It was decided to focus on the first cycle of Compulsory Secondary Education learning-teaching process, and the school prepared a detailed plan for that year's change process.

The ESI programme's effectiveness goal was to help most students develop their general aptitudes as much as possible. Specifically, it was intended to adapt teaching to first-cycle pupils, especially those with persistent continuous school failure. To reach the main improvement objective of the programme, it was proposed: to improve the work of teaching staff, especially where it concerned planning and co-ordination; to improve pupils' assessment processes; and to optimise the school's organisation to improve learning and teaching processes. Actions taken to reach those goals may be grouped as: organisational, curricular, and teachers' training strategies. Among organisational measures taken, the following are highlighted: a) reducing the number of pupils per class, as well as a new grouping criteria, to adapt the curriculum to their needs; b) establishing support sessions in foreign language and basic skills areas; c) developing the co-ordination process was started between the school and connected primary schools; and d) reinforcing departments more directly related to basic skills learning, providing them with extra time for co-ordination, preparation of specific materials to develop their work, and for individualised student attention.

Curricular measures included: revising the syllabus for some pupils; developing more practical content; and gradual planning and teaching of certain methodologies – flexible grouping, projects, and debates. To improve the teaching processes, a range of teacher development activities were also carried out.

Special interest has been given to internal and external monitoring and evaluation activities. In addition to diagnosis and initial evaluation, monitoring assessments were carried out during the improvement process, as well as a final evaluation in which the initial evaluation tests used were repeated. As a result of the external evaluation, the Ministry gave the school an award in recognition of the quality of the plan developed.

Among the results generated by the improvement process, we can distinguish those related to the school, the classrooms, and the students. In terms of the school results, the most powerful one is closer co-ordination achieved between teachers, the management team, and the guidance department, reflected both in working documents and in concrete action proposals. Teachers' meetings are now viewed as more useful, and school timetables have been reorganised. A new concept of teaching and learning is seen in their daily work. Moreover, the school has also reached a high level of teaching awareness on the need to examine aspects of the teaching process more deeply, to achieve common standards.

Concerning classroom results, teachers know the idea of "re-thinking" their methodology has not been generalised throughout the school. This is because there is some reluctance towards change, even though many teachers consider it necessary to modify what and how to teach. The idea of dividing some classrooms into two groups for certain subjects produced positive results for all groups involved: from these results we draw the conclusion that the pattern applied to the priority groups had a high level of effectiveness. In those groups where the intervention was smaller and limited to some pupils, the results had lesser effects.

Finally, regarding pupils' results, there was a significant advance in the acquisition of capacities, curricular competence level (more than 60% of the pupils of the special group showed considerable improvement), classroom atmosphere, individual working habits, together with a decrease in the second Compulsory Secondary Education – Educación Secundaria Obligatoria (ESO) – year group conflicts. This demonstrates greater tendency to concentrate on the task and increased acquisition of collective social rules.

At present, and as a result of such a process, Rosa Chacel School is considered a school that has been able to cater for the different needs of its students in an appropriate way. The work achieved with students who have a background of school failure has prevented them from abandoning the school system, as well as helping them reinforce their self-esteem. Also notable is the effort made to achieve a special kind of school, less rigid, more open to less bureaucratic cultures, with a co-ordinated way of work and, what is more important, exhibiting an attitude of continuous improvement.

Effectiveness School Improvement Programme in Mathematics. Ikastola Ander Deuna (Sopelana, Basque country)

At the beginning of the 1990s, Ikastola² Ander Deuna's teachers were worried about the pupils' attainment in mathematics and the number of students who did not complete secondary education. The teachers considered the need to modify the way in which they were working. In several meetings, they explicitly talked about this issue and the lack of common criteria when using textbooks at different cycles and levels. In addition, they were faced with the Spanish Educational System (LOGSE) reforms. Due to these circumstances,

²An Ikastola is a grant-aided private school in the Basque Country (Spain), in which pupils are taught in the Basque Language.

in 1991 the school became involved in an improvement programme for mathematics teaching. This programme was aimed at primary and compulsory secondary education students. The management team and mathematics teachers decided to embark on a change process to optimise the quality of teaching, materials and pupils' results. This began by searching resources for teacher development, and an external counsellor was asked to help.

