

**THE PARTICIPATION OF IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS IN  
MULTICULTURAL SCHOOL IN SOUTHERN SPAIN: SOME SUGGESTIONS  
FOR COOPERATION.**

**LA PARTICIPACIÓN DE ASOCIACIONES DE INMIGRANTES EN  
ESCUELAS MULTICULTURALES DEL SUR DE ESPAÑA: SUGERENCIAS  
PARA LA COOPERACIÓN.**

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*ABSTRACT*

Educators globally are struggling with how to serve newly arrived immigrant students. This article presents results of a qualitative study in the south of Spain, investigating contributions immigrant associations can make to multicultural schools. We conducted 55 interviews and one focus group with immigrant associations, and 32 interviews with teachers and school directors. We found the teaching staff and immigrant associations willing and interested in cooperating to improving integration of immigrant children and youth. In particular, both groups saw immigrant associations as potential mediators. Afterward, two participating schools began to take significant steps toward collaborating with nearby immigrant associations.

*Key words:* immigration, immigrant associations, intercultural education, empowerment, integration.

*RESUMEN*

Educadores de todo el mundo están preocupados por la forma de enseñar a los alumnos inmigrantes recién llegados. Este artículo presenta los resultados de un estudio cualitativo llevado a cabo en el sur de España. Esta investigación analiza las contribuciones que las asociaciones de inmigrantes pueden aportar a las escuelas multiculturales. Hemos llevado a cabo 55 entrevistas y un grupo de discusión con las asociaciones de inmigrantes, y 32 entrevistas con los maestros y directores de escuela. Encontramos al personal docente y a las asociaciones de inmigrantes dispuestos e interesados en cooperar para mejorar la integración de los niños y jóvenes inmigrantes. En particular, ambos grupos vieron a las asociaciones de inmigrantes como mediadoras potenciales y como una forma de enseñar al nuevo alumnado partiendo de sus fondos de conocimiento. Después, mostramos como dos escuelas participantes comenzaron a

tomar medidas significativas hacia la colaboración con asociaciones de inmigrantes de su entorno.

*Palabras Clave:* inmigración, asociaciones de inmigrantes, educación intercultural, empoderamiento, integración

## **1.INTRODUCTION**

Rapid waves of immigrants are not a new phenomenon; what is new is their magnitude and their adaptation strategies. Today approximately 200 million people live outside of their home countries; people with different cultural and social referents are sharing space and time (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). The effects of these movements on culture and cultural identity are varied, and may be seen in the ways that individuals and groups relate to each other and seek multiple ways of belonging (Croucher, 2004). For schools, the challenge of rapidly growing immigration is profound. In countries as disparate as Hong Kong (Yuen, 2002), Korea (Uhn, 2007), Greece (Vidali & Adams, 2006), Italy (Ricucci, 2008), the U.S. (Suárez-Orozco, 2001), and Spain (Author & Ejbari, 2006), schools are struggling, often for the first time, with how to respond to newly arrived students.

For immigrant students, schooling is frequently immensely difficult. Cultural and language differences between home and school, as well as prejudice against immigrants, produce tremendous stress; most immigrants experience a period of culture shock (Igoa, 1995; Pacino, 2007; Phelan, Davidson & Cao, 1991; Ricucci, 2008). Further, power differences between the host society and immigrant communities have the effect of marginalizing immigrant students (Gitlin, Buendía, Crosland & Doumbia, 2003). How to bridge the homes and communities of immigrant students with the school is a tremendous challenge. Students' available social capital, their cultural origin, their language, and their history are important resources that can undergird their

academic success (Portes, 1999). González, Moll, & Amanti (2005) conceptualized these resources as “funds of knowledge” that immigrant households and communities have. We know that positive connections between family and school, through which these cultural resources are leveraged, improve children’s scholastic success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Such connections are challenging to build, however, when teachers and immigrants do not speak the same language or share the same cultural backgrounds and assumptions. Further, immigrant parents do not usually go to the host country school because they are too busy working, in addition to not understanding the language needed for communicating with teachers.

