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Immigrant Students and the Ecology of Externalization in a Secondary School in Spain

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Abstract: We examine how counselors, teachers, and other professionals at a secondary school in Madrid (Spain) understand cultural diversity and work with immigrant students' educational circumstances. Our analysis suggests that cultural diversity is largely construed as a problem and the explanation of educational difficulties is organized around an "externalizing logic" in which responsibility for educational outcomes is transferred to process and programs outside "ordinary" teachers' realm of action. We analyze these discourses and institutional practices from an ecological perspective: within the context of the local changing demographics of the school, regional/national policy measures around diversity and wider conceptualizations of cultural diversity in Spanish education.

Keywords: secondary education, cultural diversity, Spain, immigration, professional discourses

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Spain's educational system is often introduced as having a number of particularities among Western countries in relation to immigrant students (Gibson and Carrasco 2009). Putting aside the scenario created by the current economic recession, immigration into Spain is a comparatively recent phenomenon and only became a visible social issue since the mid-1990s. It has also been relatively intense within a brief period of time, reshaping greatly the demographics of Spanish society and schools in less than two decades. For example, foreign immigrants currently comprise over 14% of the Spanish population, when this figure was around 2.5% in 1990, and has gone from representing less than 1% to close to 10% of the Spanish pre-university student body (Instituto de Formación del Profesorado, Investigación e Innovación Educativa 2011). Finally, these demographic trends are intertwined with larger socio-economic and socio-cultural changes and educational reforms implemented since the early 1990s aimed at turning Spain into a "modern post-industrial" society.

These are well known statements in Spanish educational research and policy, which have been met with a plethora of studies and publications on the topic. Successive reports confirm that immigrant students in the Spanish educational system fair off worse than their peers who were born and grew up in Spain (e.g. Defensor del Pueblo 2003; García Castaño et al. 2008) and are unequally distributed along different types of schools and educational programs (e.g. Carrasco and Soto 2000; Poveda et al. 2012a). Often, this pattern is explained by stating that it emerged in a context of educational reforms that did not incorporate immigration and cultural diversity as elements of the equation. Educational reforms established since the late 1980s have, at least formally, made explicit references to "diversity" and have put a strong emphasis on meeting all the "diverse needs" of students. But in these discussions, "diversity" is construed as a generic concept designed to encompass different cognitive, motor, and sensorial disabilities, as well as socio-cultural differences and

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disadvantages (e.g. Echeita 2006), and builds on a strongly psychologized framework – not unlike the one dominating teacher education in the United States (Ladson-Billings 2006). Also, immigration and cultural diversity emerged as issues in educational policy during the implementation of a major reform in secondary education aimed at extending comprehensive and compulsory education up to 16 years of age (among other changes in the system). This effort, designed by successive social-democratic governments, had a relatively clear rationale in its conception: promote the educational modernization of Spanish society and revamp the role of the educational system in decreasing socio-economic inequalities; which in the late 1980s were primarily construed in terms of social class and social origin (Maravall 1984; Marchesi 2000). Yet, changes in the social and political scenario in Spain during the 1990s and 2000s made this reform much more complex and contested than expected.

From our perspective, these tensions transpire in the educational policy response to increased socio-cultural and linguistic diversity in the Spanish educational system.

Demographic changes in the student population have been addressed through what several authors in Spain have described as an *externalizing* logic (e.g. Franzé 2008; Merino, García, and Casal 2006): by creating a number of parallel programs and professional figures in the educational system placed specifically to meet the needs of immigrant and minority students outside mainstream classrooms. This strategy allowed for more flexibility in policy measures -as it did not depended on nation-wide reforms in the structure of the educational system- and incorporated new professional figures in the system, yet is also facilitated a response in which general pedagogical practices were not addressed (Relaño-Pastor 2009; del Olmo 2010; Teasley 2002; Gibson and Carrasco 2009). This externalizing logic also facilitated (and/or was supported by) educational arguments in which the “causes” and “treatment” of the educational challenges posed by students’ socio-cultural diversity were discursively located

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outside teachers' immediate realm of action. For example, educational difficulties are explained by focusing on students' linguistic and family backgrounds, previous educational experiences, or community environments, rather than on classroom instructional strategies or teacher expectations, as factors that play a role in students' educational trajectories.

Even though current policies outline in some detail these programs and professional roles, their insertion in the educational system is not an uncontroversial issue nor is placing students in these "alternative" programs a straightforward process. This is partly a product of some of the structural tensions around the establishment of a comprehensive and extended secondary education tier in Spain. On the one hand, the design of secondary education in Spain moved away from the prevalent model in Northern European countries where access to different forms of secondary education (clearly differentiated and separated from each other) is determined early on by academic scores or the outcomes of formal examination processes (cf. Berenst and Mazeland 2008; Schneider 2008). On the other hand, as said, successive policy attempts to diversify educational paths within compulsory secondary education led to a proliferation of supplementary programs specifically aimed at immigrant and foreign students, students with special needs, or students generally considered "at risk". Yet, incorporation into these programs is not determined (nor mandated) based on academic standing alone.

