

## **A PERSONAL REDEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR ADOLESCENTS FROM THE FOURTH WORLD**

**CINTRA**, Barcelona (Spain)

### **1.- Rationale for the Definition:**

We call it "*Reconstruction Program*" because it is not about building something new, but of RECOVERING what already lives in the interior of each adolescent who because of social circumstances and family disintegration have touched bottom.

*Cintra* strives to be an opportunity that awakens what is most genuine in each person, achieving personal and social integration, and avoiding the repetition of the negative structures they have been living.

*Cintra* strives to be a place for Self-knowledge and "Growth."

### **2.- CINTRA today:**

*Cintra* is a school funded by the Government of Catalonia providing aid to Obligatory Secondary Education (E.S.O.); this educational stage includes 12 to 16 year olds. This center is located in the slum area of Raval of Barcelona.

Its educational program is designed for adolescents in considerable social risk. The majority come from dysfunctional families and suffer the consequences of social marginalization.

### **3.- Origin of Cintra:**

*Cintra* has its origin in an inter-congregational initiative. Its aim is to respond to the needs of those who live in grave circumstances: that is, social degradation of the slum, school failure and the lack of a family structure, factors that bring about a high rate of school absenteeism. A group of men and women religious reflected on how they could address this need. This culminated in the creation of an E.S.O. center adapted to these adolescents.

On March 22, 1996 nine Religious Congregations created the *Cintra Association* attaining juridical status for all the projects that could arise in the area of poverty and marginalization. At present, thirty nine Congregations are part of the Association.

### **4.- The slums:**

In the slums of Raval you find large groups of people from various countries and cultures in a critical state of marginalization. The difficult conditions lived by these groups lead them to prostitution, drug addiction, street violence, theft... thus increasing the problems of the existing dysfunction.

### **5.- The word CINTRA:**

"*Cintra*" (in Spanish) is a term used in architecture and engineering. It is the framework that sustains an arch until the central rock is set in place.

Symbolically, *Cintra's* desire is to be this framework that helps solidify the inner "arch" of each student's identity. All of us who are part of the Educational Project want to be an ARC to the adolescents during the four years that they study in E.S.O..

Its fundamental objective is to offer the possibility of a future with dignity to these youth and to break the cycle of marginalization. Like the blind man at the side of the road to whom Jesus, not only returns his sight, but also places him on a new path (Mc. 10, 46-52,) *Cintra* wants to take these adolescents out of their social marginalization and place them on the road to personal and social integration, equipped with values, knowledge, positive experiences, new interests, new goals.

## 6.-Student Profile:

- The majority of the students come from experiences of failure in school and broken families, some from marginalized conditions. The consequences are serious emotional, psychological, educational and behavioral imbalance.
- Many of them have experienced physical and emotional abandonment.
- Their life experiences force them to look for ways to survive. One of these ways is to become “hardened”, tough in their surroundings. This hard facade hides hidden and unconscious depressions, and drives them to delinquency, drug addiction, and social dysfunctions.
- They must hide their sensitivity and weaknesses because these can be dangerous in their struggle for survival.
- These adolescents lack the love and authority of adults. Many “enjoy” extreme freedom in day time, as well as at night. That is why they reject boundaries, from whatever source.
- Some of them find themselves obliged to assume responsibilities proper to the adults in the “family”. They are suddenly forced to abandon their infancy.
- The majority of the students come from Public or State Schools where, due to their problems, they have not been able to integrate. When they come to “Cintra” they fall into two basic types.
  - A. Many want to change, to be helped, to *mean* something to someone. In this group we find the proper foundation for an Educational Intervention.
  - B. Others, however, arrive too “burned out,” with very serious mental problems that “Cintra” cannot address. In this case, they are referred to Day Hospitals for psychiatric treatment, to centers for detoxification, to homeless shelters...

