Immigrant Families and the School in Spain: Dynamics and Factors that Influence their Relations [*]

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LE FAMIGLIE DI IMMIGRATI E LA SCUOLA IN SPAGNA: DINAMICHE E FATTORI CHE NE INFLUENZANO LE RELAZIONI

Abstract

In Spain, academic debate and school administrations have evolved to the extent that relations between the school, the family and the surrounding environment are now considered as crucial to student achievement at school and to the good functioning of the educational system as a whole. Despite this development, change is slow in practice and often complicated due to the emerging resistance of families and schools, given that they have always maintained relations marked by an imbalance of power. Our theoretical and especially our empirical work has focused on the relations between immigrant families and the school system in Spain. In view of the above, the creation of what we call positive relational dynamics and communication in schools is conditioned by the attitudes and behaviour of the school administration, professionals and families. However, the physical space in which these relations take place must also be taken into consideration. Regarding school organisation, we have emphasised the role of the school's administration. By differentiating the range of management models, we note the ones that facilitate more relations and communication with and among families (especially the one we have called the horizontal

participative model) and those that discourage them. However, the multiple and complex range of attitudes among teachers and families must always be taken into account.

Keywords: Family, Immigration, Relations, School, Spain.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Universal schooling is a relatively recent phenomenon and even more so is the development of education systems that make this possible and the promotion of family involvement in educational institutions. Moreover, family involvement has not always been considered necessary and, even when it has, it has met with resistance from both school professionals and families. That is why family-school relations can still be viewed as a pending issue in some education systems, including the Spanish one (Garreta, 2007a).

Although they should be considered as juxtaposed, what is often perceived is the separation, distance or even conflict between families and the school. This means that each institution watches over and controls its own territory against the threat of invasion or intrusion of its respective «space» (Maulini, 1997). Thus, Dubet (1997) states that there is a tense armed peace between school and family. The relation is the articulation between these two institutions with an historical and enduring asymmetry of power, and in a social and political context that includes it in the debate between public and private interests. For C. Montandon and P. Perrenoud (1994), the development of the school and the family has tended to stress the distance between them, even if some recent cultural changes do favour a closer relationship. With improvements in education levels, we see an increase in the ideology of participation (social and educational between the different agents) in certain countries in line with the democratisation of society. Moreover, citizens' attitudes to public services have evolved, with people now claiming more rights and behaving like consumers, thereby making institutions and professionals accountable for their actions. Finally, one should consider that the struggle for the production and sharing of wealth in industrial societies is less frequent and, as Touraine (1984) said, the mobilising factors for social groups are increasingly cultural issues. The aforesaid conditions have encouraged slow but steadily rising family involvement in schools and the belief that this favours the achievement of objectives that schools and families set for children. This is not to say that we are still a far cry from a school which recognises families as partners and from families who also accept this role: the

fact that family involvement is important for student achievement in school is beyond doubt [1].

Starting from these premises and following, for example, G. Chauveau (2000), J. M. Jaeggi, F. Osiek and B. Favre (2003), who suggest the existence of positive or negative dynamics and spirals characterising relations and communication between the school and families, this study aims to identify the different factors that influence the creation, maintenance or modification of these dynamics, and to identify those that depend on the school itself, the professionals or the families. Identifying these should enable an improvement in family-school relations and make concrete the idea of involving families in schools in general and specifically in Spain. The empirical study itself will be presented below after defining the theme of family involvement in the Spanish education system and after emphasising how the increase in students from families of immigrant origin in Spain makes it interesting to focus the analysis on the relation between school and immigrant families. Specifically, the field work was carried out during school year 2008/2009 and consisted of: 25 in-depth interviews with teachers in nursery and primary schools (children aged 3-12) in Catalonia [2] with percentages of immigrant families ranging from 10% to 90%; 25 interviews with parents representing the diversity of origins and situations in the schools where the teachers were interviewed [3];

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[1] For example, Thomas Nordhal (2006) states that the two fundamental factors influencing the academic success of infants are the educational level of the parents and the quality of cooperative work between the family and the school. Jaeggi, Osiek and Favre (2003) indicate two important conditioning factors that determine success or failure at school: the family history and its future project, where economic, social and cultural factors are involved along with the involvement of the families in the schooling of their children, the sense that they give to this, and the quality of relations between parents and their children's teachers (inexistent or conflictive relations or, on the other hand, problem-free), as well as their participation in or inhibition of school life (parent's meetings, individual meetings …). The studies by Rochex (1998) and Lahire (1995) also show a correlation between students' learning difficulties, the educational attitudes of the families and the disruptions of school-family relations. S. L. Christenson, T. Rounds and D. Gorney (1992) identified educational expectations, the family climate regarding learning, the relations established between parents and children, the disciplinary strategies and parents' involvement in the educational process within the family and the school context as important in this process. For these authors, parents who got actively involved in contacts with the school showed in many ways the importance they give to the school, showing their children and teachers that they were interested and considered themselves as part of the educational community.