Education is crucially important not only for learning to navigate the host society and gain employment, but also for empowerment. Education must be understood as a collective project in a reflexive and intentional social framework which has set its sights on a better future for children and young people of any cultural origin (Author, 2005). Cummins (1986) argues that students can be “empowered” or “disabled” by teachers and schools depending in the extent to which students’ cultures and languages are affirmed at school. Education empowers to the extent that students’ languages and cultures are included in its programs, the school collaborates with the community, education is directed toward reciprocal interaction, and evaluation is directed toward defense from failure. Education of immigrants should never be confused with compensatory education, which disempowers. Immigrant children and youth do not need to be compensated for anything. They bring cultures that, while they may differ from the school’s academic culture, serve as prior knowledge from outside of the school that offers motivation, goals, learning strategies, personal meanings and identities. As [Author] (1991) argues, students do not need benevolent help, but rather for the school to take their knowledge into account and build up the young person from what he or she

already is. Knowledge that empowers is located in and interacts with the language and culture of the students (Shor & Freire, 1987).

While teachers typically assume that immigrant children come to school deficient in knowledge that academic learning can be built on, with assistance teachers can learn something of immigrant communities' funds of knowledge. In the study reported in this paper, we explore the potential of immigrant associations to act as brokers between immigrant students and their families, and the schools.

Immigrant associations are a space where solidarity among immigrants is promoted, and where the construction of cultural identity that bridges the home country and the adopted country is supported (Sipi, 2000). In immigrant associations, immigrants share experiences in the new life cycle they have begun, while renewing interactions with their home country, through mediation and dialogue (Author & Author, 2010). Immigrant associations usually share basic characteristics:

- They are a meeting place for immigrants where they can expand their culture, customs and values.
- They support the affirmation of immigrants' identities and communities, (Nga-Wing, 2008; Pérez & López, 2003).
- They represent an exercise of active citizenship to improve the quality of life of immigrants in the host country (Author, 2005; Krasner & Pierre-Louis, 2009).
- They help immigrant families learn to negotiate host society institutions, including schools (Nga-Wing, 2008).

Immigrant associations also have an educational and socializing function (Author, 2005): they transmit values of solidarity, philanthropy and tolerance.

It appears that immigrant associations, which know and represent the culture of immigrant children and young people, can provide support in the schools by helping teachers see the immigrant as a member of a culture with a heritage on which new academic meanings and knowledge must be built (Author & Author, 2010). Action is thus taken with students in two ways: by developing their skills and abilities to act effectively (Ashcroft, 1987), and by promoting learning of the critical knowledge existing outside of their immediate experience.

## **2.CONTEXT**

This study was conducted in the south of Spain, where schools have enrolled immigrant students since 1990, the first of whom were Moroccan. The decade of the seventies marked an important milestone in the history of Spanish migration: the number of Spaniards emigrating to work in other countries decreased significantly, while the number foreigners arriving in Spain in search of work and a more decent way of life increased. In 1992, there were 415,000 foreign residents in Spain. Ten years later, 2012, this number had increased to 5,363,688 (Ministerio de Empleo y Seguridad Social, 2012). Spain, which has historically been a country of emigration, with the arrival of people of different cultures, has begun a demographic transformation that will have profound implications in the future (Author, 2006). These changes to the nation-state produce new ways of citizen self-organization, such as immigrant associations, which are becoming important in Spain (García, Martínez & Santolaya, 2003).

With the arrival of immigrant families from different geographic locations, Spanish schools now enroll students from the Maghreb, Sub-Saharan Africa, South America, Asia, Eastern Europe and Northern and Central Europe. The same scenario we observe in the social environment is seen in the Spanish school (Salinas & Santín,

2009). In the south of Spain there are primary and secondary schools where immigrant students represent over 60% of the enrollment.

In 2004, at the request of Senegalese immigrant associations, we began to work with them and with Moroccan associations. As we became more familiar with the associations, we found well-educated persons in representative offices, many with university degrees earned in their home countries. At the same time, in our research in schools, we have observed that teachers always complain about their ignorance of the culture of new students, their ways of life, their language, their curricular level, etc., and on top of all this, the new families stay away from the school (Author, 2007, 2008). Our knowledge of immigrant associations and of the situation of the Spanish schools today invites us to study a possible approach linking the associations and the schools to establish cooperation. Therefore, we undertook the study reported in this paper, which asked the following questions:

1. How and in what aspects of the curriculum would immigrant associations, from their point of view, be willing to cooperate with schools?
2. How might immigrant associations wish to contribute to multicultural schools in other ways?
3. How does the teaching staff view the potential of immigrant associations to cooperate with schools in the education of immigrant children and youth?
4. How willing is the teaching staff to cooperate with the immigrant associations school for optimizing integration and academic success of immigrant students?