Academic standing is seen as the initial eligibility condition but participation in a program, in practice, is the result of an apparently consensual process among teachers, students, and families. That is, given the case of a student facing educational difficulties, the school can make a proposal for enrolment in a particular program but this proposal needs to be communicated and discussed with the student and the family and it may be accepted or rejected. In other words, the system, at least formally, appears to be oriented towards dialogue and collaborative decision making. Further, especially in Spanish secondary education, the

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educational unit in charge of managing and mediating in this decision-making process inside schools is the Counseling Department (*Departamento de Orientación*), which has become an increasingly multi-professional (involving psychologists, special education teachers, social workers, intercultural mediators, etc.) and complex unit in charge of designing and implementing “alternative” programs and mediating in the process of transferring students in or out of these programs. Members of the Counseling Department are also the key school professionals who work with families, tutor-teachers, and other professionals in social and educational services in the community to address the needs of students with educational difficulties. In short, the Counseling Department is the school structure in secondary schools in Spain through which educational policies and processes such as *externalization* are played out.

From an ethnographic perspective, this shaping of educational policy and practice around cultural diversity has pushed researchers to understand the construction of educational inequalities not only as a process of segregation across types of schools (public vs. private) and/or city districts (e.g. Peláez 2010) but also as a process that is constructed within schools, their classrooms, programs, and educational practices (e.g. Carrasco et al. 2012). This turn underscores how educational policies, especially in the Spanish educational system which is based on regional de-centralization and allows for certain school autonomy, come to life through their implementation and appropriation in specific schools. Recent comparative ethnographic studies show the variations in responses in relation to how cultural diversity is construed by schools and educators (Ballestín 2011), how different programs are defined and implemented (Martín Rojo and Mijares 2007; Mijares and Pastor 2011) or how linguistic diversity is addressed in particular classrooms (Unamuno 2008; Sabaté 2009). Our study, builds on these studies and attempts to also show the crucial role played by the Counseling

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Department and its various apparatuses in shaping how cultural diversity is addressed in secondary schools in Spain.

In other words, these studies have attempted to uncover, drawing on Bourdieu (1988), the *institutional* or *organizational habitus* of schools (Diamond et al. 2004; Cornbleth 2010) as the construction space for practices and discourses around cultural diversity in Spanish education. By organizational habitus in the context of educational institutions we mean institutional-collective stable dispositions that lead actors to understand educational issues and problems within particular explanatory structures and to follow specific courses of pedagogical action. From our perspective, institutional habitus emerges as a construct that can guide in-depth meso-level analyses of school life and of how schools address cultural diversity. Yet, within this conceptual framework, studies have been less successful in extending research in other conceptual directions. One direction is 'horizontal', which involves examining the overlapping influences on students' educational trajectories of various social fields such as school, family, and peers (Lahire 2007). Another direction is 'vertical', which requires considering the different spatio-temporal scales (cf. Nespor 2004; Blommaert 2010), macro-social/historical, institutional, and personal-interactional (Heller and Martin-Jones 2001), that configure and give meaning to institutional practices and educational outcomes.

The research project this paper stems from attempts to respond to some of these challenges and is largely based on a team ethnography that simultaneously focused on the educational trajectories of immigrant students in one secondary school from the perspective of educators, students, and families during fieldwork (Poveda et al. 2012b; Franzé et al. 2010). In this paper we delve into the institutional dimension of school life and focus on educators' (especially of those closely involved in the education of immigrant students) discourses and

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practices around immigration and cultural diversity in the school – while other reports of the project have focused on peers (Moscoso 2011; Calvo 2012) or families (Moscoso 2011).

In some aspects our findings are congruent with patterns that have been presented in other studies conducted in Spain, but our goal is to provide a more 'vertically' contextualized account of institutional practices and discourses inside school. In other words, we seek to incorporate into the analysis aspects of the wider ecology of the school. We use the term 'ecological' drawing from multiple perspectives that have incorporated an ecological framework to the analysis of educational issues (e.g. Creese and Martin 2003; Bronfenbrenner 2004) and, in this paper, more specifically as an adaptation of Lemke's (2000) notion of *ecosocial system*. For our purposes these approaches call to understand discourses and practices around cultural diversity as elements that emerge within the context of the various timescales that operate at the school and are relevant to understand its institutional dynamics and day-to-day practices. This ecology includes aspects such as educational policy and social changes in Spain over the last three decades (as discussed above), the school, and neighborhood's recent social history, teachers' personal biographies and experiences, and unfolding day-to-day processes at the school.

Method

The results presented in this article draw from a team ethnography (e.g. Woods, Boyle, Jeffrey, and Troman 2000; Creese, Bhatt, Bhojani, and Martin 2008) centered on the educational trajectories of immigrant students in a secondary school in Madrid. As said, in this paper we focus primarily on the work of teachers and other professionals in the school, which was primarily documented through participant observation and fieldnotes of multiple aspects of educators' work in the school, such as teacher meetings, classroom teaching (some of which was audio-recorded), educators' interactions with students inside and outside the

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classroom, or educators' informal conversations with colleagues in spaces such as coffee breaks. We documented in particular detail the work of the various professionals in the Counseling Department of the secondary school inside and outside the school. The Counseling Department was formed by a multi-professional team that included psychologists, social workers, compensatory education teachers and, during the second year of our study, an intercultural mediator. We also interviewed several of the tutor-teachers and educational professionals who worked in or with the school, in addition to numerous conversations we held during the course of fieldwork with educators about their work with particular students. Finally, various documents, statistics, artifacts, and visual materials (including information available on the school's webpage) from the school and surrounding community were gathered during the project.

