



The value positions of school staff and parents in immigrant families and their implications for children's transitions between home and school in multicultural schools in Andalusia

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents findings from a project conducted in Andalusia, Southern Spain, which examined school practices that aimed at promoting the integration and well-being of children from first generation immigrant, i.e. non-Spanish, families. How schools addressed the transitions between home and school for the children, and how school strategies were perceived by their communities, parents and the school staff as instruments for integration were examined through semi-structured interviews. Six multicultural schools were involved in the study. Analyses show that, most of the school practices related to pupils' integration can be understood in terms of a "benevolent assimilationist model". From the schools' perspective the practice is "assimilationist" because the main goal is to "assimilate" the children as the "others" into the mainstream culture. We also refer to the practice as "benevolent" because we found a high level of coincidence between parental value positions about what the school should do in relation to their children's learning, and the strategies of the schools to integrate them. According to the parents, schools should allow children access to the skills and concepts they will need to participate in Andalusian society, hereby ascribing to an assimilationist way of thinking. Some differences were observed between parents and schools in the way the processes of integration should be carried out, in particular school discipline and the authority of the teacher. The paper concludes with the observation that the agreement between the value positions of home and school may be a temporary phenomenon.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Different approaches to deal with diversity at school

In this article we present an analysis of the role of family and school values and positions in children's transitions between school and home, in the context of multicultural schools in southern Spain. Values and positions, as relevant aspects of cultural traditions (Hedegaard, 1999), are, we suggest, elements of crucial importance in understanding the process that enables permeability between the institutional practices of home and school.

In her seminal papers, Gibson (1976, 1997) identified different dimensions, ideologies and ways of dealing with diversity in North American Schools. These different models for multicultural school management resonate with other analyses of ideologies or strategies deployed by governments – in the social arena – or individuals – in the psychological arena – in the way they approach cultural contact and diversity (Berry, 1997; Castles & Davidson, 2000). In most cases, the dimensions that are at stake are those of: a) to what extent newcomers adopt a new set of cultural tools related to the host community, i.e. language, habits,

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values, and so on; and b) to what extent minorities' cultural practices and values are promoted, tolerated or maintained in the host societies. From the combination of these two dimensions four approaches or “acculturation strategies” are identified. First is “assimilation”, as the process in which immigrants are forced – or as individuals decide – to adopt the host society values and practices, losing their original ones; second is “segregation”, where newcomers are allowed or choose to maintain their original values and practices, staying in most cases at the margins of the majoritarian society; third is “integration”, where both, host and home communities' values and practices are selectively maintained. This option has also been named bi-culturalism, and has been considered the most efficient strategy in terms of “psychological well-being” (la Framboise, Hoyt, Oliver, & Whitbeck, 2006) and social integration. The last and less desirable strategy, called “marginalisation”, appears as the process in which home culture values and practices are lost, but without a replacement of a new set of cultural tools. Except for marginalisation – a rare and unhealthy outcome – all the rest of the options are considered to have benefits and pitfalls, both as societal trends and as individual choices.

In the case of individual strategies, some authors have also proposed a flexible interpretation of these strategies (Navas, García, Rojas, Pumares, & Cuadrado, 2006). They suggested that a person or group could adopt different acculturation strategies in different areas of life. For example, a newcomer could decide to adopt a mainly assimilationist strategy in terms of work life by assuming the host society habits and values for the working environment; while deciding at the same time to adopt a more segregationist strategy when religious issues are at stake. In any case, the strategies described do not seem to appear as pure categories. They have been mainly taken as dimensions towards which displaced people and groups lean in flexible ways; while—people's strategies can also change over time and across life stages and contexts.

Some empirical studies in the Spanish context have looked at these concrete sedimentations of general ideologies in specific school contexts. Some of them have offered a panoramic perspective (García Castaño, Rubio, & Bouchara, 2008; Gibson & Carrasco, 2009); some others have taken a more micro-analytical lens, focusing on the interactive arrangements that gradually build the schools' power relations (Perez-Milans, 2006; Relaño-Pastor, 2009). In most of the studies, a mainly “assimilationist” tendency is found in the schools' strategies. As most of these studies have shown, the approach to culturally diverse students is interpreted mainly from a “deficit model” (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), where new students need to be incorporated as soon as possible into the mainstream educational path. This finding also points to the disempowerment that most foreign origin students suffer as they enter Spanish schools (Perez-Milans, 2006), leading in most cases to limits in the academic opportunities they are able to take up.

1.2. Multicultural schools: the case of Andalusia

Andalusia, like many other areas in Europe, has gradually become a multicultural society.¹ The National Statistical Institute has shown an increase in the number of people applying for residency from 240,475 people in 2005 to 669,176 in 2011. The 2011 annual report of the Andalusian Permanent Observatory of Migrations shows that the number of people born outside Spain aged between 16 and 65 years old residing in Andalusia was 9.87% of the total population.

This situation of social change in the Andalusian population has affected educational institutions in a particular way. Children from very different origins have been incorporated into schools. Data have shown that the foreign students in Andalusian compulsory education had risen from 14,159 in 2000/2001 academic year, to 54,879 in 2005–2006, growing to 70,434 in 2012–2013 (Junta De Andalucía, Consejería De Educación, 2012). Schools are placed in a particular position within society in relation to these children. As public institutions they have a fundamental role in the integration of these pupils. Soriano has suggested that this role is mainly due to the potential they have as a tool for achieving a permeability that permits connections to be made between indigenous populations and newcomers (Soriano, 2004). There is a general agreement that the successful integration of immigrant communities is aided by a sound education and the attainment of qualifications that have currency in the practices of the host country. This cultural reading of integration makes school one of the main instruments in its achievement. The argument in this article is that the more the receiving schools know of the abilities and knowledge of the immigrant families, they better they are able to facilitate the participation of the arrivals in the economic, political and sociocultural spheres of the host cultures.

At this point we turn to an account of the Spanish and Andalusian educational contexts and dilemmas embedded in them. The premise for its Education policies is attention to diversity as one of the central points; currently this aspect is assumed to allow appropriate responses to the needs generated by immigrant populations. However, the educative model employed was introduced in 1990² and focused on the general area of Special Educational Needs, subsuming immigrant children within this broad categorisation. The LOGSE (Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo; Educative System Regulating Law) aimed at addressing the “Special Educative Needs” of any student, assisting them through a wide range of “Curriculum Adaptations” designed at different levels of generalisation, from those applied to a single child, to those applied to the whole school if a condition affects the whole population (Marchesi, Coll, & Palacios, 1990). The main aim of this framework is the normalisation and integration of every student. Here normalisation is achieved through individualised attention to each “special educative need”, whichever this is, physiological or socio-cultural.

¹ This tendency is at present switching as a result of the economic crisis in Spain.

² This law is not in force at present time. However, some aspects of its philosophy and strategies have pervaded along time, especially those related with the management of diversity.

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