### **3.METHOD**

This qualitative study attempted to find out the capacity for cooperation with, and the contributions that immigrant associations could make to, schools in Spain. The

study was carried out in two stages. Below we describe the participants and data collection method in each stage.

*1st Stage: With the immigrant associations*

Fifty-five immigrants who were members of immigration associations participated in this stage. Of these, 48 were interviewed and 7 took part in a focus group. The 48 immigrants interviewed belong to 16 different associations, i.e., three members of each association were interviewed. The 16 immigrant associations participating in the interviews were the following: 3 Moroccan immigrant associations, 2 associations of immigrants Senegal, 2 associations from Russia, 1 federation of immigrant associations, and 1 association of immigrants from each of the following: Mali, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Ghana, Mauritania, Pakistan, multiple African countries. The 7 participants in the focus group included one representative of each of the following associations: Moroccan women, Senegal, Guinea Bissau, Ghana, Russia, Association of Moroccan Immigrant Workers (ATIME) and Morocco.

We asked members of the immigrant associations to discuss their association's origin and background, goals, activities and projects, and the nature of cooperation with schools the association has experienced or would be willing to participate in. We asked focus group to discuss values and attitudes native parents teach their children about immigrants, problems between immigrant and native students, and possibilities for immigrant associations participating in schools.

*2nd Stage: With the teaching staff.*

The participants in this stage were 16 directors and 16 teachers from infant and primary education and secondary schools located in the zone of the most immigration

and where at least one immigrant association is located in the surrounding area. Data were collected from in-depth interviews. Interview questions asked about personal background, experience with cooperation of immigrants associations in the school, perceptions of the benefits or potential of such cooperation, and possible repercussions of participation of immigrant associations on relationships between immigrant and native children.

#### *Data analysis techniques*

The interviews and the focus group discussion were recorded and transcribed. Categories were identified and coded. Data were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis program AQUAD 6.0. Finally, conclusions derived from the data from the immigrant associations and the school teachers and directors were triangulated.

## **4.RESULTS**

The study sought to find out how the immigrant associations might participate with the schools. First, we present perspectives of the immigrant associations, then perspectives of the teachers and school director.

### **4.1.Proposals for intervention by the immigrant associations**

Based on the problems of coexistence that have been and are being generated in the social and school environments between different ethnic and cultural groups, the immigrant associations propose participating in the schools as intercultural mediators among native and immigrant students, teachers, and families of native and immigrant students.

#### ***4.1.1. Intercultural mediator with students***

The associations defend the idea that development of intercultural mediation directed at native and immigrant students from very early ages will lead to coexistence among students from the different cultures that share the school environment, and suppression of negative, stereotyped attitudes that native children have toward immigrants. Toward that end, they propose collaboration with schools in the following two activities:

First, they propose assisting teachers in designing intercultural programs and activities that prepare native children to accept immigrants from a very early age.

Second, they propose participating with awareness activities, such as showing movies about the immigration phenomenon and introducing immigrants' cultural symbols in the schools.

The representatives of the various immigrant associations point out the need for an intercultural mediator of the same nationality as the immigrant children in the school or their own participation as mediators. They justify their proposals with two reasons. First is the fact that seeing people in the school belonging to the same cultural group has positive repercussions on the self-esteem of the immigrant child, on his or her expectations for the future, and on the positive value that native children give minority groups. The representative of a Moroccan association talks about this form of participation in the following example:

*Immigrant students must see the presence of adult immigrants in the schools, whether as mediators or otherwise, because that increases their self-esteem, their expectations for the future, is a reference for them and is valued, that is, the child perceives that they are valued and they are not inferior to the rest (AIMGD<sup>j</sup>).*

The second reason is that the mediators who are the same nationality are the educational agents who know the immigrant's culture the best and can intervene in

solving cultural conflicts.

