Unified Rugby Course

➢ Limiting Barriers and Assumptions

Trust Rugby International Spain
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Unified education requires analysis and reflection on the barriers that create inequalities, planning actions for improvement, implementing changes effectively and evaluating their impact, from the perspective that the road to inclusion is a continuous process of improvement.

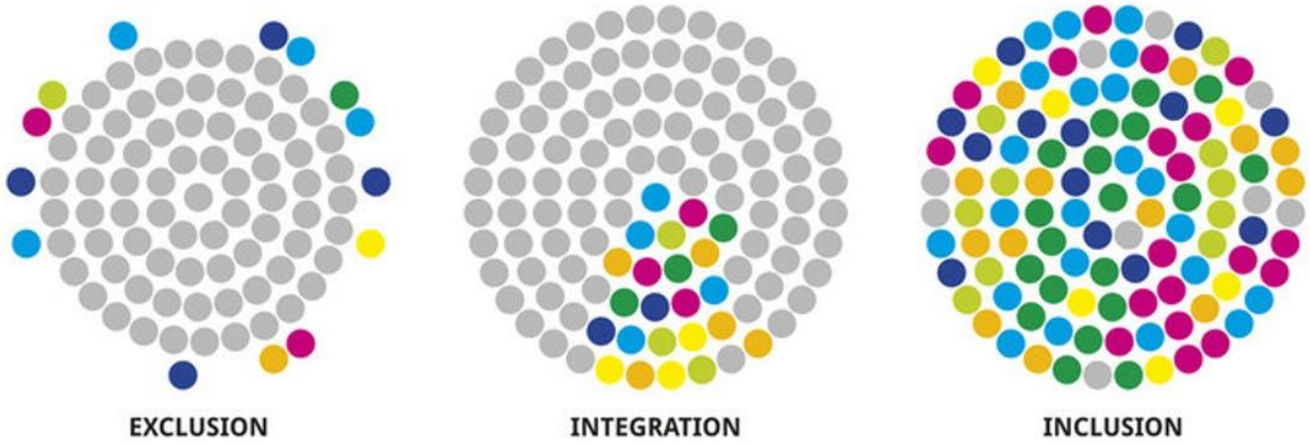
The general lines of action that characterise the inclusive education model and guarantee the development of its principles are: **the identification and elimination of barriers in the context**, the enlistment of resources to respond to diversity, the commitment to unified culture and values, and the development of a curriculum for inclusion.

The first element refers to the identification and removal of barriers that may be present in the school and socio-cultural context and in all the dimensions that define unified schooling: cultures; planning processes, organisation and functioning and practices. Particular emphasis should be placed on the start of schooling and at transition points.

SOCIALLY EXCLUDED GROUPS

According to Afonso and Sastre (2017), the types of groups that are mainly affected by social exclusion, i.e. those who are most vulnerable to social exclusion, are classified as follows:

- Young people under 25 years of age, without formal training, with school failure or in a situation of abandonment and/or family breakdown.
- Dependent people.
- Victims of gender-based or child violence.
- People in a situation of long-term unemployment.
- Single-parent families.
- Immigrants.
- Victims of discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin, sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Former drug addicts and ex-prisoners.
- Ethnic minorities.
- Physically, mentally and sensorially handicapped.



BARRIERS IN THE TRAINING PROCESS

Barriers to presence, learning and participation. The concept of 'barriers to learning and participation' was developed by Booth and Ainscow (Ainscow, 1999; Booth, 2000; Booth and Ainscow, 2002). It is a core concept in relation to the way in which trainers should approach their educational work with learners who are disadvantaged or more vulnerable to exclusion processes. This concept emphasises a contextual or social perspective on learning difficulties or disability. It makes us see that such difficulties arise from the interaction between the learners and their contexts: the social and economic circumstances affecting their lives, the people, the educational

policy, the culture of the environments of participation, the teaching methods. As Echeita (2002) points out, understanding the dependence of any disadvantaged participant on the social factors that inevitably influence their lives and with which they interact from their personal conditions allows us to appreciate that, when their social environment respects and accepts difference as part of their reality, makes itself accessible in all senses and mobilises to provide the different supports that each one needs, disability is "diluted" and we only find ourselves with people who can lead a self-determined and average life. On the contrary, when their environment is filled with "barriers" (social, cultural, attitude, material, economic...), which make it difficult, for example, to access the system, to remain in it with quality or to make the transition between stages and to adult life, disability "reappears". Therefore, the very concept of learning difficulties or disability cannot be understood without considering the mediating effect of the context in which the pupil develops.

Barriers that can coexist in three dimensions:

1. At the level or dimension of culture (shared values, beliefs and attitudes).

2. In planning, coordination and operational processes (educational and curricular projects, committees and teams, management, timetables, groupings, distribution of resources, etc.).

3. In real practices; teaching methodology, type of interdependence between participants, evaluation practices, resources, etc.

