

# Social and educational inclusion of immigrant's adolescents in Spanish Educational System: an outstanding pedagogical challenge

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**Abstract**—Spanish educational system has lacked of historical experience, concerning the attention to multicultural education until two decades ago, when the arrival of different backgrounds students to the country forced to rethink the educational policies and practices to meet the requirements of this new school reality. The research, from which this article arises, focuses on how the compulsory education approaches socio-educational inclusion of one of the most marginal sectors for pedagogy and curriculum policy: immigrants' daughters. This research plan has an ethnographic-biographic nature, essentially based on the processing of "unique school life stories" of pre-teens, born and previously educated in their original country, and integrated in Spanish School in the last years of primary education, without prior mastery of Spanish language. The work shows variables and attendant circumstances in schooling and socio-educative inclusion of these girls, as well as dialectical interrelations, which can be observed among: family stimulus, especially mothers' ones; pairs' groups, with their attitudinal contradictions; professional stereotypes; andyone educational policies, ignoring necessary changes in curricula and pedagogical practices. All these reasons favoured didactic routine practice and minimization of some educational innovations, which were taken as a rule by some schools before the immigration phenomenon.

**Keywords**—Immigration; Adolescents; Education; Gender; Expectations

## I. INTRODUCTION

The education vision, as a mean to promote social cohesion and improve the number of personal, social and employment choices, has been the most proper way to behave in Western culture for decades. Immigrant families consider schooling essential for their children's future opportunities, placing many of their hopes on what the educational system can offer them. Current studies about such opportunities, because of increased social mobility, suggest these are less likely in the disadvantaged sectors due, for example, to school failure [1], and there still is another reason to investigate how this occurs and how we can reorient education could be re-oriented to prevent such failures. In order to conduct this study, we visited primary schools and compulsory secondary schools to investigate about pedagogical strategies which are implemented for inclusion.

Concerning this matter, teachers have been the most studied group among the agents involved in teaching and learning process. The pioneering study "Pygmalion in the

classroom"[2], demonstrated the immense influence of teachers' perceptions on the students in terms of academic results and future expectations [3]-[4]. When we refer to immigrant students, we must add to this perspective the cultural and interactional preconceptions of those teachers, who, sometimes, do not share or fail to understand the characteristics of the original culture of their students. If we also consider gender, several studies have shown how, despite the acceptable performance of these immigrant girls in compulsory education, both they and the teachers have low expectations regarding their opportunities to access higher education, attributing this negative perception to factors such as the economic level of their families [5] and/or the academic cultures of the countries of origin [6]-[7].

However, teachers are not the only agents exerting this influence; given that educational institutions establish how the teaching activity and curricula are organized, they also play an essential role on students' academic expectations and inclusion [8]. These studies analyzed how the organizational and relational structure of schools, as well as the traditional subject-based curriculum design, severs the connection between pedagogical activity and actual multicultural social needs, and promotes decontextualized knowledge, hindering the creation of realistic expectations of academic achievements, especially when the cultural referents are different, or antagonistic to the culturally dominant ones. In addition, the lack of specific training among teachers on intercultural issues is another factor, limiting the theoretical and practical reflections, required to achieve the type of integrated education needed to foster inclusive actions.

The family is crucial to the construction of this academy process [9]. In this sense, Glick and White [10] note that "...parental expectations influence children's own expectations and attitudes towards school. Higher aspirations and the involvement of parents and others people, within immigrant families, may promote high achievement. Besides, high aspirations for post-secondary education may also reduce the negative effect of earlier poor preparation experienced by minority youth. When looking for group differences, in educational outcomes, then, expectations and aspirations can be more important than other attitudinal measures." In general, immigrant parents consider schools as spaces in which new generations can improve their sociocultural and employment opportunities, leading to high expectations among their children [11]. They also emphasize the importance and impact

of the education system on fostering and improving the social, cultural, and economic life of their children, and for many parents this is the main aim of the migratory process [12]-[13]. Although this matter has to be taken into account, we should recall that work and the socioeconomic status of the family is another major reason for migrating. Glick and White [10] also state that "...socioeconomic status, family background, educational and occupational expectations have long been identified as important determinants of post-high school attainment."