#### ***4.1.2. Intercultural mediators with Teachers***

The immigrant associations agree that one of the greatest problems teachers have is the lack of time to work as a group to design an intercultural curriculum. Moreover, teachers need knowledge of their students' cultures because they think that the presence of immigrant students has a negative repercussion on the academic progress of the native students. A representative of immigrant associations from Guinea Conakry says:

*Some teachers tell us the presence of immigrants in the schools causes the performance of native children to go down and they need help for their classes to go well. I think that there is where we can help as mediators (AIGCI<sup>ii</sup>)*

In view of this scenario, the associations propose cooperating in two ways. First, they can provide teachers with materials and resources that foster development of intercultural exchange. The associations think they should support and cooperate with the schools in any activity that enables integration of immigrant children and their coexistence with native children. They will also carry out awareness activities and give the teachers objects from the countries the young immigrants come from. They also insist on training teachers in the customs and cultures of the home countries of the immigrant students.

Second, the representative of the immigrant association who acts as mediator should be the bridge between the parents of immigrant children and the teachers.

The immigrants think one of biggest obstacles confronting the immigrant student is the “bad” family education that native students receive. According to the participants, Spanish families teach negative attitudes and stereotypes about immigrants. For example, they stress that parents talk to their children pejoratively about immigrants’

customs and the way they dress. Two immigrants belonging to a Moroccan and a Senegalese association, respectively, express it like this:

*When the children are small, that is, in infant education, there are no problems, but when they grow up, the problems begin. When they are ten years old, both immigrant and native children begin to form rival gangs. This is due to the negative education about the immigrants that the native children receive. It is curious to hear the children in infant education say that there are “Moros (Moors) and Blacks” in their class when they still do not know the difference between colors...I think the problem is in the families, since they inculcate negative behavior in the children (AIM).*

*I think the problem they have with immigrants is a continuation from parents to children, that is, if the parents see the immigration phenomenon as a problem, children see it like that too. The Spanish parents have a negative preconceived idea about immigration (AIS2)*

#### **4.1.3. Intercultural mediators with families**

The associations propose intervening in the families through intercultural mediation, causing a change of attitude in the native parents and in the education they are transferring to their children. Another immigrant from the Ghana Association gives this example:

*Horrible, horrible .... Native parents educate their children to reject our culture and create bad stereotypes of us from the time they are very small. They tell them things about the way we eat and the way we dress, and make the children afraid of us. And not to mention our religion, they think we are all fanatics... These are things that the immigrant associations should work on through mediation with the parents (AIG1).*

With regard to immigrant families, all of the associations propose mediation activities with families to achieve the following goals:

1. Inform families of the importance of their children going to school every day, that is, fight against school absenteeism.
2. Involve the families in the education of their children.
3. Increase family participation in school activities.

4. Establish bonds between immigrant parents, native parents and the school.

In summary, we found the immigrant associations to be not only very willing to work with the schools, but also resourceful in the ideas they proposed for working with students, teachers, and families.

## **4.2. Proposals by teachers**

Teachers propose ways that immigrant associations can work with agents in the education community, including immigrant and native students, immigrant and native Spanish families, and the teachers themselves.

### ***4.2.1. Immigrant students***

The teachers agree on three kinds of proposals for immigrant associations to work with immigrant students. First, teachers suggest that the associations cooperate in activities for receiving the immigrant students at the beginning of the school year in order to explain to them how the school functions. Second, the teachers propose that the immigrant associations act as mediators between immigrant students and the teaching staff regarding the various cultural obstacles that teachers come up against while teaching immigrant students. Third, they suggest that immigrant associations cooperate in the design of activities that promote integration of the immigrant student in the school environment, such as:

1. Spanish courses given by the associations in the school, but after school hours. As one teacher put it,

*...many of the children come here not knowing Spanish and the associations should try to help us to get them to learn Spanish. The sooner the child learns, the sooner he can become integrated in the school and in society, for example, in review classes, Spanish, etc. Immigrants that are not enrolled in the school could come here for Spanish classes (T 11)<sup>iii</sup>*

2. Activities that promote self-esteem and change of attitudes in immigrant students. This type of activity attracted our attention quite a lot because of their purpose. The teachers defend the idea that organized activities given by the immigrant associations themselves would promote the self-esteem and change in student attitudes because students would perceive their group as valued and see that they can make important contributions to the school, that is, they will not see themselves as an ethnic minority subjected to the dictates of the native group. The importance of self-esteem and change in attitudes in the immigrant students is explained by one of the teachers in the following way:

