Transnational mobilities: migrants and education

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This article uses international comparisons to examine the ways in which national differences in educational philosophies and policies have affected trajectories through education for immigrant and second generation students and their succeeding socio-economic, civic and political integration. By looking at various settings such as classrooms, immigration policies and state education programmes, it examines how education systems have responded to the changing demographics of their transnational student population and how contemporary forms of mobility are shape-shifting conditions of inclusion and exclusion in education.

Introduction

Migrants and their children now represent more than half of the student population in many urban schools and post-secondary educational systems. Countries where international migrants constitute high shares of the population include Saudi Arabia (26%), Australia (20%), Canada (19%), the United States (13%), Germany (12%), Spain (11%) and France (11%) (United Nations, Economic and Social Council 2006).

These flows create new challenges in educational institutions, in the USA and in Europe (particularly Spain) as they prepare young people for the labour market and citizenship. The United States has a tradition of immigration – the majority of Americans can trace their family origins to a country other than the United States. Spain is very different: around six million Spaniards emigrated in the twentieth century to the Americas and to Northern Europe, yet today Spain has one of the fastest growing immigrant populations in the European Union and in the OECD countries with an average annual increase of 13% (OECD 2004). Immigrant numbers rose from 500,000 in 1996 to 4.5 million in 2006.

These new migration patterns put established conceptions of national citizenship under extraordinary strain (Jones 2007). Immigration may challenge traditional national identities and indigenous populations may be threatened by it – matters which are made more controversial by the economic necessity of a sharp increase in immigration to the US and many European member states (Anderson 2005; Oliver 2006). Some of the questions that these challenges construct are: How have schools and universities responded to the changing demographics of their transnational student population? How do contemporary forms of mobility change conditions of inclusion and exclusion in education?

This article will use international comparisons to illustrate the ways in which national differences in educational philosophy and policies have affected trajectories

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through education for immigrant and second-generation students and their subsequent socio-economic, civic and political integration. The article will look at shifting concepts of nationhood and the challenges that transnational mobilities pose to ideas of cultural homogeneity in education and feelings of belonging. The first part of the text establishes a theoretical point of departure and contextualises the concept of nation and education historically in Europe (looking in particular at the case of Spain) and in the United States. The second section examines contemporary policy practices in both countries. Finally, the third part of the article outlines some reflections on the themes that have been examined.

Thinking theoretically

The debate over the relation of ethnic culture and existing structures has come to dominate our understanding of immigration and education (Tienda and Mitchell 2006). Transnational studies have examined how migrant groups have historically reconstituted belonging, mobilised territory-based identities across geopolitical borders, and challenged existing pedagogies in the education systems of host countries. It has become necessary to move beyond the imagery of ‘territories’ as spatially fixed geographical containers for social processes and to contest terms such as ‘local’ and ‘global’ as powerful descriptors of space. Rifkin (2000) observes that contemporary ‘science’ no longer sees anything as ‘static, fixed and given’ (1) – apparently hard and fast entities are always constituted of rapid movement and there is no structure separate from process.

Accounting for mobilities in the fullest sense problematises concepts of nations as fixed, territorial and ‘natural’ entities and problematises education systems as stable structures. In this respect, differential mobility empowerments reflect hierarchies of power and position intersected by class, gender, legal status, ethnicity and racialisation processes that consist of ‘forms of power-knowledge relationship which focus on the body and processes of subjection’ (Winant, 1994; Barot and Bird 2001, 609).

Rights to travel are highly uneven and distorted even between two areas as geographically close as North Africa and Spain (a distance as short as 14 kilometres). For immigrants, this distance can be an extraordinarily long journey, not least for the kind of reasons which Ahmed (2004, 152) suggests: the ‘idealisation of movement depends upon the exclusion of others who are already positioned as not free in the same way’. Skeggs (2004, 49) further argues that mobility and control over mobility both reflect and reinforce power: mobility is a ‘resource to which not everyone has an equal relationship’. Similarly, Law (2006) asserts that mobilities entail distinct social spaces that orchestrate new forms of social life around complex intersections of ‘endless regimes of flow’ (237) which move at different speeds and scales.