[2] Eight in the city of Barcelona, three in Cornella del Llobregat, five in El Hospitalet del Llobregat, one in Olot, one in Girona, one in Llagostera, four in Tarragona and one in Balaguer.

[3] Morocco (9 interviewees), Algeria (1 interviewee), Gambia (3 interviewees), Colombia (3 interviewees), Bolivia (2 interviewees), Ecuador (2 interviewees), Argentina (1 interviewee), Peru (1 interviewee), Chile (1 interviewee), Philipines (1 interviewee) and Romania (1 interviewee).

the immigrant families ranged from those residing in Spain for over 15 years to more recent arrivals. The centre of our study was an ethnographic phase [4] in eight schools in Catalonia with varying degrees of immigration in both urban and rural areas, and scale (from schools with two lines, two groups per course, to unitary schools and rural schools where different courses share the same classroom). The selection was based on a range of social situations among families rather than on the existence of different dynamics of relation [5]. In all cases, these were state schools given that this is where the bulk of the immigrant population is concentrated. The study was carried out over three months, during which time all the activities in the school were recorded in field diaries: the interviews with teachers, families, janitors, cooks, etc., and also all the meetings with parents, the tutorials, festivals and so on.

2. The involvement of immigrant families in Spanish schools

The perception of the importance of family attitudes and expectations in student achievement at school (Bolivar, 2006; Cagijal, 2007; Fernández Enguita, 2007; Collet & Tort, 2008) is also confirmed in the Spanish case, as is the development of legislation and the debates (among academics and professionals) with regard to recognition of the importance of involving families in schools. Thus, Spanish education legislation and specifically the part dedicated to participation in schools, or the official documents and reports of the administration show this evolution of the role of families in the education system. Although the steps may have been timid at times, with even some setbacks [6], the need and interest in having the parents represented through their associations [7] in the organisation of the school, especially in the School Councils (*Consejos Escolares*) has been recognised [8].

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[4] See, for example, Hammersley, 1980 and 1994.
[5] The earlier interviews allowed us to detect these chosen schools, as did the interviews carried out with representatives of the *Federation of Parents' Associations of Catalonia* (FAPAC).
[6] For the development of this legislation, see Pulpillo, 1982; Fernández Enguita, 1992; Romero, 2006; Collet & Tort, 2008; Garreta, 2008.
[7] For A. J. Pulpillo (1982), the creation of parents' associations is found in the Law of Associations passed on 24 December 1964 and its complementary norms (Decree of 20 May 1965). With the return to democracy the importance of participation became more evident. For an analysis of the development, situation and functions of the AMPA, see Garreta, 2008.
[8] As indicated in the Education Law 2/2006 (LOE), this is a body consisting of the school head (who acts as chairperson), the head of studies, a councillor or representative of

Family-school relations in Spain are defined by a relative increase in family involvement in the school. However, as we show, there is resistance. Firstly, it should be noted that, in many cases, teachers have not been trained to value this (until recently, with the new teacher-training degree programmes, both initial and ongoing training did not consider it relevant for teachers [9]; see Samper & Garreta, 2007a), and teachers are also faced with increasing demands from society, which means they are often puzzled, underrated and have little social recognition [10]. Teachers often call for family involvement in children's learning processes on the basis of the teachers' own parameters (checking reading with younger pupils, homework and the diary with older students, and assisting with regard to information search, motivation to study and read, etc.), sometimes without taking into consideration that there are families who lack the resources to meet these demands or who do not agree with this distribution of functions (either too little or too much). On the other hand, there is a growing tendency for families to delegate this responsibility to the school (Bolivar, 2006). Since it is not guaranteed by families, the basic core of socialisation is transferred to schools, thus producing a «primarization» of the secondary socialisation of the school (Tedesco, 1995). There are, obviously, families who do not come into this category.

The diversity owing to immigration must be added to the initial broad range of situations, roles and family expectations. Among other issues, the diversity of expectations, attitudes and knowledge regarding the Spanish educational system and what the school expects of families make this relation more complex. One of the first findings is the great increase in students of immigrant origin in schools, but also the diversification of their origins and ages of arrival. Despite the efforts made, the impact has been considerable. Specifically, according to data from the Department of Education of the *Generalitat de Catalunya* [11], in 2000/2001, 2.2% of pupils in nursery education (ages 3-6) were of foreign origins and 2.77 in primary (6-12) were of

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the local council, teachers elected by the *Claustro* (not less than a third of the council members), representatives of the families and students (who cannot make up less than a third of the council members), a representative of the administration and service staff, and the school secretary, who acts as the Council secretary. As Montañes (2007) states, in state schools, the School Council is divided into work groups to deal with specific issues, such as a commission for student admission, one for discipline, one for economic affairs, etc. These commissions are set up to facilitate decision-making and action-taking. An analysis of the role played by School Councils can be seen in Feito (2005).