Fieldwork was conducted during the 2007/08 and 2008/09 academic-years and the guiding logic was that each team member would focus on or co-document different relevant contexts inside and outside the school. During most of the two academic years of the study, fieldwork was distributed amongst the research team which usually involved two full days per week of participant observation in the school and two alternative forms of work inside the institution: (a) each member of the research team individually documented and observed particular activities or spaces of the school or (b) two ethnographers co-observed the same activities and spaces of the school. In the latter case, each day of observation at the school was completed with a meeting between co-observers (often audio-recorded) in which we exchanged and discussed field-notes and observations to create an additional shared narrative of the fieldwork day. The heart of the analysis of the data of this project is the collective work of the research team (the co-authors of this paper and other members of the team who focused on family and peer dynamics) in research meetings where different data sources and materials

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of each ethnographer were shared and discussed. In these discussions, particular patterns were identified and categories developed which were later triangulated across data sources and the available evidence.

In short, the project is based on intense and extensive participant observation and fieldwork in the various formal and informal spaces that configure educators' work in the school under study. In this paper we present numerous extracts that portrait these contexts and the discourses and practices that unfold in them. In particular, we give special analytic value to discourses and arguments as they emerge in daily conversations and interactions between educators and, therefore, detailed fieldnote extracts play an important role in the presentation of our analysis (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995; Blommaert and Dong 2011). Yet, this data is triangulated and complemented with data from other ethnographic data sources such as interviews, documents, and other observations.

IES Central-Aluche: A South Madrid Public Secondary School

The *Instituto de Educación Secundaria (IES) Central-Aluche* (Secondary Education Institute Central-Aluche, pseudonym, shortened as *ICA* or *IES Central-Aluche*) is a state-run secondary school in a large southern district of Madrid, Spain. The school is located between two neighborhoods: (1) Aluche, a largely middle-class neighborhood mainly formed by residential apartments built during the 1960s and 1970s, and (2) Carabanchel Bajo, a working-class district developed during of the migratory movement from 'the country to the city' that took place in Spain in the 1950s and 1960s. Over the last two decades, the district has received large numbers of immigrants, primarily from Latin America (particularly Ecuador and Bolivia), which currently comprise approximately 19% of the district's population (municipal census data for the year 2009). The majority of immigrant residents in the district occupy homes within Carabanchel Bajo and surrounding neighborhoods. Despite

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this border location, the secondary school receives most of its students from Carabanchel Bajo and serves a student body that is increasingly of immigrant origin and identifies itself with the working-class neighbourhood of Carabanchel rather than the middle-class homes that surround the school (Poveda 2012). Based on figures reported by the school, the proportion of immigrant students at IES Central-Aluche grew from 16% in the 2003/04 schoolyear, to 32% in the 2005/06 school-year, to 50% in the 2008/09 schoolyear. Of these immigrant students, members of the Counseling Department consider that 95% have Latin-American backgrounds (primarily from Ecuador, Bolivia, and Colombia to a lesser degree) - this is an estimate figure provided by school staff, since official statistics for the 2008/09 academic year did not compile information on students' nationalities. The vast majority of immigrant students in the school are first generation immigrants who either arrived during their childhood in Spain or have been recently re-united with their parents and have begun secondary education in Spain.

ICA was established in the late 1980s as a response to local political and social pressure to meet the educational needs of the growing student population of the district (born in the Spanish baby-boom of the early 1970s). As part of the political and educational reforms of the time, there was an explicit commitment to provide university-oriented secondary education to a largely working class population with, at the time, rural family backgrounds. As summarized in the introduction to the school's current educational project and mission statement (a 22-page written document available on the school's website), these initial students were to be the first generation in their families to complete secondary education and move on to higher education:

Excerpt 1: IES Central-Aluche's Educational Statement¹

In the early 1980s, the increase of the population in the area, formed mainly by young couples, led to a growing demand for school spaces in secondary education. This was

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initially solved with the opening of *Instituto Aluche-Norte*, which started operating with three educational shifts. Given the persistence of the school placement problem and the demands of the local neighborhood associations of the area, new schools were established including ours. (...) ICA opened in the 1988/89 academic year.

In this collection of new secondary schools in the district, the original idea was to allow different schools to concentrate on different educational paths and, since its establishment, ICA has privileged pre-university secondary education - despite an initial attempt to also offer vocational and technical forms of secondary education. Since the changes that were implemented in the 1990s, the two strands of secondary education that the school offers are *Educacion Secundaria Obligatoria* (ESO, Compulsory Secondary Education) for students between 12-16 years of age, and *Bachillerato* (Pre-university Baccalaureate) for students between 16-18 years of age. ESO graduates who want to consider technical-vocational forms of post-compulsory education have to transfer to other schools after completing ESO. Yet, the school has also been responsive to the social reality of the families and students it serves, and to the increasing social diversity of its student-body, and has designed and implemented a number of programs, incorporated new staff (e.g. a social worker, an intercultural mediator) and adopted measures to respond to students' needs. The Diversity Plan for the 2009/10 school-year (a written document available on the school's website) summarizes this scenario in the following terms:

Excerpt 2: Diversity Plan, 2009/10 school year

As a mirror of surrounding social changes, there are a significant number of students from single-parent families, re-constituted families, families with grandparents or aunts/uncles playing a parental role, dysfunctional families, and students under care of regional child-protection services (...) For several years the school social worker has

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designed plans to re-direct students' leisure time and allow them to receive after-school support in other neighborhood institutions. Beginning last year, three after-school support groups at ICA were opened through the national PROA Plan which will continue this year.

