

Teacher and family in intercultural realities. Speeches and practices

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Abstract: This article analyzes the participation of families in school, inquiring about the specific problems that foreign families can present acting as border elements for effective communication between school, teachers and family. The objectives this article responds are: 1) analyze the way in which foreign and native families participate in schools, as well as, 2) the activities organized in the centers with the intention of promoting participation. With an ethnographic methodological approach, the collection of data was carried out in two geographical contexts, Seville and Jaén, in which a case study was developed in a school in each of the mentioned cities. In the light of the data obtained, the participation of families in schools does not depend directly on their foreignness, but on their family's interest in education and school and in practices and actions implemented there in order to provide equal access to participation.

Key words: school, teacher, family, participation, immigrants.

Resumen: En este artículo se analiza la participación de las familias en la escuela, indagando sobre las problemáticas específicas que pueden presentar las familias extranjeras, actuando como elementos fronterizos para una eficaz comunicación entre escuela, profesorado y núcleo familiar. Los objetivos a los que responde el artículo son: 1) analizar el modo como las familias autóctonas y extranjeras participan en el ámbito escolar, así como 2) conocer las actividades organizadas desde los centros con la intención de promover la participación. Con un enfoque metodológico etnográfico, la recogida de los datos se ha realizado en dos contextos geográficos: Sevilla y Jaén, donde se ha desarrollado un estudio de caso en un centro educativo de cada una de las ciudades citadas. A la luz de los datos obtenidos, se hace hincapié en que la participación de las familias en los centros educativos no depende directamente de la extranjería de las mismas, pero sí del interés familiar por la educación y la escuela y las prácticas y actuaciones puestas en marcha desde los colegios para posibilitar el acceso igualitario en la participación.

Palabras clave: escuela, profesorado, familia, participación, población inmigrante.

Family, school and immigration. Family participation at school

Family participation at school, especially for immigrant families, and the management of cultural diversity in school contexts under the philosophy defended by the intercultural paradigm establish the theoretical framework on which this study is supported. In particular, the present study's interest is in the analysis and reflection on the way in which foreign families participate in school contexts, indicating the case-based differences which deter their more "normalized" presence at education centers, while acknowledging the activities organized in schools which try to promote family participation in the key of "interculturality".

Addressing the concept and significance of participation would imply "real and direct intervention: taking part, being protagonist of one's life and not just spectator or recipient of alien initiatives, influencing the decision making that affects oneself and the collective we are part of" (De la Guardia and Luengo, 2007: 263). In turn, family participation in educational centers must be one element more to consider in the accomplishment of educational objectives, as it is an important factor in the frame of the educational function of school itself.

In this line, Pozuelos (2008: 130) indicates that participation implies actively taking part in the educational process and this is carried out by means of two strategies: "1) directly involving parents in some classroom experiences: workshops, chats, field trips, etc., and 2) explicit reference of the work plan to parents so they can act from the domestic field in the development of certain objectives and socio-family activities closely related to the ones in the classroom".

This way, in the interest of "favoring interaction between family and school, it is necessary that the educational center opens its doors to the community, in particular to parents" (Hernández and López, 2006: 20). Nonetheless, "family participation in schools has not taken off as a substantial element among the different members of educational communities" (Essomba, 2008: 138). More concretely, for the case we are interested in, immigrant families' participation, García Castaño, Rubio Gómez and Bouachra (2008: 39) indicate that some researches consider that these "are built at school, by the indifference for the schooling of their children and for the responsibility of their children's results at school". However, it is essential to avoid homogeneous explanations and reflections when referring to the immigrant families' participation in school contexts, since today's immigrant population presents heterogeneities that makes it difficult to generalize in such respect (Rodríguez, 2011).

Albeit, when this situation is approached, a fast problematization emerges from family participation in school contexts related to their non-national origin, to the lack of knowledge and the incorrect use of language, ignorance of administrative aspects, lack and incompatibility of time with their jobs and especial emphasis on their alleged non-participation at school (González Barea, 2008).

Among the topics used to explain the minors' failure and maladjustment to school, the most frequent are those that refer to the hypothetical "conflict between the traditionalism of protagonists and the modernity of children, their alleged double and divided identity, or the naive believing that all of their school problems would be solved with the implementation of an intercultural curriculum" (García Borrego, 2008: 131).