The main goal of this programme was to improve every student's attainment in mathematics. Improvement goals included: to train the teaching staff in a way of teaching and learning mathematics; to reinforce the inter- and intracycles co-ordination processes; to improve teaching methodology using the agreed teaching materials and activities; and to foster an evaluation culture. To reach these goals, a series of strategies were established relating to the curriculum, the school organisation, and teacher development.

Curricular actions included: establishing common minimum goals and contents, changing curricular organisation; modifying teaching materials; changing teaching methodology; and designing support strategies in advance for each pupil and for groups of pupils.

The improvement programme has introduced various organisational changes. First, a system was set up reinforcing the co-ordination among the mathematics teachers inter and intra cycles. Then each classroom was divided into two groups to reduce the teacher-pupil ratio and pay more attention to each pupil. Finally, new and different periods of time were established to pay attention to and support those students with higher difficulties.

A teacher development programme was designed according to specific programme needs. To do this, the teachers of the school and the counsellor worked together throughout the programme and their training mainly took place at school during working hours.

Although it was planned to evaluate the project, this arose naturally throughout the improvement process. Evaluation of materials, the new methodology, and students' results became common and daily practice at school. Using different materials from those previously used meant a tight control process on their use in every classroom was necessary. The teachers monitored the way in which the students used the materials, through a previously agreed key indicators system. In many cases, tests were elaborated during the process to evaluate pupils' achievement after using a specific material.

A systematic internal evaluation of processes and results of students' learning arose out of this. Common rules and tools were established for

monitoring and for all teachers to be able to access, review, and analyse this information during cycle team meetings. Teachers periodically filled in a register form about each pupil, pointing out his/her achievement level on particular indicators related to learning goals. Information provided by this evaluation was used to decide on support strategies, best ways to use textbooks and materials, and to inform parents.

The teaching task has also been evaluated. At the end of each academic year, the head of studies surveyed all the teachers, gathering information on different issues, to know whether plans have been complied with, if new difficulties have arisen, to evaluate the co-ordination processes, to know what actions should have been necessary so as to improve their work, and to propose suggestions for possible changes.

Although the school did not initially consider external evaluation of the improvement programme, the Federation of Ikastolas offered to evaluate this programme and the students' achievement in English and Basque Language. This organisation develops a yearly evaluation of pupils from different schools at the end of primary education. Information is gathered about different dimensions of their achievement, using it to make a report that is returned to the school. This report shows each student's results and each classroom's results compared with the other groups. The overall results of the school are also compared with those of the other schools of the Federation. The school's results are also compared with those from previous years. Results obtained in both evaluations show that, as a whole, the school average is higher than that of the Federation of Ikastolas. This is attained in aspects such as statistics, number, mental arithmetic, and problem-solving. Nevertheless, such positive results have not been obtained in geometry, and results are negative in mathematical logic.

According to the school principal, it has been possible to adjust the training and professional development by setting up a system of attending and responding to teachers' needs. The school has also optimised its evaluation processes at different levels and has appreciably improved co-ordination processes at all levels.

Teachers state that it has been possible to improve considerably students' achievement, except in two respects: it has not improved as much as desired in all dimensions of mathematics, and not every group of students have moved forward equally. These circumstances have led to reflection about the reasons for the general improvement in some dimensions and not in the others: analysis process, decision-making, and improvement.

Teachers think that an important improvement of co-ordination has been achieved, partly fostered by continuity of teaching staff. Common criteria of action have been established, guaranteeing coherence and continuity among different educational levels. Dynamic systems have also been set up to gather and share information as a basis for appropriate decision making. In general, teachers feel quite satisfied with the programme and with the running of the school. They consider that the school as an organisation has learnt considerably as a consequence of this experience, adapting itself to the changes introduced and addressing needs of the students, the parents, and the community.

The Reading and Writing Process in the Rural School and the Growth of Interest for Reading. Rural Grouped School Teruel I (Perales del Alfambra, Teruel)

If it is difficult to improve a school's quality in ordinary conditions, it is easy to imagine how problems increase when classrooms are separated by several kilometres and each of them enrolls pupils of very different ages. This happened in the Rural Grouped School Teruel I (C.R.A. Teruel I, 1997; MEC, 1998).