Among immigrant students we find cases of "uprooting", of children who have spent a large part of their childhood in their home country, with grandparents or other relatives who were more permissive than the parents they have been re-united with. In some cases, the economic, social, and housing situation worsens, and apartments have to be shared by several families or other persons outside of the family (...) To provide a response that is appropriate to these situations, we have established partnerships with intercultural mediators from the neighborhoods where ICA students live. A couple of times a year these mediators attend class tutor meetings and provide feedback and suggest work strategies.

This self-portrait of IES Central-Aluche's social reality and educational challenges also provides an indication of how diversity is addressed at ICA and how the school administration and Counseling Department have interpreted the different policies and resources available in the educational system to meet student diversity. As stated in the introduction, the general policy response to increased socio-cultural diversity in education in Spain has been to design a variety of supplementary and alternative programs around the core of each tier of the system. In the case of compulsory secondary education (ESO), these programs are built with basically two alternative rationalities in mind: (a) to provide academic-educational support for students who experience difficulties during their studies but are seen as potentially capable of meeting ESO requirements; or (b) designed for students at significant risk of "dropping out" and presented as an alternative educational path for students

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who are not seen as capable of completing conventional ESO. For the last few years ICA has focused on designing and implementing a variety of programs that are more in accordance with the first type of rationality, and the Counseling Department is very active in implementing these measures and orienting students into their programs or, if that is the prediction, helping students transfer to other schools where the second type of programs are offered.

From our perspective, the critical issue is that this approach to diversity, intertwined with the school's demographics and ICA's curricular offering, produces an educational scenario in which some students are, in practice, tracked to different educational streams, inside and outside ICA, which disconnect them from a mainstream educational path. This distribution of students along different educational streams is strongly associated with students' cultural backgrounds. For example, drawing from educational data collected by the research team, between 2005-2008: (a) while immigrant students comprised 50% of the student population in ESO, this figure was reduced to 17% in Pre-university Baccalaureate, (b) between 54-100% of students who were "proposed" to transfer to various programs outside ICA had immigrant backgrounds, (c) 91% of students in *Compensatory Education* had immigrant backgrounds, or (d) 52% of students in the *Curricular Diversification* group had an immigrant background². In other words, immigrant students were over-represented in all the educational programs that move students away from an academically oriented educational trajectory and under represented in those paths which extend their study at IES Central-Aluche until they are 18 years old.

These figures are not unlike those found in other reports for the city of Madrid (Poveda et al. 2012a), other ethnographies of secondary education in Spain, or even the international literature on educational tracking (e.g. Rubin 2006; Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard,

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and Lintz 1996). In the following sections we will examine how the “educational facts” of ICA are intertwined with the policy context we presented in the introduction, aspects of the social history of ICA summarized above, institutional practices and discourses on cultural diversity and immigrant students and even the educational biographies of the teaching staff. Thus, the analysis illustrates the particular shape discourses and policies adopt when they are put into practice in local contexts and the (intended and unintended) effects they may have.

Educational Policy in Context: Addressing Diversity through Educational Programming and Counseling

Our analysis suggests that IES Central-Aluche also operates under an externalizing logic which is made visible through three processes: (a) a portrait of immigrant families and students that highlights their deficits – discussed in the following section; (b) a displacement of immigrant students from ordinary classrooms to special programs at ICA; (c) a transfer of problematic immigrant students to programs outside ICA - programs which are not offered at ICA and seen as incompatible with its “academic mission”. The last two outcomes are produced through intense counseling work with students and families where these trajectories are constructed as the most desirable option for particular students. This process is so significant that it is incorporated into how teachers and other professionals categorize students and may become a part of students’ subjectivities (Poveda et al. 2012b). Here we examine how this counseling work unfolds at ICA and how it is incorporated into educators’ discourses.

As the third term of the school-year begun, discussing the options that were available for students the coming academic year emerged as an important topic for teachers, counselors, parents, and students. Three types of students and transitions were at the center of these conversations: (a) students who were finishing their second year of secondary education with difficulties and had several options open to them for the second half of their secondary

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education; (b) students who were entering their last year of compulsory secondary education with difficulties and could be placed in a special program for their last year; (c) students who were in their last year of secondary education and were close to the maximum legal age to be students at IES Central-Aluche and had to contemplate other programs outside ICA. As said, the majority of students who were placed/recommended for alternative programs were not born in Spain. From the perspective of the school however, it is not only a numerical question. Immigrant students and families “required” more intense work because, understanding the options that are available in the Spanish educational system, the consequences of these choices (as construed by the school and educational authorities), and achieving consensus, are not simple matters at all. This effort takes place in numerous formally or informally planned occasions, as the following extracts show.

