The curricular and social integration of immigrant students: parallel roads

Gerardo Luis Santos Bocero\textsuperscript{a}*, Susana Fernández Larragueta\textsuperscript{b}, Juan Fernández Sierra\textsuperscript{c}

\textsuperscript{a}Universidad de Almería, Cta. Sacramento, s/n, Almería (04120), Spain
\textsuperscript{b}Universidad de Almería, Cta. Sacramento, s/n, Almería (04120), Spain
\textsuperscript{c}Universidad de Almería, Cta. Sacramento, s/n, Almería (04120), Spain

Abstract

When immigrant students arrive to a new scholar system, they don’t experience only the incorporation into a curricular context, but also into a particular social environment. In this sense, our purpose in this study has been to analyse the characteristics of these two main integration processes: curricular and social integration; and to study their mutual interaction. For that, we made a study case (at one Primary Education centre), using in-deep interviews with immigrant students and their teachers; just like observation processes in academic and non-academic contexts.

Keywords: curriculum, social integration, immigrant students

1. Introduction

In this document, we analyze the incorporation process of immigrant children to the human and social context of Spanish school. Our interest in this matter emerges from the verification, in previous researches, of the difficulties that part of these students experiment in relation to their acclimatization to the new school. The characteristics of scholar institution don’t allow an isolated analysis of the different situations and dynamics; but makes necessary a global approach that includes teaching planning, actions, and conceptions, just like the interrelation between these factors and the panorama of social relations developed daily at academic and non-academic contexts. All this have been materialized in a study case (Walker, 1983), settled at the last curse of a Primary Education school, in the province of Almeria (Spain); with these research purposes: to study the teaching and curricular processes around immigrant students; to know the social relations and situations that these children experiment during school day; and to analyze the interrelation between these two factors. The research process has been framed form the first moment in the interpretative paradigm (Pérez Gómez y Solá Fernández, 2004), with the purpose of become familiar with the

* Corresponding Author name. Gerardo Luis Santos Bocero Tel.: +34-950-214-458

E-mail address: gsb590@ual.es
principal actors and their particular points of view. In this sense, the study case was based on two principal information research strategies: participant observation processes at academic and non-academic contexts, and semi structured or in-depth interviews (Flick, 2007) with immigrant pupils and their teachers.

2. Curricular bifurcation

In first place, we’re going to describe and analyze the didactic action that teachers develop in relation to their students, and especially to their immigrant pupils; owing to our purpose in study the potential interrelation between this teaching action and the characteristics of the classroom social climate.

2.1. General curriculum

Enshrined in a traditional temporal and space frame -where the timetable obey to the classical division in subjects of about sixty minutes, and the space is structured trough lines of multiple desks oriented to the main table-, teachers usually establish two groups of students during their classes; in this sense, meanwhile some children follow the general lesson, others work with another curricular materials and realize different activities. The first group consists of almost every student of the class-group, and between them there are natives and immigrant children; they are boys and girls that, apart from their academic achievements, dominate the Castilian language, as well as reading, writing and mathematical skills.

As far as dynamic work is concerned, these pupils follow a standardized pattern of activities, based in direct training (Baumann, 1990) or in lessons linked to the classical sequence “lecture-exercises-exam”. These activities are usually related to text-books -the most used curricular material in most of the subjects- and are periodically complemented by qualifying tests with the purpose of categorize the student learning process. The distribution and features of these exams are related also to the corresponding text-book. Finally, and about the teacher figure, his work is almost always characterized by the prominence in the different didactic situations; and at the same time, by a transmission of standardized cultural contents (Pérez Gómez, 1998), with the uniform class-group as principal receiver. To sum up, we can say that during our fieldwork we’ve encountered that the diverse elements that form this general curriculum are usually developed in a traditional way.

2.2. Parallel curriculum

We’ve observed that, in every class-group there are some pupils to whom teachers entrust different academic activities, following then a very different -not the general- dynamic. In this sense, we don’t talk about ‘parallel curriculum’ as a curriculum “formed with those educative experiences that pupils develop with members of his culture of origin” (García Martínez, 2002) or a curriculum based in communication channels like TV, radio or internet (Giannatelli, 2004), but a “parallel, different and dissociated [work] from the commune curriculum” (Yaradola de Mathieu, 2007).

The subjects where these pupils usually develop a parallel work are those know as ‘principal subjects’: Language, Math or Environmental Knowledge; there are students that follow this parallel dynamic only in one subject, while others follow that in almost every class, discounting Physical and Artistic education. This group of students, which range from one to four children, is always formed by immigrant pupils and/or children of Therapeutic Pedagogy. In the case of these immigrant students, they have not dominate yet Castilian language, and/or reading, writing or math skills.

The activities that these immigrant students develop can or can’t be related to the corresponding subject; being the disconnection, in this last case, much more evident. Anyway, the characteristic that defines better this parallel curriculum is individuality, because the exercises they realize are planned to being done alone, and their contents are totally different from those their partners of class-group are following -general curriculum-. At the same time, like at the general dynamic, the curricular materials have here an important role too: the materials that these students use determine all the activities they do when they’re enrolled in the parallel curriculum, and are totally different -in
contents and activities- from the text-books that the other children are managing. Last, we’ve observed that these materials seem exclusively focused on the leveling of these students in basic skills.

