THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL, FAMILY AND PEER-BASED DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF STUDENTS' SOCIO-ACADEMIC TRAJECTORIES

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Abstract

In this paper we discuss findings from multi-level ethnography conducted in a secondary school located in Madrid (Spain). The study focuses on the variety of institutional, family and peer-based factors that contribute to the construction of students' socio-academic trajectories. In particular, we attempt to understand the role these social fields play in the construction of educational careers that are comparatively less successful in the case of immigrant students. Our findings suggest that these 'objective outcomes' are immersed in a web of discourses, practices and representations held by educators, parents and students about the future, the role of schooling in adolescents socio-educational paths and the interconnections between each social field (school, parents, peers) that show significant contradictions and discontinuities. In our analysis, we uncover some of these tensions and examine the role they play in the configuration of adolescents educational subjectivities.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Students in the Spanish educational system begin their secondary education in a comprehensive educational tier designed for all students between 12-16 years of age known as *Educación Secundaria Obligatoria* (ESO) 'Compulsory Secondary Education'. This tier was introduced and maintained through successive educational reforms that began in the early 1990s and which were originally based on strong socio-democratic educational premises. During a decade of socialist government in 1980s, the framework for a reform of the Spanish educational system, which at that moment was still defined by legislation passed during Franco's dictatorship, was established. The goals of this first major educational change in 1990 included extending compulsory basic education to all Spanish children and strengthening the role of the educational system in the promotion of socio-educational equity in Spanish society (Maravall, 1984). This impetus was clearly defined by the political agenda of the governing political forces during the 1980s and was seen as part of the culmination of Spain's transition into a modern Western democracy.

However, this political and economic transition involved other transformations that became increasingly relevant in Spanish society and the Spanish educational system during the 1990s and which shaped significantly subsequent educational policies and practices. Incorporation into European economic structures facilitated the arrival of numerous economic immigrants whose children were a visible part of the Spanish student population by the mid-1990s (Martínez, 1997; Bartolomé, 1997). Simultaneously, as elsewhere (e.g. Karsten, 1999), neo-liberal discourses and policies in education have gained visibility and the preoccupation with socio-educational equity has been progressively replaced by calls for 'accountability' and 'choice' in education. Policies implemented in Spain during the last two decades have

responded to these pressures in various ways and secondary education is especially affected by these moves.

The presence of immigrant students, and more generally a student-body which is construed as increasingly diverse, led to the implementation of specialized provisions, programs, policies, professionals and educational tracks that, from a critical perspective, seem to undermine the comprehensive organization of Spanish compulsory secondary education (Marchesi, 2000). Yet, formally ESO continues to be a comprehensive and compulsory educational tier in which students' educational placement is not pre-determined by formal examinations or decisions which are made at clearly delineated moments of students' educational careers (cf. Berenst and Mazeland, 2008). Rather, educational trajectories in compulsory secondary education are the complex product of decisions and recommendations taken by counsellors, teachers, tutors, students, families and the changing opportunities offered by programs and curricular measures which are frequently transformed.

Research, policy and media reports (Serra, 2008; Defensor del Pueblo, 2003; 'Los jóvenes inmigrantes no llegan a la universidad' *El Pais,* 13 April 2009) suggest that in this complex process immigrant students do not fair off well. The different structures and programs implemented in secondary education appear to be creating a stratified system in which immigrant students are placed in lower-educational tracks or geared towards the labour market and numerous immigrant-origin students are leaving the educational system after 16 years of age without the minimum qualifications the system provides. Further, these processes take place in an educational system which is increasingly segregated: immigrant and ethnic minority students concentrate primarily in state-run schools and are scarcely present in schools run by the Catholic Church or other private-charter schools (e.g. Franzé, 1998; Peláez, 2010; cf. van Zanten, 2006; Karsten et al; 2006).

In analytical terms, the proliferation of programs, professionals and expectations that characterize Spanish secondary education have facilitated that secondary schools become 'category rich' sites in which students are labelled, defined, placed and managed in educational terms through institutional identities created by the educational provisions they participate in, the psycho-educational vocabulary used to describe students and the intersection of these labels with students' gender, class and ethnicity. In linguistic anthropological terms (Wortham, 1996; Agha, 2007) educational institutions are sites for the construction of *metapragmatic identity models*, the explicit and implicit definition of the type of person and educational 'subject' a student is within a socially constructed repertoire of socio-educational identities (Anderson, 2009; Foucault, 1988; Youdell, 2006). More importantly, given how schools and formal education operates through time and space, an educational metapragmatic identity model will also enunciate aspects of students' future educational trajectories (Lemke, 2000; Polman, 2010).