Therefore, rather than focus on ethnic culture and structure as an either/or proposition, this article considers that a more fruitful approach to deal with migration and education is to look at how the interaction between culture, socio-economic background, immigrant legal status and racialisation processes are situated within the opportunity structure in Europe and in the USA and how this, in turn, may shape students’ educational pathways.

A central part of the debate on immigration and education is how young adults – in a specific class and ‘ethnic’ location and with a particular immigrant (ir)regular status – come to understand education in social contexts; contexts themselves influenced by broader political, historical, social, and economic trends of host societies. In this
respect, Rhoads and Valadez (1996, 19) introduce the concept of critical multiculturalism, which calls attention ‘to the role of education as a powerful force in situating student identities as privileged or marginalized’. They argue that the major challenge facing educational institutions is to serve culturally diverse student populations by ‘enacting multiple organizational roles and embracing multiple forms of cultural knowledge’ (Rhoads and Valadez 1996, 27). If educational institutions ignore their students and the larger society that the institution serves, they reproduce the status quo. This further marginalises minorities. Such educational practices lead to more institutional discrimination and the maintenance of power and privilege for those who traditionally have held this power, relegate those without power and privilege as outsiders to the borders of education and society. Educational institutions, therefore, are not only a microcosm of society, but can play an active role in perpetuating prevailing hegemonic societal attitudes through their socialisation processes.

Overall, then this article tries to develop an understanding of how contemporary forms of transnational migrant mobility are shaping conditions of inclusion and exclusion in education – conceiving of this question in terms of the kind of complex dynamic already sketched theoretically. As the analysis proceeds, research about various social settings such as classrooms, immigration policies, and official education programmes will be noted.

However, before the contemporary situation is analysed, it is important to contextualise concepts of education and nationhood characteristic of modern Europe and the United States, and the creation of cultural homogenisation and modern nations.

**Nations and educations: historical dimensions**

In Europe, the complexity of changed class structures – notably the collapse of feudalism and the emergence of the bourgeoisie – and new technologies and forms of production, signified by the term ‘Industrial Revolution’, were compounded during the nineteenth century by intense processes of nation building in Europe which deeply changed its cultural and political map (Thiesse 2001). By recognising the people as the sole legitimate source of national sovereignty, the French Revolution of 1789 made necessary the establishment of a state education system, to teach people how to exercise their citizenship (Banton 2001). The ideological revolution, which started in the Age of Enlightenment, included the idea that all men (though not women), whatever their birth or their social status, were members of ‘a nation’ which was to be constructed as a political, economic and cultural entity and that meant cohesion: members of the nation sharing a strong feeling of belonging.

Of course in some cases, the shaping and growing of national feeling occurred before the creation of national states and of institutions such as a school system and an army which would stress ‘the nation’. In such contexts, ‘education’ outside schools was fundamental and one of the main elements assisting the creation of an independent national state. Printed matter, also, was an important way to disseminate the basic elements of national cultures among the population: the language, first, but also narratives concerning ‘national’ history, heroes, heritage and major cultural achievements. Museums of history, art or ethnography were often created with a clearly expressed patriotic aim. Vincent (2000) has suggested that the intensity of such a patriotic education may explain why the idea of ‘a nation’ as a political and cultural entity rapidly expanded through Europe during the nineteenth century until the nation state became the main form of political organisation within a few decades.
However, it is also often stressed that the creation of state-run teaching-and-learning systems with national curricula was involved in the formation of modern nations and helped to forge national identity in the nineteenth century (Brubaker 1992; Banton 2001). In such national schools children were taught reading, writing and counting but typically within a value frame which stressed national culture, national history and national values. Civic and patriotic education was a key factor of the nation building process and of its long-term consolidation with alertness too to the need to train a homogeneous national elite to provide stable leadership (Brubaker 1992).

Formal schooling thus helped to make possible the unification of communication at national level, not least through national languages. In France, for example, the primary school made it possible to achieve linguistic unity. While at the time of the Revolution over a third of the population did not speak French, the process of ensuring a shared national language was completed by the end of the nineteenth century (Brubaker 1992). In Italy, Giuseppe Mazzini founded Young Italy (1832), an organisation for the unification of the Italian nation as a democratic and class-free republic: ‘Our problem is above all things a problem of national education, that is, of persuading the peoples of the peninsula and the islands of Italy to regard themselves as a single nation’ (cited in Silone 1946, 89).