## II. METHODOLOGY

The current study focuses on two interrelated issues. We investigate how the socio-educational expectations of immigrant adolescent's girls are constructed in Andalusian schools (Spain) and it takes a hard look on the role played by the educational and social structures [14], concerning this process in classrooms and schools. This knowledge would assist in developing pedagogical strategies promoting inclusion and creation of viable and relevant expectations among these girls.

The present study was built on a previous work, in which we investigated about different aspects of teaching and learning activity in multicultural school settings [6]-[12]. It had a naturalistic design and it was based on individual school-life stories, concerning the socio-educational life of 12 immigrant girls<sup>a</sup>. We followed these 12 girls up for 2 academic years. The girls were selected according to the following criteria: they were immigrants' daughters, their native language was different from Spanish, they had already been to school in their home countries, they entered the Spanish educational system in the second cycle of primary school<sup>b</sup> and they were schooled in educational centers where we were conducting a wider investigation.

The individual school-life stories were constructed by inquiring into the girls' perceptions, memories, experiences, views and feelings concerning their past and present student's life and future aims or desires, based on successive in-depth interviews with them. These were supplemented by: interviews with their mothers, teachers and close family members; informal conversations with these 12 girls, their mother and teachers; the analysis of institutional and academic documents.

Furthermore, the school-life stories were supplemented by input from three discussion groups, included teachers, students, families and several other professionals, involved in the education system or who had experiences in this area. These discussion groups were simultaneously used both as a

<sup>a</sup> In the study area, the three major immigrant communities are of similar size. Their members come from South America, the Magreb (i.e., North Africa, especially Moroccans) and East Europe.

<sup>b</sup> That is, between 7 and 8 years old. In another study [4], we observed that the inclusion process is different when they start primary school earlier.

data collection method and as a way to compare the information collected, using the above mentioned techniques.

We should explain that the term "school-life stories" refers to the stories that the researchers created based on the information provided by the girls about their experience of Spanish educational system. This school-life stories have shown five elements of analysis: mothers, peers, cultural roots, teachers and dominant pedagogical practice.

## III. PEDAGOGICAL ELEMENTS OF SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL INCLUSION: DATA'S DISCUSSION

In order to present the most relevant evidence emerging from the study, we followed a categorization process that led to the creation of five sections as a framework for the analysis: a) the role of mothers in the construction of their daughters' expectations; b) the role played by the girls' relationships with their school peers in this construction process; c) the influence of the socio-cultural and family context; d) the influence of the teachers; e) the impact of the educational and teaching practices in the classroom.

The narrative we present emphasises and respects the voices of the girls and their mothers, without sacrificing other voices or situations that help us explain and understand how their expectations are constructed, and how the school, its staff, and the education system in general influence, limit, or promote the fulfilment of their wishes and their future socio-educational prospects. The code we employ to present information on the different school-life stories is as follows: (Name + Story) when the information is provided by the girl; (Name + Story: family) when the information is provided by the mother; (Name + Story: teach) when provided by the teachers; (Name + Story: RFN) when the information was taken from the researcher's field notes. Regarding the discussion groups the following code is used: Disc.G + the number of the group (1, 2, or 3).

### A. *Mother-daughter's relationship: projection on the future*

The main reference point and influence on the construction of future expectations among immigrant girls are their mothers. They attempt to plan their daughters' education and other aspects of their social life with the main aim of protecting them, encouraging their participation in the host society, and in some cases, preventing or decreasing their exposure to the past or their country of origin, "*The less contact with what we left behind, the easier it will be for Corina. It is important to us that she feels this is her country. I don't want to create false ties that could make it hard for her to get integrated in this country...*" (Corina's story: family). When we analyse the girls' perceptions of their reality, we see how these often coincide with their mothers' views regarding their wanting to distance themselves from their past, although their arguments differ in that they are more personal and strongly connected to their migration experience and the sense of being uprooted from their place of origin. Sofia explained