[9] Implemented mainly in the 2009/2010 course in teacher training studies.

[10] For further details on this, see Fernández Enguita, 1993, 1995b, 2005 and 2006; Garreta, 2003, 2006 and 2007; Garreta, Llevot, & Bernad, 2010.

[11] http://www20.gencat.cat.

foreign origin, while the respective figures for 2009/2010 were 8.75% and 14.1%. Moreover, if only state schools are taken into consideration, these percentages are higher (11.55% in nursery and 18.67% in primary schools). In fact, the segregation of immigrant children in schools is a subject of concern in Catalonia (see Sindic de Greuges, 2007).

On the whole, despite views that favour a balanced relation between the two parties concerned, the diversity of school and professional situations, school dynamics, and family expectations and attitudes make this relation a kaleidoscope of situations and, at times, even a source of conflict. Moreover, immigration has led to a greater increase in this diversity of expectations, attitudes and responses, as well as to uncertainty among teachers.

2.1. *Immigrant family-school relations. The interviews*

Interviews with teachers and families helped to establish how this relation is perceived and also to make an initial evaluation, especially with regard to identifying the most suitable schools for carrying out the ethnographic study.

In general, for the teachers interviewed, immigrant families do not participate much in the school compared with the theoretical model of school participation. However, in many schools, this is also true for the other non-immigrant parents [12]. The teachers state that the current school model is as little adapted to immigrant families as it is to other native families who have work schedules that do not encourage involvement, who have low cultural levels and insufficient knowledge of the educational system, and who, in general, are usually left out of many spheres of social decision-making and participation, amongst which the school [13]. Another factor pointed out by

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[12] As we indicated in a study on *Parents' Associations* (PA) in Spain (Garreta, 2008), a very formal participation is asked of families (mainly attendance at meetings and with tutors, and registration and participation in the PA), and the families, in general, show little participation: 57.5% average registration in the PA, 32% attendance in activities organised by the PA, 18.3% attendance at PA meetings, while participation in the organisation does not exceed 1.5%.

[13] The following transcriptions are examples of teachers' views, and also illustrate the statements made by the parents below. «At the level of initial meetings for the course, we have always had a very low level of attendance since before we had the newcomers, and we still will have the same. It used to be normal to have 4 or 6 parents, and now, at best, two of these are now mothers of immigrants […]. They do not collaborate or get involved. There are very few who help their children with homework. But nor do the native population, because normally they are working families where both parents get home late and have no help». «There are families that are very aware and collaborate and participate, and others who don't, and with the fact of not understanding the language, they don't contribute anything. […] The families who don't

teachers is that many parents are unable to help their children with school-work because they themselves do not have the ability to do so or do not speak Catalan – the language of instruction in schools in Catalonia [14]. Moreover, poor or non-existent communication and differences in criteria with regard to the socialisation and teaching that should be carried on in school are mentioned by teachers as factors that make greater involvement of many immigrant families difficult.

Notwithstanding all this, teachers find that immigrant families have been drawing closer to the school in recent years [15], despite the language problems and the fact that they do not understand the workings of the school in any depth or are unable to clearly distinguish which aspects they can go to speak about in the school. This approach is found in schools that made an effort to open up the school itself and create spaces for affective and effective communication with and among the families. They often mention that celebrations (parties at the beginning or end of the course, intercultural days or weeks, Halloween, etc.) are the ideal setting for this type of communication. Some teachers consider this a necessary condition for pedagogical work.

The schools visited for the interviews have set up mechanisms to make communication with immigrant parents possible or to facilitate this at a linguistic level [16]. Many use translators, if necessary, in the meetings at the beginning of the course, during the term and also in the tutorials. In some, but not all, schools there is a translation service for the information sheets that are given to parents (however, this does not always include all the languages spoken in the school). Regarding everyday communication, there is always someone from the same origins – a neighbour, friend, relative or child – who can act as a translator and intermediary between the school and the family. However, in the teachers' opinions, language is not the only obstacle to communication with parents from certain countries: some parents see a clear separation of family and school, each with their own functions, and this is especially, but not uniquely, found with Moroccan families. These parents do not actually hinder the action of the school since they do not interfere in

participate do not do so for cultural and economic reasons. Some think that the school has to give them everything, they tell you they don't have the resources and then they don't collaborate in anything».

[14] It is, however, also true that some teachers state that there are families who use the language difficulty and their situation of lack of economic resources as pretexts to avoid any collaboration with the school.