This is, insisting once again that the problem is in them, children and their families, and the culture which defines and conditions them, emphasizing their ethno-cultural particularities. On the one hand, in explanations they ignored aspects such as "the conditions that they share with other sectors of the native popular classes according to their subordinated social status" (García Borrego, 2008: 132), while on the other hand, there is a tendency to avoid analyzing the educative strategies of the families and their expectations about school.

Therefore, comprehending the role that families assume or are given would require, on the one hand, to attend the way these families participate in school settings, the way they see interculturality, the ways they consider their children as bearers of diversity (or not) and the way they educate and socialize them in the configuration of the differences. And on the other, it is as well necessary to explore the value that teachers place on families, especially foreign ones, in order to explain school integration, success and failure (Colectivo IOE, 2007) or the achievements of certain intercultural practices and the relationship between schools, teachers and families.

In this sense, we start from a conception of the intercultural from a multiple perspective, taking into consideration that making reference to interculturality at school is to consider it as:

an educational approach based on the respect and appreciation of cultural diversity, directed to each and every one of the members in a society as a whole that proposes a model of intervention, formal and informal, holistic, integrated, configurator of all the dimensions in the educational process in order to achieve equality of opportunities/results, the overcoming of racism in its diverse manifestations, communication and intercultural competences (Aguado, 1996: 54).

Thus, interculturality needs to be conceptualized as "a school reform in a broad sense" (Nieto, 1992: 207), which recognizes the importance of family participation and the context inside the school environment, just as it is defended by the tenets of the critical intercultural approach systematized by Gorski (2009) and that we defend in this study.

The work presented describes such tenets in the educational practice, inquiring on the problems and limitations that immigrant families experience while actually participate at the school where their children are enrolled.

To do so, the bases are the meanings and behaviors that arise in the articulation between school, interculturality and family participation, where the factor “foreign” could influence the level of family participation, as “immigrant families are both subjugated to instability-generating factors and the pressures for disintegration that affects every family” (Beck, 1998); and families are also subject to processes specific to them and which have to do with fragmentations and reconstitutions that affect relations and determine the conditions of their children’s socialization (García, 2008).

In these realities, it is necessary to consider the analysis of educational centers, also including the perspectives of immigrant and domestic families and teachers about the transversal axis of “the intercultural”. It is precisely such perspective on the school contexts the one this article presents, in particular addressing the reality of foreign families and their added problems reflected in school dynamics.

Methodology and research process

The process of investigation we have developed in this work is located purely in ethnography, understanding ethnography as the field of knowledge which tries to capture the meaning and rules of social action in a particular context having continual interaction with the informants (Velasco and Díaz de Rada, 1997).

At the same time, this research focus neither on evaluating nor repeating what it is said about what is done on the subject of intercultural education. Our ethnographic positioning consists more precisely, as explained by Bertely (2001: 34), in relation to the challenges of educational ethnography, “while comprehending, from the inside and in specific situations, social representations –official and not official, written or oral, informed or based on public opinion– that conform the cultural framework of formal education”.

“This does not imply finding the truth, but rather recording and interpreting the multiple truths that cast doubt on the legitimacy of the hegemonic school discourse and that allow unraveling discursive logics, productions and significant amalgams, fissures and hidden gaps behind an apparent rationality, as well as the silenced voices that form school culture”, the author adds.

Hence, this work is characterized by its exploratory, descriptive and inductive character, as elaboration and hypothesis testing is not the origin but its interpretation –in its most anthropological sense (Wolcott, 1993)— and the analysis of the discourse of the informant actors: teachers and families, in this case.

The research in which the present work is framed comprehends three years (2006-2009), taking into consideration different contexts and actors for its realization. Regarding the study contexts, these correspond to two capital cities in province from Andalusian communities in the south of Spain: Seville and Jaén. The election of these two contexts relies on the configuration of two different scenarios related to the settlement of foreigners, therefore, in the composition of the perception about diversity: Jaén is an urban zone with strong influence from the rural context (the majority of foreign immigrant population that comes to this city is stirred by the labor force demanded in the agricultural sector); conversely, Seville has a more urban context.

