

Guillem Ramis, Spain. A project descriptive essay which speaks to Principle 14 on empowering children

Testimonials and Experiences from the Balearic Islands, Spain



Guillem Ramis was an elementary school teacher on the Mediterranean island of Mallorca, Spain for most of his life. He noticed racism and

growing xenophobia and realized that there was a need for multicultural education. When he came upon the Earth Charter, he felt he held the blueprint to address these issues, as well as many more. Guillem worked on a children's adaptation of the Earth Charter in order to make the language accessible to his young learners. He coordinated several translations of the adaptation. Under his guidance, there are about seventy schools in the Balearic Islands that have incorporated multicultural education philosophy based upon the Earth Charter.

Since the 1980's, increasing immigrant population flows into the Balearic Islands of Spain from Northern and Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Americas were causing important changes in the ethnic composition of the islands. I was a third grade teacher at Blanquerna Public School, on the island of Mallorca, and aware of the need for an educational response to the situation.

In the year 2000, the Ministry of Education of the Balearic Islands established a multicultural education programme for peace and co-operation. The programme, called Vivim Plegats, or

Living Together, was initiated to counter the growing racism and xenophobia in the Balearic Islands due to the arrival of the new immigrants mentioned. As I had already taken steps in that direction, the Ministry decided to relieve me of my teaching duties, allowing me to dedicate myself full-time to create, organize, and coordinate the Vivim Plegats programme, a position I was glad to accept.

The small Vivim Plegats team decided to work with two documents as an ideological basis for this programme – the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the Earth Charter, which in addition to addressing issues of human rights, the central problem we were facing, offered a very broad vision of peaceful living. As an initial step, in order to make the language of the Earth Charter more accessible to young learners, we put together three children's adaptations of the Charter, each targeting different age groups. These adaptations were then translated into a number of languages including Catalan, Spanish, Gallego, and Euskara – the four languages of Spain; French; English; Russian; Portuguese; Greek; Japanese; German; and Arabic to facilitate its accessibility by students and the families of recent immigrants. The children's adaptations of the Charter became the inspiration and starting point for a number of activities in the programme.

During the years from 2000 to 2004, over seventy schools in the Balearic Islands put into practice the principles of the

Earth Charter, with students working on themes related to multiculturalism, education for peace, and co-operation. A team of teachers developed a methodology to help incorporate the Earth Charter's values into the existing curriculum. Each teacher was then encouraged to develop his or her own personal vision. Children as young as three years old learnt about the Charter through simple illustrations showing the Earth as our common home. For older children, suggested activities ranged from cultural-exchange workshops to a photography project based on illustrating the Earth Charter's principles through photos taken by children.

As part of the programme, a multicultural team, known as monitors, visited the schools regularly and gave performances about their cultures so children learnt about life in different immigrant communities. The monitors reflected the multicultural nature of the new society, the challenges that different groups experienced on the islands, and the political and cultural situation in the world. The programme further encouraged inter-school collaboration - they shared the Earth Charter with the other schools, thereby establishing a common link between them all, and then exchanged letters and e-mail correspondence. The programme also involved the community, from parent participation to cultural performances, exhibitions, and essay competitions. Due to a change in government, the Vivim Plegats programme is no longer supported by the Ministry, but the

Principle 14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.



majority of the participating schools continue to be committed to the vision of the programme. In May 2005, for the second year, Mallorca hosted the Children's Social Forum, which incorporated the principles of the Earth Charter.

Adults know that today's children will be the ones responsible for our society of tomorrow, and I believe the children of Mallorca should have their own environment in which to grow and relate to each other. They also have their own "little forum" where, with ideas and resources appropriate to their ages – games, stories, dialogues, drawings, and songs – they learn to talk, live, and have fun together. In this way, we work towards the defense and construction of a more just, responsible, kind, and happy society. In this process, the "Fòrum d'Infants," as a basis for its formation, incorporated the Earth Charter. Its principles were developed in a reflective, active and playful way: "The Earth is our house. We are part of an immense universe. What we can accomplish. Respect and care for living beings. In life, all is connected. Each person should have what they need to be able to live. No to war, yes to peace."

Eventually, the children of today will be

responsible for our society tomorrow; therefore, children have to be educated as citizens of the planet Earth and inheritors of all its values and riches. With the Earth Charter, children learn that "another world is possible" – and another Mallorca too! •