The Rural Grouped School Teruel I is a public primary education school, made up by nine isolated rural unitary schools that decided in 1988 to join and work together. These schools are located in different villages at an average distance of 40 kilometres from the region's capital. Their population, of a middle-low socioeconomic level, are farmers and cattle farmers (ovine). In each unit a maximum of 25 students is distributed in one or two classrooms. This geographic dispersion highly limits collaboration possibilities of teachers, because they can only meet once a week in the teachers' assembly. In these meetings, important deficits in reading and writing and the need to find a solution for those problems were underlined, so the management team decided to submit an ESI project to the teachers' assembly.

This ESI project focuses on the improvement of comprehensive reading skills and on optimising teachers' collaboration. After analysis of initial pupil reading levels and problems, teachers began adapting reading material and elaborating new activities and resources. Also reading sessions and several other reading were planned and the school's timetables reorganised. The basic aim of the effective reading programme is that, by the end of primary education, pupils reach satisfactory reading levels, reading faster, under-

standing better what they read, and finding reading more pleasant. To reach these aims, improvement goals have been proposed: to increase the number of library books and improve the way the library is managed, to optimise use of materials and improve management of the bibliographical resources, to enhance teachers collaboration; and to give the reading programme a cross-curricular orientation.

An effective reading programme was designed and carried out, to reinforce and complement what the rural school cannot cover in the first stages of education. All the teachers and all the units constituting the Rural Grouped School were involved in the project. Another Rural Grouped School was also involved as a control group.

Regarding curricular aspects of the improvement design, the developed reading programme included the following characteristics: the content was structured around a reading book and complementary workbook; teachers adapted these materials adjusting them for each level. Reading was organised in five weekly sessions of 20/30 min with a fixed sequence. Beginning with silent reading, vocabulary activities were added in the second session; after this, exercises related to comprehension, visual ability, and memory were included in the third and fourth sessions; finally, the sequence ended with some work on complete texts. Moreover, every reading session focused on: attention and space ability, vocabulary, visual memory, space education, and comprehension.

Organisational measures complemented the instructional programme. The cross-curricular character of the programme meant reorganising both teachers' and pupils' timetables. Additionally, management of the school's bibliographic resources was improved: the bibliographic collection was increased, a catalogue of the list of titles available was elaborated and the bibliographic resources were reorganised, so that it could be possible to control students' use of the materials.

Finally, some teachers attended a seminar on effective reading so that they could advise the rest of the staff, and The Centre for Teachers and Resources advised the school on the legal aspects of the "Annual Plans of Improvement."

This programme paid special attention to monitoring and evaluation, with people responsible for the programme carrying out an initial diagnosis of the level of each pupil, as well as continuous monitoring of progress achieved and a final evaluation at the end of the school year, to determine the extent of achievement of goals.

The effective reading programme has produced very positive results. Reading is now a consensual goal agreed by the whole teachers' assembly and has become a priority, both because of its perceived importance and because it has been proved that reading is more effective than other types of learning. Teachers are now more committed to the improvement of the programme and to the quality of teaching. This commitment has a positive repercussion on sense of belonging to the school and is overcoming the limitations caused by dispersion of the classes.

Teachers of different classrooms have noticed that team work is a productive and satisfactory way of working, confirmed by the outcomes of the reading programme. Collaboration among teachers of different subjects and classrooms has been improved, and this improvement is a stimulus to keep on working this way, and influences the general running of the school. Therefore, formal collaboration between form teachers has now been established as a high-priority goal.

One of the most notable results is that the different units have more reading books. This facilitates teachers' work, provides pupils with a wide range of reading texts, and fosters interest in reading. In the first cycle of primary education, the average of effective reading has increased more than 50% from the initial evaluation to the final one (with 19% improvement in the control group). In the second cycle the difference is even wider (50 vs. 3% in the control group). A smaller increase has occurred in the third cycle, although there have also been positive results. In general, students have improved their reading level and their interest for reading has been clearly increased. As important data, the average number of books read by the pupils in a school year has risen from two to seven, and there has also been an increase in the number of books pupils take home.