As for as qualifying processes are concerned, these immigrant pupils experiment a similar situation, standing on the margins of those periodically tests. This situation is, somehow, ‘realistic’ or ‘coherent’: those pupils which haven’t participated of the general curriculum, can’t enter in the normal qualifying process, because its purpose is, precisely, to measure the learning of those contents worked at classroom during the general dynamic; but at the same time, suppose leaving these children also ‘on the margins’ of the ordinary class-group dynamic.

Regarding the paper that teachers develop with these pupils which are enrolled in a parallel curriculum, we’ve observed that some of them try to supervise their work. But their teaching actions are very influenced by the paper they develop in relation to the general dynamic. In this sense, generally, the supervision of those children that don’t participate in the general dynamic is not too much continued, and some immigrant students can have the same page of their books opened during consecutive school days; a teaching attitude and action that, many times, culminate in a wide range of situations and behaviors in these students: boredom, inactivity, disruptive actions, etc.

3. Social interaction

In our conversations, teachers say they don’t know about integration or discrimination problems with their immigrant students. However, during our fieldwork we have observed differences between these children, related to their personal situation at the social interaction panorama that is established during classrooms and breaks: differences in their degree of membership and participation in the ordinary social dynamics, in their range of personal interactions, or in the actitud that the rest of partners develop toward them. In this sense, we have discovered the existence of two main ‘groups’ of immigrant students, with certain cultural, personal and socio-economical features, shared by boys and girls of both groups.

3.1. The first group

The first group is formed by immigrant pupils that have born in Spain, or have arrived here during the earliest Primary Education years. With diverse origins, these children usually have a medium/high purchasing level, somewhat we observe in their clothes -fashionable or trendy-, in the fact that they don’t repeat the same clothe during week, or in their school material: books in good state, new backpacks and pencil cases, etc. Regarding their academic level, and from a perspective of ‘success as achievement’, these pupils usually obtain good marks, don’t experience too many difficulties passing subjects, and they always follow the general dynamic (or curriculum). These children participate with normality in the different social dynamics that happen at academic and non-academic contexts; they have their partners approval, sometimes they are even ‘leaders’ or ‘popular’ boys and girls; and they don’t have problems at making interactions with anybody at the class-group. A social situation very different to which other immigrant pupils experiment; those we have included on the ‘second group’.

3.2. The second group

Like we have pointed, our research leaded us to establish another group of immigrant students, which share certain characteristics and develop a very different social dynamic with their partners. Generally, these children have born in their origin country, and they have moved to Spain during the last three or four years. Respect to their purchasing level, this is medium-down: we usually see them with the same clothes, they don’t dress fancy items, their scholar materials are in a bad state, etc. Regarding their academic achievements, they usually follow the parallel curriculum in one or more subjects, or anyway, they have difficulties passing them. On the other hand, most of them have repeated some Primary Education year.

The main characteristic of the social situation that these children experiment during the scholar day is ‘isolation’; the same ‘isolation’ that they suffer related to their participation in the general dynamic and curriculum. In this sense, those immigrant students that are included in a parallel curriculum during classes and, at the same time,
isolated from the rest of their partners in the academic-curricular level, experiment many difficulties searching their gap in the ordinary social dynamics of the class-group. These students have slim social interactions during classes, and when they talk or interact with someone, is usually trough individual -not group- interactions. Their social relations are usually limited to other immigrant pupils that are also enrolled in a parallel curriculum; to other partners not integrated -like them- in the social group; or to those pupils labeled by teachers as ‘problematic’.

This isolation is also reflected at break times: when they go out to the playground, they experiment a very similar interactional dynamic, and during these non-academic times, they remain -again- on the margins of those activities that their other partners develop. In this sense, in very little occasions we can see them sharing these breaking times with their regular class-group, and when that happens, they maintain groups by nationality. Their social relations during these times are usually limited again to other students enrolled in a parallel curriculum and/or with integration problems, and sometimes to children of other classrooms or even ages.

4. Conclusion

Right after, we show the more significant evidences that have been emerged of the information and analysis realized during the research process; with the principal purpose of help to the questioning and constructive criticism of the processes and factors present at the scholar, academic and social life of many immigrant pupils.

In the first place, we want to underline the establishment by the teachers, in most classes and subjects, of two different dynamics: one followed by most of the class-group, characterized by the homogeneity of contents, activities, curricular resources, etc.; and another that is followed, on the margins, eminently by some immigrant pupils. Teachers offers to the integrants of this last group a work totally different from the activities followed by the rest of the class-group; a work that he or she will have to develop in an individual way. A curricular situation that, we have observed, contribute to the curricular and social disintegration of these pupils with regard to the class-group, because they aren’t only not following the same academic work of their partners, but at the same time, their enrollment on the parallel curriculum inhibit the possibilities of establish social interactions with another boys and girls.

We have verified, likewise, that are precisely those immigrant pupils that follow a parallel curriculum during classes, who develops less and more slim personal interactions and relations with their partners: these are limited in many occasions to another children which, like them, are part of the parallel curriculum and/or experiment a minimum degree of membership to the class-group; or to pupils or other curses, ages, etc. during breaks. In this sense, we can state that we’ve discovered a strong correlation between these students degree of integration regarding the academic routine, and their degree of integration regarding the class-group social panorama.

Ultimately, it seems ‘logical’ that, if one children remains during a big time of scholar day following a learning process in which his interactions with the teacher or his partners are almost nonexistent, isn’t going to feel that he or she is part of the class-group, in an academic nor social way, during classes or during breaks. A situation that reflects the degree of symbolic violence that scholar institution, teachers and their didactic actions, could bring in the scholar and personal life of certain students.

References