Before 1860 ‘Italy’ was the name of a peninsula: the patriotism of the Italians had been directed toward a single town, not a country; the people of Italy did not share a common language, nor had most even known what the word ‘Italy’ meant. (Smith 1959, 3)

In the case of Spain, a complex history had seen the creation of Moorish academies and universities (e.g. Salamanca in 1218), at least for some time a ‘multicultural dialogue’, and educational provision linked both to class and religions and gendered identities (Capitán Díaz 1994; Bramón 2002). These patterns began to be ‘modernised’ in various ways at various times but in a startling shift, in ‘revolutionary’ times in the Constitution of 1812, education was made the basic responsibility of the State, although it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that there were any real efforts for constructing a true system of education in Spain. The Revolution of 1868 and the subsequent establishment of the First Republic (1873) highlighted the importance of academic freedom and the separation of Church and State in education. In 1874, after a brief Republican period, the monarchy was restored, and education became an arena of struggle between liberals and conservatives. With the coming of the Second Republic in 1931, a new Constitution brought educational reform, including the call for free compulsory primary education, academic freedom, and non-religious instruction (Capitán Díaz 1994).

All these changes came to an end with the failure of the Republic and the success of General Franco in the Spanish Civil War in 1939. Education was converted into the transmission of General Franco’s views on Spanish nationalism and Catholic ideology. For a long time the school system remained divisive with elementary schools for the masses and secondary schools for the bourgeoisie. Social division was justified by the inequality of ‘abilities’, presented as ‘innate individual differences’. The separation of the sexes was explained by the specific preparation of girls for their future lives as housewives (Bravo-Moreno 2006). Thus one of the most important events, which changed not only contemporary Spanish education but also the whole of Spanish society after the death of Franco, was the Spanish Constitution of 1978.
Overall, then, there was not merely – in the nineteenth century in different places – a single and simple effort to construct ‘a nation’. Such movements had different urgencies, and diverse political assumptions (in addition to nationalism). In the nineteenth century and on into the twentieth, different relations between the State and the Church, various assumptions about class and gender, different patterns of political parties and a range of struggles between republicans and monarchists, and secularism and religion, created varied inheritances for the twentieth century as it tried again to come to terms with migration and ‘race’ and ethnicity. Certainly the concept of nation became a specific version of a ‘state’ and a political and economic organisation supported by a strong sense of sovereignty and assumptions about ‘belonging’. Certainly ‘education’ played a major role in the process of cultural homogenisation in the nations of modern Europe – but this does not mean that the European nations were the same, nor that their experiences were the same as those of the USA.

In the USA, the rise of the public (state-maintained) school was partly a policy response to the large waves of immigration in the nineteenth century. It was clear, for example to Horace Mann in Boston, Massachusetts, that the public schools should be the ‘social balance wheel’ of the Republic: not least by assimilating the children of immigrants into America – to avoid importing the conflicts of Europe, including religious tensions. A version of this tradition continues: well over 80% of children still attend public (state-maintained) schools (Urban and Wagoner 2003).

This historically significant development meant that – at the level of individual states in the USA – a system of publicly financed schools began replacing the network of semi-public independent and charity schools. The new institutions were designed to achieve social goals, indeed political ones. The ‘common school’ movement helped to absorb the immigrants of the nineteenth century, initially from north and west Europe in the early part of the century, including the 1830s and 1840s; and later in the century, especially in the 1880s and 1890s, from south and east Europe. Revisionist American historians have strongly emphasised that, from the dominant Anglo-Saxon and Protestant perspective, the immigrant influx offered the threat of social tension and disorder. The political mix of Protestantism and faith in capitalism and republicanism helped to define the reformers’ wish to control morals and create an ‘American’ population through state schooling.

Immigrants in turn were made anxious that the common school movement sought to Americanise their children at the expense of traditional customs and beliefs; while blacks were condemned to the segregated system of the post Civil War South. The beginning of the twentieth century saw an escalation in the battle about cultural choice and identities and included new anxieties, not merely about European immigration from southern Europe and from western Russia but also immigration from East Asia, notably China, to ‘the Golden Mountain’. It is clear that many migrants – and American blacks – were subject to widespread discrimination (Pulliam and Van Patten 1998).