how, when she left Romania, her only wish was to see her mother, who had migrated 2 years earlier, "I thought of nothing else...", she digs into her memories, "... but now I see that my future is here... I'd like to go to university." She does not want to return home because her aspirations have changed, arguing that "It's impossible to go to university back there because it costs so much", but she also adds personal reasons, "I don't know anyone back there and don't want to start from scratch again..." (Sofia's story). The sense of being uprooted by the migration process and the great difficulties she had when she started school in Spain have marked her.

The second main mothers' aspiration is that their daughters achieve what they think they should achieve over the medium to long term [15]. In this sense, and despite the harsh working conditions, mothers often endure their normally support and plan the future of their daughters. As firmly stated by the mother (Rumanian) of Ileana, a 12-year-old girl in her last year of primary school: "I think my daughter could be a good lawyer, I would like her to be a lawyer or doctor... I like the idea of her being a lawyer, it's a good profession, interesting, you can meet lots of people, get to know their problems and solve them." (Ileana's story: family). These opinions pass from mother to daughter by empathy or conviction; as stated by Laima, a good student also in her final year at another primary school "...I'm worried about going to secondary school because things could be different... I'll go later... to study something more important... my mum says I'll go to University... she wants to quit the greenhouses and work in a warehouse, then perhaps become a shop assistant... and for me, University..." (Laima's story).

#### B. The intercultural communication with friends: difficult balance

The second factor we took into consideration, with concerns to the inclusion among immigrant girls, is the effect of the relationships they establish with their peers at school. The focus of the analysis on the interactions between the classroom and the actual school is justified by the potential of the education system and teacher to influence and offer guidance. Esposito [16] stated that social interaction among students at school (and in classrooms) is crucial to their learning about their identities.

Our first observation was that peers apply a double standard of acceptance-rejection toward immigrant children. Thus, at the age and the educational level under study, although we did not observe openly racist and xenophobic attitudes in the students, neither did we observe the opposite. In fact, we noted that in a situation that could potentially provoke a racist response, the same preadolescent individuals and/or groups reacted in exactly opposite ways depending on the situation, timing, and circumstances.

As noted by Read: "...it is very important to pay attention to the way in which girls construct their own image

in terms of success in social relationships, because this construction will have an impact on who they would like to be more" [17]. In this sense, the case of Ania is significant. As reported in the researcher's field notebook, she has achieved high levels of participation, acceptance, and interaction with her peers, "Ania is a girl who dances and sings very well... she has been in this school 3 years now, and although the first year was difficult, she is now very integrated... she is a leader. The classmates do what she suggests... she participates with girls from other classes during breaks and there is a good atmosphere between the boys and girls, although they play different games." (Ania's story: RFN) However, a serious racist backlash occurred in the social context of the city where she lives following an act of violence in which some immigrants were involved. Although this act did not occur in the school, the burden of xenophobia and machismo in the indigenous social context penetrated the school and fell on immigrant girls like her. At this time, the researcher wrote, "Today, Ania turned up in the head teacher's office crying and terribly upset, she couldn't talk...she finally managed to explain what had happened... in the playground a group of children had spat out, "Your mum is a whore who rips money off men from our town." (Ania's story<sup>c</sup>: RFN).

These serious social and personal behaviors are relevant from the pedagogical and educational point of view, because they indicate an undercurrent of racism or xenophobia in these students, mainly as a result of social contagion. Nevertheless, in many cases, these attitudes or ideologies are circumstantial rather than being firmly entrenched, and thus educational actions are both feasible and needed to ameliorate these aggressive ideas and behavioral patterns. This clearly shows the importance of remaining alert and basing educational actions on deep reflections to help teachers eliminate this social pressure and redirect young people away from certain xenophobic attitudes and behaviors that arise, or are provoked intentionally, in their environment and that have a strong effect on the immigrant teenagers in particular. It is of interest to recall the words of Wells, "This is a reminder to researchers and practitioners alike that subgroups of students, in this case the children of immigrants, may not be affected by schools in similar ways" [18].

