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CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

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Migrations and cultural change in the school: a perspective from the geography classroom

Maria Villanueva and Carmen Gonzalo
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain)

Introduction

In 1993 research was carried out on students' ideas about migration during a Geography course at our Faculty of Education. The main interest of the research was the exploration of students' family memories, in order to study and interpret their feelings and attitudes towards the new waves of migration in Europe, which at that time were just becoming apparent in Spain. The fact that almost 80% of the students were descendants of the internal migration movements from the deep rural areas of southern Spain to the more industrialised areas between 1950 and 1970 was the starting point. The study, based on their personal feelings and memories, tried to explore those elements which could be used to analyse their ideas and attitudes towards the incipient flows of foreign migration.

Ten years later the situation has changed dramatically. Spain is experiencing the same process previously experienced by many other European countries. Increasing flows of immigrants from different origins are changing the social landscape and defining a new society. Schools and the educational system are reflecting these changes and are facing new requirements; these educational and social challenges require new perspectives, new attitudes and also new skills.

This paper analyses the same issue ten years on, when the context is no longer a predictable future but a reality. With similar methodology, the exploration of family memories was used to analyse and compare situations of migration, but this time a new element was added: the personal experiences of students during their teaching practice in primary schools.

The context: new trends in migration

Europe has been a continent of emigration: since the sixteenth century: around 80 million people left Europe, while only 20 million arrived. In the case of Spain this imbalance is even more pronounced: 10 million people left the country, mainly for Latin America until the second half of the twentieth century, when the direction of the flow shifted towards the most developed western European countries. Between 1950 and 1970 two million people emigrated, mainly to the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland and France. However, the economic recession of the seventies stopped the outflows and favoured policies of return.

As has happened in Europe generally, the trend changed very quickly in Spain over the past five years, so that it is now a country of immigration. The current number of legal immigrants represents 1.8% of the total population, and if we add nationalised residents and the estimated number of illegal immigrants, the figure could easily reach 2% of the population. In spite of this, the number of Spanish residents abroad in 1999 was some 2.2 million, which represents a number larger than that of foreign residents in Spain at the time (around 1 million).

Only 20% of the world's migrants are settled in Europe, and of those Spain is hosting legally 2.5%. The average of foreign population for the European Union is around 4.9% so it can be said that Spain's migrant population is still far lower than the average, as is also the case in Portugal, Greece and Finland.

Table 1 Origin of new residents in Spain (1998)

Country of origin	% of the total
North America	2
Latin America, Central America	18
Asia	8
Africa South of Sahara	4
Magreb	21
European Union and EEE	44
Eastern Europe	3

Source: Mapa de la inmigración extranjera a Catalunya, 2000

Table 1 shows that foreign residents in Spain come mainly from European countries. This can be partly explained because of the increase in tourist resorts and settlements for retired people in search of better weather conditions. New jobs in the service sectors (personnel, leisure, health, travel agencies, legal assistance services...) in the coastal Mediterranean areas are frequently filled by people of the same European origin as the new migrants. The second important immigrant group is people of Maghreb and Latin American origins. These groups are unequally distributed in the country; they concentrate mainly in big cities, coastal resorts and intensively agricultural areas, and are less present in other regions. In the case of Catalonia, the three elements are combined so that an increasing flow of foreign population is arriving and reshaping many parts of the territory. In 1997 immigrants represented 1.35% of the total of the Spanish population, 1.87% of them being in Catalonia.

Table 2 Origins of new residents of Catalonia

Country of origin	%of total	Highest level of education of family heads (%)			
		Primary	Secondary	Higher Education	None
North America	2	9	28	61	2
Latin and Central America	20	17	44	32	7
Asia	10	23	41	27	9
Africa South of Sahara	6	24	20	11	45
Magreb	33	29	16	5	40
European Union and EEE	27	11	34	53	2
Eastern Europe	2	20	43	33	4

Source: Mapa de la inmigración extranjera a Catalunya, 2000

The large inflow of people coming from Central and Latin America (53%) indicates clearly an economic motivation but also the fact that the language is common. The level of education data shows that the rate of people with secondary and higher education degrees is high and that the lowest levels of education are to be found among migrants from Africa south of Sahara and the Maghreb. The most recent records indicate that

between 1997 and 2002, the increase in foreign residents in Catalonia was 249%, and that they are mainly concentrated in the Barcelona region.