Excerpt 3: Walk-by conversation in the Counseling Department (from fieldnotes, May 6, 2008)

Maria José, the school social worker, is working at her desk. The office is located in the main school hall and most of the time she has the door open. While she is at her desk, Jonas, an Ecuadorian student, fashionably dressed with baggy pants and a sophisticated haircut, walks by the door and Maria José calls him back. He stays standing under the door frame and Maria José asks him if he went to talk to the educator at social services – as she later explained, Jonas has a “school truancy” file open at the district social services and his family faces fines and potentially other measures if he continues to miss school. Jonas said that he did go and talked with her but did not like it because all they did was threaten him. Maria José replies that they were not threatening him, just informing him about what can happen if he continues doing this. Maria José then asks if he talked to his mother and Jonas says he did and

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that she scolded him. This brief conversation finishes with Maria José telling Jonas that his hair looks nice and that he looks very handsome today. Jonas replies that he cut his hair some time ago.

Through informal conversations like the one above, arranged meetings in the counseling office, or visits to other programs outside ICA, students are presented with the various programs and alternatives that are open to them as a response to their educational difficulties as students in “ordinary” ESO. These consequences and the projected portrait of the student may be resisted (Excerpt 3) or embraced (see below) but in all cases involve a response to students’ needs and diversity that is put in the hands of specialized professionals (i.e. the members of the Counseling Department, staff at the district social services, etc.) and educational streams that move students outside their ordinary classrooms or even the institution itself. As said, this is a decision that has to be spelled out to students and families and accepted by them:

Excerpt 4: Meeting with a mother and a student (from fieldnotes, June 16, 2008)

As Aurora, a school counselor and psychologist, and I are walking towards her office we meet Yolanda, a 17 year-old Ecuadorian girl who is in her third year of ESO. She says that her mother is here so Aurora can explain how PCPIs³ work and she can sign the papers. As we walk to the office, Aurora says that what she will do is go through the presentation she prepared for the meeting that took place the other evening. Aurora tells the mother that Yolanda did not seem too convinced but that after talking to her and listening to the explanation she is more set on it. Aurora already knows that Yolanda wants to do the “electronics program” which happens to be offered at *IES Aluche-West*. Once in the office, after a detailed explanation about the alternatives inside and outside ICA (see notes 2 and 3), Aurora gives Yolanda's mother a paper

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form to complete where she has to express her opinion – the form was generated by the regional government as an annex to official documentation on the PCPI. Yolanda's mother looks at the form, talks to her daughter and asks what she should write. After thinking about it for a few seconds she writes "I agree" (*Estoy de acuerdo*).

The range of programs and alternatives in secondary education in Spain configure students' future socio-academic trajectories within the educational system and, from our perspective, also provide a set of categories to classify students. For the teachers who work in the school, program labels form a short-hand system to define students and place them in different future socio-educational paths and define them as certain *kinds* of students (Anderson 2009; Poveda et al. 2012b). More broadly, given the demographics of the school, at ICA there seemed to be an emergent discursive construction centered particularly on Latin American students which had visible effects on their schooling.

Discourses about Latin American Students at IES Central Aluche

As noted above, the demographics of the school under study changed substantially over a relatively short period of time. Not only did the total proportion of immigrant origin students increase significantly but, among these, Latin American origin students (from Ecuador, Bolivia and, to a lesser degree Colombia) became the largest group, to the point that during the 2008-09 school-year Latin American students represented close to half the ESO student body of the school. Obviously, these changes did not go unnoticed to teachers at the school and conversations about Latin American students became visible both during formal staff meetings and other informal events (coffee breaks, informal gatherings, etc.). As a result, a particular *discursive formation* (Foucault 1972), an ideologically organized set of beliefs and statements contextualized and produced in social practice, around Latin American students seemed to be emerging at ICA. This formation emerged through the multiple

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occasions for peer-teacher socialization and reflexive activity (cf. Kroskrity 2006) that were part of educators' work at ICA. It portrayed Latin American students' educational experiences, family backgrounds, and linguistic repertoires in a way that, overall, undermined educational expectations for these students. Again, documented in similar terms in other ethnographies on Spanish secondary education (e.g. Ríos-Rojas 2011; Delpino 2008; Patiño 2007), this construction of Latin American students draws from arguments that are visible in wider educational discourses in Spain, and is locally shaped and aligned with the particular ways in which student diversity is addressed in the school. In this section we will discuss some of these discourses and examine their place in the ecology of influences that we claim configure ICA's response to cultural diversity.

A first set of discourses is tied more directly to Latin American students' academic experiences and results. The overall position is that Spanish secondary education is particularly challenging for these students. Educators in the school offer an explanation of these difficulties and have particular approaches to their management.

Excerpt 5: Interview with a Compensatory Education teacher (audio-recorded interview, February 7, 2008)

Carlos: (...) Bear in mind that many come from other countries and with a level, where even if they have gone to school, or are minimally schooled, its educational system is (...) this is very noticeable when they come, for example, from Dominican Republic, and they have an educational system, so to speak, poorer or inferior. And it shocks them quite a bit, that for example, there they are "A or B students" and they come here and must go to Compensatory Education. This is quite a shock, besides then, something happens, they bring, specifically from this country, gaps, I do not know if derived from (mal)-nourishment, arising from the educational system, derived from

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the lack of stimuli, I don't know, but they are doing well and suddenly you discover that there is something they don't understand, regardless of how many times you explain it, simple things, regardless of how many times you explain it to them they don't get it (...)