Several studies conducted in Spain shown how students in secondary education are defined, through linguistic practices, explicit discourses and educational decision-making, within educational institutions according to the educational trajectories and provisions they are placed in (Ponferrada, 2009; Unamuno, 2005; Patiño, 2007; Poveda, in press). However, many of these studies tend to focus primarily on certain 'voices', those of students and teachers, in the construction of educational identities and privilege the classroom as the key sites to observe these processes. The logic behind these decisions is well grounded and has led to very productive findings and insights; however, it has done so by overlooking other actors in the process - such as counsellors, other socio-educational professionals and especially immigrant parents - and spaces that play a key role in the configuration of students' trajectories - such as counselling sessions, staff meetings, after-school activities, provisions by social services, etc.

In this paper we seek to continue these analyses of immigrant students in Spanish secondary education by drawing on the findings of a multi-level ethnography conducted in a secondary school located in a southern district of Madrid (Spain). However, in this study we understand students' socio-academic trajectories as complex and multifaceted processes in which several social fields play a role (Lahire, 1998; Mehan, 1992; Mehan et al; 1996). In particular, our research project explores the role of three key social fields (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Allard, 2005) in the lives and socialization processes of adolescent students: family, peers and educational institutions (Lahire, 2007). These are seen as partially independent but overlapping forces that configure adolescents' educational experiences and that, for our purposes, are part of the process of defining the 'type of student' immigrant adolescents become and the opportunities that are opened or closed through this construction. In this article we examine some of the ways in which students are defined and constructed through institutional discourses and practices, how these constructions are responded to in a number of ways by adolescents and how they are interpreted by immigrant parents in the context of the educational expectations they have for their children.

Methodology

During two academic years (2007-08 and 2008-09) a team of ethnographers was engaged in fieldwork that focused on the different elements of this matrix. Specifically, we documented:

The work of counsellors, teachers and other professionals: The study involved participant observation of educators' work in spaces such as teacher meetings, their classrooms (some of which were audio-recorded), their interactions with students and informal spaces such as conversations with colleagues during coffee breaks. We also followed in detail the activities of the various professionals that form the counselling department of the secondary school. This

included contacting and observing their relations with other professionals and services outside the educational institution such as child social services, intercultural mediators or counsellors from other schools in the district. In the study we also formally interviewed several teachers and, in the course of fieldwork, held numerous informal conversations about their work with particular students.

Peer relations inside and outside schools: Several students and their peer networks were followed in classrooms, the playground during recess and in their informal socialization and leisure spaces outside school. A number of students in the school, especially students of Latin-American origin (although not exclusively), were involved in creating and consuming *reggaeton* / hip-hop music and graffiti. These activities received particular attention and we documented some of their formal and informal performances as well as their composing strategies. Also, the research team offered two video-documentary workshops as an after-school activity and the students who enrolled in these workshops produced video-recordings of their lives and interests outside school. We also prepared a number of activities in which students took photographs of the school and produced a corpus of participant-generated photographs (Rose, 2007). Finally, several students participated in semi-structured interviews.

The experience of immigrant families: As part of the study we were interested in accessing and documenting the perspectives of immigrant parents on the education of their children. Initially, we documented some of the 'formal activities' that the institution supports in relation to parents, such as the school parent association, parenting classes and workshops or group meetings between educators and parents. However, we soon discovered that immigrant parents participated minimally in these 'formalized' spaces and direct contact with immigrant parents in school activities was minimal. Therefore, eventually a member of the research team contacted a set of immigrant parents and conducted semi-structured interviews on their migratory experiences, educational expectations and practices. All the parents selected for this

part of the study were Ecuadorian (the largest Latin-American origin population in the school and area) and had children enrolled in the school during the time of the study (see Moscoso, 2009).

Other educational spaces: Members of the research team also documented, in a less systematic fashion, the organization of other educational spaces and activities inside and outside the school, such as after-school educational support programs offered at the school or the facilities and organization of vocational and technical training programs offered at other institutions in the area. These spaces were particularly relevant as less successful students in the school participated in them (i.e. after-school support) or were eventually geared towards these programs after repeatedly not meeting end-of-year academic expectations.

Instituto de Educación Secundaria Central-Aluche in context: History, demographics and 'educational facts'

The *Instituto de Educación Secundaria Central-Aluche*[1] (ICA) is a state secondary school located in a large southern district of the city of Madrid, Spain. The school stands in the intersection of two neighbourhoods: (1) Aluche, a neighbourhood with a large middle-class population primarily formed by residential apartment buildings built in the 1960s-1970s; (2) Carabanchel Bajo, a working-class district that grew out of the migratory movements from 'the country to the city' that took place in Spain in the 1950s-1960s. In the last few years, the district has also received large numbers of economic immigrants, primarily from Latin America (Ecuador and Bolivia especially) - according to municipal census data for the year 2009 approximately 19% of the district population is of immigrant origin – and a majority of immigrant residents occupy homes within Carabanchel Bajo and surrounding neighbourhoods.

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[1] 'Secondary Education Institute Central-Aluche' is the pseudonym that will be used to refer to the school. The name is based generically from one of the city areas it draws students from (Aluche). All the names of participants in the study we present are also pseudonyms.