[15] The recent nature of the phenomenon of immigration in Spain must be borne in mind and also its recent impact on the educational system.

[16] For more details about the mechanisms implemented by the Catalan administration, see http://www.xtec.cat/lic/.

its field. However, teachers often state that these parents do not understand why they have to take part in something that is not their responsibility. Nor do they understand the interference of the school in their own affairs, where they consider that the school has no authority [17]. The teachers do not understand this difference of perception and objectives. The parents' behaviour is generally perceived as showing a lack of interest in their children's schooling or participation. This *a priori* judgement hinders the most basic communication with parents as they are considered unwilling to collaborate and to perform the role that schools (the professionals who work there) expect. From this standpoint, they perceive a need for intercultural mediators [18] of different origins who, having a clear idea of what the school objectives are, can make these understandable and convey the proposed goals: complying with the social norms and also knowing and accepting their rights and obligations [19]. To some extent, teachers see it as a breach of trust that families approach the school when it is in their interest, such as to obtain places for their children or assessment about requesting grants and assistance, but then do not offer the collaboration expected of the parents [20]. In fact, we see how teachers talk in terms strictly connected to their profession and to their view of how families should participate in school life [21].

The amount of information the parents have and the communication improve with time and experience, so that the teachers perceive a significant

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[17] «There are two things that take you back a bit, first, the language and second, the way these families think about the school. Because they believe that in the school the teachers do what they have to do and it is their place, and the home is their place, and this collaboration that they are asked for, perhaps they do not see it like that. Because they believe that the school does it well enough, and, they at home and you at school, each to their own, seems to be their way of thinking. This, sometimes, also means that it is hard to have this relation».

[18] For further information about intercultural mediation in schools in Catalonia, see Llevot, 2004.

[19] «If anyone from their culture understood that we all have to collaborate to reach the objectives, both those here and there. If someone was able to to see it clearly, and convince and make it spread like oil over water … But, someone from outside can't do that. First, because we don't know them well enough and we don't have the way to make them understand it. In contrast, one of them would have an effect. A cultural mediator from their own ethnic group».

[20] «Many families, at the moment of enrolment do everything they can to approach the school, but later, when it is you that asks them for things, it is they who are not interested in responding».

[21] What often concerns them most is to satisfy the established protocols, which is considered necessary from a more professional point of view. In general, the effort to transmit the message of the school or obtain the information that is considered necessary is much deeper, in line with the protocols of action, not so much to listen and understand the concerns and demands of the parents, who, on the other hand, do not always express them explicitly or understandably.

positive change when it is not the first child; or as time passes, the situation improves as parents get to know the educational system better and start to trust the teachers and the school administration. However, this improvement is slowed by a fact that we observe among all families, not only immigrants: relations and communication are better at the lower levels and decreases with children's age. At the pre-school level, the mothers (especially) go to pick up their children every day and this direct and habitual (informal) contact is highly valued [22] by teachers and families, and ensures better reception of the information. However, this must always take into account the difficulties in communication because of linguistic and/or cultural differences, and that translation cannot always transmit the contents of the questions and/or answers between the teachers and immigrant families. Thus, for example, heterogeneity in upbringing [23] is believed to influence the fact that the messages, while received, are not understood in the expected way. This causes concern among the teachers, because they see a distancing from the pedagogic objectives of socialisation and development of habits, as established by the school.

The parents interviewed valued the attendance of their children in the school positively and many explicitly stated that one of the reasons, although not the main one, for emigrating was precisely the possibility to offer their children a better future and, thus, they value the learning that the school can give to build a project for the future.

The families express happiness with the school and the degree of communication achieved. In some cases, this evaluation seems to respond more to a positive affective feeling or gratefulness to the school than to real communication. Thus, in the case of newly arrived families or families who have been in the country for several years but with mothers who do not speak Spanish or Catalan well, communication is very basic and depends fundamentally on the affective connection [24]. Many of these parents delegate their children's education totally to the school in the aspects of instruction and do not really understand what role the school expects of them, as they think

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[22] As the educational level rises, a reduction in the interest of the two parties for this informal relation is found (see Garreta, Llevot, & Bernad, 2010).

[23] «They don't have enough information. It's not that they don't listen, but, for example, but if you say it's important for the children of P3 [6 years old] to come to school, they say that they are very young, and if you say that 'but here they are developing habits and socialising, and that will help them', they tell you 'if it is the morning, we sleep, they sleep'. They have completely different values».

[24] We see that the real degree of involvement depends a great deal on the workings of the school and the affective comunication there is in the school community: the interviews indicate this and also the ethnography that is presented below.

that if the teacher asks them to go to the school it means there are problems. However, the majority attend the meetings at the beginning of the course and the tutorials when they are asked to, although they do not always understand everything said. If the affective connection is good and they are available (especially at the times the schools expect families), then parents can decide to go to the school to talk about their children more easily. It is true, however, that they go when there is something in particular that interests them or when they consider there is a serious or urgent problem concerning them and which justifies the visit. In these cases, when it seems urgent and a problem needs to be solved, they do not understand that they have to wait for an appointment to speak to their child's tutor. When the urgency is not perceived by both parties, the distance between family and school increases and conflicts can even be generated.