#### C. The original family and culture: subtle influences

The social and family context surrounding the girls is another key factor in the inclusion and construction of their future prospects. Pressure at school and social pressure are more evident, visible and suspicious, according to more or less macho attitudes in the host contexts, if belonging to a cultural context, which discriminates against women in their countries of origin. All these matters, together with the fear or apprehension among some families of losing the ability to protect or control their daughters, produce contradictory

<sup>c</sup> In the study area, Russian women are seen as looking for indigenous men to support them. This was the reason for the insults.

feelings in these girls that hinder their inclusion in the host context. The words of Raissa, a 15-year-old student at secondary school, are significant in this respect, *"My mother doesn't let us go out with people from round here... she's afraid that we'd go out with a boy from here... We don't want problems with people from here..."*. When asked if she would like to return to her country, she replied, *"No, I'd just go on holiday there; I'd prefer my older brothers to move here (to Spain)..."* (Raissa's story). This dual attachment to their origins and family, together with the attraction of some of the ways of life they would like to share with their peers from the host society, cause contradictions and conflictive aspirations in the construction of their personal, social, cultural, and professional future.

Clearly, the dramatic increase in feminists saw in recent decades [19]-[20] both in host society and their origin countries, has influenced many of these girls, who rebel, although mildly, when their families treat them differently from their brothers regarding certain school issues. Hafsa (15 years old) was refused parental permission to go on a school trip, unlike her 14-year-old brother who obtained permission; as she said, *"...that's because I'm a girl... it's unfair..."* (Hafsa's story).

However, we have to beware of generalization concerning the ways of behaving and reacting, as a variety of factors and circumstances is always involved. In this line, we found examples, which contradict social and professional representations of certain cultures, especially when considering Maghreb families (North Africa). This is the case of Layla and Zaida, two 15-year-olds, who have differently internalized their experience of migration. The first girl attended a mixed urban school for several years in her country of origin before entering Spanish education system, where she studied for 6 years. Her father had emigrated previously and, after prospering as the owner of a small business, the family was able to reunite. Layla encountered differences at school compared to her country of origin, *"I hang out with my friends and we go to the park... I go out with friends, some of them are Spanish... they're my age... My father treats me no different to the boys... we are all the same here; they treat me as an equal... In Morocco, girls can't hang out with boys, but not here, here I can hang out with the boys..."* (Layla's story). She feels supported by her family in her search for her future career, *"My father says I should study whatever I like, my uncles tell me to be a doctor or a lawyer. But I've always liked the idea of being a police officer... In Morocco, even if you study hard, you have a long way to travel (to go to university) and maybe they won't let you, but here you can, here the university is next door and you can travel... in Morocco that's really difficult..."* (Layla's story).

On the contrary, Zaida is a girl who comes from a relatively wealthy large family, some of whose members are women in the liberal professions. In contrast to what it might be expected from her social and family status, she shows

external and intra-psychic resistance to her inclusion in the new socio-cultural context, *"The thing is I don't like to go out. My mum says go on, go out, don't hang around here, but I don't like going out. My mum tells me off, telling me to go and study with my friends... But I really don't like going out..."* (Zaida's story). There are obviously less evident and subtle aspects and factors influencing these attitudes, especially personal experiences related to how to live and internalize the different dimensions of the migration processes. Zaida expressed this with some degree of grief, *"Not everyone relates to us in the same way. Some people believe that everyone in Morocco is bad, but there are bad people here too. I had a really hard time [when she came to Spain], I had a lot of friends there, my family was big, and when I came here and didn't make any friends I felt... I don't know, really awful..."* (Zaida's story). The balance the family has achieved between their culture of origin and the new one, which has been assisted by their educational and socioeconomic level, has helped them to achieve a kind of social mix which allows them live at ease in the host culture. However, it has been difficult to pass this on to Zaida, who assesses her present and future in terms of feelings and specific situations, not through a rational analysis of her future potential, as perceived and projected by her mother. The daughter looks for references and clings to one dimension, the closest, explaining it in this way, *"At home, we live the same way we did in Morocco, we speak Moroccan...I learn to speak Spanish with my friends, but I don't talk much... I watch Moroccan TV, my dad always puts it on... My mum buys me music from there (Morocco) in the market..."* (Zaida's story).