Despite this 'border location', ICA draws its students primarily from Carabanchel Bajo and serves a student body that is in large proportion of immigrant origin and identifies itself with Carabanchel rather than the middle-class homes that surround the school.

From the moment the school was established, it has projected itself as an academically-oriented institution committed to pre-university secondary education. When it opened in the late 1980s it offered pre-university post-compulsory education and despite some attempts at simultaneously offering vocational and technical forms of secondary education these alternative paths were never implemented. Since the reforms of the 1990s the two strands of secondary education that the school offers are compulsory ESO for students between 12-16 years of age and pre-university baccalaureate (*Bachillerato*) for students between 16-18 years of age. Students who want to consider technical-vocational forms of post-compulsory education must transfer to other schools after completing ESO or primary education students and their families may simply consider other secondary schools with a wider range of options as a more suitable choice.

As said in the introduction, over the last decade Spanish educational policy has been increasingly concerned with the large amount of students who have problems completing ESO successfully. The response has involved designing and implementing a variety of supplementary and alternative programs around ESO. Broadly speaking, these programs are designed with two alternative rationalities in mind: (a) as providing academic-educational support for students who experience difficulties during their studies but are seen as potentially capable of meeting ESO requirements; (b) designed for students at significant risk of 'dropping out' and considered as an alternative educational path for students who (for a variety of reasons) are not seen as capable of completing conventional ESO. Over the last few years ICA has been involved in designing and implementing a variety of programs that are more in accordance with (a) and has a multi-professional counselling department that has been very active in executing

these measures and/or orienting students into other programs - closer to the (b) type - offered outside the institution.

As is the case in many other Madrid schools (Poveda, Franzé, Jociles, Rivas, Villaamil, Peláez and Sánchez, in press), the aggregate figures of the distribution of students into these different educational programs and strands is not blind to their backgrounds. The following tables summarize this:

Table 1: Student population at ICA, school year 2005-06

Students in ESO (Total)	*498*
% Immigrant students in ESO	**32.7**
% Latin America	23.5
% Eastern Europe	3.2
% Morocco	1
% Other	5
Students in Baccalaureate (Total)	*161*
% Immigrant student in Bac.	17.4

The figures in Table 1 were obtained during the first stage of the research project in which ICA was surveyed alongside other secondary schools in Madrid. Data for the 2005-06 school year show two trends that have become even more consolidated since then. Immigrant origin students were a significant part of the student body in numbers above the average for the city of Madrid (for the 2005-06 school year the mean in our sample of schools was 28.1% and the local authority spoke of about 20% of the secondary school students in Madrid with an immigrant background) or the immigrant student population of the district (18.6% according to the educational census of the Madrid regional government). During the two years of fieldwork, the school did not provide updated statistics but acknowledged that the number of immigrant

students, and particularly students of Latin American origin, was growing steadily. According to information collected by members of the counselling department in 2008-09 about 50% of students in ESO were of immigrant origin and of these students over 90% were of Latin-American origin - primarily from Ecuador and also from Bolivia.

The achievement levels of the different groups of students in the school do not follow the same paths. Table 1 shows how the proportion of immigrant students who move on to pre-university secondary education drops sharply. Also, as explained above, ICA was actively engaged in offering different educational support programs for 'at risk' students and/or guiding students to programs not offered in the school. Again participation in these alternative programs is associated with students' background. Table 2 summarizes part of the available data that illustrates this (see Poveda, Jociles and Franzé, 2009 for a fuller discussion of school figures):

Table 2: Students in ESO proposed for placement in alternative programs (June 2008)

PCPI **('Professional-Technical Qualification Programs') / Outside ICA**	**Total =**	**39**
% Spanish origin	46,1	
% Latin America	43,6	
% East Europe	7,7	
% Other	2,6	
ACE **('Alternative-Educational Support Modules') / Outside ICA**	**Total =**	**3**
% Latin America	100	
Compensatory Education / Inside ICA (ESO yeas one-two)	**Total =**	**34**
% Spanish origin	8,8	
% Latin America	76,5	
% East Europe	11,8	
% Other	2,9	
Diversification class / Inside ICA (ESO years three-four)	**Total =**	**19**

% Spanish origin	47,4	
% Latin America	36,8	
% East Europe	10,5	
% Other	5,3	

At the end of their second year of studies, a majority of Latin American students are proposed for placement in 'alternative programs' or repeat year two and only about one third (35.4%) moves on to year three regularly - in contrast, 77% of Spanish origin students move on regularly to year three and only 17.1% are proposed for alternative programs. During the third and fourth year of ESO this cycle is completed. Table 2 presents the distribution of students who were proposed for placement in different educational programs (i.e. 'tracks') at the end of the 2007-08 school year. The categories in this table may not be easy to interpret by someone not closely familiarized with educational policies in Spain but they are crucial to understand the institutional dynamics of ICA in relation to immigrant students.