The impact on a school system where the numbers of children are falling

The birth rate in Catalonia has been falling since the turn of the twentieth century and the trend has been accelerating more recently. The rate of 9.2% could be enough to indicate problems of replacement in the age structure; the current immigration wave is helping to fill the age gap in the pyramid and it is also mitigating the lowering of the fertility rate, which is now only 0.9 children/woman. The impact on the school system has been important, as figures show. Although compulsory school starts at the age of 6, 53% of 2-year olds and 100% of 4-year olds have already entered the school system.

Table 3 Number of pupils in Infant and Primary Schools

Year	Pupils
1980-81	867,306
1990-91	644,396
2000-01	562,997

Source: Departament d'Ensenyament. Generalitat de Catalunya. 2002

The school has also been one of the first environments to reflect the impact of external migratory movements, as happened also in other European countries. The latest reports (2000/2001) show that the number of foreign children in Catalan schools has increased very fast, especially since 2000. This is a new social challenge that is affecting mainly Infant and primary schools, which are developing plans and strategies to integrate children and are trying to cope with all the questions related to communication with their pupils' families.

Table 4 Migrant children in Catalan schools

Region of Origin (2001)	Infant	Primary Education	Secondary Education
E.U	749	2,084	1,106
Rest of. Europe	212	378	362
Central/Latin America	515	2,441	785
North America	123	372	110
Africa south of Sahara	413	363	71
Magreb	1,182	3,655	430
Asia	329	853	190
Total of incoming pupils	3,523	10,146	3,064
Total of all pupils	210,331	346,604	369,093

Source: Departament d'Ensenyament. Generalitat de Catalunya. 2002

As most of the schools currently associated with the training of teachers are affected by these incoming flows of foreign children, they represent a direct observational platform for our students during their teaching practice period. They are also a natural source of data for our research.

The students' approach to migrations: from family memories to meeting 'the other'

The internal migratory movement in Spain between 1950 and 1970 was one of the most significant events in recent social history, and the process of settlement and integration has definitively marked Spanish society. Many were forced to leave their villages in the deep rural areas for economic reasons, and to move into different social and cultural environments.

Catalonia received 500,000 people, most of which were settled in the metropolitan area of Barcelona where our University is situated. A large proportion of the students at the Faculty of Education are descended from those families who moved into a region with strong cultural differences, e.g. language. There are some features which can be considered similar to those of current incoming migration. Our students have in their families memories of their places of origin and of the process of integration in Catalonia, so their experience was considered an excellent first-hand life story which could be used to help them to understand the migratory phenomena in general and to increase their awareness about the current process and their role in it as future schoolteachers.

The research involved 130 students in their first or second year. All of them were asked to complete a form on which they had to answer questions about their birthplace and that of their parents and grandparents; family jobs both in the place of origin and when they first arrived and finally, the dates of migration. The data collected assured us that there were enough relevant elements for the research, and that students would be able to approach the migratory issue starting from their own family history. The objectives of the students' work were:

- To analyse feelings about migration, specially those related to the change of cultural and familiar environments, by exploring family memories.
- To look at similarities and differences between past and present migratory processes by learning about the life stories of new migrants and approaching them from their own family experience.
- To explore the social change undergone by schools in the previous five years as a consequence of migrations, and to learn how they are facing the new challenges that this represents: academic, administrative and management issues, such as late entrance pupils; cultural issues; communication with the families, etc.
- To discuss and analyse their own approach to and feelings about the migratory phenomena, not only in Catalonia but at a global level.

The work was planned in three different but connected steps.

The first centred on the collection of family histories. The students were asked to interview two persons from their family in order to obtain a detailed report of their migratory odyssey. The methodology, based on oral history, allowed the students to collect all data through an open interview, which was considered the best method of approaching personal feelings and memories. The importance of talking about details was stressed: the luggage they carried or the clothes they wore; impressions on first arriving, their personal feelings and emotions. This was considered a useful way to discover emotional elements of their own history which could be compared with those of the new migrants; and at the same time, it was thought to be a positive approach to appreciation.

of not only similarities and feelings between the two experiences, but also the differences, taking into account the distance of 30 years between the two situations.

