

Ecuador: a country with contradictions



REPORT ON VISIT TO ECUADOR, MAY & JUNE 2010

by Els Salembier

For Kalikèn

Introduction

The Swallow, Centre of Emancipating Education, is a test case for the implementation of the quality school model in The Gambia. The specific objective for the program of The Swallow (2008-2015) is: improving quality education in The Gambia, through an emancipatory approach. This program is taking the Dakar Framework for Action (United Nations, 2000) as general framework. In particular, it wants to work on goal 6: 'Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills'. The specific aim for the covering program of Kalikèn is: *Promoting a practical framework for basic schools in developing countries, for improvement of quality education.*

From the point of view of Kalikèn, I travelled with 3 questions in mind:

1. Is the pedagogical method, as we developed in The Swallow, a method that could be transferred to other countries as Ecuador?
2. Is there any interest from the educational field in Ecuador in this specific pedagogical approach?
3. Are there schools or other organisations that are already working in somehow the same directions?

I had the chance to travel to Kenya in 2009, and visit schools there. The experience during this trip confirmed the method of The Swallow would be interesting there. But this is still within Africa. In Europe as well teachers and

educationalists are interested in the approach. Some ideas have already been further developed in a small school in Belgium. This visit in Ecuador will look at the questions from another point of view again.



I have enjoyed the country and the people. Ecuador is a country full of contradictions to me. There are big *American-style* cities and very small villages (which could be African). There are jungles and high mountains, there is a wide variety between people, their living conditions and styles. I saw rich and poor schools, I heard well developed ideas on education, but saw schools as well where everything still has to be done...

Els Salembier

On vvob

I have been warmly welcomed, not only by Stijn Janssen and Anneleen, but by the whole team of VVOB. I am very grateful for the facilities they provided, for the opportunities, for bringing me into contact with a diversity of educational people, for organising a perfect program. A special thanks goes to Stijn and Anneleen for their hospitality and company, and to Norma for her warm open mind from the moment I

arrived. I have been joining some discussions at the office of VVOB about the second part of their program. The discussions were interesting, and I hope they will keep on organising the exchange of good experiments in different schools, as this seemed to be an interesting part for me. I have seen various interesting experiments, worth to share their experiences with others.

TIMETABLE

journey to Ecuador	26/05
welcome at vvob	27/05
vvob	28/05
Quito, old city	29/05
Otavalo	30&31
Rio Bamba	01/06
Quito, ttc & school	02/06
Quito, ministry of ed	03/06
Quito, collegio Am L	04/06
Mindo	05/06
Departure	06/06

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a bilingual school teaching gardening



The school is near Otavalo, specific for indigenous children. It is a bilingual school: both Spanish and Quichea are taught. The school has nursery and primary education. I visited all classes, kitchen and garden. I observed a mathematic lesson and talked to the director and some teachers.

Positive aspects:

The village has its own school, so even nursery children can reach there. This is very positive. It is important every village has at least one school, so children do not have to go far, and get to know the peoples and structures in their own village. It is a basic for building up a solid society.

There is a garden where children are practising to grow herbs and vegetables. Herbs are given to drink as tea in the morning. There is enough space to grow some amount of vegetables. However I did not observe, but I have been told that the vegetables are actually used for cooking lunch for all children.

Challenge:

I observed that the content of the mathematics was high for the age of the children. This fact makes the content of the mathematics too abstract: transfer of this content to daily life situations will not be possible or very difficult. As far as the teacher was following the syllabus, this does not seem as a challenge for this school, but for the whole educational system.

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remarkable mix of children at the Pestalozzi school

The Pestalozzi school in Otavalo started as a school for children with handicaps. After, parents observed the good work done at this school, and send 'normal' children as well. They have now a mix with 40% of children with all kind of handicaps, which requires a special way of teaching and acting towards the children.

Positive aspects:

The director of this school is well aware of their vision and mission. A lot of attention goes to physical needs: feeding, hygiene, etc.

Attention goes as well to the safety & belonging needs of the children: they are accepted as they are, they are part of the group and treated with care by their teachers. This is affecting their own behaviour in learning to accept each other.

Challenge:

This school is not officially recognised, due to their special program. To survive in a financial way, is a challenge. These type of experiments could be more encouraged by the government.

Proposal on exchange



The people from Ecassef have been explaining that this Pestalozzi school is supposed to be part of the exchange program 'scholenband' from VVOB. So far, they couldn't find a interested school in Belgium, due to their mix of children. In Belgium most schools do not have children with handicaps, unless the specialised schools (and they don't have the other children.)

In The Swallow, our school in The Gambia, we have some children with a handicap, for example syndrom of Down. And we have a

strong vision on opportunities for all children, despite handicap, background or other limitations. We are very much interested in an exchange with schools in other developing countries, as we share similar challenges.