Differences between families appear in the possibilities of establishing the educational projects for their children and the strategies to achieve these, and are not only caused by financial situations, but also by the possibilities of supporting them in this process, the knowledge of what can help or hinder them, and the capacity and possibility to persevere and motivate. The educational level of parents and other relatives offer a broad spectrum of possibilities and cultural resources to guide the possible path. In other cases, when these resources are lacking or limited, it is more difficult to establish specific objectives. On the other hand, it is also true that a higher socio-economic level means a greater likelihood of carrying out the projects [25].

Families build their relations with the school based on the references they have of what this relation should be like and the resources they have to manage the project they wish for their children. This way, the parents' experiences as pupils form part of the knowledge that they use to define what this relation should be, as well as their experiences as parents in other schools and even in other educational systems. This, added to the everyday experience of the openness or distance of the teachers (who are not all the same) and of the schools (which are not all the same), goes to define the kind of involvement that is established, generating distance, misunderstanding and

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[25] «All. For my daughters I have all the expectations. The oldest wants to be a doctor. And in my family they are all professionals, my father was a moulder, my mother a seamstress, a sister designs children's clothes, my brother is a scientist in Brazil, but he trained in Chile and has also been to Germany. He looks for cells against cancer. My other brother is a programmer, and the other is a radiologist. And I started pharmacy, but didn't finish. And I became a computation and systems analyst, and, finally, I went into alternative therapies. And well, if my daughhter becomes a doctor, I'll be really happy. I have always wanted her to be a professional. If they can go that way. […] The youngest first wanted to a mother, and now she also wants to be a doctor».

conflict or closeness, complicity, etc. Thus, parents' attitudes are not only conditioned by their social and cultural origin, but are also influenced by the benefits they expect to obtain from investing in education, the importance that they give to this, and the relation they establish with the school and school culture [26]. From our study, we conclude that there are schools with more positive or more negative relational dynamics (spirals) that influence the communication between the school and the families; dynamics that can draw in and involve those who are initially reticent about taking part or, in contrast, dynamics that can discourage those most involved.

To sum up, through the interviews we found the existence of schools with different dynamics in the family-school relation, and the presence of more or fewer students of immigrant origin was not a variable to explain the better or worse dynamics [27]. Instead, the *a priori* role adopted by the school in its relation with families, the perception among families of the roles expected of them by the school, their attitudes and expectations, plus the ability of families to manage the educational project for their children, are all interesting points to analyse in greater depth. These questions are detailed below from an ethnographic perspective.

2.2. *Immigrant family-school relations. Ethnography*

Starting from the fact that there is a very broad variety of families and schools, with different relational dynamics, and that the expectations of the agents do not always coincide, the factors that have been shown to be especially important and determinant in the ethnography of the type of relational dynamics (i.e. those that make it more or less positive) are as follows: the spaces in the school and in its surroundings; the organisation of the school (the organisational culture, how space and time are managed); family representations, attitudes and expectations; the working dynamic, attitudes and expectations of the teachers and other professionals in the school; and the channels of communication and their effectiveness. These are detailed below.

(a) *The school and its surroundings.* The first conditioning factor for family-school relations is a contextual one and consists of space (and its management), as this can improve or worsen the conditions in which relations between professionals and families, and between families themselves, take

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[26] See Jaeggi, Osiek, & Favre, 2003.
[27] This does not mean that there is no perception of uncertainty among teachers and the feeling of being overworked.

place. The physical surroundings of the school (the availability of parking places and waiting areas for the families, etc.) [28] create a more or less adequate setting for waiting and meeting. Moreover, the design of the school building (some can be considered comfortable and purposely designed while others appear complicated, where it is easy to get lost, and thus not adequate for the purpose) also conditions relations among families, and between them and school staff. In the Spanish case, the school has only a limited degree of control over its own physical space, and none at all over its surroundings. However, efforts can and should be made to encourage municipal authorities to improve these areas in order to provide the best conditions for the purpose.