*It is important for the student to see that his culture is valued, for example, the association can come and perform some kind of activity about their culture, then the immigrant student sees that his culture is valued because native students participate, ask about and take interest in it. We definitely consider this sector important, breaking down the predominance of the Spanish culture. It is a reference because the immigrant students see that they are persons that are not just coming to school to receive, but also to give (...) they are seen as persons who can contribute something (T15)*

3. Coexistence activities among the various immigrant groups and the natives. For example, one of the directors interviewed explained: "...participation of the associations promotes change in attitudes and approach to the other culture, it is a powerful tool for changing attitudes. Furthermore, the immigrant students would also change their attitudes toward the Spaniards because they would appreciate that their culture is valued by their teachers and fellow students" (D2)<sup>iv</sup>

4. Educational reinforcement activities. Teachers believe that the associations themselves should organize school reinforcement activities for immigrant students who have a noticeable academic delay.

#### **4.2.2. Native students**

The teachers agree with each other that immigrant associations have to organize activities for native students for them to accept the immigrant as just one more citizen, and find out about his or her culture and customs. They believe that immigrant associations should promote coexistence and knowledge exchange between cultures in order to change attitudes, reduce prejudice toward the immigrant, and bring the different cultural groups closer together. One of the directors told us,

*Of course, they (immigrant associations) have to participate in schools so the native students see the immigrant as just another person and not as an immigrant. Let me explain. An immigrant can be in Spain for 15 years and always be an immigrant. I think that is a problem in Spanish society. The associations have to cooperate so the native students see the immigrant as a person with feelings just like them, and not just as an immigrant, that is see them as subjects and not as immigrants, strangers (D5).*

Some of the proposals the teachers made for what associations should do for native students are the following: 1) Oral descriptions at school by some association leaders explaining the stories of their lives, that is, why they emigrated, social-employment and economic characteristics of their countries, their first years in Spain, etc. The teachers defend the idea that activities in which an immigrant narrates the circumstances of his or her migration favors a change in attitudes and prejudices that natives have toward immigrants. 2) Activities in which integration and coexistence are promoted among the students of different cultural groups, including the “natives”; and 3) Activities in which they explain and teach the main aspects of their culture such as values and ways of living, by means such as pictures, objects, video, traditional stories, and gastronomy.

#### **4.2.3. Immigrant Families**

According to the teachers, participation of the associations with immigrant families concentrates on two main aspects. First, they believe the associations should try to change the attitudes of immigrant families toward the educational system. Some of the work done by the teachers to achieve this goal is:

- Explain to the parents how important it is for their children to finish their compulsory studies, and if applicable, to continue studying.
- Inform the parents about the characteristics of the education their children are receiving in the new country.
- Motivate parents to inculcate study habits and responsibility for learning in their children.
- Show the families aspects related to the host country culture.
- Advise parents about how important their relationship with the school is, attending counseling sessions to tell the teachers about the problems they have with their children, to receive information about the educational progress of their children and to cooperate with the teachers.

Second, teachers believe the associations should be a bridge joining the schools and the immigrant students' families. The teachers point out that a change in attitudes in the immigrant families, making them interested in the education their children are receiving, has to be accompanied by increased participation of the parents in the schools. Teachers propose that parents can participate in the schools by giving talks to the natives about their country, and that immigrant families can expose native children to their mother tongue.

The teachers propose that the immigrant associations intervene with native families on two points. First, the associations can foster a change in attitudes by carrying out awareness activities that eliminate attitudes and prejudices the native

families have against the presence of immigrant students in the schools, for example, the belief that immigrant students lower the school's academic level. Second, immigrant associations can foster coexistence and closeness between native and immigrant families by organizing activities. One of the directors told us,

*It would not be a bad idea for there to be a connection among the parents. It is important for the different cultures to know and respect each other. I think that is the most important problem. That they find out about the customs, different religions, the different ways of seeing life and being able to contribute what each of them has good in them and reject what is bad (D3).*