One element that stands out in teachers' discourses is how schooling and life in the country of origin is imagined. The above excerpt, while providing a particularly crude vision of this representation, illustrates some of the elements that configure it. Schooling in the Latin American countries where students come from is represented as noticeably less demanding and of lesser quality than education in Spain. Remarkably this construction of formal education and schooling in Latin America is produced by teachers without any direct experience about these school systems, explicit documentation on students' previous educational experiences, documentation on the educational systems that are discussed, or sensitivity to some of the basic structural elements (e.g. rural vs. urban settings, class differences, private vs. state education, etc.) that configure schooling in the Latin American region. Nonetheless, previous schooling is presented as creating certain effects that hamper Latin American students' experiences in Spanish education – which in Carlos' case mentioned above, are even complemented with a particular interpretation of the cognitive effects derived from various forms of “deprivation”. Ironically, the underlying pervasiveness of this lowered expectation of Latin American students is even visible in how teachers interpret apparent cases of academic success. While this progress is positively acknowledged and valued, this assessment is accompanied by after thoughts that index other underlying assumptions:

Excerpt 6: Conversation in a café (from fieldnotes, May 7, 2009)

We are in the first morning school break having coffee at a café across the street from ICA. Rosa, an English ESO teacher and class tutor, is talking to Aurora (psychologist

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and school counselor) about the exam she had to supervise that morning in a Pre-university Baccalaureate class. She comments that the kids have grown and are older and “cuter” now (than last year when she had some of them as ESO students) and that she noticed that out of 30 students, 13 were foreign. Rosa and Aurora agree that is quite a large number, especially for Baccalaureate, although Aurora then mentions than in her compensatory education class there are only two Spanish-origin people including her. Then, they agree that “it’s a good thing that so many reach Baccalaureate.” After this Rosa adds, “well, there are several that are not going to make it”.

In short, Latin American students are often considered academically less qualified and this view transpires implicitly and explicitly in various commentaries made by school staff. Further, this assessment takes into consideration different moments of students’ biographies. As shown above, one explanatory factor behind this assessment has to do with previous schooling and early childhood experiences. Additionally, there are also aspects of students’ present-day experiences that are perceived as obstacles to their academic success. Most professionals in the school understand and acknowledge that the lives of the immigrant families they work with are characterized by hardship, stressful labor, and challenging material conditions (see Excerpt 2). Most immigrant parents worked in manual labor (construction, house cleaning, and other services) which involved long working hours and commutes to/from home. As a result, students were perceived as not having much day to day support and the school did not benefit from effective parent-teacher communication:

Excerpt 7: Interview with a Compensatory Education teacher (audio-recorded interview, February 7, 2008)

Interviewer: Do you have contact with the families?

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Maria: Yes, Yes, continually, and most cannot come. They are given all kinds of problems at work. They have very precarious jobs. Once it was terrible because the parents were here because of a problem with their girl, and I called them constantly at work! You can't have personal meetings, you have to call them at work, but they can't talk, but you have to do it, because... that's another problem, children are alone all day, all day. You call their mother and its: "What do you mean he did not go?! I left his snack on the table!" Then you call home, the student picks up the phone and says: "No, I'm my brother". It's very complicated, no matter how much contact you have with families (...)

Most teachers understand that these labor and family conditions are hardly of parents' choosing and reflect the harsh reality of the labor market and economic system in Spain. Nonetheless, these family circumstances have material negative effects on immigrant students' educational and school experiences, which is what teacher accounts highlight. In part, this representation of family circumstances in the school underlies some of the measures (partly discussed in the previous heading) taken by the school to meet students' needs, such as incorporating an intercultural mediator to increase family-school communication and organizing different after-school support programs aimed at immigrant and at-risk students. Generally speaking, teachers try to keep in mind that this socio-economic reality is part of students' lives, but they also acknowledge that it is not difficult to slip into transforming all these material impediments for teacher-parent collaboration into a simplified explanation where "parental disinterest" is highlighted. In fact, one unfortunate change in families' lives that made educators re-examine their beliefs was tied to the dramatic effects the economic recession had on families. Throughout the later part of 2008 and beyond many immigrant (and

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Spanish-origin) parents lost their jobs and, as a side-effect, had more time to attend school meetings and respond to teacher calls, a change that was also gender patterned:

Excerpt 8: Conversation in a café (from fieldnotes, May 7, 2009)

We are in the second morning break in the café across the street from ICA. Héctor, the school intercultural mediator, is telling Aurora (psychologist and school counselor) about all the conversations he has had recently with students about their families making plans to return to their countries. Many are Bolivian kids who were only recently re-united with their parents and now have to return to Bolivia because both parents are unemployed. Aurora comments that she has had several cases in class where this has happened within the same school year, but she also mentions that it is affecting many families in the school. She had a Compensatory Education group where all of the fathers in the class were unemployed (as they all worked in construction). Aurora has noticed this frequently over the last year, even with her own children's school: many more fathers come to meetings, come to pick up their children from school, whereas before you simply "did not see them". She says that "now fathers can't find jobs and mothers can readjust the hours they work cleaning homes or find new homes to clean to make ends meet".