Open Reading Groups. Primary Education School Nuestra Señora de la Vega (Haro, La Rioja)

One of the most common problems found in schools is the inappropriate development of reading skills, particularly because of the influence that mastery in reading and writing has for later learning. The teacher's assembly of the school Nuestra Señora de la Vega, aware of the importance of this learning process, started to develop a programme called *Open Reading Groups* (C.P. Nuestra Señora de la Vega, 1997; MEC, 1998). Nuestra Señora de la Vega is a primary education public school located in Haro (La Rioja), a village of around 9,000 inhabitants in winter but 30,000 in summer. The

school enrolls 411 students from five villages, of a medium-low socioeconomic background, with families mainly working in agriculture and wine-producing activities.

Teaching staff of the school had continuously observed that many of the students' difficulties were based on inadequate reading and writing. The poor command of these strategies and, in general, of the techniques to receive and transmit information is not only a restraint for school development but also conditions later learning. It was felt that it is in the first grades in which the basic reading level is achieved, and where positive or negative attitudes towards reading are developed. That is why it was seen as essential to intervene in these levels to prevent later school failure. The management team, the school's counsellor and every teacher were involved in the programme, supported by nonteaching staff and by many parents. Involvement of students in the reading sessions was also a core aspect of the programme's development.

This improvement programme was based on a range of previous reading, creativity, and logical skills innovation experiences in the school. Previous experiences were viewed as unsuccessful because of the lack of an adequate organisation and structure.

A formal evaluation of needs was carried out. Problems of expression and, above all, comprehension, were found, as well as limited interest in reading and difficulties of some students from ethnic and social minority groups with reading and writing. The reading level of the students was assessed with a test measuring their reading speed. Once these results were analysed, five reading levels were established, to which the students were assigned.

The global goal of the improvement programme was to improve students' reading skills and their comprehension and expression abilities. Specifically, it was intended: to motivate students and develop their interest in reading; to succeed in helping pupils make the most of their possibilities of reading speed, reading comprehension, and memorisation of what they have read; to improve the underprivileged pupils' self-esteem and their attitude towards learning, to reach a level of attainment that they would never have been able to achieve in their previous class groups.

Different strategies have been carried out to achieve the proposed goals. The most significant change has taken place in the curriculum. A programme of reading instruction has been developed: in every session, most of the time is used reading the corresponding text, and these texts differ depending on the different reading levels of each group. Thus, the teacher is the initial model, reading the text aloud, then students read it in the same way until an

appropriate level is reached; it can also be read silently. Meanings of unknown words are explained and comprehension questions are answered. This is done orally and in writing. The last step is correcting questions and controlling spelling: but students are not given the correct answer; mistakes are indicated and students read the text again and find the correct answers.

These curricular measures are linked to organisational strategies. Students are distributed in flexible groups according to their reading level, involving modification of space and restructuring teachers' and students' timetables. Teacher development activities are also carried out. A seminar series on reading is organised in the school in collaboration with the Centre for Teachers and Resources. The teaching staff also attends meetings at the beginning of the programme, where the methodology is introduced, appropriate instructions to carry out the reading sessions are given, and approaches and procedures are agreed.

Programme monitoring and evaluation were carried out at school by the co-ordinators of the programme and in every reading group by the teacher responsible for it. Periodic evaluation sessions were held to analyse problems appearing during each activity and readjusting the reading groups. The Pedagogical Co-ordinating Commission also evaluated the programme in its meetings. The formal evaluation of the improvement goals was carried out in the final evaluation, and also on a continuous basis in both the teachers' assembly and specific co-ordination sessions. Each teacher was in charge of his/her classroom monitoring; he/she had to assess his/her pupils' attainments and base group changes on these. The Inspectorate Service of the Ministry of Education carried out a global evaluation of the results achieved and followed up the reading sessions closely, observing activities developed in every classroom and meeting with the school's teaching staff.

Results show that pupils' reading has been improved, and that the project is now embedded as a common activity. Improvement processes have also been implemented almost as intended.

High expectations were emphasised in the school from the beginning of the programme. Teachers' teamwork increased, and the relationship with the education inspector developed. The *Open Reading Groups* experience has also fostered parents' involvement and their perception of the school as an educational community. As a consequence of the improvement programme and its activities, there has been a change of attitude in the school, from not taking parents into account to considering them very important. This has led

parents to a deeper feeling of belonging to school. It has also helped them become more involved in reading sessions and other school activities.