The Second World War and tensions over national identities and memories (notably German and Japanese) significantly intensified this distrust. ‘Americanism’ intensified and earlier immigrants were sometimes seen as ideologically suspect. National and local organisations routinely investigated individuals and groups considered hostile to the US action in Europe. The US Supreme Court helped to block some of the era’s worst assaults, striking down restrictions on teaching foreign languages. Not just foreign languages but any other areas of learning that parents and students
wished to pursue were now protected from arbitrary state and pressure-group interference (Pulliam and Van Patten 1998).

In the United States, the ‘histories’ of immigrants are also continuous and contemporary. Recent waves of immigration have included Vietnamese and Koreans – as well as new waves of immigration from Eastern Europe and Russia.

But the point here is that these two very different historical patternings of the relationship between migration and nationalism in Europe and the USA – which of course can only be sketched in a short article such as this – affect the contemporary moment. While both European societies and the USA take up the ‘formation of the nation’ theme in the nineteenth century, they take up the theme in rather different ways, not least because of the remarkable experiences of the USA as a society of immigrants, the different relationships of the Church and the state in the USA as compared with a number of European countries, and the changes in the directions of flows of immigration.

In the next section, contemporary policy practices and implications regarding education and immigration will be considered in Spain (and then in the subsequent section in the United States). What has happened historically tends to limit the range of choices over the ways in which educational systems accommodate newcomers.

Spain: contemporary policy practices and implications
As was hinted earlier, the Spanish situation has altered quite rapidly. In the twentieth century around six million Spaniards emigrated; until the 1930s, 80% left for the Americas. From the 1950s to the mid-1970s, 75% emigrated to France, Germany, Switzerland, Britain and Belgium.

However, at the end of the twentieth century, Spain evolved from its traditional role as a sending country and then its role as a transit country for migrants heading north, to become a receiving country for foreign workers, mostly from Latin America, Northern Africa, and from the European Union (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 1998). Today immigration of Third Country Nationals (any person who is not a national or a citizen of a European Union Member State) has become one of the most contested issues in the Spanish media, and the second most important ‘national’ issue for Spaniards after ETA terrorism.

This new visibility for immigration is because of the sharp increase in the number of immigrants in the last 15 years: by 2007 immigrants represented 11% of the total population. Overall, Spain has experienced the fastest rate of immigration in the EU (Rodriguez García 2005). The largest sources of immigration are Morocco and Ecuador – both countries with colonial links. However south and east Asian countries are also important sources, particularly China which has contributed nearly half of all Asian immigrants.

According to an OECD report on equity in education in Spain, immigration has shaped the performance of education systems in a number of ways (Calero 2005).

It is this relationship which is now the central theme of the article – here for Spain and later for the USA.

Spain: education and immigrant children
In Spain, there are obvious challenges due to foreign language learning. These challenges may vary according to the immigrant’s country of origin. For example,
command of Spanish is harder for immigrants from China than for immigrants from Eastern Europe. Secondly, the educational level of some immigrant groups presents additional demands besides language barriers. Migrant children may be from a Spanish-speaking country, but their educational level may be lower than for Spanish-born children of the same age. Thirdly, the economic roles of the immigrant population affect parental involvement in school. Immigrants in Spain are highly concentrated in the services and construction sectors: 59% and 17% respectively. Almost three in four immigrant women find work as cleaners, nannies and cooks (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2005). A fourth impact relates to the geographical distribution of immigrants. There are wide variations in the densities of immigrant populations across Spain, ranging from 11 in 1000 students in school education in Ceuta to 99 per 1000 in the Balearic Islands.

This uneven distribution across regions is matched by further disparity within major urban centres, which may involve residential segregation based on factors such as accessibility of work and rental markets. Immigrants are more highly concentrated in metropoles such as Madrid and Barcelona, whose school systems are thus placed under potentially greater strain. Furthermore, within these cities there are major variations in migrant densities, with some schools playing a very large role in the education of immigrant children and others playing only a minor role. This disparity may also contribute to policy tensions within the education system – e.g. between state schools and fully-subsidised private schools – which add to social conflicts that sometimes surface in the wake of major immigration (Calero 2005).