The second step was to learn about new immigrants. The students had now to interview two people who had arrived in Catalonia in the previous two years, choosing from immigrants in their neighbourhood. As in the case of their own family, the students were asked to allow interviewees to talk freely about their experience, including the same or similar details as in the first part of the work.

The school was the third experimental field of the exercise, which was concentrated in the primary schools where the students had been doing their teaching practice. Twenty-three schools were chosen, all of them placed in the urban region of Barcelona: 80% were in a circle of 25 km around the city centre and the rest less than 40 km. Fifteen of the schools were in cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants, and none of them were in towns under 30,000. All schools had a long experience of monitoring teaching students' practice. The students worked in groups of four: their task was to collect and analyse information about the evolution of the migration inflows through the records of the schools, taking the year 1997 as a starting point. They were asked to find data on new arrivals as the school, countries of origin, and all related aspects such as school policies and strategies to cope with potential difficulties in the integration of the children and in communication with both pupils and their families.

All the schools analysed have had an increase in numbers of non-European pupils. The percentages have increased very fast since 2000; in 1997 in almost all the schools in the sample the average was in the range 3-5%, but by 2002, seven schools were exceeding 20% and eight had more than 10% of non-European pupils. In all schools the largest group was from Latin American, followed by Morocco.

Drawing conclusions

After completing the three parts of their work, students reported their findings to classmates, commented on the main aspects, and agreed about their importance and relevance. They agreed that one of the main outcomes was knowing about their own family history. Students broadly knew about their origins, the move of their grandparents to another region in search of employment and a better life; many still return for holidays to the regions of origin and some still maintain the old houses where their parents grew up. But the students discovered through the interviews details they had never imagined about motivations and feelings; about the long and difficult journeys with poor and rudimentary luggage; the search for a job, the fight for accommodation (often in slums, old houses or flats shared with other families); and finally, the success of their enterprise and integration in the new society through long years of hard work. Their children grew up in the new environment and they themselves are the third generation, now studying at the university. Some students were very impressed by these chapters from their grandparents' histories, never having been told before about these years as most of the troubles had been left behind and lives had changed so dramatically for the better. These results have confirmed those of 10 years before: the method has been an effective way to involve students in the learning process, from the affective to the conceptual sphere. (Gonzalo and Villanueva, 1996)

As for the second element involved in the work, the most important finding was the discovery of newly-arrived people in their neighbourhood. In the earlier study, students

encountered difficulties in finding someone to interview; there were very few available immigrants, the students had hardly met one before, and most of the potential interviewees did not dare to answer the questions because of their legal situation. Ten years later the situation was different: in the new context, finding someone of foreign origin who was willing to be interviewed was very easy. However, the students recognised that in spite of the evidence of the new waves of immigration in all towns and villages in the last five years, they knew almost nothing about the lives the newcomers were living. Students reproduced the process they used with their own family, and the findings impressed them very much. Above all and, in spite of both particular differences and of finding some situations much more extreme than those of their own family, they found that motivations, difficulties and feelings could be very similar. To some extent the students recognise that they now look at 'the others' with different eyes.

The work in the schools provided interesting outcomes. Students were made aware that immigration is a crucial issue for the schools and that their professional profile must include the knowledge and the skills that will enable them to work in an intercultural school environment. Secondly, they appreciated the efforts of the teachers and of the schools in adapting their educational projects to the new requirements. But, beyond this, they realised the importance of education in the building of a new society.

Globalisation has brought fundamental changes to our society and consequently to the way in which societies are shaping educational policy and practice. The continuous inflow of a non-European population into our countries is reshaping our schools; this requires that teacher students must be equipped to deal with cultural conflicts over a range of issues. Education must be orientated towards the global citizen who needs to live with others within a compact of mutual tolerance and respect in diverse and often conflict-ridden real and virtual public spaces (Huckle, 2001). To involve students in a practice which places them face to face with migration issues is a way to educate for a concerned citizenship.

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