#### D. The teachers: empathy and stereotypes

The teachers are the fourth factor we considered, when analyzing the creation and construction of expectations among these girls. As the classic studies have repeatedly shown, a correlation exists between the teachers' expectations of their students and their educational achievements [2]-[3]-[21]. This constant finding is not only repeated regarding immigrant girls, but reveals subtle peculiarities and nuances related to prejudice, pseudo-cultural conceptions and stereotypes related to the way the teachers perceive the girls' future academic and social opportunities. *"Educational Institutions, as schools, have traditionally influenced the social constructs of different personalities, reproducing gender in learning, perpetuating routines and sealing the thoughts of the teenager for many years* [22]. The following statement was made by a teacher in a discussion group, with the more or less explicit consent of most of the professionals involved in the group, *"Here we have culture A, B and C. Culture A, indigenous, culture B, Magrebies (North Africans), culture C, other nationalities"* (Disc.G: 2). This indicates the dominant thinking of teachers about the phenomenon of immigration and their expectations about these young people, based on their geographical-cultural origins. Even with this fixed and deterministic attitude toward culture and learning, teachers act very differently in their classes depending on

their pedagogical thinking, socio-cultural ideology, and professional commitment.

A minority of teachers considers the inclusion of these students to be a problem and a nuisance stating that they cause "...*disruption in the classes*", (Sofia's story: teach), arguing that they cannot keep up with the rest of the class; they do not understand and hold the others back. They try to keep the student outside their classrooms on support lessons or language classes for as much time as possible, or keep them busy performing trivial tasks to stop them from "*interrupting*" (Álika's story: teach). The complaint of an intercultural project coordinator reinforces this fact: "*When these students arrived here, the school did not design any strategies... some colleagues even referred to them as moors<sup>d</sup>... They had no intention to get involved in this issue at all...*" (Disc.G: 1). For example, some teachers act in making immigrant girls invisible, because they are normally patient and silent in the classroom, getting them to focus on the work that the language teacher has set them or complete the tasks given in the support lessons.

Contrary to this attitude, we encountered other teachers who interpreted the phenomenon of migration as a new social and educational situation to which the education system had to respond from an inclusive and intercultural vision, respecting diversity and offering cultural richness and new educational challenges. These teachers are professionals seeking innovation and want to renovate school, not only for the children of immigrants, but to meet new personal and social needs, "*We can't wait for the perfect classroom to turn up. Training courses alone aren't going to solve the problems. It's up to us, the teachers, to take the bull by the horns. What would be really interesting in exchanging experiences...?*" (Disc.G: 3). These professionals are well regarded in their schools and respected by their colleagues; however, they achieve little success with most of the other teachers, when attempting to engage them in their plans for innovation or intercultural projects. In general, they are female teachers who are also involved in educational actions based on a gender perspective.

The difficulties experienced by many of the teachers, of the case studies, in initiating and incorporating innovative educational experiences, are shaped by the professional culture and the academic training style applied in compulsory secondary education in Spain. These teachers are highly trained in their areas of expertise, but have no or very poor training in pedagogical and didactic issues. They perceive any educational challenge as a teaching problem or as a problem the students have in retaining material related to their specialty: "*The immigrant students aren't a problem for me, provided they've learned Spanish well. Once they've learned it, there aren't any differences...*" (Disc.G: 3)

These teachers focus on academic performances to the extent that learning Spanish and the hypothetical academic levels in the countries of origin are the only issues related to the multicultural educational problem, leading to denial and invisibility regarding the immigration and intercultural phenomenon. They tend to disregard any specifics and therefore, in the face of gender-based issues, react by ignoring or simplifying them while maintaining formally respectful attitudes. However, they do not get educationally involved in such issues and justify their attitude with explanations such as the following: "*Yes, there are differences between (immigrant) boys and girls, the girls are quieter... the boys don't stick to the rules as much... Naima is very slow, but good, she's very quiet...*" (Naima's story: teach).