As said above, 'alternative educational programs' can be considered of two types. On one hand, support programs for students with difficulties but potentially capable of completing ESO. These are 'compensatory education' and 'diversification'[2] and are offered at ICA. On the other hand, alternative educational programs for students who have not been able to complete ESO and are above or close to the legal age limits to be in regular secondary education. These are PCPI and ACE[3], which are usually designed and offered in secondary education/technical

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[2] 'Compensatory education' is offered for the first two years of ESO (with a possible extension into a third year) and is thought as supplementary educational support for students with previous schooling experiences or socio-cultural backgrounds that put students at disadvantage in relation to the standard requirements of ESO. 'Diversification' is offered in the last two years of ESO for students who have experienced academic difficulties during their studies and primarily involves methodological changes that allow for more individualized support (i.e. smaller class groups, less teachers, more tutoring hours, etc.)

[3] *Programa de Cualificación Profesional Inicial* (PCPI) 'Initial Professional Qualification Program' is designed for students who are over 16 years of age and do not have an ESO certificate. It provides one year of technical training that, if successfully completed, may allow accessing further forms of technical training and/or opting for the preparation of a series of exams that, if passed, grant the ESO certificate. *Aula de Compensación Educativa*

training schools but ICA does not offer them – thus, students who are recommended for these programs must transfer to other institutions. With these distinctions in mind, the figures show that the majority of students who are proposed for transfer to programs outside ICA are of immigrant background and that in programs offered at ICA the vast majority of students who are proposed for 'compensatory education' have a Latin American background (76.5%). It is also significant that this figure drops visibly in relation to students who are proposed for 'diversification' – a program that primarily involves methodological changes and is though for students capable of completing ESO. Here we find that Spanish and immigrant students are proposed in similar proportions to the program.

These program labels provide the categories that are central to the work conducted by different actors in the school, the work of teachers, the identities of students and the expectations of parents. In the following section we discuss how they emerge in the discourses and practices of each of these constituencies and discuss the implications they have for the sorting work done at ICA.

The construction of educational trajectories in teachers, parents and students discourses and practices

Teachers categorizing students

When prompted, teachers easily make projections of the educational trajectories their students will follow, regardless of the amount of exchanges and experiences they have had with them - although some are also aware (and even critical) of the implications that are tied to the placement decisions that occur during students' educational careers. This is clearly visible in

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(ACE) 'Alternative Education Module' is designed for students who are also at significant risk of dropping out from ESO and provides initial technical training. In contrast to PCPI it is much more clearly geared towards direct entry into the labour force and is thought for more 'problematic' adolescents (i.e. a percentage of positions in the program are reserved for adolescents in the juvenile justice system)

the interview data produced during the project. The following responses show how a teacher and class tutor who had been working in the school for only about a month is capable of formulating articulate expectations about his students, in particular of Latin American students:

Extract 1: Interview with year two tutor

<u>Talking about Rocky</u>

I: Do you think he is going to finish secondary school?

T: I think so, I believe he is probably a future baccalaureate student, at the very least he is a future baccalaureate student

I: And what do you think he could do here afterwards?

T: Go to university, perfectly and get a job, or a higher technical degree, a priori I see him as a baccalaureate given his grades (...) If he doesn't have any problems, that will depend on the stability he has at home and his willpower, but well I see him as a future baccalaureate (...) a university future without any problem (...)

<u>Talking about Andrés</u>

I: How do you imagine Andrés?

T: I see Andrés (...) but well will I think it he is a '7-8 fails', he is a future I don't know, they will have to put him in a PCPI or one of these special professional qualification programs I mentioned because I don't see him, I don't see him graduating from compulsory education which is the most basic, the bare minimum required here to work, it is mandatory (...) I don't see him capable of graduating, hopefully I'm wrong, hopefully I'm wrong, but he has to go through a radical change in attitude (...)

In the interview he was asked to comment on the Ecuadorian students he teaches and in this discussion he sets up a contrast between Rocky, as an exceptional Latin American student who seems to be 'integrating' very well in the school, and the majority of Latin American students he has who seem to follow other paths. In the above extract we can see how the

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educational programs available at ICA and surrounding institutions work as identity categories in which students can be positioned (cf. Wortham, 2006). These categories project on the student an assessment of their capacities, attitudes and motivations. They also involve placing students in one of alternative educational paths, which are hierarchically ordered in terms of their social and academic value – as well as in terms of the future socio-economic outcomes. Noticeably, in the above extracts the role of teachers or institutional decisions in constructing these paths is discursively minimized, while responsibility is explicitly transferred to family support and students own dispositions. Elsewhere, we have shown how this line of argumentation is part of a larger explanatory framework in which the causes of educational failures and remedies are 'externalized' by educators to forces outside their control (Frazé, 2008).

However, students' identities are not only the product of teachers' reflexive discourses. They are also produced in interaction and in institutional daily practices. These processes especially illustrated in the 'visits' to other programs outside ICA organized for students by the counselling department. These visits are not intended for and opened to all students[4]; rather they involve targeting particular students for these visits on the basis of how the school staff defines students' behaviour and expectations.

