

IMPLEMENTATION OF SERA CYCLE 1 - SPAIN

Deciding who: trainer and students' features

- The whole board of teachers at CEPER Retamar were informed about the imminent period of implementation of SERA Cycle 1. Previously, the Department of Education in Almeria had agreed and given permission to “break up” with the usual teaching planning. At the same time, the Prison Management also agreed on the implementation of SERA, as long as some requirements were met (to be taught always to the same group of students and in the same place). Considering the requirements and after discussion, the teachers agreed that the most suitable unit to take action was Unit 21 of El Acebuche Prison (Almeria, Spain), mainly due to the specific functioning of this unit: Unit 21 is what in the Spanish prison system is known as a “respect” unit. In general terms, this means that the inmates freely choose to enter this unit, where they must follow a special program – they must attend school or carry out any educational activity, they must have had a positive progress during their imprisonment so that they are able to reach 3rd Regime in a short period of time, they weekly debate and decide in assembly different aspects of their everyday life in the unit, etc.). Regarding the school, the fact that it is always open for students (morning and afternoons) and it is part of their everyday routine also favoured this decision, together with the teacher’s acceptance (Ms. Fabiola) and her schedule availability. So, the students at Unit 21 were informed of SERA program and were proposed to follow it, to which they agreed on a voluntary basis and showed their willingness to do so.

- It is fair to remark that no radicalized or at risk of radicalisation inmate is currently imprisoned in El Acebuche (that could happen in the future, though). Nevertheless, we decided to test the sequences since the observations during the implementation period can always give valuable feedback. Also, some of the inmates who went through the program had committed crimes related to gender-based violence, which could be considered as violent extremist attitudes.

Remarks on implementation: adapting SERA to the specific context

- Added to the context described above, we faced with the necessity of adapting the original timing of the program from 6 hours to 4 hours, mainly due to the prison organization of the daily activities but also to make it fit with the teacher’s schedule. To do this, we needed to select some sequences which we considered more significant for our students, and discard others which neither could have been carried out for security reasons (cooking, for instance) nor fitted the 4 daily hours given their timing or structure.

We also had to adapt some sequences or work on two at a time to cover with their content due to the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Spanish Constitution (6th December) as a mandatory activity proposed by the General Department of Penitentiary Institutions to all prisons in Spain

- The testing period started on 22nd October and finished on 30th November.

- 18 male students (average of 45 years old) completed the program from beginning to end, plus 4 or 5 who joined along the course. According to their academic level, most of them attended Level 2 (last stage of primary education).

- As mentioned before, the teacher leading the training was the one in Unit 21, Ms. Fabiola; however, some other teachers have also implemented some hours of Cycle 1, either because they regularly teach some hours in that unit (Ramón and Constanza, 6 and 4 hours respectively) or because some help was needed at some point (Fernando and Rafael for the sports sequences with 4 hours both). Occasionally, external people have contributed in some sequences (speakers), and Juan Carlos as school headmaster and national coordinator of the program and Valeria as collaborator in the opening and closing of Cycle 1.

- The first day the students were given a notebook each so that they could write down whatever done and felt during the development of the sequences.

- Basically, the sequences which were adapted were:

- + E2. Enlightened communication - Billy Elliot.

In this case, students watched a very popular and well accepted Spanish film from last year, “Campeones”, since it was an activity to celebrate the Constitution anniversary included in the prison’s schedule. Because of the plot of the movie – accepting and dealing with disabilities, but also resilience – the teacher decided to work on sequence P30. Growing stronger in adversity, on resilience, and which also presented a movie.

- + E8. We get informed, E6. Let’s learn about social networks, both dealing with media literacy, and S6. No to inequity, working on the Constitution, human rights or justice.

Also as a mandatory activity to celebrate the Constitution anniversary, a journalist from the local press was invited to give a talk, so the teacher took the opportunity to work on E8 and E6 contents. On the other hand, the mayor of a town near Almeria was invited for a talk on the Constitution and Human rights, which served to cover S6 contents.

- As variation complement to some of the sequences, students designed three large wallcharts showing what had been worked, and placed them in the classroom and the corridor of the school building:

- + one wallchart showed mandalas representing the students’ expectations about all the things they were about to learn and the commitment they had undertaken when accepting to participate in SERA Cycle 1.

- + the second wallchart was on the film “Campeones”: cut –outs from the local press and students’ reflections about the values the film transmits.

- + the third wallchart reflected the different cultural and sport activities carried out in the course (photos without faces to transfer beliefs, resilience, culture...).

- The closing day of Cycle 1 the Prison Manager, together with Ms Fabiola, Juan Carlos and Valeria, awarded the participants with a Certificate of Attendance to SERA Cycle 1 in a very joyful, relaxed and friendly atmosphere.

Final thoughts

- According to the trainer, Fabiola, the students were very excited at the idea of participating in the program, and they took it as a challenge because, on the whole, they show great interest in their own cultural and educational training.

It must be said that the students' degree of involvement in the program was quite good, acceptable and constant, even if they had to face the difficulty of having to attend school two hours more a day than they are used to. The heterogeneous nature of the group and the lack of time at certain points where they were required to deal with personal unavoidable matters so frequent in prison couldn't stop the experience from being a success.

- From the students' perspective, on the closing day they were asked a first question: Did any change take place after the program? Some of their answers were: "yes, from a psychological point of view; increasing participation in the activities, get to know oneself and others more deeply, learn to trust and respect, teamwork, assertiveness...". More specifically, they stated to have enjoyed especially the sport activities, the work with fables...

To conclude, students took turns to briefly say a sentence about the course (a feeling, an opinion, what they enjoyed the most, what they would like to highlight...), and here are some of their statements:

- + Antonio: full of sense; love inside four walls, moral strength, inside and outside.
- + Juan: we had fun, all of us learned from each other.
- + Alexander: group integration, learning to get along well in society.
- + Franklin: awareness on people with disabilities (film).
- + Mauricio: values.
- + Jose Manuel: religion, empathy, understanding and respecting; each and everybody has a disability.
- + Javier: evolution from an indifferent attitude to a final feeling of usefulness; willing to keep working on the course so as to maintain this spirit.
- + Lafati: teamwork.
- + Ramón: a very positive experience, sharing, relating and getting to know each other better and more deeply.
- + Manuel: feeling very grateful; was able to get to know myself better; strengthen values, reflection.
- + Patxi: would like to thank for the experience; would like to highlight different stages: teamwork (sport activities, which promoted laughing and learning); fables (religion, culture); the film "Campeones" (which really touched him since his own nephew has a disability); social networks (really important to teach how to use them properly); working world.

- + Rafael: felt happy to participate, it has helped me a lot. At first I considered it as if I was obliged to, but now I consider it to be my duty, to myself and to you all.
- + Antonio: really had lots of fun.
- All together, they concluded with the words Wellbeing, Gratitude and Integration to show and express how they felt after the experience.