Regarding the presence of foreign school population, it is important to note that Jaén is the Andalusian city with the lowest percentage of foreign school population –some 3.5% of foreign students–, vs Seville, one of the provinces that presents a higher percentage of foreign students –12.1%– (according to the Andalusian Institute of Statistics for the school term 2009-2010).

In both cities, a case study on educational centers has been performed. Both schools were intentionally selected as they share one characteristic of interest for this research: the “relatively high” presence of foreign school population in the school center in respect to the total distribution in each city.

Description of the educational centers selected

School in Seville: This public educational center is located in the district of Cerro-Amate in the city of Seville, which is defined as one of the main expansion zones in the city, with new residential and industrial areas.

The socio-familiar profile in the zone is truly varied: it is characterized by consisting of mono-parental families with children, very low economic status, low socio-educative level, sporadic jobs and informal economy, endemic addiction problems of various types in one or several family members and limited support or very deteriorated extensive relationships.

In educational terms, for the school term 2008-2009, the center had 242 students, 190 Spanish, 6 Bolivian, 6 Chinese, 1 Colombian, 1 Ecuadorian, 10 Moroccan, 1 Peruvian, 24 Romanian, 2 Russian and 1 Venezuelan, which implies 52 students whose native country is not Spain (21.48%). In the abovementioned school term, 21 students were diagnosed as having Special Educational Needs, two of them from Romania, however, one of them was transferred to a different school center.

In the school term 2009-2010 the center has 241 enrolled students, of which 44 students come from foreign families; this represents 18.25% of the total enrolled students. Classifying by nationalities, there are: 3 Bolivian, 6 Chinese, 3 Colombian, 2 Ecuadorian, 10 Moroccan, 1 Peruvian, 17 Romanian, 1 Russian and 1 Venezuelan.

As we notice, there is a decline in foreign students in the current academic term as a consequence of different factors: in the first place, several families left the neighborhood at the end of the last term due to the economic crisis and lack of jobs; in the second place, the two groups in the sixth grade of Primary Education of the last year gathered a high rate of students who come from foreign families. Therefore, the transition of these students to Secondary Schools has affected the numbers in those educational centers. Finally, and paying attention to the records in Childhood Education, it is worth mentioning there is only one foreign student from Morocco.

In respect to the school's teaching staff for the term 2008-2009, there were 23 teachers, 4 men and 19 women, plus a non-official religion teacher. The center also includes one educationist and one administrative staff member with school monitoring functions.

Finally, it is important to mention the Educational Plans and Projects in which the center participates for the term 2008-2009. They are the following: Learning Community Project; Quality Improvement Program; Project of Incorporating Information and Communications Technology to the Center's Education and Management; Opening Plan, consisting of services like Morning Hall, Canteen and After-school Activities; Sport in School; Learn to Smile (oral hygiene program); School Support Program (support lessons at after school hours for 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th grades); Intercultural Project. Temporal Classroom of Linguistic Adaptation (TCLA). Support Learning Programs in Spanish, maternal culture, Arabic culture and language workshop; Curricular Design of Children and Primary Education; Central Linguistic Project. Reading Plan and Library Language Communicative Approach. The local newspaper. PIN "School Radio"; Improvement Proposals following the results of the Diagnostic Evaluation Tests; and Space for Peace School.

It should be noticed that as of the 2006-2007 term this center is a Learning Community, which implies a transformation in its structures and pedagogic endeavors that would enhance and strengthen the relation of the educational center with families and community.

Following the work developed by Group Inter (2006), the benefits of working with Learning Communities are thought to be: a) for students: better academic results, attitudes and behaviors, lower absence rate; b) for families: the students' parents or tutors give more value to the educational processes, the teacher values families better, parents are more confident when thinking about the teachers' work with their children, more continuity and coherence is given to the work of families and school; c) for teachers: higher motivation and involvement, families value teachers better and the perception of school also improves in the community.

Jaén School. This public school is located in a blue-collar neighborhood, whose social class is middle and lower middle. The center is one of the first public buildings in this part of the city, it was built during the 1950s in order to assist the schooling necessities of the community at school ages. It is nestled in front of the market with the same name in a mixed area, residential and commercial.