Extract 2: Summary of field-notes of a visit to an ACE (5 June 2008)

Three students have been proposed for a visit to another secondary school in the district that at the moment specializes exclusively in alternative educational programs. These are three boys, all with a Latin-American background, over 15 years of age and will not complete ESO within the expected time-

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[4] As explained by one of the school counsellors, in the past general visits were organized to technical secondary schools, since this tier is not offered at ICA and is another possible option (alongside baccalaureate) once students successfully complete ESO. This policy was changed when several teachers in the school claimed that too many students from ICA were choosing moving on to technical post-compulsory secondary education instead of pre-university baccalaureate. Currently only students who are not seen as 'academically-oriented' (e.g. students in the diversification class or compensatory education) are invited to these visits.

frame. The previous morning I had been talking to Maria José, the school social worker, in her office and she commented that she did not know if the three of them would show up, two of them said the previous week they would go to the visit but have not come to school in the past few days. She then said that she "found it understandable that they do not want to go to an ACE, they see it as an extreme measure for very particular and problematic cases. Frank (one of the students) would fit the case since he is already a kid with judicial measures but Roger's only problem is that he misses many classes".

The morning of the visit, Aurora, the school counsellor, arrives at the office with two students, Roger and Jimmy, and the six of us – the two students, Aurora, Maria José and two ethnographers – take the bus to visit this alternative school. The school we visit is physically quite different from ICA. The outside walls of the building are covered with elaborate graffiti that seemed to be produced by students with the permission of the school. The inside walls of the schools have many photographs of students involved in extra-curricular activities and comic strips (probably made by students) that talk about immigration or the 'juvenile protection system'. The first part of the visit consists of a conversation and presentation of the program in an office by the school staff. Here the teacher explains how the program works, what they can learn here and what they would be asked to study. In the second part we visit different modules taught at the school: the electrical training class, which is basically organized as an apartment with 'stripped walls' and all the electrical structures visible to the students and, a hair-dressing class, which is organized as a beauty-parlour shop. All students in the electricity class are male while all the students in the hair-dressing class are female. During this visit, the teacher asks several questions to the students, including one about their background, and Roger and Jimmy also ask some questions. The teacher that is guiding the visit insists that they should take coming to this school as "a job", they must be responsible and committed with the program even though they do not work like in a "regular school". He later insists that studying in this program involves using costly equipment and occupying a student slot that is quite expensive and has a high demand, so they can't allow having students wasting time here, since there are other kids who would like to occupy these slots.

On the bus-ride back to the school, we ask them what they think about the modules. Jimmy says that it's OK and Roger says that he definitely does not want to go. Then they say that if they go they will go together. One of the ethnographers asks how they arranged the visit, if they volunteered or

were requested to go, they answer that the teachers "convinced them to go". Aurora asks them if they have an idea now of how ACEs work and tells them that when they get to the school they can go to her office and take a look at all the modules of this type they have in the district. She insists that the important thing is not if they liked or not this particular school and program - among other things, apparently, Roger recognized some of the teenagers in the school they visited and does not get along with them so he was quite negative about the whole experience - but to think if they would like to enrol in a program of this type, even if it's in another area such as culinary arts, which seems to interest Roger more. When they get to the school several of teachers they meet in the halls ask them what they thought of the visit and if they were "convinced" by the program. Aurora in her office shows them a list of the different programs that exist in the area and tells them that they can think about it and talk about it next week. Then Roger says that what they want to do is "kick them out" of this school and Aurora replies that they don't want to kick them out, that what they want to do is "find a place where they are well".

This episode illustrates how students, particularly Latin American students with more problematic academic and social trajectories, are inserted in school routines and practices that define them as 'student-types' that do not fit in well with the expectations and educational programs available at Central-Aluche. Rather these 'types' fit in and are better matched with 'program-types' offered outside the school; where the expectations, methodology and educational goals of the programs seem to be better suited for students – and, incidentally, these alternative programs also seem to be occupied by students with similar socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. The extract also shows how placing students in different educational tracks is not a process that is achieved through formal moments of assessment or decision- taking and is, rather, something that is construed as occurring over time and collaboratively between teachers, counsellors and students. However, we also see how this process involves ascribing certain identities to students that are not passively assimilated. Rather, we find students producing a variety of stances in relation to how they are managed and categorized by the institution.

Students discourses on institutional categories and trajectories

Students in the school also incorporate these categories into their vocabularies. These representations appear both in interviews and the visual materials produced and circulated by students in the school –either elicited by researchers or produced within daily school life. More generally, students have a representation of the future that lies ahead once compulsory secondary education is completed. The photograph shown in Figure 1 shows a picture taken by two students (one Spanish origin and one with a Moroccan background) in the fourth year 'diversification' group. The photograph shows a detail of the entrance to a pre-university baccalaureate classroom (2º LC BAC) and was titled by the students *Donde nunca hemos llegado* 'Where we never got', a statement that explicitly indicates the types of alternatives they consider are already out of their reach - although, at least formally, they would be able to consider enrolling in this form of post-secondary education if they completed successfully their year in 'diversification'.