The classroom is one of the areas undergoing most change. The number of students per group has been reduced and flexible groups have been formed for the reading sessions, enhancing student interaction and motivation. The school's timetable has been reorganised and teaching takes place in a range of areas, involving both teaching and nonteaching staff. It has also been observed that the increase in reading comprehension has brought about a much more orderly atmosphere in the classroom.

Students' reading speed and comprehension have increased more than expected at the beginning of the programme, affecting the performance in other subjects. Moreover, a positive attitude towards reading sessions has been developed and maintained, but at different levels depending on the different groups.

The New Compulsory Secondary Education Teachings and Attention to Diversity in the Educational Centre Padre Piquer (Madrid)

Implementing new educational programmes is always a challenge for schools, as they have to adapt to new structures while defining the curriculum according to their pupils' and context's unique characteristics. This is even more complex in the case of schools such as Padre Piquer, with a very heterogeneous population and a large number of pupils with special needs. This improvement programme, focused at the compulsory secondary education level, is an example of how a school has used deep reform of the education system to optimise its own processes and outcomes (C.F. Padre Piquer, 1992, 1998).

The Educational Centre Padre Piquer is a grant-aided private school in Madrid, owned by the Foundation Caja Madrid³, and managed by the Society of Jesus. Most of its pupils come from disadvantaged social classes; this feature, together with the size of the school (up to 1,100 pupils), defines its educational focus and teaching strategies. Currently, around 30 private companies are collaborating with the school, influencing the teaching through promotion of the students' contact with the working world. Because it is a private school, it can also determine some of its management and co-ordination bodies.

³Caja Madrid is a saving bank which also carries out social work.

Padre Piquer took part in the Experimental Reform of Secondary Education⁴ in the school year 1983/84. From the school year 1992/93 on, this initiative was substituted by the new Compulsory Secondary Education, which necessitated reorganisation of the curriculum and introduction of changes in the school's organisation and management. At the same time, different initiatives were carried out to cater for students' diversity and wide range of needs, and to reduce dropouts. This programme sees a convergence of different improvement strategies, as the implementation of the new education system, as set up in the Organic Act on the General Organisation of the Education System (LOGSE), meets the specific conditions of the school and its pupils.

Many of the pupils of Padre Piquer come from ethnic minorities and disadvantaged social classes, and the school enrolls students from 23 different nationalities. There is a high percentage of pupils (around 35%) with 1 or 2 years learning delay. These conditions generate a challenging situation with consequences for the school's educational guidelines and its priority improvement areas. To cater for the specific needs of the pupils and achieve the school's purposes, the staff stress significant and discovery learning and pay particular attention to pupils' motivation.

The three main goals of this ESI programme were: to personalise education to cater for students' diversity; to give all students a comprehensive education focused on development of the person as a whole; and for all students to continue studying after having finished compulsory education.

To reach these objectives, intermediate improvement goals were proposed: to promote parents' involvement in school activities; to change curriculum organisation; to get the most of teachers' time and work by training all school staff as educators; and to optimise the school's material resources. Achieving these purposes meant setting up a range of strategies affecting different spheres of the educational process. Concerning the curriculum, curricular adaptations were developed, especially in instrumental areas. New optional subjects were also created, such as social skills workshops and a workshop to

reinforce basic capacities. Remediation and support activities and new curricular adaptations were also carried out for students who could not reach the proposed goals; and, as an extreme measure for those students in a higher risk situation, the curriculum was modified, developing 1- and 2-year diversification programmes.

There were also changes in the organisational structure, such as modifying student grouping criteria, to establish homogeneous groups according to different variables; and changes in criteria for selecting and allocating teaching staff, to give more specialised attention to students with greater need. In addition, the number of groups in every year was increased, and new laboratories, workshops were created to teach the new subjects and new co-ordination bodies were created.

Evaluation of pupils and the educational process was considered one of the essential elements of the curriculum, and an important reference point for making decisions concerning educational intervention and process improvement. The ESI programme was periodically evaluated by the teaching staff and also by external agents. The most significant result has been that the percentage of the pupils achieving the Secondary Education Certificate has increased to slightly higher than the national average. For the academic year 1997/98, 77% of the students achieved this certificate. The main success, however, is the "added value" to students, more than the absolute academic success.