#### E. *The pedagogical practices: more routine than innovation*

The educational and teaching practices followed in the classroom are closely linked to social and educational theory and teachers' thinking. We observed that the routines implemented in the classrooms and schools strongly hinder inclusion and intercultural communication in the educational community. These practices revolve around three outdated pedagogical principles, which limit the possibility of offering alternatives and are becoming increasingly ineffective and unsustainable as we move toward a more multicultural and diverse society and, above all, in a period which shows an increasing numbers of immigrant children in Spanish schools.

The first of these limitations is the standardized impersonal approach of teaching activity, combined with a one-way and individualistic conception of the teaching and learning process, which fails to ensure communication, exchange, closeness, knowledge, and recognition of the Other. Although it is said lessons should be adapted to the individuals, the approach and focus is still utilitarian and academic and this further limits personal adaptation, "*...what's the point of teaching her English if she cannot speak Spanish...*" (Naima's story: teach). These non-personalized individualistic work systems, which do not promote intercultural communication, strongly isolate the girls, who tend to focus on individual tasks in class and gather in small groups of other immigrant girls in the playground, with little possibility of interrelating with larger and varied groups of young people.

The second limitation is related to organizational-educational issues. Learning time for each student continues to be managed based on a concept of individual deficits in terms of subject content: therefore, the dominant pedagogical strategy is to carry out multiple remedial interventions outside the regular classroom during school hours. This system of remedial classes outside the classroom, which aims to help children in learning some basic subject matter, dislodges the immigrant children from their groups, making their incorporation and participation in class more difficult. In addition, they end up receiving poor and routine lessons that

<sup>d</sup> In Spain, the term "Moors" is a pejorative term to refer to Arab people.

are of no use to them, not even to "attain" the level of their peers. On the contrary, this strategy increasingly manoeuvres girls toward a parallel curriculum, which is typically inconsistent, unsystematic and random and which hinders their subsequent incorporation at higher levels of the education system, thereby undermining their future expectations.

In this line, teaching them Spanish in a decontextualized manner, outside the system of social relationships in the classroom, does not promote inclusion. This way of organizing compensatory education promotes the creation of closed, outside the classroom, displaced, and ghettoized groups and hinders intercultural communication, stigmatizing those children receiving help, driving them into isolation, especially the girls who feel more comfortable and safe when they are away from their classroom, even to the extent of accepting discriminatory language as normal, *"I'm better in the class with Moorish kids than in a class with others, in the class with Spanish kids I feel embarrassed... when we don't pronounce a word right they laugh at us, because the Spanish kids know more than us..."* (Álika's story).

The key factor involved in perpetuating these obsolete pedagogical practices is the assessment and rating system, which is based on evaluating performance regarding the acquisition of subject matter predominantly based on rote-learning. Education based on rote-learning and summarizing textbooks or notes, which still continues to be the main practice in Spanish schools, involves an extra struggle for immigrant children, preventing them from devoting their school time to acquiring meaningful and relevant knowledge. This system effectively encourages their exclusion from the system and discourages them regarding their academic and future expectations, *"Spanish kids read something only a couple of times and they can write it in their own words, but we study for hours to write down the answers exactly right... I've got a good memory, but only if I study for hours to remember..."* (Ikraam's story). Furthermore, many of the girls are more affected by this situation than the boys; the families force the boys to go to school, whereas the girls often needed at home to help with the chores and to take care of their siblings. They are subtly allowed a greater level of absenteeism, as the teachers recognized in the discussion group, *"...really, the teachers are more lenient regarding the girls being absent... somehow they understand the problems and needs of the family regarding looking after their little brothers and sisters, to help out at home... we all know that women have to do more chores in this regard... it's a pity, but generally everybody accept this ..."* (Disc G: 1). Obviously, this is an added burden for the girls.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has described factors, elements, and circumstances with the greatest relevance to the construction