(b) *The organization of the school.* The school's physical space and how it is managed reflect the value given to education, its function and the relations that are established between the team of professionals and the families. Beyond the physical space as such, which can favour its use or not, the limitations or ease of access of families to certain parts [29] of the school is an indicator of the attitude of the school's administration towards parents and to their involvement in the school, and also illustrates the practical workings of these relations. Beyond what the norms establish, the school's administration establishes a policy and thus, to a great extent, conditions family-school relations, one of the aspects in which the kind of management of the physical, as well as of the symbolic, space is defined. This is what we call school-dependant space management. The main issues dealt with more or less openly in families are the timetable for opening and closing parts of the school (and the time the doors are kept open); the number of open and closed doors – that is, possible accesses to the school; the delimitation of the internal spaces: where and when families can or cannot enter; where and what the waiting area for the parents is and how it is organised. All this makes it possible to talk about schools that are more open or closed to families [30].

The way parents deal with these aspects depends on the management style of the school's administration. In our study, we identified different management models for the school and these distinguish its internal dynamics and the relations established with families (and the parents' association). In brief, we considered vertical and horizontal management and five specific models:

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[28]   It is not the same to calmly park one's car as to double-park in haste, far from the school. Nor is it the same to go on foot or by car. The relations between families take place at the gate or in the school playground, but also on the way to and from school.

[29]   Once again, we see how places where pre-school teaching (age 3-6 years) is done are more open to families: the access of families to these spaces is easy and frequent, and informal comunication is habitual.

[30]   For more information, see Garreta, Llevot, & Bernad, 2010.

- *The pure vertical model* – Characterised by very clear hierarchical relations between the school's administration and the rest of the staff, and with the families and their representatives in the parent's association and school council. This kind of management is closely guided by the administration, with little listening to others, and it does not favour involvement (authoritarian style, autocratic, with unidirectional communication) or closer relations.
- *The apparently democratic vertical model* – This type of management coincides with the previous, in which the administration takes the decisions, but where they are masked by apparent participation. This means that there is consultation, where the rest of the teachers and the families have their say, but, in practice, the decisions still depend on the administration and the policy to be followed is clear. Although not initially, this type of management tends to discourage involvement, given that there is a perception that nobody really listens.
- *The directed horizontal model* – The term horizontal here means that the school administration takes other people's contributions into consideration. In contrast with the previous model, contributions which can be implemented are taken into consideration. However, it is also true that, despite this, decisions are taken that may or may not be in line with the opinions heard, since implementation of the project or maintenance of the order established in the school dominate. We could say that they favour participation, but are ultimately inflexible towards certain changes or contributions.
- *The non-directed horizontal model* – This kind of management style could be called «laissez faire» because it lacks the leadership of the school administration, and the management style is characterised by a consideration of all the contributions and by inoperativeness. In other words, under apparent consultation, any question to be resolved is stretched out over time, and when a decision is taken, it responds to the «strongest wind». In some cases, this lack of leadership can be due to conflicts between the teachers and resistance by some of these to carrying out the administration's proposals [31], or disenchantment from a belief that there is no way to make the school work.

The participative horizontal model: this is the model we believe assures the best relations between school professionals and families and between families themselves. It differs from the previous one because the management style takes into account the other professionals in the school and the families, specifically represented by the parents' association, and the members of the school council. The difference is joint decision-making and low resistance to

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[31] This means that any initiative is torpedoed and thus there is a feeling that no progress is made.

changes. This means there is a greater feeling of an educational community and that opinions are listened to and are translated into actions (that is, there is mutual bidirectional communication).

(c) *The attitudes and expectations of the families.* The families, as we have pointed out, have prior images of how they should relate to the school, what teachers are like and what the correct relations with them should be, and these do not always coincide with those of the teachers. Beyond what we have said about the previous experience of parents in the school, as a function of their age, gender, dress, comments by third parties, etc., the families garner an idea of the teacher and their work (normally compared to the representation of the «ideal teacher») that also defines the expectations that are generated and the attitudes they maintain. Thus, there are teachers whose image encourages a more personal relation and others who set distances. There are also teachers whose behaviour (greater or lesser interest in the family and the child, cordiality, physical proximity, the information they provide, etc.) indicates the type of relation they wish. It is also true that there are occasionally erroneous perceptions on both sides and situations may arise (being too busy, in a hurry or stressed, offering no greeting, forgetfulness, etc.) that lead to incorrect interpretations and which can create nonexistent distances (which can lead to negative relational spirals and even conflict).

Families often define satisfaction with the school in terms of their children wanting to go to school and being happy there without problems with their classmates («he/she has friends») or with teachers. Referring to themselves, they are generally satisfied if they maintain a cordial relationship with other parents (more cordial with some than others, given that the existence of groups is normal) and with teachers. For the parents, this does not necessarily mean the creation of a network of relations for themselves. This is not their aim, but rather the relations they maintain are often based on the target of building a network of stable relations for the children and which have positive effects on the socialising and educational process. The cordial relation with teachers means that they know and respond to their demands and expectations. They especially value this aspect when they have some interest, and they respond rapidly and clearly. Families do not mention going to activities organised by the school and parents' association as a priority, but wish to be kept informed about their child's progress: some with frequent tutorials, others with more sporadic tutorials, while others just simply want to be informed if any problem arises.