The rapid growth in immigration to Spain has occurred at a critical phase in its history of education, the extension of compulsory secondary education and increasing participation in upper secondary education and to a lesser extent university education (Sedgwick 2002). While recognising the efforts of Spanish authorities, a number of concerns remain. The school system has been viewed as a means of promoting social objectives in the twentieth century. One of the principal tasks of state education was to offer everyone the opportunity to succeed and facilitate social mobility by raising their social capital. Thus, democratic schooling involves a commitment to decrease the achievement disparity that emerges in primary school. However, this disparity increases throughout secondary education, possibly because the training of secondary school teachers focuses more on the knowledge needed to pursue an academic career than on the abilities and knowledge required to be an effective secondary school teacher (Cros et al. 2004). This pattern favours classroom practice which is equally conservative. Most teachers have been educated on the assumption of a homogenous classroom and have not been specifically prepared to manage the complexity of issues of mixed comprehensive classrooms. Thus, teachers are not well-prepared to deal with the challenges of immigration.

On the other hand, the children of migrants have very diverse educational backgrounds and so the targeting of resources would need to be more sensitive to significant differences in the characteristics of immigrant groups. For example, it is not only language barriers as such which the children of immigrants face, in the case of some groups from Latin America. It is the educational level of children that is frequently the issue; not language as such. Other groups present other difficulties including social adaptation to school, which compound language problems. In general, a more selective, targeted approach may appear to be desirable to manage multiple and variable students’ needs.
Within this framework of comprehensiveness and inclusiveness, schooling would also need to be integrated in social terms. However some parents are concerned about the impact of ‘social mixture’ in state schools, which include children from poor socio-economic background, children from minority groups and children of immigrants. Consequently many parents choose to remove their children from mixed settings and enrol them in private schools which are located in middle-class neighbourhoods and which will provide a more ‘exclusive’ environment (Calero 2005). Comprehensiveness and inclusiveness are viewed in Spain as attributes of compulsory schooling and although it is free, a significant practical problem concerned, until a few years ago, the absence of the award of a certificate to children of irregular immigrants demonstrating that they had completed their education. Furthermore the children of irregular immigrants are also hampered by further practical obstacles in obtaining a decent education in the host country. These obstacles are characterised by, among other factors, a higher mobility which precludes their children from settling in schools, their poorer living conditions and their greater vulnerability (Chávez 2007).

In addition, irregular immigrants are rarely able to enrol in higher education courses. During the enrolment process, applicants must show proof of their residency in order to enrol and be eligible for state discounts (Seif 2004). This makes it difficult for irregular migrants to pay, and it also deters them from applying due to the likelihood of their residency status being checked. An additional obstacle for Third Country Nationals regularised immigrants who hold university certificates is that they need to homologate their credentials and this process takes years before their certificates are recognised as valid to work in their professions in the European Union or in the USA.

There is a classic argument that if primary and secondary education were both compulsory and free there would be no differences between the families who could afford education and those who did not have the means. However children of immigrants, children of minority groups and children from a poor economic background tend to be concentrated in state schools and often in marginalised neighbourhoods where they can afford housing. Thus, this inequality becomes a social problem and not a question of intellectual capacity. Conversely, teachers are not well-prepared to handle mixed settings where students’ heterogeneity of skills, socio-economic background, ethnic origin, immigrant status, language and religious faith is the norm. Thus, we ought to ask ourselves whether equity is guaranteed with the provision of a compulsory primary and secondary education and whether this provision should stop at the end of compulsory school.

There has been a democratisation in terms of quantity, related to the raising of the school-leaving age, which is the result of an enormous social and economic change: the ending of child labour, the need for a more skilled labour force, and the increase in unemployment among young people. These have all led to an extension of the time spent at school. The principal advances have been recorded among those who, until then, were excluded from it. However exclusion persists for those who have become the most disadvantaged: immigrants and especially irregular immigrants, minority groups and families from a poor economic background.