In educational terms, during the term 2008-2009, there were 360 students, 39 were not Spanish natives. Even though, it is convenient to underline the high percentage of students who, in spite of being born in Spain, are children of foreign parents. If we classify by the students' country of birth, there are 321 Spanish, 12 Moroccan, 9 Colombian, 8 Ecuadorian, 4 Romanian, 2 Venezuelan, 1 Bolivian, 1 Indian, 1 Italian and 1 Pakistani. The center has 20% of students whose families were born in other country than Spain.

Moreover, and regarding students in Special Education, it is worth noting there are 10 students in the term 2008-2009. The school staff for that term was 31 teachers and supervisors. The teaching staff currently has the following profile: 17 permanent teachers in the center, 2 teachers in service commission, 7 teachers with temporary posting, 1 teacher in practices, 1 Catholicism teacher, 1 special education monitor and 1 administrative and service monitor.

Finally, it is important to include the Plans and Programs being developed in the educational center for the term 2008-2009, which are the following: Coeducation Plan; Educative Compensation Plan; Opening Project; Information and Communications Technology Program; Bilingualism Program; "Sports in School" Program; Support Program; Self-protection Plan; Space for Peace School Project; Scheduling; and Attention to Diversity.

By contrast, in the school in Seville the approach to diversity –related to immigration– is an issue tangentially and discontinuously incorporated in different educational programs, however, it does not imply the transformation of the organizational structure.

By and large, the main objective of this article is to analyze the way in which families –local and foreign– participate in the academic environment, reflecting on the casuistic differences that stop their more "normalized" presence in the educational center, as well as to learn the activities organized at schools which try to promote family participation. All of this, paying attention to the teachers' perspective in relation to family presence in school and with the transversal axis: "the intercultural".

Data gathering techniques

In the third period of research –when the data used for this article were recorded– developed in the academic term 2010-2011, ethnographic interviews were conducted (Velasco and Díaz de Rada, 1997), both formally and informally, to Primary Education teachers and to local and foreign families, including aspects to instantiate a conversation in which the interviewee could develop a speech.

In the interviews to teachers, relevant topics were addressed –description of the academic center where they work, difficult situations to solve found in the educational practice, interpretation of diversity, ways to approach interculturality, competence abilities and appropriate skills or formative demands to possess, inquiring on the importance given to families in the role of educator, relation with the center, their forms of participation, their intervention in Parents Associations, a comparative look between Spanish and non-Spanish families, etc.–, in the following dimensions: a) General description of the center; b) Assistance programs to diversity; c) Students: schooling process, socio-educational relations; and d) the center relations with the families.

Regarding the interviews with families, these included topics such as: criteria followed in the school selection process, reception process, status of their children at school, their children's school and after-school activities, the role families should have in the child's formative process and in the educational system, their assessment of foreign students at school (for Spanish families), their children's feelings (for foreign families) and actions taken in order to incorporate them, their involvement in school activities, etc.– which configure the dimensions: a) characteristics of the family unit; b) schooling process; c) family's role in school; and d) School-family relations.

In relation to the informants, there was a total of 24, divided as follows: four teachers from each center, four foreign parents from each center and four local families in each center (see table 1).¹

Regarding the criteria followed for the selection of informants, these were:

- In the case of teachers: directive team members, in order to obtain a wide vision of the functioning and casuistic of the educational center regarding our objective; support-teachers and teachers in general who showed willingness.
- In the case of parents: members of the School Board or Parents Association and willingness.

¹ This table can be found at the end of this document, in the Appendix (Editor's Note).

Data analysis procedure

The fundamental objective of the data analysis process is to search meaning and offer a reflection on the speeches uttered by the actors while keeping an eye on the contexts in which they were produced. Thus, the main interest of this research is based on the epistemological and methodological principles of anthropology, in Geertz's (2005) terms: to contribute with interpretations of the meanings used by people.

In order to follow the information analytical approach, rigorously and scientifically, we proceeded to use an information treatment system neatly and consistently. In order to organize and analyze the information, we resorted to the qualitative-data-treatment computer program QSR NVIVO8.