#### **4.2.4. Supporting teachers**

Teachers understand that immigrant associations can carry out important work of supporting their own teaching. Teachers suggest proposals in four areas. First, the associations can provide resources on other cultures. The teaching staff says it should be the associations themselves that give them materials on the culture of the students' countries. In the words of one teacher,

*The associations could bring their countries' literature, and documents and things that they do for the teachers to use. If we have Moroccan children, we can work with the Moroccan associations so they can bring us things. Romania has that newspaper that I told you and the last issue came with a book they have published, written by Romanian poets in Spain, and we can use it (T6)*

Second, the associations can help in teaching the "other" cultures. This proposal sustains the idea that it is the associations that should provide them (for themselves) with knowledge of the major features of the immigrant student culture. A teacher explains the cultural benefit of participation of the associations:

*It would be of interest to us if the associations participated so we can find out about the immigrant students' culture. Because in teaching, you have to*

*start out from the knowledge and experience of the children for their education to progress positively, and therefore, it is of interest to us to know about their culture (T4).*

Third, the associations can serve as mediators between the teaching staff and immigrant parents. A basic idea that all of the teachers underscore throughout the interviews is the urgent need for immigrant associations to develop functions that bring immigrant parents closer to school life. Fourth, the associations can advise teachers about characteristics of the immigrant student. In this respect they point out that once the immigrant associations have brought the immigrant students' families closer, they can be the ones that tell the teacher about the circumstances surrounding the students.

## **5.DISCUSSION**

Spanish society before the massive arrival of immigrants was multicultural in the sense that each region presented its own cultural traits, although they fall within the same national and western values. With the arrival of immigrants, many Spanish schools have students of different nationalities, experiences, religions, languages and customs. Like in many other nations, this phenomenon is relatively recent in Spain, and the schools need new ways of understanding how to respond. To help, we studied how the schools can use the knowledge of immigrant associations. We interviewed 55 individuals representing 16 different immigrant organizations in the south of Spain, and 16 directors and 16 teachers from infant, primary, and secondary schools located in the zone of the most immigration and near at least one immigrant association.

The results of this study show that, to strengthen intercultural exchange and the integration of immigrant and native children and youth, teaching staff and immigrant association representatives agree that the school's doors must be opened to allow new educational agents to come in and become involved: the immigrant associations, which

will facilitate entry of other languages and cultures into academically monocultural schools and curriculum. It is very significant that, in this study, the teaching staff and the immigrant associations separately agreed, giving very similar reasons for these associations to make contributions and cooperate with teachers.

Immigrant associations see themselves in the role of mediators with the student, the teaching staff, and families. With the native students, they see themselves mediating in awareness activities that help native-born students to accept their immigrant peers. With immigrant students, associations can raise their self-esteem and help students see that their culture is scholastically and socially valued, as they see since persons of their own cultural group playing an important role in the school. Furthermore, as they know the culture, immigrant associations can help negotiate and channel conflicts arising from culture shock. The role of mediator with the teaching staff is also envisioned as an aid, providing resources, cooperating in designing intercultural activities and acting as the bridge between school and immigrant families. This posture ties in with the commitment they make to mediate with the families. With native families, associations favor improving negative attitudes toward immigrants. With immigrant families, they favor developing knowledge of the Spanish school system, making the parents responsible for taking an interest in the school and participating with the teaching staff in the education of their children.

The teaching staff, which up until now in the Spanish context has not worked with or looked to the immigrant associations for participation in the schools, perceives value in such cooperation. They understand that an important contribution of immigrant associations is in the curriculum, proposing and designing curricular documents together, intervening in specific educational content for peace and coexistence, and in counseling activities. The teachers affirm, just as the representatives of the immigrant

associations do, that the associations can intervene with immigrant students in reception activities, and as mediators between students and teachers. They can intervene for the integration of the immigrant child in school, positively promoting their self-esteem and self-concept, reinforcing knowledge and facilitating coexistence. Teachers think that immigrant associations can also work with native students and families in changing their attitudes. With immigrant families, the associations can play the role of mediator by helping them see their children's school and education as something important.

Immigrant associations, in their role as mediators, would enable school and families to approach each other, as shown by Henderson and Mapp (2002), and would improve the value that families grant the school and the scholastic success of children and youth. This role enables teachers to learn to become familiar with and make use of the community "funds of knowledge" that immigrant students bring (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005), by not only building links between teachers and community, but also by becoming involved in curriculum planning and in altering other aspects of the school environment that act as barriers to immigrant students. Ultimately, in proposing how they can work with schools, we see the immigrant associations as becoming active participants as citizens in their new country.