## 7.- Pedagogical Team: Composition

- One Director
- Eight tutors
- Two professors from: “Department of Educational Strategic Plan. Cataluña”
- Special Professors for C.V. (Miscellaneous Credits)
- Volunteers

We serve 50 students

### 7.1.- Teacher Profile:

The teachers are the principal designers of the entire educational program. Key words in our vocabulary are: *Dialogue, Respect, Process and Belief in the Students*. Thus, they must have certain personal dispositions:

- **Able to educate in values by their own attitudes.** The relation professor/student is so close that the students are able to “read” their teachers, the authenticity of their personal positions, of their words, of their performance. Thus, the importance of personal genuineness.
- **Capable of challenging with certain conviction,** making demands only at critical moments, when there is a threat against Respect towards a person from the Center or from outside. This requires dialogue and flexibility.
- **Capable of feeling empathy,** not only with the student himself, but with the situation which he/she lives. In this sense, they must be persons who *believe that the student can change*.
- **Capable of reflecting on the incidents which takes place,** positive as well as negative. We cannot stay on the “surface” of the events, but must understand them from within. It is important to recount the *Process* of each one.

- **Capable of team work** and integration with other professors. It is essential that each member experience the support of the group, especially in times of frustration and helplessness.
- **Capable of psychologically tolerating pressures** that come from contact with broken persons and their harsh realities. We must look for a psychological equilibrium that includes a capacity for reflection on the educational task and the possibility of disconnecting from the same.

Throughout the year, we receive specific training according to the needs that surface.

## 7.2. Volunteers:

We also have at our disposal a group of volunteers, religious and lay, who are receptive to all that has to do with the world of exclusion. They address various needs: tutoring, secretarial work, accompanying students to hospitals and psychologists, looking for new locales and subsidies from Foundations, banks and businesses, groups of Alumni, participating in the School for Parents, visiting the student's families at their homes, showing interest in their problems and getting involved in finding possible solutions.

## 7.3. Reason for our Educational Option:

Upon initiating the Program, we prioritized the principle of *PERSONAL FOCUS*. We do not want to be another school from the slums that repeats the same patterns and causes the same consequences. We want to offer an alternative: that each student be fully tutored.

## 8.- Educational Proposal of CINTRA

### 8-1. Specific Curricular Adaptation

*Cintra* offers certain programs that are adapted to the individual needs of each student so that they will terminate the E.S.O. with the training needed to enter the work force.

A) *The common credits* are identical to those given by any center of E.S.O. The difference is the particular level of each student. The teachers prepare much of the material that is used by each student.

B) *The Elective Credits* provide an overall vision of certain trades, they develop interests and skills that will help them choose a job, or average level studies. Trades such as:

Carpentry, Electricity, Auto and bicycle Mechanics, Hotel Management, Beautician...

### 8.2. The Basis for the educational intervention of CINTRA:

Garcia Roca states: *"To educate is to teach how to live, placing relationship first above all. Exclusion hurts the most intimate part of the person, their confidence, their desire. That is why we put all our effort into building emotional niches, the tender spaces, because in order to become persons of Reason, We Must Awaken Feelings."*

From this stand point, *Cintra* opts for:

- An **individualized intervention** that will adapt to the needs and aptitudes of each student so that he/she may have the same opportunities as all;
- A **socialization** process as the foundation for integration into a harmonious coexistence in society;
- An **education in freedom** and responsibility that will bring about autonomy.
- A **participation** that will make it possible for them to be active agents of their own growth.

### 8.2.1. **Tutelage:**

We understand tutoring to be the professor's ability to stand along side the student, to live the personal processes with him, helping him resolve his behavioral problems of: learning, autonomy-dependence, relationship... This means knowing how to reach the sensitivity of each student, and provide him with resources for a more purposeful and happy life.

The tutor must be capable of *accompanying* the students in their growth process, developing Tutorial Objectives for the integral growth of each one, providing the resources needed to live a more focused and fulfilled life.

The tutor will place special emphasis on building a close, warm, and caring relationship, breaking down the obscurity in which they have always lived, and reviving their dignity and their wish to change. The Process is initiated.

We work so that the relationship tutor/student will help him feel that he *means* a great deal to someone. With this *Experience* emerges a more positive and motivating self image is born.

### 8.2.2. **Individual Tutoring:**

In practice, each tutor is responsible for six students during the school year. It can happen, and it has happened, that a tutor intervenes in the tutorial process of students from other groups for diverse reasons. What is important is that ALL the students feel that their needs for growth and maturing are looked after.

Each tutor has one and a half hours a week to personally spend time with each student of his/her class.

Furthermore, the tutor looks after the students at any given moment when serious difficulties emerge. It is important to confront and solve these situations when they arise. In these instances, the other professors take charge of the class left unattended by the tutor.