In contrast, the flyer captured in Figure 2 -taken by the research team in the school entrance hall- shows how some students at ICA are already engaged with their 'future' university studies and the controversies taking place in higher education. These expectations are reflected (and only seem relevant in this context) in the involvement of some of the students -and the school student association- in the protests against the reforms that were taking place in Spanish and European higher education as part of the European Union promoted convergence policies in higher education (i.e. 'The Bologna Process').
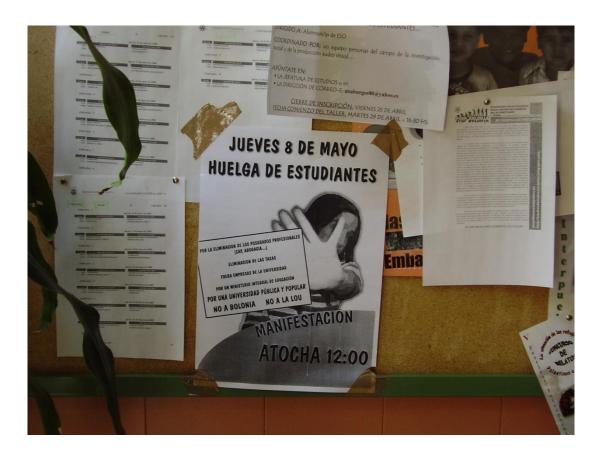
Figure 1: 'Where we never got'

Figure 2: Student bulletin board in the main entrance hall

(**Capture of the central poster**: Thursday 8 May / Student strike / Against professional postgraduate degrees / against tuition fees / Against corporations in higher education / For a full ministry of education / For a public and accessible university / No to Bologna / No to LOU[5])

While these artefacts capture the expectations and discourses about post-ESO trajectories, students also have articulate ideas about the implications and expectations that are attached to participation and placement in the different tracks that exist within compulsory secondary education. Again, we find that Latin American students produce the most explicit statements in relation to this issue, given that for them it is often a first-hand experience - either because they are themselves placed in or considered for these 'alternative' programs or because close friends from their peer network are. For some students, participation in compensatory education is assessed in terms of comparisons between outcomes, as Extract 3 shows:

Extract 3: Interview with Ronaldo, a second year Ecuadorian student

((talking about the 'compensatory education class')) because when we are in the 'small class', well there is nothing to get distracted with, its just paying attention and all that, I don't even have to study, just a small review and that's enough (...) ((talking about the 'ordinary group classes')) but where I fail is in the 'big classes' with everyone, in the bigger classes, those I fail (...)

Here we see a student comparing his achievement levels in compensatory education classes (which he states are Language and Literature, Social Studies, Mathematics and English) and in the ordinary track classes (which are Physical Education, Technology, Music and Art). For him, as well as for many other students and teachers in the school, compensatory education presents a 'watered-down' version of the curriculum in which expectations are lowered and the chances of obtaining positive results are increased. However, Ronaldo's assessment seems to be formulated in the present tense in terms of the concurrent comparisons he makes about his

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[5] LOU: *Ley Orgánica de Universidades* 'General University Law'.

achievement. It does not involve considering the types of paths that being to be laid out to students once they are enrolled in a compensatory education program. These considerations are incorporated into the discourses of students who have found themselves placed in compensatory education and still maintain high educational expectations:

Extract 4: Interview with Jota, a fourth year Ecuadorian student

J: When I arrived in the third year everything was fine, but suddenly (...) I was in maths class (...) I have always been lousy at maths (...) so much, that now I still need to pass second year and third year maths (...) I'm awfully bad! and I came and said that I didn't understand the teacher, and that (...) and I saw (...) I thought that there were a few classes of a compensatory type (...) but you could choose the classes (...) you know? I just wanted maths classes and they changed me to all (subjects) (...) And I didn't know well, you know? So I asked, I do not know, but I asked it (...) and that was, it was a great mistake (...) I regret having done it...

I: Why?

J: because when I arrived at 'compensatory' I relaxed, I said well!, and I relaxed a lot, a lot (…) I relaxed very much, I failed and failed, and in the end (...) and I failed four or three (subjects), I think that was four or three (…)

This extract shows how entering compensatory education is not interpreted as an opportunity to receive educational support that may facilitate students' success in the ordinary curriculum. Rather, it is seen by students themselves (alongside teachers) as a first step in a succession of moves within secondary education that lead students to poor educational outcomes. It also shows how entering compensatory education - or other alternative programs - can occur in a context in which students may not be fully aware of the conditions and implications this adscription has. As we have insisted upon already, placement in programs is not something that can be solely decided by teachers or administrators based on students' objectives outcomes. It is a decision that must be made and approved in conjunction with

students and families - which is one of the reasons why the work of the counselling department as a mediating element in this decision-taking process is critical. It also shows the importance that parental representations and their understanding of the workings of the Spanish educational system, and particularly of secondary education, is a crucial element in defining students' trajectories. As the following heading shows, this is something that might be a challenge for immigrant families.