In a comparative review of performance and engagement in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) stated that the European Union member states were far less successful in educating the children of immigrants than countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada (PISA 2003). This means that these children do
not have equal opportunities on the labour market, which in turn does not help them to integrate. Successful integration of immigrant populations is essential for ensuring social cohesion in the host countries (Zetter, Griffiths and Sigona 2006). The OECD report claimed that the majority of non-indigenous pupils were highly motivated, and moreover, the fact that they did less well at school could only partially be accounted for by differences in socio-economic backgrounds. According to the report, language teaching was a much more significant factor in those countries where education for non-indigenous children did function well and there were extensive programmes that arranged to give these children extra language lessons.

If differences in socio-economic backgrounds can only partially explain the poor performance of immigrant children at school, is the teaching of extra language lessons the solution to improving their chances in education? Other barriers besides socio-economic capital and language learning may exist for young immigrants today.

The next section will examine whether the school contributes to reducing those barriers and in turn helps young immigrants succeed in their adopted country. A different education policy such as the one implemented in the USA will help us to explore further the link between immigration, political and civic integration and how these in turn shape-shift conditions of inclusion and exclusion in education systems.

The USA: contemporary policy practices and implications

Over the past generation annual immigration flows have tripled, with more immigrants entering the US during the 1990s than during any other decade of the last century. Not only has the number of immigrants increased substantially but the share of the total US population that the foreign-born represent – now roughly 13% – has almost doubled since 1970 (although the share remains below the 15% that the foreign-born represented at the turn of the twentieth century). A majority of foreign-born residents live in four states: California (28%), New York (12%), Texas (10%) and Florida (9%). The national origins of immigration flows have also changed dramatically, shifting primarily from Europe to Asia and Latin America. In 2003 – of the foreign-born – 53% were born in Latin America, 25% in Asia and 14% in Europe (US Census Bureau Current Population Survey 2003).

One important characteristic that distinguishes contemporary immigration from previous waves of immigration is the presence of significant numbers of irregular immigrants (Passel 1986). In 1994, 13% of the US foreign-born population was irregular (Fix and Passel 1994). According to the 2000 Census that share rose to 28% which exceeded the highest estimates of the population’s size before the legalisation programme of 1986 (the Immigration Reform and Control Act). Furthermore it is estimated that anywhere from a quarter to a third of the current annual immigration flow is irregular. There were an estimated 12 million irregular immigrants residing in the USA before January 2007. Congress has been debating whether or not to legalise these irregular immigrants, as well as putting in place stricter border and workplace enforcement.

Largely left out of this debate are five million children living in families in which at least one of the parents is an irregular immigrant and, who, like their parents, would be greatly affected by the result of this debate (Capps and Fortuny 2006). Under current law, these young people generally derive their immigration status solely from their parents, and if their parents are irregular or in immigration limbo, most have no mechanism to obtain legal residency even if they have lived most of their lives in the
US. Therefore the educational future of young people, who grew up in the US and have graduated from high school, is restricted by current US immigration laws. Section 505 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 discourages states from providing in-state tuition or other higher education benefits without regard to immigration status. Since Section 505 became law, 10 states have enacted laws permitting anyone, including irregular immigrants who attended and graduated from high school in the state, to pay the in-state rate at public colleges and universities. These states all pay the Section 505 penalty.

As a consequence of the current law, thousands of students, who should not be punished for being taken to the United States, are left with a future in low-income careers. These children do not have equal opportunities in the education system or on the labour market, which in turn does not help them to integrate in the host society. Between 1993 and 2004, the border enforcement budget grew from $740 million to $3.8 billion and the size of the Border Patrol nearly tripled, yet the number of irregular immigrants doubled during that time (Ewing 2004). In practice, one of the reasons for the increase of the irregular population is the new restrictions imposed on irregular immigrants’ ability to adjust status following the Illegal Immigration Reform. As a result the number of the irregular population may well grow faster than in the past as fewer irregular immigrants are able to become regularised. Despite unprecedented numbers of immigrants, few mainstream institutions have directly confronted the significance of immigration-driven demographic change for their policies and programmes.

Schools are a good example of this. In 1997 one in five school-age children in the US was the child of an immigrant, a share that had tripled since 1970. However, debates over educational opportunity – including vouchers, high-stakes testing, standards of learning and the like – rarely consider the needs of the children of immigrants (Ruiz de Velasco and Fix 2000). According to Little and Klarreich (2005, 22) ‘President Bush’s War on Terror has transgressed into a War on Immigrants including those asylum-seekers fleeing terror. Immigrants and advocates also complain about increased sweeps by Border Patrol agents, who they claim engage in racial profiling’. In California schools, voters have overwhelmingly supported moves to limit the use of bilingual education and to restore California’s Proposition 187, which impeded irregular immigrant children from attending elementary and secondary schools.