The steps were:

- Interview transcriptions. All the information recorded was transcribed respecting the literalism of the speech. These documents became part of the internal resources with which we would work in QSR NVIVO8, organized according to the contexts where they were compiled (Jaén or Seville) and according to the interviewed actors (teachers and parents).
- Analytical axes definition. In the second place, all the information was reduced to information units to facilitate its handling when interpreting it. Therefore, a series of analytical axes was established, "content units" according to Werner and Schopfle (1987), which allowed ordering the compiled information. These are the following: a) homogeneity versus heterogeneity; b) recognition and/or problematization of diversity; c) languages; d) racism; e) questioning signs of our actions and statements; and, f) school structure and design.
- Data codification and interpretation: In the third place, we proceeded to codify the data obtained according to the analytical axes and subsequent interpretation.

Result Analysis

When trying to approach themes related to the school-immigration-family trinomial, different areas and levels of analysis rise, on the basis of the data collected for this research. We focused on the terms in which family appears in this educational amalgam and which have to do with "the intercultural".

In this sense, the level of participation of local and foreign families in their children's educational center will be analyzed, as well as the kind of activities organized in their schools and in which families have an important participation.

Family participation in school, foreign families in particular

In any democratic context, taking and thinking about participation is basic and fundamental. In educational contexts, this should be equally essential. Besides a democratic response, family participation in educational centers implies a primordial necessity for the adequate development of students. However, reflection on this topic is not free from difficulties.

For the participation analysis and school-family relations study, it is worth touching on some factors: one of them would suggest, as a theoretical starting point, at the very meaning of participation and what it is meant by this concept. Another factor worth taking into consideration is the reflection on the communication channel and their resources used to bring schools and daily life with the family. Another issue to consider is the expectation level families have toward the school and everything organized inside. Another factor to reflect on would be those aspects to which participation is directed and those in which with no participation is encouraged, among many others.

(...) school has a very important educative function, but if it is not supported by families, then there is nothing we can do. Child education must be a joint undertaking (primary teacher in Jaén, 2009).

Following Pozuelos' indications (2008) and taking into account the research conducted, we can point out that in the case of Seville's school, there is an important participation of the families in the school's educative aspect, given the fact that it is a Learning Community. Taking a step forward, there is also actual integration of immigrant population, which is considered a positive factor among the rest of the families. In the following testimony of a Spanish mother, a school council representative, we can verify it:

Interviewer: What do you think of Faitha being in the School Council this year?

Interviewee: I think that's very good.

Interviewer: How do you think that happened?

Interviewee: Because that's ok. Why the heck wouldn't a Muslim be part of it? If the girl is involved in everything, poor thing. When we have to make cakes, they are ready immediately. When people from Almería came, they were ready immediately to the meeting, they are people who give themselves, who come to every meeting and face the music, who have the right for being Muslims (family in Seville).

It is true that we pointed out Seville's school as it is the only one found to have families involved in purely didactic aspects of the education of their children at school. In the rest of experiences, participation is merely linked to after-school activities – which are no less important–.

One of the apparent key aspects to think about family participation in educational centers is to take into account the parents' opinion of school functioning and the professionals involved. In this sense, data show that if parents hold a good opinion about the school and everything organized in it, participation will be more encouraged and naturally produced than if, on the contrary, there are significant differences between the educational center and families.

The following testimony of a Spanish father from Jaén is a clear example of absolute inconformity with after-school activities in the center and their organization, which leads to scarce participation:

Interviewer: Do your children participate in after-school activities in the center?

Interviewee: They have activities outside the center. I had them in some activities center last year, but to be honest, I think they were just wasting their time, come on, they did nothing. They began computer science and did nothing, then they enrolled in sport in the school and I didn't see why either. I have tried because I'm interested in the center working and this kind of activities too, but they are not well organized and it's just a waste of time (parent from Jaén, 2009).

However, and against such argument, throughout the investigation we have proved, mostly, several speeches of families who express their agreement with the center's guidelines. They also have a very good opinion of teachers, as manifested by one mother in Jaén:

(...) teachers don't back down, they are totally willing to undertake and start new things (...) the bilingualism thing comes up and they go for it. Another project of coeducation comes up, which implies them going to English classes and they go for it (...) they are truly participative people (...) I see this center is very positive because the teachers are involved and active (parent from Jaén, 2009).