### 8.2.3. **Group tutoring:**

#### **A) Base Group:**

We begin the day joining the two classes which form the one grade level with the two tutors and the volunteers assigned to that day. We call this meeting, Base Group. It usually lasts from thirty to forty five minutes, and it is an informal time for motivation.

Its objectives are:

- To create a suitable environment before starting the day's work.
- To help form a good relationship among all.
- To dialogue on the happenings of the previous day.
- To prime them in having a positive attitude for the rest of the new day.

#### **B) Class Group Tutoring:**

Each tutor has one hour a week for group tutoring. It is a time for dialogue, for positive confrontation, for listening to others, participation, and reflecting on diverse topics.

- At the beginning of the academic year the tutorial hours are routine, because it is difficult for them to *be on good terms* with the others and with themselves. Later on, they *desire* this time. These experiences begin to strengthen their integration into *Cintra*.
- At this point it is possible to "*stretch*" each one a little bit more in the process.
- When the group is well formed you appeal to the sincerity of all to face group or individual conflicts. They learn to analyze with respect and resolve the conflicts.

These relational experiences, repeated again and again, end up *Giving Shape* to a different way of being, of feeling and of behaving.

## 9.- Conclusions:

1. Discovering the relationship between Teaching as a Vocation and the personal story makes it easy to see Education as a developing process and mutual enrichment (one not only gives, but also receives).
2. The educator must believe in his/her own abilities and in the possibility of discovering others, especially when they work in extremely socially disadvantaged places and with the “brokenness” of young people.
3. We must *believe* in these students, and specifically, with patience, understanding, do all we can to overcome all that appears difficult. These attitudes, by themselves, already bring about healing.
4. Education should become a *service of proximity*, where communication, personal attention, cooperation and gratitude are practiced. The teacher must feel emotionally involved in the educational process of the student. All of this will help break down social exclusion.
5. The educational process should create an *Alliance* between the healthy part of the student and the teacher in such a way that together they can fight the “*illness*” that the student carries inside and that destroys the rest. In this manner a richer inner world can help him/her in the immediate future. It is important to foster those “*interior processes*” that foster security and well being.
6. Impossibility of depending on external interventions. The educational process must be *creative* and follows these steps:
  - First of all, observe the problem, the risk, the difficulty...
  - Following, the most adequate and enriching response is prepared for the student.
  - He/she modifies it according to the way the process evolves and the results that are observed. First and foremost, the educator must be convinced of the steps that he proposes, as well as convincing the students.
7. Involve the students in their own growth process with clear descriptions of their different experiences, so that, understanding their own process they will, little by little, learn more about themselves, identifying the causes and the consequences of their actions. And in that way discover the help that they can give themselves. We must not impose ourselves on others, but *walk with them and begin where they are at*.
8. There are two ways to face a problem:
  - 8.1. “*Attack*” the external symptoms, eliminating them, rejecting them, not giving them a place as educational “*material*.”
  - 8.2. Try to “*Deprogram*” fixed behaviors in the following manner:
    - A.) Find the various triggers that set their problematic behavior or conduct in motion without categorizing them at any time. It is important to formulate questions such as these:

*Why does he act in this way? What protective barriers is he creating? What anguish, fear, weakness makes him manifest him/herself in this way? What purpose does the lie, the theft, the violence serve...? What space must one enter in order to help him recreate himself in a different way? What is the healthy self and how can that form part of the building process? How can we foster a strong mental attitude in order to face their problems with greater insight?*

B.) Have a more comprehensive understanding of the situations lived by the students, and share that with them at key moments.

C.) Gradually engage in dialogue with the students regarding the hurts they carry within themselves and that are manifested in their conflictive behavior; a dialogue that opens them up to discover others *Esthers*, other *Cassandras*, other *Marcos*, within themselves, and not only those aspects that stand out above the others. Dialogues that will help them discover parts of themselves that are more complete, more wholesome, richer.

D.) Think of new ways of acting that breakdown habitual behavioral patterns.

E.) Discovering the symptoms that *predict a reaction*. We all have buttons that are pushed when we come into contact with triggering agents. It is good to name these “triggers” that can come from without, as well as from within oneself.

WE EDUCATE WHEN WE OPERATE FROM WITHIN THE VERY PROCESS OF  
EDUCATING