In general, the intended improvement goals have been achieved through curriculum re-organisation, curricular adaptations, changes to grouping strategies, creation of new optional subjects, successful implementation of a Spanish Language programme for foreign students, optimal use of material resources, and improved parental involvement. Teachers' use of working hours has been optimised by training. It is still necessary, however, to devote more time to nonteaching staff's training and involvement, especially administrative and services staff.

Improved classroom outcomes appear particularly to be due to the open attitude of teaching staff to innovation and new ways of working. The teachers accepted their pupils' baseline results and were conscious that this meant classroom changes, including a new teaching methodology. They, therefore, carried out diverse strategies to individualise education and address student diversity.

Perhaps the most evident and important student result is their recognition of university as a logical next step for them on leaving school. Until recently,

⁴The Experimental Reform of Secondary Education was a pilot initiative on Secondary Education developed in order to start a bigger reform of the structure of the education system. Its main objective was to look for a new organisation model for this educational level in order to overcome the early differentiation in branches of the secondary education, the social devaluation of Vocational Training studies, and the excessive academicism of the Baccalaureate (the general branch of the upper secondary education).

80% of students finishing compulsory education went on to vocational training, while the remaining 20% left the education system. Now, 80% choose to follow the Baccalaureate, and the 20% that previously abandoned the system, now opt for vocational training.

LESSONS LEARNED

A characteristic defining the ESI programmes analysed in Spain is their heterogeneity. In the sample selection, a broad representation of programmes was pursued, selecting all schools from different educational levels, public and private ownership, and various environments. Since the study has been completed, those differences have increased, relating also to goals, strategies, or the way in which ESI processes were run by their leaders. Because of this, they help us understand the key factors involved in the development of ESI programmes. Following Hoeben's (1999) evaluation framework, we introduce what we have learned from the case studies into 10 lessons.

1. The key factor for the development and success of ESI programmes in Spain appears to be *internal change agents*, primarily the principal's *leadership*. Analysing the Spanish examples, we conclude that, in every case, leadership is the most important issue for developing the ESI programmes, and one of the most decisive in its implementation and success. Nevertheless, we have not identified specific characteristics of these leaders. Therefore, we find authoritarian principals, exercising a strong control on the school, but also pedagogical leaders, who can be considered the real levers of the school (Pérez-Albo & Hernández Rincón, 2000).
2. The famous sentence "school change depends on what teachers do and think" (Fullan, 1982) is still true. *Teachers* are the ones developing change, so their involvement is crucial for the success of the programmes and this has been verified in the Spanish case studies. Teachers' cohesion and co-ordination have also been key to the success of ESI programmes, and these two issues are closely related to school climate. As we have noted, however, a current characteristic of the Spanish Education System is lack of school autonomy in staff management, meaning that schools have no decision power in teacher development and recruitment. In-service training is organised by specialised centres, without taking into

account schools' needs. Although schools can ask for specific training, it is not very common practice. Nevertheless, in some of the ESI programmes it is considered a core aspect, since ad hoc training has been carried out. With respect to staff recruitment, teacher mobility appears to be negative for ESI improvement processes. This is an endemic problem of public schools, because, although teachers are civil servants, the delay in awarding definitive posts makes it possible for 50% of a school's staff to change every year. This reduces their commitment to the school's educational goals and projects.

3. The *external change agents* collaborating in the development of the Spanish ESI programmes have varied considerably. The schools taking part in the "Annual Plans of Improvement" call have been supported by the Educational Inspectorate and centres for teachers' training, while the University has collaborated with the "ikastola." Likewise, the involvement of external agents in the programmes' success has also varied. We conclude that *external agents are not a determinant issue for the success of Spanish ESI programmes*. This can be explained in the Spanish education system, because there are no institutions in charge of supporting schools. Such a role is assigned to the Educational Inspectorate, even though it is more focused on supervising than in assessing schools.
4. The existence of an *external stimulus or pressure* to develop an improvement process is an essential element in both the selected cases and in other experiences previously analysed. Among the possible reasons for this, it is necessary to point out the traditional lethargy of the Spanish schools and teachers up to now, and also the thought of the educational authorities that "all public schools are equal" as a guarantee of equity. Due to this, the development of global experiences was not favoured.
5. The importance of *adequate planning* of the programme is another aspect continuously appearing in the cases studied, supported by teacher opinion. A characteristic of the "Annual Plans of Improvement" call was the requirement to make a diagnosis prior to the change action, selecting the improvement areas, elaborating the project, carrying it out, evaluating, and institutionalising it. This organisational requirement has been found to be one of the keys of the success of the "Annual Plans of Improvement."
6. According to the definition of ESI programmes, *optimisation of organisation and school structure* have been considered improvement objectives. Together with curricular strategies more related to classrooms, school-level improvement has been carried out through this. To achieve