Despite the good relationship between families and the educational center, participation, in general, is deemed scarce by the different agents in the academic field. The discourse that refers to participation of local and foreign families in different after-school activities the educational center organizes highlights two factors among which the justification of the scarce participation, somehow, is essential.

One of the factors rests on economic grounds and the possibilities they offer, or not, for the paying no fee in the case of the Parents Associations or the activities they organize. In turn, this factor seems to be related to the families' available time to be at the center and join their children in the activities. In the following testimony from a Spanish mother, member of the Parents Association, we grasp this idea:

(...) those activities that are a little more expensive, well, they don't take place because nobody will pay for them. So, while doing the activities, we have to consider the economic capacity of the families. For example, we can't go to farm schools as it is really expensive, we think these outings are really expensive for these children, and we look for other activities (parent from Jaén, 2009).

Another factor we encounter –without differentiating between foreign and local families– refers to the families’ interest in the centers’ after-school activities and their attendance to planned activities; the following testimony of a Spanish mother, member of the Parents Association, is an example:

The information given by the college is ok, the Parents Association has a general meeting at the beginning of the term. Some 15 to 20 people at most go to this reunion, even though this year was incredible because there were only us, Parents Association members, five people from the whole school (...) there has been a poor attendance (...) and that’s all, the lack of interest of the parents (parent from Jaén, 2009).

In turn, such interest seems to be related to the way of understanding such activities, and the aims and expectations of the families and their children who approach them. And it is here where we find two kinds of arguments, one that understands after-school activities as entertainment for the children and the center like the place in which they can be until their parents finish working, just as explained by one Moroccan mother in Jaén:

Interviewer: Are they enrolled in any after-school activity?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Why?

Interviewee: Because I haven’t enrolled them. Because they stayed at home every day. Because you enroll them and pay more.

Interviewer: So, you are with them.

Interviewee: Of course, I had no other choice. If I have work, we enroll them. If I don’t have, I stay at home. Why enrolling them? (Family from Jaén, 2009)

The other argument sees a formative and enhancing function in these activities organized in the center and, therefore, the need to participate in them, just as one Spanish mother from Seville points it out: “(...) everything they do here do it so children have fun, involve, learn, and parents participate” (parent in Seville, 2009).

Concluding on the families’ interest in participating in the events taking place in their children’s educational center, this seems to depend neither on the foreignness nor on their families, but on a more personal matter that is not related to the origin of the family nuclei and this is the way one Spanish mother in Jaén explains it: “(...) I believe it doesn’t matter if they are foreign or Spanish, you can see this in people with little interest and it’s not because they are immigrants” (parent in Jaén, 2009).

Truth is, the collected discourses show that families –foreign mostly– know about the Parents Association in the educational centers, which indicates that the possible lack participation does not depend on the lack of knowledge of the organizational or functional aspects of the school; just as the following argument from a Moroccan mother in Jaén:

Interviewer: Do you know that there is a Parents Association?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: And, do you take part in it?

Interviewee: Yes, but with money.

Interviewer: And do you assist to the PA meetings?

Interviewee: I've been there twice and the other time I couldn't go. Sometimes I have too much work at home, and I've been twice and that's it (family in Jaén, 2009)

Even the following discourse of a school teacher from Jaén highlights the good relation between the PA and the school: "Well, those activities are very important, uh, in this school I'm blown away with the good relation with the PA, with the smooth running of the directive council (...) the PA members respond perfectly, and parents in the School Council respond wonderfully". However, they even indicate the scarce parents' general participation in school activities:

(...) But I have to say that in general, participation is poor. I wish parents, well, would respond better to those activities. I don't know if we would have to promote them more, maybe we could make some kind of promotion, perhaps it's just a matter of publicity. Then, after the activity, we can also have some activities, like the experiences, showing photos. Maybe it's possible, we could improve participation a lot, it could grow (primary teacher from Jaén, 2009).

As it is evident in this last fragment of a teacher's answer, there is willingness and concern in the teachers for the improvement and growth of family participation in the educational center, and, in this sense, they reflect and search for possible actions in order to improve it: promoting and informing about what is organized and assessing the activities to acknowledge the level of family satisfaction about the event, and also concretizing the activities at a classroom level and not involving the whole school:

There was a teacher who used to organize meriendas [light suppers] and every parent came, but she didn't do it generally. And as there were people from other countries, well, they brought candies from their countries. And they did participate more than at a whole-school level. At that level it is more disperse and it gets lost (parent in Jaén, 2009).