Many of the barriers lie outside the school. They are at the level of national policies, education systems, teacher training systems, budgets and resources. In other words, many of the resources needed to develop unified education are outside the mainstream school and the classroom. They are, for example, in families and communities. It is also necessary to remember that the barriers that we must analyse are not only those that can limit learning and participation, but also those that affect the teaching staff and the rest of the people who live together and participate in the life of a school. We could even say that, if they are not the first to feel welcomed, valued and respected by others, it will be difficult for them to carry out their work in favourable conditions to promote learning and participation. The absence of a policy for welcoming new members of a teaching team, the lack of coordination of work, hostile or isolated relationships, the lack of internal or external motivations are, among others, obstacles or barriers that negatively condition teaching work.

Once the barriers have been recognised, the next step for the teacher or trainer is to propose alternatives to the presentation of information, to design models that encourage the expression and participation of everyone and their different learning styles. As this is a complex issue, given that no two learning styles are the same, what we propose is not to focus on how to involve people with one or another learning disability or difficulty, but to establish some general guidelines that will help to eliminate most of the barriers in the activities.

For communication barriers

If we agree that opting for a single means of communication between participants and information is a barrier for certain people to be able to participate in the dynamics of the group; the unified strategies to be implemented in this case so that this does not happen would involve offering different communication systems in the group, which not only rely on the auditory route with the

use of oral language. If the communicative exchange is foreseen by offering other communicative channels such as visual, tactile, pictographic, signed or gestural, students who have problems using oral language will be able to access information through these models.

This implies prior preparation of the material to be presented to the students. It is therefore important for us to be aware of the communicative styles of our students.

But not only do we remove barriers to communication by presenting information in this way, but we also allow students to present it using these media and to express themselves about everything they have learned. Therefore, when designing activities in which participants have to present their work orally, foresee that they can do so using multiple forms of communication.

For physical barriers

Perhaps this is one of the barriers that is least difficult for us to identify, and yet it is one of the most frequent in our proposals. Physical barriers are not only found in the steps, when we propose activities with a strong psychomotor content, without any alternative to participate in the activity, we are putting up physical barriers. If we propose an exercise where graphomotor skills are essential (drawing, writing...), we are putting up barriers. If I design an activity or exercise in which I offer alternatives in its execution (audio recording, choice of illustrations, writing to dictation...) I am breaking down physical barriers. If I propose multiple ways of presenting activities in which I am not assessing the student's motor skills but the acquisition of a specific competence, and I offer them different ways of expressing themselves and being able to assess their learning, I am eliminating barriers to participation.

For sensory barriers

It seems, and I say this from my own experience in my work, that sensory barriers are the ones to which all teachers are most sensitive. Having a blind or deaf student in the group implies a higher empathy point than with other disabilities. With little guidance, teachers realise that they cannot only propose visual exercises, but that they must provide linguistic or tactile aids, offer textured reliefs, additional verbal information, audio descriptions, omit here or there... A whole series of inclusive strategies that almost immediately break down the sensory barriers for these pupils.

For structural barriers

The previous barriers are directly linked to another type of barrier, which are the structural barriers of the group, those that propose learning situations in an unorganised environment, without stable work routines, without anticipation of what is going to happen at each moment, without organisation of the work... These are great barriers for those participants who present learning styles that require a great structuring of the environment, with visual supports that guide them as to what has to be done; spatial supports, with distribution of spaces that help them to know where they have to do it; and with routine structures that provide them with the security to know when they have to do it. If we also provide the activity with a predictable work system, we help the student or participant to overcome these structural barriers and focus their attention on the real learning proposed.

Therefore, each proposed activity must adhere to this structure and when designing it we must foresee in which area, or in which place in the notebook it is going to take place; how much time we are going to dedicate to it; where to start the activity; when it ends; what it is used for....

For cognitive barriers

Most of the activities and exercises that we propose in the group have a strong cognitive component in order to be solved. Mental processes are activated and all the necessary Executive Functions are put to work in order to tackle the task successfully. However, there are a number of participants who have learning styles in which certain executive functions are not activated autonomously or have a lot of problems in doing so. In these situations, if we demand tasks from participants without anticipating the cognitive barriers we are leaving them out of participation and their own progress.

To avoid these obstacles, we can use various inclusive strategies that act as mediators between the learner and the task in order to activate the required mental process. But it is not only in the way of presenting activities that cognitive obstacles are present, but also in the way of expressing them or motivating the participants for these tasks. Another way to avoid cognitive obstacles would be to assimilate the fact that we acquire knowledge through different ways and therefore we must present it through as many ways as possible. We are talking about multiple Intelligences.

For curricular barriers

This is one of the most serious problems of our education system. We have grown up with a single school model that proposed a homogeneous and rigid curriculum that everyone had to reach at the same time and at the same age. The word "level" thus acquires its worst expression by becoming synonymous with exclusion: if you have a curricular level you participate, if you don't have a curricular level you can't do this; whether it is used for the low level or the high level (high abilities). This is the most important barrier that is systematically proposed in schools and against which it is most difficult to fight. It is an invisible barrier because it requires opening the teacher's eyes to new possibilities of curriculum design, a curriculum design in which all participants have a place. We can achieve this with Multilevel Design, if when designing the activities we propose different levels of complexity for their resolution, we will open the doors to all. This multilevel design must be accompanied, in order to be more effective, by additional strategies such as Cooperative Learning and Shared Teaching.