This way of representing Latin American students is aligned with the particular shape of the educational programs for students with "diverse needs" at IES Central Aluche. Educational programs are partially determined and defined by national and regional policy, but individual schools have certain leeway to determine what programs they implement, specify the type of students they will target for these programs and distribute resources among them. At ICA the cumulative effect of the decisions the school has taken in relation to these issues places immigrant students, and especially Latin American students, on the margins of

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the secondary education curriculum. This positioning objectively involves a lowering of academic expectations and educational opportunities within the educational system in Spain, something which is coherent with how Latin American students are portrayed at ICA. More generally, it rests on a view of 'integration' into Spanish society that seems to involve a personal moratorium during which academic progress or future-oriented educational decisions are set aside. The following episode during a class-tutor staff meeting synthesizes this position:

Excerpt 9: Year 4 ESO tutor staff meeting (from fieldnotes, April 14, 2008)

Aurora (school counselor and tutor of a year 4 diversification section) is discussing with the class tutors the options that are open for fourth year students who will probably not meet all ESO requirements in June. They are discussing the particular cases of different immigrant students including a boy from Ecuador who arrived in the school last year who has been saying that he wants to return to his country to complete secondary education. Later Rosa comments that "these Latin American kids who arrived as older students need between 2-3 years just to adapt and after that they can settle down and make decisions. They have been without their parents for several years and then they come here and are more controlled. Then, their parents feel guilty and "give them everything". She later mentions that "even their language is different; these kids are even embarrassed to talk in class because they think other students will make fun of them".

From our perspective, the point is not to question the belief that migration, especially in later childhood and adolescence, is a challenging and complicated transition for both the children and parents (Moscoso 2011). Rather, what is significant here is how this process is construed as completely external to teachers' work in a way in which: (a) the role that the school, tutors, and educators can play in shaping the nature of the "transition period" is

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minimized; and (b) the objective implication of delaying educational decisions in secondary education are not contemplated by teachers in the system. Further, the notion of a cultural transition resonates with the personal biographies of some teachers who, during their adolescence, made the transition from “the village to the city” – a transition that reflects the demographic transformation that shaped Carabanchel and other peripheral neighborhoods of Madrid in the 1950s and 1960s:

Excerpt 10: Conversation in a café (from fieldnotes, May 7, 2009)

We are in the first morning break at a café across the street from ICA. After talking about the students in *Bachillerato* (see Excerpt 6) Aurora and Rosa start to talk about the cultural references they share with their students. Rosa mentions that her students essays are all very similar; they write about what they experience between them or life in the neighborhood (...) Rosa then goes on to talk about her own childhood: she came from a village 200 km away from Madrid to study here. When she returned to her village in the summer, she realized that she was already very different than her old friends. Aurora says her experience was similar. She went to boarding school in the province capital and when she went back to her village, she just did not get her friends' jokes and humor. Both agree that they are better off now but that it was very hard work for them, and they say that “if for us this was a contrast and shock, imagine what it's like for these students who cross the ocean and come from thousands of kilometers away.”

These parallelisms between the biographies of teachers and students are established, yet there does not seem to be any particular transfer of expectations or even strategies from the life trajectories of Spanish teachers with rural backgrounds to their current day foreign-born immigrant students – some of which, incidentally, may also have rural backgrounds.

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More broadly, the socio-political history and origin of ICA has some convergences with the biographies and social trajectories of these teachers and the socio-educational and economic progression that was involved in migrating from the Spanish countryside to Madrid and being academically successful despite family origin. Nonetheless, this impetus does not seem to transfer to the expectations and work with current foreign immigrant students.

In short, discourses and practices around immigrant Latin American students at IES Central Aluche emerge as a coherent system that has visible effects on their educational trajectories. Our argument is that this system is shaped by multiple forces at the policy, institutional, and personal level and our analysis has attempted to tease out the ordering of these influences. In the conclusions we summarize this analysis and discuss some of the implications they have for our understanding of how the Spanish educational system deals with student diversity.

Conclusions

In this paper we have shown how two well documented educational facts about immigrant students in Spanish secondary education (e.g. El País 2009) - that immigrants are less educationally successful and are overrepresented in alternative educational programs- emerge in a particular secondary school. We have shown how this outcome can be seen as the result of multiple processes operating at various socio-temporal scales. Educational reforms and social transformations in Spain have set the terms under which cultural diversity and socio-educational opportunity are addressed. The institutional history and educational priorities of the school we have investigated result in favoring the implementation of some programs over others and promoting an active Counseling Department. The demographics and social relations of surrounding neighborhoods configure the socio-cultural reality of the school in which Latin American origin students occupy the most visible position. In turn,

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these conditions are tied to the emergence of particular discourses around cultural origin, a way of categorizing students and the emergence of specific parallels between teachers' and students' biographies.