(d) The channels of communication and their effectiveness. A factor that appears to be the key to family-school relations is communication. In the

first place, as mentioned, those schools with more positive dynamics open the physical and symbolic space in which communication is possible, and then allow this communication to flow without forcing it, manipulating but reinforcing it, as may be the case with all the various forms it can take in each daily situation – such as with the more informal communication in pre-school education. This strategy appears as the premise for any respectful, creative and productive relation between the school, the children and the families. These are fluid relations, where it is not possible to talk without listening, or to judge without understanding.

The habitual channels of communication between the school and parents are: meetings at the beginning of the course (with irregular participation, but which can be favoured by adapting them to family schedules or by having a childminding service, but also by making the meetings more appealing, more in tune with family interests and concerns) [32]; the tutorials (that are not always carried out in the necessary number and quality; beyond debates on how long they should take, they are more appreciated by both parties when they are held at times when neither teachers nor parents are in a hurry to finish, in suitable places, with receptive attitudes on both sides, and especially where interest is shown to reach out to and communicate with the families); the school diary (an interesting tool for following up, but which needs to be explained better to families as regards its purpose and use); the circulars and notes to parents (that should be clearer, more specific and adapted linguistically to families, and not just immigrant ones, to make the messages more understandable) [33]; the notice board (which does not always have the desired effect because of its location [34], language and updating); the use of the telephone to maintain communication with families, along with e-mails and the web; the school magazine (that exists in a few cases and is a good channel for information and a strategy for involvement if participation by the families is encouraged); and, finally, consultations – that is, informal contacts which are especially valued in schools with richer and more frequent dynamics, and which serve to encourage comments [35] show an interest for

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[32] In some schools, the parents who have attended meetings say that the same themes are dealt with each year, that there is little new, the power-point presentations are copies of the previous years' except for the fact that there are new photos in which, with a bit of luck, their children appear.

[33] We have found unclear notes to the families, with difficult vocabulary, whose length complicates reading.

[34] In fact, in two cases we found that the noticeboard was in an «inaccesible» place for parents, a hall that was supposedly habitually frequented by them.

[35] Positive, as on occasions these contacts are used to demotivate or shame the families «in public». We find examples of reproaches for the student's work or attitude, or that of the

and the control of pupils, and the desire to talk and to know parents' opinions.

(e) *Working dynamics and attitudes of teachers and of other professionals in the school.* The teaching staff, who have not been trained well enough to recognise the importance of the role of families in schools, have found themselves limited to approaching families with the «new» concept of the need to involve them. The ethnography confirms that, until relatively recently, the training received by teachers, and the educational system as a whole, has not given importance to this relation between the teachers and the families, beyond the presentation meetings and tutorials. The other forms of relation mentioned and, fundamentally, the whole range of informal contacts, are not often considered a priority. However, in recent years, all these issues have enjoyed greater academic and social recognition, owing to the belief that they are key for academic success, and have received greater attention in both teacher training faculties and the ongoing training of teachers, which seem to acknowledge this importance, especially through the increase in the range of courses available on these themes. Even so, there is a long way to go because the perception that families should stay in «their own territory» is still deeply rooted in teachers.

Despite differences between teachers, it is common for them to define the role of families as following and supporting schooling, and attending «the meetings that are called». However, teachers with responsibilities in school management (and also the parents' association representatives) [36] mention enrolment and participation in the parents' association and the school council, or voting for these bodies. Briefly, pre-school teachers again give greater importance to informal contacts than do others. The knowing look, the greeting, the «How did the day go?» gain importance between teachers and parents, and among families themselves, and this disappears as students grow older.

On the other hand, although we shall not dwell on this issue here, teachers have positive and negative representations of families and use these on a daily basis in their relations and their work in the classroom (in the classification they make of students; the expectations that are generated; the proximity or distance, even physical, that they adopt; and the limit to establishing fluid communication with certain families).

From the ethnographic study carried out, the need to pay due importance to other professionals in the school and their role in relations with

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families, spoken to at the door of the class or in front of other parents. These events generate distance and even conflict.

[36] See Garreta, 2009.

families is also clear. Thus, we found that janitors, cooks, monitors, etc. contribute to creating a positive dynamic and facilitate this connection between school and family. Where the school's organisational dynamics allowed, it was seen that those whose role favoured family involvement were the ones who showed: a capacity to work to develop their functions; a willingness to serve and give personalised attention; amiability, empathy and a capacity to maintain a close relationship with families; and a capacity to create trust and to handle everyday situations and the conflicts which could arise. They were also good at informing people. These professionals identify with the project of the school, are recognised as members of the school community and, unlike others, are visible [37].