Learning to think, time to think.

Lately there has been a lot of talk, and rightly so, about the importance of thinking in educational fields. Congresses such as ICOT 2015, proposals such as Robert Swartz's Center for Teaching Thinking or the titles in SM's Library of Educational Innovation are just a small sample. But is there anything new in all this? Hasn't the purpose of education and training, at all levels, always been to generate knowledge through processes of critical and reflective thinking?

Perhaps these new actions are due, precisely, to the fact that over the years, that purpose of teaching to think that seemed inherent to education has been replaced by a teaching devoid of spaces for reflection, by a teaching closer to the definition in the dictionary, which is none other than "to instruct, indoctrinate, train

with rules or precepts", by a teaching assimilated to the process of depositing content in the minds of students. And all this despite the fact that learning to think should undoubtedly be the main objective and raison d'être of education. Without this ability, it will be difficult for us to progress autonomously, to imagine and create possible worlds, to question others that should not exist and, in short, to be free.

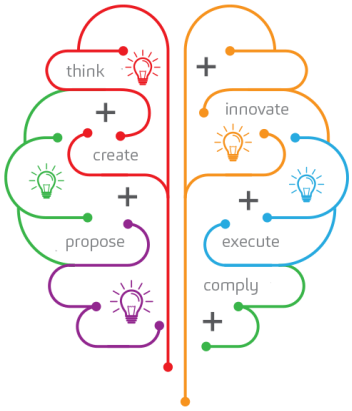
And why talk about time?

Because in the society of immediacy, of fast food and fast learning, of multitasking and (supposed) efficiency, it seems that we do not have time to think, starting with teachers and trainers, who are increasingly dedicated to administrative and bureaucratic tasks, and continuing with students, and then by students, crammed with content whose ultimate aim seems to be to pass assessments more concerned with the quantity than the quality of what they learn, when in fact research shows us that thinking and reflecting are an essential part of learning, and when this means that we need time to think - and to talk - about the ideas that new concepts and new information give rise to.

In her book Time to Think: Listening to Ignite the Human Mind, Nancy Kline reminds us how more and more people say "we don't have time to think about what we need to do; we're too busy doing it" when, in fact, time spent thinking is time gained to act more effectively. This author introduces an idea that can be key in educational contexts: the creation of environments conducive to reflection. In addition to time, one of the fundamental components of such environments is equality. Another is respectful and uninterrupted listening. Another is the avoidance of limiting prejudices. Another is appreciation, i.e. positive reinforcement. Taken in the context of the classroom (but also in the context of sport and work) this means that everyone has time to think and to express themselves without being interrupted, while receiving respectful and interested attention from their peers.

How often do teachers, instead of letting students find their own answers, offer the solutions?

Do we really allow time for people to think and to express their ideas? Are we able to listen to them without interrupting and without interpreting what they say? How many times do we ask a question in class and if the student does not answer the first time we move on to the next one, assuming that he does not know the answer when, in fact, he is thinking? How many times, even in everyday conversations, when there is a space of silence our interlocutor apologises and says "sorry, I'm thinking", assuming that if he or she does not clarify, we may believe that he or she has drawn a blank or does not have the answer? How many times do teachers or trainers, instead of leaving others to find their own answers, offer the solutions?



Are we limited by our assumptions?

And how often we make assumptions about what we do not know exactly: these are 'pre-judgements' and they are usually negative. But these negative assumptions, which can become limiting to our thoughts and behaviours, can be reversed and turned into liberating prejudices. This requires time to think about these biases and a model of question formulation that can be summarised in the following example.

Person A I would like to share an idea I have with my superior, but I cannot.

Person B Why not?

A I think he will laugh at me.

B Why do you think he will laugh at you?

A I suppose he'll think my idea is stupid.

B Why are you assuming that he/she will think your idea is stupid?

A I assume I am stupid.

This is when the interlocutor may say something like "Of course you're not stupid. And we may or may not follow this advice and talk to our superior.

But what if Person B were to say instead:

B Do you really think it's true that you're stupid?

A Well, no...

B What are your reasons for not thinking you are stupid?

A Because I (person A fills in the blank) ...

B Instead, what should you take on in order to be able to share your idea with your superior?

A I would have to assume that I am intelligent.

B So, if you knew you were smart, how would you go about sharing your idea?

A I would just talk to him/her.

The boss might not agree with my idea, but he would certainly feel that he was making an effort worth taking seriously.

Of course, there is no absolute guarantee that the manager will not laugh at Person A's idea. But if that is the case, the person suggesting the idea can still walk away knowing that they have really made the effort. They might also take the opportunity for another thought. And, on the other hand, just think about what positive outcomes might occur if the superior supported the idea and what opportunities would be lost if the idea had never been shared.

Adapted from Nancy Kline: Time to Think. + info at https://www.timetothink.com/