There is a school in Belgium, named De Koli-brie (in Tielrode, Temse) that is interested in these exchanges as well. Due to their Freinet system, they are attractive for children with small limitations, so they have experience on the matter as well. We hope to set up an exchange between these 3 schools.

technical skills at Rio Bamba

This small school near Rio Bamba is in collaboration with the university UNACH. I was lucky to witness the 1st of June, the 'international day of the child' with a special program of both school and university involvement.

Positive aspects:

The school wants to focus on technical skills. Therefore they managed to have some equipment, although some is not working yet (for example a ceramic oven). There is a special teacher employed for weaving, and children are learning to bake bread.

Challenge:

There is a willing at the university to work in this kind of schools, with only indigenous children. They are well aware that the education

has to be adapted towards all the people of the country. However a lot of work is to be done here. The student teachers from the university had a similar interaction with the children as I observe with Belgian student teachers and Gambian children. They are living in another reality and different thinking patterns. The education and the teachers will have to take care not to act paternalistic, to respect the diversity of cultures by trying to know and understand more of the indigenous cultures. Language plays an important role in this matter: the parents at the program only responded towards the (only) speech given in Quichea. Teachers here have to be able to speak this language, if they want to make any progress at all.



a private school at capital Quito

A private school located in Quito, is named Collegio America Latina. Children are from middle class mainly, and paying school fees. The school has a department nursery, primary and secondary.

Positive aspects:

The school takes care about the wellbeing of the child: feeling safe and part of the school is important here. The atmosphere is peaceful and somehow informal, student feel 'at home'. They are not shy to come and ask questions to me as a visitor.

Attention goes to physical needs through a clean and beautiful school environment and lunch every day, by an international menu. Their kitchen is well organized.

Challenge:

This schools has interesting ideas to share with others. I am hoping they are not separating themselves from the society, but willing to share and exchange experiences with other schools.



intercultural education in Quito

This school is linked with the teacher training college in Quito and is named the 'escuela de experimentacion pedagogica Republica de Venezuela'.

Positive aspects:

This school has a lot of pedagogical knowledge. I observed an interesting activity in class: closing of a project, with demonstration of results, where parents as well were invited. A lot of efforts have been done here, I hope children experience a lot of these type of activities in their classes.

Challenge:

The topic in class on 'different people in our country' made it clear that intercultural education needs to be worked out in a different way. Focus should not be on the exotic and sensational aspects of the various people, as those will make the distance between people even more big. Focus should be on similarities, in order to understand that we are all people with similar needs and similar ways to solve these needs.





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Questions & Conclusions

From the point of view of Kalikèn, I travelled with 3 questions in mind:

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2. *Is there any interest from the educational field in Ecuador in this specific pedagogical approach?*
3. *Are there schools or other organisations that are already working in somehow the same directions?*

Through the observations in various schools and exchange with educational workers at different levels I have to conclude that the pedagogical method is suitable for this country, and even more: due to the new constitution, the changes in education should go exactly in the direction of a method based on basic needs of people and environment. Therefore there was a lot of interest from teachers, directors, tutors, university staff and staff at the level of the ministry. I explained on the pedagogical approach and gave out some publications. Stijn Janssens (VVOB) concluded that the ideas are already in place in Ecuador. The method developed in The Swallow gives a concrete practical example, and is therefore very useful. Some schools are already trying to work on topics or parts of this method. It would be very interesting to exchange more ideas with them. A website is being developed at Kalikèn, where a forum gives opportunity to these type of exchanges. I hope that the different people I have been speaking with, will actually participate on this forum!

With special thanks to
Norma and Stijn from VVOB
for all the translations

Visit us at the web:

www.kaliken.org

www.theswallow.org

Presentations on the pedagogical approach of The Swallow in The Gambia

I was allowed to speak at 3 occasions:

- UNACH at Riobamba, department of education: college for all students of the department (circa 120 people)
- Teacher training college at Quito: gathering with the tutors of the college (circa 40 people)
- Ministry of Education at Quito: presentation for staff of various departments (circa 40 people)

I have been elaborating on following items:

- *Situation of education in developing countries, and in Africa in particular
 - Brief history of education
 - Characteristics of education
- *Why quality education?
 - More or better schools?
- International agreements on Education for All
- Importance of quality education
- *Critical and post-colonial pedagogy
- *The Swallow, Centre for emancipating Education: a case study
 - objectives
 - pedagogical framework

There was a lot of interest in and questions about the practical implementing of the pedagogical system. It is very clear that educational people in Ecuador have theoretical ideas on various fields related to education: pedagogy, psychology, social sciences, etc. They also know which of the paradigms could be there basic to start from. This is already a good base to change education!

At this point in the history of Ecuador, the new constitution is pointing in a clear direction for education as well: schooling for the wellbeing of people and environment. These two aspects together in one country are a fantastic opportunity to change education into quality education for all.

The challenge, as many are pointing out, is to transfer these ideas to concrete pedagogies and teaching methods. Some schools are focusing on one or more aspects, some exchange is already organised. Transfer to the reality of the daily activities of all teachers and children is yet to be established. I hope my visit and exchange of ideas has been a very small contribution in this process.



At the UNACH, Riobamba