3. Conclusions

In Spain, academic debate and school administrations have evolved to the extent that relations between the school, the family and the surrounding environment are now considered as crucial to student achievement at school and to the good functioning of the educational system as a whole. Despite this development, change is slow in practice and often complicated due to the emerging resistance of families and schools, given that they have always maintained relations marked by an imbalance of power (with one side establishing how families should participate and the other side either adapting or not, with the costs that this second option can involve). This participative and democratising concept has been introduced without the relevant teacher-training and without properly considering teachers' attitudes (until very recently, this concept was not a priority among teacher-trainers or among most teachers), and families do not understand their «new role». In fact, its development must overcome historical dynamics of the compartmentalisation of roles.

Our theoretical and especially our empirical work [38] has focussed on the relations between immigrant families and schools in Spain, and although this is a specific and new phenomenon (as immigration has had a recent impact

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[37] We find schools with a relational dynamic that satisfies both families and teachers, in which the janitor or cook (to mention two specific cases) encourage this dynamic: the former by facilitating contact between families and teachers; and the latter by reassuing parents on what and how students eat in school.

[38] Which we are currently studying, especially with regard to the factors that influence the reduction of the informal relation in the later courses of compulsory schooling in Spain.

on schools), the conclusions drawn contribute interesting information for analysing the family-school relation in general, and not only in Spain or with regard to immigration.

As presented above, the creation of what we call positive relational dynamics and communication in schools is conditioned by the attitudes and behaviour of school administrations, professionals and families. However, the physical space in which these relations take place must also be taken into consideration. The physical space is the setting where these relations occur and, although it is not essential, it should be considered and managed to ensure that it meets the needs and functions that should be carried out there. Regarding school organization, we have emphasised the role of the school's administration. Differentiating the range of management models, we note the ones that facilitate more relations and communication with and among families (especially the one we have called the horizontal participative model) and those that discourage them. In fact, the management model conditions the relational dynamics since it favours or reduces it, creating what we have called positive and negative spirals (or dynamics) that can absorb the less involved or discourage those who are more so. However, the multiple and complex range of attitudes among teachers and families must always be taken into account.

With regard to immigrant families, knowledge of the educational system in which their children study (which improves with time) and of how family-school relations are approached (which are also learnt) are the first two hurdles that most come up against. What is most interesting to observe among families is the different capacity to define and manage their children's educational projects through their knowledge of what can help or hinder them, the capacity and the possibility to persevere or motivate. The expectations, but especially the educational level and other cultural resources of the parents and other relatives, constitute a range of possibilities in guiding the possible path; when these do not exist or are limited, it is more difficult to design and materialise specific targets. This greater or lesser capacity to manage educational projects translates into strategies (or the lack of them) for relations with school professionals.

The last aspect, and possibly the most important, is communication in schools. Over and beyond the difficulties in teacher-family understanding, when there is a lack of knowledge of the habitual vehicular languages (Catalan and Castilian), we have shown the existence of different channels of communication between both parties, but which are not always used efficiently. Improving the communication appears to be the most effective strategy carried out in the schools studied, in order to favour family involvement and strengthen the positive relational dynamics that benefit student learning and achievement at school.

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Riassunto

In Spagna, il dibattito accademico e le amministrazioni scolastiche si sono evolute a tal punto che le relazioni tra la scuola, la famiglia e il quartiere intorno alla scuola sono ora ritenute fondamentali per il successo dello studente e per il buon funzionamento del sistema scolastico. Malgrado l'evoluzione in tal senso, il cambiamento è lento nella pratica ed è spesso reso complicato dalla resistenza da parte delle famiglie e della scuola, dato che hanno da sempre mantenuto rapporti contraddistinti da squilibri di potere. Il nostro lavoro teorico, e specialmente quello empirico, si è incentrato sui rapporti tra famiglie di immigrati e il sistema scolastico spagnolo. Alla luce di quanto esposto, la creazione di ciò che chiamiamo le dinamiche relazionali positive e la comunicazione nelle scuole sono condizionate dagli atteggiamenti e dal comportamento dei dirigenti e professionisti scolastici, nonché delle famiglie. Tuttavia, va anche considerato lo spazio fisico in cui si attuano questi rapporti. Per quanto riguarda l'organizzazione scolastica, abbiamo sottolineato il ruolo della direzione scolastica. Differenziando la gamma dei possibili modelli manageriali, abbiamo individuato quelli che facilitano più relazioni e più comunicazione con e tra le famiglie (particolarmente per quanto riguarda il modello che abbiamo chiamato orizzontale partecipativo) e quelli che li scoraggiano. Tuttavia, andrebbe sempre presa in considerazione la variegata e complessa gamma di atteggiamenti tra i docenti e le famiglie.

Parole chiave: Famiglie, Immigrazione, Relazioni, Scuole, Spagna.