We can see that both the teachers and the associations are willing to cooperate together to facilitate academic learning of immigrant children and youth, in a way that utilizes the prior knowledge, learning strategies and cultural identity that immigrants bring with them when they arrive in the new educational system (Igoa, 1995; Phelan, Davidson & Cao, 1991; Ricucci, 2008), and which are different from those of native students. Furthermore, we also perceive the benefit of association participation because, as Cummins (1986) argues, education empowers if it considers and values the language and culture of the student. Moreover, as Oakes and Rogers (2006) argue, grassroots

associations that include “parents, community members, organizers, advocates – are far more likely to blaze a timely, effective, and sustainable route to ending educational disparities” than are educators working alone (p. 18). It is through involvement with the community associations that both students and teachers learn critical knowledge from outside their immediate experiences, in order to broaden understanding of themselves, the world, and ways to transform the assumptions that are taken for granted. Collaboration between schools and immigrant associations that is based on intercultural dialogue would be not only empowering for immigrant students but also have the potential to transform the ideas and prejudices of native-born students toward immigrants, and to address the racism that is perceived in many native children and youth.

## **6.IMPLEMENTATION OF A NEW EXPERIENCE: COLLABORATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS.**

After completing the study, two secondary schools that had participated in the interviews agreed to carry out collaborative work, each with an immigrant association in the region. The project these two schools undertook views integration as capable of preventing conflicts and social injustice, and of enhancing the human values and knowledge of immigrants and natives alike. Schools were put in contact with members of the community, through the immigrant associations – Moroccan, in this case – which are familiar with the social and economic reality of the students’ country of origin and live this reality as well. The project also includes families in the immediate social environment. With the help of the immigrant associations, the following activities have been conducted:

- 1) Classes for immigrant mothers in the Spanish language and the Spanish education system, taught by native Spanish mothers,
- 2) Travel for meetings with Moroccan schools,
- 3) Intercultural theater,
- 4) Activities that include the school curriculum, including: study of migration, intercultural lectures in the classroom, expositions of intercultural instruments, interreligious dialog, an edition of a school magazine, study of peace and integration, and study of historical memory about when the Spanish were emigrants,
- 5) Entertainment and culinary encounters between teachers, families, immigrant associations, and students,
- 6) Development of notebooks that include stories, songs, games, and recipes of the distinct nationalities of the students, and notebooks about the customs and different religious bases of the students, and
- 7) Classes in Arabic.

Other activities that have been carried out include an intercultural week, a Film Forum, school working groups of the center, and an intercultural corner and cross-cultural design of the schools. Although the two secondary schools are very happy with the results of this work, the project needs to be evaluated formally in the future.

## **7.CONCLUSIONS**

The teaching staff and immigrant associations in the south of Spain are willing and take an interest in cooperating and complementing each other's actions and activities, improving integration of immigrant children and young people. Teachers and immigrant associations agree on the problems facing immigrant and native students, the

teachers and immigrant families. They also agree on the need for immigrant associations to participate in schools to overcome these obstacles by developing intercultural mediation, bringing immigrant families closer to schools and with activities that promote cultural coexistence. Cooperation between immigrant associations and teachers would make the school and society see immigrant children and young people as the carrier of social and cultural capital on which to begin the construction of knowledge in the new educational system.

Education and learning are social actions that require continuity among educational agents, one of which is the immigrant association. Participation of immigrant associations in the classroom and with other agents in the educational community has the potential to promote the creation of learning communities where coexistence and knowledge exchange among cultures will be their primary goal. We believe that cooperation between local immigrant associations and the school will assist in empowering immigrant and native children and young people. In the case of two secondary schools, we see this needed cooperation beginning to happen.

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## **Endnotes**

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<sup>i</sup> Moroccan Immigrant Association Discussion Group (AIMGD)

<sup>ii</sup> Guinea Conakry Immigrant Association, first interview with this association (AIGC1)

<sup>iii</sup> Interviewed teacher no. 11

<sup>iv</sup> Interviewed director no. 2