this, both principals and teachers asked have considered flexibility in school organisation a core element, in aspects such as grouping, changing timetable and resources allocation.

7. The idea of *organisational learning* is not widespread in the Spanish educational context. Therefore, there is no awareness of the school as an organism which learns; it is, therefore hard to see the involvement of this element in the ESI programmes. Nevertheless, we have found that those schools with *more previous innovation experiences and a positive attitude towards developing new experiences, are the ones with many more possibilities of developing change processes*. The five schools we analysed are examples of this.
8. *What is happening in the classroom has an impact on pupils' achievement*. According to data, in those programmes with a very structured curricular design, the achievement goals are more likely to be reached. Nevertheless, the degree to which these programmes favour the whole development of the student and the educational community is not as clear. These programmes give priority to effectiveness over improvement. On the contrary, those programmes in which goals are more global, including the social dimension and where inflexible teaching processes have not been designed, quantitative evaluation is less adequate and student academic results are harder to determine, but the global appraisal is more positive.
9. All the programmes studied have intentionally searched for *parental involvement* in their development. However, this has been performed in different ways in each case. For instance, in the C.P. Nuestra Señora de la Vega, a stable group of mothers took part in preparing materials used in the programme. In Rosa Chacel, a school with a large proportion of pupils with learning difficulties from a low socioeconomic background, the commitment of parents with their children learning has been pursued. Where commitment has been achieved, the students have highly improved. It does not, however, seem to have been a core issue for the success of the programme, although, as mentioned before, the students' achievement has been improved with their parents' support.
10. The programmes analysed have considered *pupils* as passive actors to whom the programmes are directed. In every case the importance of pupils' engagement with their own learning is acknowledged but, nevertheless, they are not seen as actors in implementing and developing the programmes. From this point of view it can be concluded that, *rather than main characters, they are passive addressees of the programmes*.

CONCLUSIONS

The first conclusion of this case study is coherent with its starting principle: the relevance of the context for the development of the ESI programmes. The Spanish education system has a special culture of school change, which can both foster and impede development and implementation of ESI programmes.

The impulse of many teachers to improve education is among the characteristics that define change, clearly exemplified by the existence of strong Pedagogic Renovation Movements. Moreover, the fact that the Spanish school leadership model emphasises the principal as a natural leader at school, makes it easier for him/her to mobilise the rest of the teachers. Implementation of reform of the education system should also be underlined, because it means challenge for schools. Among the elements that impede the change, the following are stressed: limited use of school autonomy; lack of support by the educational authorities; and that teachers do not always have a sense of belonging or commitment to their schools. The absence of available local literature on school effectiveness and school improvement and the few people who read the existing literature also needs highlighting. As a whole, it can be stated that in Spain there is a very defined tendency to immobilise, making it difficult to find schools involved in change processes.

But Spain is not a special or isolated case: every education system has its own characteristics, conditions, and history that define what is happening in each school. As a consequence, if research on effectiveness, improvement, or effective school improvement intends to be more useful and to propose theories and models of universal validity, it must be more sensitive to contextual contributions. Therefore, our most important conclusion is the need to carry out more international research. Comparative studies are of great help for the development of the educational sciences, and being acquainted to them is a must for researchers.

Other than this, we reiterate that the most relevant ESI factors in the Spanish case studies seem to be: the planning of the improvement process and the self-regulative improvement cycle; a school organisation that facilitates the school's "core business": principal leadership; and teacher involvement, collaboration, and development. The least relevant elements are external agents and parental involvement. Those factors are coherent with the results found in other research projects and can be considered the "tangible" contribution of the case studies to the elaboration of an Effective School Improvement model.