Meanwhile most of the core provisions of the 1996 Welfare and Illegal Immigration Reform laws limiting legal immigrants’ rights remain in force. These issues include whether immigrant families have access to English as a second language, child care, and transportation assistance and whether public and private agencies providing this help have the linguistic and cultural capacity to assist immigrant families (Capps and Fortuny 2006).

With the failure of comprehensive immigration reform in the Senate in June 2007, several incremental reforms dealing with particular groups of irregular immigrants were debated but not approved. One of them was the Development, Relief and Education of Alien Minors (DREAM) Act that would have provided the possibility of legal residence for young people who graduated from high school in the US but did not have legal immigrant status. In law, to be eligible, the high school graduate would have to have entered the US by the age of 16, to have been in the US at least 5 years, to be under the age of 30, and to have no criminal record. If the DREAM Act had been approved, these high school graduates would have received conditional US residency that could turn into a regular legal immigrant status during the next six years, provided
this youth attended at least two years of college in the US or served in the US military for at least two years.

An estimated 65,000 irregular immigrants a year graduate from US high schools, and 13,000 are believed to go on to US colleges. One estimate was that DREAM would cover 279,000 high school graduates now under the age of 24, and another 715,000 now aged 5–17 who would become eligible in the future (Migration News 2008). The failure of the DREAM Act to advance to the Senate floor indicated persistent opposition to regularisation programmes. President Bush issued a statement opposing the DREAM Act, apparently fearing that incremental reform would make it harder to achieve comprehensive immigration reform. This begs the question of how the nation benefits from denying irregular youth a higher education instead of focusing on their potential contributions to the nation as adults.

The USA: education and immigrant children

In 2005, Hispanics² accounted for more than 10.9 million students enrolled in the US. The growth among the Latino student population has significantly surpassed that of other ethnic/racial groups. They are also among the fastest growing student populations and the second largest group of students after whites. Hispanic immigrant children account for more than half (58%) of all immigrant youth in the US (Tienda and Mitchell 2006; Fry 2007). While in some areas there has been some improvement in the status of Latino education over the past decade, participation in all levels of education remains low, while dropout and retention rates are still high. The white-Latino gap increased from 16% in 1974 to 26% in 2003 (Kohler and Lazarín 2007). In fact, while 42% of whites and 32% of blacks aged 18–24 were enrolled in post-secondary institutions in 2004, only 25% of Hispanics of the same age group were enrolled in higher education (Fry 2007).

Among those attending college Hispanic students tend to enrol in two-year rather than four-year institutions. Research has shown that students who enrol in a two-year college with the expectation of transferring to a four-year university are unlikely to do so (Tienda and Mitchell 2006). Perhaps the most troubling is the fact that Hispanic students have the lowest college completion rates of any other racial/ethnic group; even after surmounting the obstacles on the path to college, further barriers such as low financial resources and inadequate career guidance, remain. From early childhood through to higher education, Latinos continue to be underserved by educational programmes designed to help the most disadvantaged students. The disparity in educational attainment, combined with the fastest rate of population growth point to serious negative consequences for the United States as a whole.

In spite of these clearly alarming trends, relatively little attention has been paid to their prevention. The status of Latino education reveals a number of missed opportunities from early childhood education through to higher education. Compared to their peers, Latinos are more likely to start school later and leave school earlier. Especially worrying is that Latinos are the second-largest student population enrolled in state schools and improved educational outcomes for Latinos have not kept pace with their rapid growth. Perceptions of Latinos as having a ‘bad culture’, as likely to turn to crime, to have too many children, to rely on social welfare, as a group that is ultimately sentenced to failure, are reflected in national opinion surveys that ask Americans to rank their preferences for immigrant-sending countries. Europe consistently comes out first, Asia in the middle and Latin America at the very
bottom (Kao and Tienda 1995; Espenshade and Belanger 1998; Rumbaut 2005; Chávez 2008).