Immigrant parents' discourses and relationships with Spanish secondary education

Contrary to dominant beliefs held by teachers (and certain public commentators) Ecuadorian parents show a high degree of commitment and interest in their children's education. More generally, schooling in Spain is seen as providing opportunities that they themselves did not have during their time as students or which are comparatively better than those currently offered in their countries of origin (see Moscoso, 2009). Also, not unlike Spanish middle-class families, facing the demands and challenges of schooling in Spain may involve extra-support and effort on the part of families

Extract 5: Interview with Claudia, an Ecuadorian mother

(…) Their father has also been on top of things, that they study English. English is not good here. I don't know English, but here they don't speak it well, Spaniards do not speak good English. He is in an academy, the kids are from Argentina, England, France and other places I can't remember, so I have him there. My girl goes Monday and Wednesday and he goes on Friday. Saturday they both have French. Since the girl will be going to secondary school next year she needs to start looking at French, she has to be ready and not like the other one who had problems. We are making a special effort. (…)

This orientation reflects a general commitment to advancement through investment in formal education. Such a commitment involves mobilizing a number of personal and social resources but it also means dealing with the Spanish educational system, with its complex

regulations, decision-making processes and particular channels of communication between school staff and families. It is in this matrix where parental expectations and they type of choices that in practice are made begin to clash. One especially contentious issue between families and schools is how 'retention' is presented as a measure implemented to facilitate immigrant students' transition into the Spanish educational system. In some cases (Extract 6), through dialogue with teachers, retention may be construed as an educationally beneficial measure – despite the fact that, in practice, it limits the options that may be considered for the student if he faces future educational difficulties. In other cases (Extract 7), the tendency of Spanish schools to propose retention as an initial transition measure is explicitly questioned and interpreted in more explicitly political terms.

Extract 6: Interview with Laura, an Ecuadorian mother

My son came when he was five year old and they put him behind, instead of moving him forward, I think here it is more advanced than in Ecuador, (they have) another method (...) he had problems in the sixth grade, he repeated, I mean the teacher told me that it was preferable, [but] that if I wanted she would pass him because I already had a place at the secondary school, she told me if he is going to fail, t is better to repeat. Then I began to think, I said "better to learn more, it doesn't matter" (...) so well, my son repeated, he should now be in second year and he is in first, but it does not matter, the important thing is that he passes knowing.

Extract 7: Interview with Clara, an Ecuadorian mother

(…) In school they do because they say our countries are under-developed and the educational level is lower, they have said this to me, they do. When he came they wanted to put him in a lower grade, I said that it was not possible, that in any case they should test him to see how he is doing, but he did have many 'blank spots'. The level here is a bit more than what he has doing there (…)

These episodes also illustrate aspects of the decision making process in the Spanish educational system. As said, it set up in a way that requires 'informed parental consent' for

important educational decisions and is not left exclusively to the hands of professionals or the outcome of objective assessments (cf. Mehan, 1996; Berenst and Mazeland, 2008). To support this process the system has formal resources and spaces for communication, such as teacher-parent meetings, counselling units or published materials outlining the organization of the system, etc. In other words, it presumes a communicative and relational scenario in which parents can act as informed and empowered interlocutors who are practically on equal standing with educators in terms of their executive capacity. Such an assumption, even as a communicative ideal, may seem problematic but it especially distorted in the case of immigrant parents relationship with schools.

To begin, teachers acknowledge that the material and work conditions that many immigrant parents experience create important restrictions to the opportunities parents have to participate in meetings with teachers or other school events. However, even this line of argumentation seems to displace the problem to family-based shortcomings rather to institutional inflexibility:

Extract 8: Interview with compensatory education teacher

(…) in the family quite a few things do not work, in all students something in their families does not work (...) they have some kind of family disadvantage. These children also need academic guidance, personal guidance and family (guidance), because at home they don't get such guidance, they are lost. Since parents fail so much (...) because of different circumstances (...) because these families live in the conditions in which they live (...) it is not a questions of blaming parents because they are slaves (...) they reflect their circumstances (…).

A 'material reality' that is corroborated in parent's discourses who admit the constraints they face to participate in school activities, whether initiated by teachers or the school parental organization:

Extract 9: Interview with Juan, an Ecuadorian father

(…) in other places they call it AMPA, association of students' parents, it offers a series of activities for the kids and also for mothers and fathers who want to participate. So there are some activities that they organize, Sara has decided to go to some. I went to the first meeting, I took the day off from work and went. I was more or less interested in their activities, I saw one that I could participate in but, of course, my schedule made it incompatible (…)