of social and educational expectations among immigrant preadolescents and adolescents in Andalusia, Spain, and has stressed the need to consider them in an interrelated, holistic, and diachronic manner. We have analyzed how a combination of family, socio-cultural, pedagogical, curricular, ideological, and professional factors can limit the opportunities that compulsory education should offer immigrant girls attending Andalusian schools. This remains the case despite the positive attempts of the educational system in Andalucía to provide support strategies and remedial education to these girls, who belong to the most disadvantaged socio-economic sectors in Spain.

In this regard, although the Andalusian Autonomous Regional Government has promoted gender initiatives alongside intercultural programs inside and outside the educational context<sup>e</sup>; they have failed to sufficiently penetrate the classrooms and bring substantial changes to organizational and teaching strategies. This is because the spirit and principles behind these gender and intercultural initiatives do not fit within the dominant pedagogical and curricular approaches designed and perpetuated by the National and Local Administrations and which are formally imposed on school-life and school staff. The Spanish curriculum remains anchored to a purely subject-based model that compartmentalizes both the content and organization of time and space at school. Furthermore, education is one of the front lines in the local and national political area and every new local and central government attempts to control and dictate how and what to teach. This deep political intervention even extends to the pedagogical approach itself, which becomes formalized in the official regulations<sup>f</sup>, teachers have to follow. All this has strengthened the idea that educational problems are almost exclusively administrative-political issues, obviating the need to address the cultural, social and professional aspects these changes require; meanwhile, partisan political debates focusing on highly ideological issues have led to apathy and disbelief regarding the ability of the system to respond to the educational needs demanded by the cultural and personal diversity in today's society.

Thus, school curricula in Spain are not designed to deal with multiculturalism, let alone interculturalism. This problem is far from new, as school failure has traditionally occurred in sociocultural less-favored classes. The incorporation of immigrant children into Spanish schools has again highlighted this problem, because the introduction of more tangible and directly observable differentiating cultural elements has made even more obvious and visible the contradictions and limitations of the predominantly technocratic curriculum and the eminently transmissible learning methodology used to inculcate both subject content and the dominant values. The dominant curricula—subject-

<sup>e</sup> This comprises two plans for the integration of immigrants in Andalusia (Plan integral para la inmigración en Andalucía, 2001-2004 and 2006-2009).

<sup>f</sup> These regulations are published in the Boletín Oficial del Estado (Official State Gazette).

based, ethnocentric, short-sighted, assimilationist and invisibilizing—continue to suffocate other cultures and feminine aspects [23]-[24].

The list of issues is long: teachers' views based on beliefs, narrowing the academic opportunities of their students, according to their countries of origin; intra-psychic attitudes concerning immigrant students, as being responsible for their learning process, as they are considered to be the ones who have to adapt to the social and cultural reality, thereby becoming assimilated into the dominant culture; educational policies focused on performances; xenophobic and macho contexts that remain present. All these issues lead to educational deficiencies that impinge on self-confidence among immigrant children and hinder effective guidance regarding their future prospects. This is even more incisive among immigrant girls, who suffer a greater lack of other references, support or resources outside the educational system.

However, there are reasons for optimism. Mothers in particular transmit their future aspirations and expectations to their daughters. Peer-groups, so essential to constructing the identity of the young students, have malleable double-standards of acceptance-rejection that can be pedagogically refocused toward interpersonal communication. The effects of gender and intercultural initiatives have been fewer than expected due to the drawbacks of the official curriculum, but have nevertheless contributed toward improving opportunities for immigrant girls. Finally, a minority of teachers, especially female teachers, are innovative and committed to interculturalism. All these elements together enable some of these girls, against the predictions of the social and professional majority, to construct social and educational hopes and expectations for the future, stay in education, and even make progress within it.

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