Thus, teacher stereotyping and low expectations for Latino students are also associated with the achievement gap between Hispanic students and other groups, which in turn contributes to Hispanic students’ disengagement in academic classes and their failure to form strong attachments to schools and teachers (Schneider, Martínez and Owens 2006). This particular pattern of disconnection appears to be unique to Hispanic students, resulting in a failure to see the importance of formal education to their futures.

Overall, ensuring that the US state schools and universities improve their capacity to work well (or even adequately) for Latino students, as well as immigrants and English language learners, is one of most significant challenges for the American education system.

The problem is highly complex and multifaceted. Education is one of the fastest and most efficient means of social mobility; it is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially excluded immigrant children, children of immigrants and their parents can rise above poverty and obtain the resources to participate fully in their communities. Yet Latinos lag far behind other sectors of the population in educational outcomes.

Reflections

This article explored how education systems and definitions of citizenship have perpetuated prevailing hegemonic societal attitudes through failing to offer everyone the opportunity to facilitate social mobility by raising their social capital, and by excluding part of the immigrant population as formal outsiders of the nation state. The analysis also attempted to examine how education systems and relations emerging from geographical mobility are involved in the production of new expressions of social and political inequalities from a comparative and historical perspective.

Overall the article favoured a ‘both/and’ view over an ‘either/or’ approach in the discussion of contemporary society and acknowledged the need to consider change as well as continuity with the past in educational systems. Secondly, the analysis conceptualised structure as dynamic in order to play down the fixity usually associated with the term and to convey the sense that relationships are constantly evolving. In line with this reasoning, the use of the metaphor of shape-shifting is defined as crossing boundaries, transformation, transgression and changing. Aristotle argued that metaphors bring about learning (Bernabé 2007, 21). A metaphor does not only refer to an idea, but simultaneously describes the particular idea in a certain respect in order to bring about a new understanding.

The concept of shape-shifting is one that facilitates purposive, interactive and (re)construction of education systems. It is also defined here as an active process in teaching for social change to achieve social justice, thus opening up different ways of thinking and being. Moreover shape-shifting appears in that process as part of several undertakings, such as: using it to develop others and build community, to further the sociocultural and political critique of education and as a way of challenging and transforming the status quo in counter-hegemonic ways.

The key element, that underlies what teaching for social change is about, is the concept of critical multiculturalism already described in the theoretical framework. It is a call to inquiry and a call to action. Being educators and teaching for social change
involves critiquing and deconstructing social and political agendas in education as well as in society at large. Thus, educators are viewed as agents who have the potential to develop a social conscience orientated to justice, recognising that all knowledge is political, value-laden and contested; and who choose to hold it open for critique and deconstruction. Educators’ beliefs and assumptions about social justice are not immune from questioning. They need to reflect and critique their positions of ascribed privilege reshaping and shifting their thinking and practice by recognising that they learn from and with students. Thus, critical multiculturalism aims to invite students and educators to examine how their modes of seeing and listening have been shaped specifically by the dominant culture at a historical moment and at a particular geographical location.

Finally this paper argued that shape-shifting should be an important feature of education systems as constantly reformulating themselves to accommodate newcomers. At the same time discursive and other system-based powers are shaped and redefined (in terms of scope, relevance, efficacy and so on) as they become entwined in the settings and activities of everyday social life. On this view educational institutions are not a one-dimensional phenomenon; they have to be understood as constantly reformulating themselves as we trace through their effects at different points in time and location in sociocultural spaces.

Further research into cross-national comparisons will enable academics to analyse relevant factors on the success of social cohesion for autochthonous populations and immigrants, including institutional arrangements in education as well as migration and integration policies.

Notes
1. The term ‘irregular’ refers, in this article, to those immigrants who arrive by legal or illegal means in a host country and work, which they are forbidden to do. Babar Senekalde from Senegal, a country where many migrants risk their lives by reaching the coastal Spanish waters by boat, states on the issue of ‘illegality’ the following: ‘I consider myself legal because I have never committed a crime and documented because I have documents that establish my identity’ (cited in Fraerman 2007).
2. The terms ‘Hispanic’ and ‘Latino’ are used interchangeably by the US Census Bureau and throughout this paper to identify persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish and other Hispanic descent from any ‘race’.

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