To circumvent these challenges in the relationship between immigrant families and schools, regional educational policies, rather than diversifying or making more flexible the channels of communication between teachers and families, have favoured the incorporation of new professional figures in the school system specialized in managing school-community-family relationships. ICA was pro-actively committed to making use of these resources in a number of ways. As said, it had a large and dynamic counselling department that included a social worker, who served as a liaison with the local social services and followed through their schooling a number of students -immigrant and of Spanish origin- with 'open cases' in the district social services. ICA also participated in an after-school educational support program funded by the national government designed for at-risk students and had implemented an extended after-school use of the school library. Additionally, during the second year of fieldwork, municipal authorities funded an 'intercultural mediator' position in the counselling department. The person who arrived at the school had a Latin American background (something that was explicitly expected) and his work focused on counselling immigrant students along their studies, providing educational support of different types and, especially, mediating in the communication between families and teachers. However, this mediator role was construed by some teachers as focused on helping parents re-asses their educational expectations, especially when these were perceived as being too high and a source of conflict with the school:

Extract 10: Interview with intercultural mediator

(…) There are kids who have been regrouped not so long ago, and at certain ages, let's say, more or less, age 16, right? (...) because sometimes they would say: "my children are at the University, in their 3rd year", let's say "in Economics" and I would think: "how good!", they are not with their children, and this has its cost, but at least in academically they are very well" (...) But you also have this gap (...). That parents perceive that their children are good students in their country of origin, they have good grades; however, when the time comes (...) we are talking about kids who are 16 and 17, that would be year four more or less, they face a certain gap, and these kids have to deal with the academic gap, apart from the whole integration (process), and all this at a key moment. Why a key moment? Because it is the fourth year of ESO, where many things are decided, because if you finish (successfully) fourth year of ESO all options are open: you can do technical training or you can go to baccalaureate to go on to university studies. Year four of ESO opens doors, then these cases yes we are seeing them. I think that the approach that they are taking, say, in this secondary school I feel is OK in the sense that is you can transmit to parents a reality, which is that two things are going on: they have a certain academic gap, they have to, well, they have to adapt, their own adaptation, say, to society, to the school. And one of the jobs I have as a 'technician' is to transmit this information to parents, right? That they have to deal with, let us say, a year of transition, and that this does not mean that the opportunity to study is lost or that they will be marginalized (…)

Here we see how the intercultural mediator is delegated with the task of unpacking the expectations and procedures of the Spanish educational system and compulsory secondary education to immigrant parents. However, in his interpretation of the challenges that immigrant students and families face he reproduces part of discourses and beliefs - about expectations, the timing of migratory transitions, etc. - present in Spanish professional discourses on immigrant students experiences (cf. Poveda. Jociles and Frazé, 2009). As we have attempted to show in this paper, the implications of these discourses have problematic consequences for immigrant students' educational trajectories.

Conclusions

These data show how actors involved in compulsory secondary education hold different discourses and engage in different practices in relation to what constitutes a successful academic trajectory and how it can be attained. These differences reflect, among other things, asymmetries between participants in relation to their knowledge of the educational system and its functioning as well as in their capacity to manoeuvre through the 'workings' of the system. In these unequal dynamics immigrant parents are in the most vulnerable position: for them the educational system seems to be quite impenetrable and the practical channels of communication that are set up to render it meaningful are laden with contradictions. Immigrant students (as well as Spanish students), through their daily experiences, come to understand the functioning of the system and the implications of the diverse educational itineraries that are available somewhat better. But only 'somewhat', the extracts we presented show how students' educational decisions also involve regrets and taking into consideration short-term comparisons that do not foresee the implications of being placed in particular programs or are assessed in relation to other concerns (e.g. peer relations, immediate material consequences, etc.).

In this context, it seems teachers and administrators hold the upper-hand and have created an institutional and a discursive apparatus in relation to immigrant students designed to accelerate their exclusion from the educational system - so as not to disturb teachers' 'comfortable' working conditions. Indeed, from a theoretical and academic perspective there is much to criticize in the logic of teachers' discourses (see Franzé, Moscoso and Calvo, 2010) but from our point of view focusing on teachers' individual representations and prejudiced intentions misses the main point. For us, the important issue is to understand how these practices and discourses are tied to wider ideological, institutional and political processes (e.g. Heller and Martin-Jones, 2001) and how these play a role in the construction of these educational outcomes. In fact, it could be argued that the intentions of IES Central-Aluche are laudable: the

school is committed to high educational standards - by focusing exclusively on pre-university secondary education - while it serves a very diverse student body (50% of students in the school have an immigrant background). However, it does so within a system that has increasingly favoured different educational tracks within secondary education to 'meet' the needs of a diverse student body. The administrative configuration of the school in relation to district resources –and its own explicit programmatic decisions- facilitates transferring less-academically oriented students outside ICA. Educational work with immigrant students is increasingly left in the hands of specialized professionals and units, rather than being incorporated into 'ordinary/daily' educational practices. Finally, teacher training schemes and dominant educational theories draw from certain conceptions of culture, development and family dynamics that construe immigrant students in problematic ways. The school we have investigated works in this terrain and makes use of these resources to construct students' educational trajectories. If anything, our analysis should help to scrutinize the logic behind these policies and measures.

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