

INCLUSION PROJECT: «EDUCATION WITH QUALITY FOR ALL»

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INTRODUCTION

The 'Fundação Síndrome de Down - FSD (Down's Syndrome Foundation) in Campinas was created in 1985 by three parents of children born with Down's Syndrome . It was created with the firm intention of building up some long lasting work, which could be quickly multiplied.

The Down's Syndrome Foundation is a non-profit organization whose main objective is to provide people with Down's Syndrome with an opportunity for their full development. In trying to achieve that, the Foundation has created and maintained a school structure - The 'Centro de Desenvolvimento Integral - CDI' (The Whole Development Center)- where children and youngsters participate in physical, educational, artistic, professional and speech related activities.

The idea of starting some systematic work with *inclusion* at the Down's Syndrome Foundation came up in the first semester of 1997 with a group of parents who met every two weeks at the Foundation, to discuss themes of common interest.

A group called InterAction Group was then created , and it was made up of parents and professionals of the Foundation, whose initial objectives were to move and to inform the regular public and private schools of the need to support the inclusion of students with Down's Syndrome and to offer our partnership with such schools, that is, to provide them with any kind of information that would facilitate inclusion.

To achieve that, the group contacted schools in Campinas and prepared informative material.

The project has grown ,and we are presently trying to send most of our students to the regular schools. The unfolding of this project has been enormous. We will have to modify our working structure, and to think of a «new» future for the Foundation.

The main consequences of this project are :

- to direct most of our students to the regular school system;
- to change part of the Foundation into a center of professional training and development,
- aiming at inclusion and education with quality for all.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Because we believe in the school inclusion, the Foundation intends to make it possible for its students to achieve a normal and full development, as well as it intends to cooperate to the achievement of at least some of the objectives of the national policy of special education as follows:

- Awareness raising of the school community for the importance of the presence of special education students in the regular school system;

- Admittance of the student with disability to the regular classes, whenever possible;
- School attendance throughout the schooling years, considered the students' own pace;
- Support to the regular school system in order to create the conditions for the integration of the ones with special needs;
- Offering of pedagogical conditions for the experience of situations which would allow them to develop gradually more complex levels of independence;
- Preparation of the students to actively participate in the social, cultural, sports, arts and professional activities;
- Permanent evaluation, with an emphasis on the pedagogical aspect, aiming at identifying the possibilities for the development of the student. (Resource material to set the basis for the IV Executive MEC TV debates; Proceedings of the 2nd Cycle of Debates/ Special Education: Education for All, Municipal Secretary of Education of Campinas)

In 1998, the Foundation sent several of its students to the regular schools within a program which shall be described below.

THE PROJECT OFFERS

Specialized services to the students

The students with Down's Syndrome go to the FSD twice per week totaling 8 hours weekly, whereby they are taken care of in the pedagogical and speech therapy areas.

Services offered to the teachers

In 1998, the Down's Syndrome Foundation followed up on 24 schools, carrying out periodical meetings with teachers who hosted our students, together with directors, pedagogical counselors, 'mobile' teachers and teaching supervisors. These meetings aim at supporting the inclusion of our students through the exchange of experiences with the other professionals, and through the offering of informative material which meet the needs of each place and professional. Throughout the year we offer free of charge to the teachers who have received our students a study group concerning literacy. The study group has a two-hour meeting weekly. However, the interest shown by the teachers for the study group was very little.

We have also received at the Foundation's school structure, the CDI (Centro de Desenvolvimento Integral), the visit of several professionals from the schools where our students were placed, and where the aims were similar to the ones in the above cited meetings.

We have also intended to offer courses, talks(to families, janitors, and other students at the schools), other study groups, workshops, whose suggested themes will come from the needs of those teachers involved in the project. Such needs have been raised through discussions and exchange of experiences which take place during the meetings.

Services offered to parents through

Group meetings and/or individual meetings with the professionals involved with the project, whenever necessary.

Services to the community

Work of the InterAction group - a group of parents and professionals that aim at preparing and distributing informative materials which can facilitate the inclusion process through awareness raising of the society in general.

EVALUATION

In 1998 we directed 34 students to the regular school, 7 of whom left the Foundation. We could then follow up on 27 of them. In quantitative terms, this is not a very significant number, considering that a total of 77 students were assisted in the Foundation.

The students

From the total number of students, 4 left the program during the semester and one student joined the project in the second semester of 1988. From the total number of students directed to the regular school only 3 failed the first grade and one returned to the special school (in this case to the FSD), because of the parents' decision to do so.

The students who attended the regular school showed:

- significant improvement in their behavior and in their social relationship with the others;
- greater independence and autonomy;
- improvement in the learning of reading and writing;
- significant improvement in speech.

This evaluation was done by comparing the student with him/herself at the beginning and at the end of the year.

We are also drawing a comparing the students who went to the regular school system with the ones who stayed at the FSD. This study has not been completed yet. The first results coincide with the data mentioned above, the students who attended the regular school showed a better development (global : speech, behavior, cognitive, etc.) than those who stayed at the FSD.

The teachers and the regular schools

- Most of the teachers of the regular schools

were very receptive and open to both our students and our professionals.

- The possibility of an interesting dialogue was offered with an emphasis on the experience exchange between the professionals of the FSD and the professionals of the regular schools. In those dialogues we gained an important space where we can pass on information about Down's Syndrome, promote debates about inclusion, literacy, teaching methodologies and evaluation procedures.
- In some schools it was possible to hold meetings with all the professionals working at the school, and not only with those who were more directly involved with the students from the FSD. This is very important because as the movement in favor of inclusion grows, soon all the classrooms will have children with disability.
- There were instances in which we could contribute to discussions about students who did not belong to the FSD.
- Several professionals from the regular schools became interested in knowing more about the work we do and came to visit us.

It is extremely important to say how much we could learn and improve our practice as a result of those contacts.

It was that experience that made us, for example, change our evaluation parameters, by changing our level of demand (making it higher) given the results shown in the activities performed by our students.

The parents

By questioning the parents about their children's many absences from school, we could see that the parents lack a certain awareness of the role the school plays in their children's lives. That was something we had been working on during our meetings and

specially with the groups of parents and the psychologist. Most parents say that they do not expect their children to be able to read and write in the regular school, but they expect them to learn appropriate social behaviors there.

They also expect integration of their children with the other classmates.

We also noticed that some parents have low expectations regarding their children's potential and a tendency to «facilitate» their own life. It has led some parents to prefer leaving their child at the Foundation only, which offers activities most of the

time during the entire week, than having the trouble of taking their child to two different schools. This issue has been constantly brought up in our meetings with parents.

Furthermore we noticed that it is very difficult for some parents to understand the Foundation's role regarding the support groups. Some parents think the Foundation is the place for the children to socialize, to meet and to make friends. However, this is not our aim as far as the support groups are concerned; our work has more to do with an individualized remedial tutoring to help in the school work. And at this stage of the project a minimum attendance is necessary.