After-school intercultural activities

Along this investigation period and our contact with the educational centers, we have verified that the after-school activities organized and practiced in the centers and where families' presence is more or less visible generally revolve around different topics:

a) In some cases they mostly celebrate specific holidays: Peace Day, Andalucía's Day, Chinese New Year's Day, Christmas, carnivals, end of term, etcetera.

b) In other cases, they organize and have intercultural celebrations dedicated to cultural encounters of the different families with children in the center, with special focus on foreign families.

(...) We had a great time, a large meal, three women came to my house and we prepared it. We celebrate everything here, from Romania, China and well... everything is ok with the principal. A lot of mothers, Spanish, everyone. It was a huge supper; the big table was full. The day of the party, as we were a lot, there weren't any leftovers (parent from Seville, 2009).

As this last testimony by a Romanian mother, the after-school activities that involve more participation of the families in the organization as well as in the development are welcomed by the parents.

At the same time, families explicitly demand the organization of festive activities that show and recreate part of the culture of foreign families in the school. In the following speech, by a Colombian father with an enrolled child in Jaén, it is evident:

Interviewee: Man!, I think the year is too long, it has a lot of days and for example, once a year, they should tell us how many Ecuadorian there are, and make an Ecuadorian activity. Then, I, for example, the Colombians, we can say, look, a Colombian activity, that's great and we organize it. The Ecuadorian on another day, the Indian another, but of course, if there are not a lot of Indians... then that is the problem, there are not many. What activity would they do?

Interviewer: Then, do you think they should speak more about cultures and celebrate specific days?

Interviewee: Of course, doing activities. It also depends on how many people there are. If it's only one, what kind of activity can one person do? There are a lot of Colombians, Ecuadorians, Peruvians, but that's the problem (...) but at least giving the opportunities to show the culture and activities they do in their countries. For example, doing a Spanish activity and let the Colombians later in the same day, but showing a bit of every country and every culture (parent in Jaén, 2009).

As we notice, the main objective in demanding these “more cultural” activities is to reconcile and integrate the “cultures” in the educational center, having some space to show fundamental aspects of those “cultures”. However, despite the acceptance of the center and families of this kind of activities, from our theoretical stance, we refute their realization, as they respond to the “reification”, “essentialization” and “folklorization” of the “culture” of the families and students’ native country. It can convey the broadening of the existing cultural distances, which have to be accompanied by a more didactic treatment of these topics, not with the aim of promoting differences unintendedly by the different agents involved.

Conclusions

With this work, it becomes evident once more that school and family must work in parallel, as both are the agents in charge and responsible for the children's formation, values and education; and making it in a coordinate way, is understood as, having a positive repercussion on the students.

In this work, we have stressed the active agents in school: family, analyzing their participation in formal school activities and reflection on foreign families, as, a priori, they are characterized to be culturally different and having added problems which have something to say about the levels of communication and participation at school.

Based on this study, it is worth mentioning that the contact and kind of relation established between the teachers and families of the children enrolled is found at school through the logics and implication related with the levels of a determined institutional tradition, which allows or obstructs it, educational professionals' sensitivity to create places of communication and encounter, kinds of family and their interest/willingness for the educational practice, among other factors.

Over these pages and in the light of the empiric results obtained, we can conclude that family participation in educational centers does not depend directly on their foreignness. In turn, it is the interest in education and school the core principle which encourages, mostly, the level of family participation in educational centers.

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Appendix

Table 1

School/Informant	Seville	Jaén
Teacher	-Principal, teacher -Head of Studies, teacher - TCLA teacher -Children's teacher	-Principal, teacher -Head of Studies, teacher -Primary support teacher -Primary teacher
Local parents	-Mother -Mother -Mother -Mother	-Mother -Mother -Mother -Father
Immigrant parents	-Moroccan mother -Bolivian mother -Romanian mother -Romanian mother	-Moroccan mother -Moroccan mother -Ecuadorian mother -Colombian mother

Source: own elaboration

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