Within our analysis we have paid particular attention to how immigrant students' educational trajectories are configured through an on-going decision making, communication, placement, and discursive process in which counselors, social workers, class tutors, intercultural mediators, and other professionals whose primary role is not limited to content matter teaching play a crucial role. As a result, our extracts have a recurrent set of protagonists such as Aurora (psychologist, year 4 ESO tutor and member of the Counseling Department), Maria José (social worker and member of the Counseling Department), Hector (intercultural mediator and member of the Counseling Department), Carlos and María (compensatory education teachers and members of the Counseling Department), and Clara and Rosa (teachers and class tutors). Indeed, our own methodological decisions/possibilities have favored this attention shift but we also provide empirical evidence that supports our claim about the crucial role these aspects of institutional life play in the configuration of students' trajectories in Spain's secondary education system - in contrast to the usual privileging of classrooms and classroom interaction as the central sites in the construction of students' trajectories (e.g. Martín Rojo and Mijares 2007). Given the importance of the Counseling Department and its various practices in immigrant students' outcomes, we want to close this paper highlighting some of the traits of the processes we have examined which might be especially relevant to critically scrutinize how socio-educational equality and opportunity are constrained in Spain

As seen above, placement in different educational programs is construed in the system as a collaborative process between educators, students, and families. This portrait presupposes

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a relatively symmetrical communicative scenario where parents and students can have effective input in the decisions and considerations that are made in relation to students' educational trajectories. From a critical perspective, as well as based on our findings, this is a problematic assumption. On the one hand, as we have seen, the process is highly asymmetrical given that educational institutions mobilize a pool of professionals (tutors, administrators, counselors, social workers, intercultural mediators, district social services, teachers from other schools, etc.), who largely understand the shaping of educational trajectories in similar terms (Poveda et al. 2012b), to interact with individual students and families. On the other hand, there are visible inequalities between families and students in their capacity to effectively interact with schools, network resources, and even confront/question the decision-making process of schools (cf. McGhee Hassrick and Schneider 2009). Our findings show that one disadvantage is purely material and informational. Immigrant parents face an economic reality that makes communicating with the school very complicated. Also, the structure and programs of Spanish educational system are complex and obtuse enough to pose a real challenge to many immigrant families – and, indeed, to many Spanish families, students, and professionals in the system. Professionals at ICA are aware of these limitations and seem to define the problem in these terms: as something primarily related to material and informational constraints. From our perspective, while these elements play an important role, there are also broader socio-cultural ideologies in relation to formal education, life trajectories, migration, and socio-economic opportunity that play a role in how decisions are made during secondary education (Poveda et al. 2012b; Calvo 2012; Moscoso 2011) which are not incorporated into how educators at ICA understand educational processes.

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Finally, an overview of the process through which students end up being placed (i.e. “decide” to enroll) in different educational programs and tracks suggests that it is not easy to identify a critical gatekeeping encounter/key situation (cf. Erickson 1975; Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz 2002; Michaels 1981) in which socio-educational trajectories and opportunities are managed. Rather, educational counseling and educational paths seem to emerge as the cumulative product of numerous informal and formal conversations, direct and indirect sources of information and, more generally, the construction of academic identities. In other words, in line with what others have suggested (Ponferrada 2009; Aliagas 2009), academic trajectories intertwine with the progressive construction of certain socio-educational subjectivities. This reframing may allow for a more ethnographically nuanced and theoretically elaborate approach to the construction of socio-educational inequality, yet it also complicates greatly proposing specific educational changes or an effective critique of particular educational practices, since it not easy to locate unique spaces and moments in the educational process where a transformation could produce visible effects. Rather, the analysis we present provides elements for a larger critique of dominant educational policies and ideologies in Spain and their effects when they come into life in schools.

Notes

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1. The quotes from school documents have been retrieved from sources available at ICA’s website. To protect the anonymity of the site and preclude automatic translations and web

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search, only the English translation of these documents is provided. In these translations we have attempted to reproduce the original terminology of the documents. All other extracts from interviews and fieldnotes have been translated or rewritten into English and made anonymous through the use of pseudonyms and the omission of other identifying details.

2. The second figure comprises the full range of percentages of immigrant students who transfer to the various programs outside ICA (see note 3). *Educación Compensatoria* (EC) '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 them at a disadvantage in relation to the standard requirements of ESO. *Diversificación Curricular* 'Curricular Diversification' is offered during 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.). These are the two programs ICA has organized for ESO students.

3. *Programa de Cualificación Profesional Inicial* (PCPI) 'Initial Professional Qualification Program' and other programs implemented over the years ('*Garantía Social* -GS- 'Social Guarantee' or *Aula de Compensación Educativa* -ACE- 'Educational Compensation Course') are designed for students who are close to or over 16 years of age and do not have an ESO certificate. They provide various forms of technical training that, if successfully completed, may allow accessing the labor market with some basic skills, move on to further forms of technical training or, with supplementary course-work, obtain an ESO certificate through an alternative route. None of these programs are offered or have been offered at ICA.

4. Tutor/a (in Spanish original) is an important and specific role in the educational system in Spain. A tutor is teacher who also acts as head-teacher of a year section of students; thus,

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becomes the reference teacher for the students in the year section, coordinates with other same-year tutors, the school administration and Counseling Department, and is the main interlocutor with families in relation to that section of students. Teachers in secondary schools usually volunteer for the tutor role in addition to their content matter teaching. In this project we have targeted teacher-tutors, especially year two and year four ESO teacher-tutors, as participants since they are teachers who have a closer relationship with students, the Counseling Department, and have a more relevant role in educational decisions around students.

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