THE EXPERIENCE OF GROWING UP AMONG CULTURES:
THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD SCHOOL PRACTICES FOR NEW IMMIGRANTS INTO THE COMMUNITY

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Children who are forced to migrate with their families are in the difficult position of having to live between two cultures: the left behind and the new culture where they decide to emigrate. The children of migrant families often suffer with their families the “cultural shock”. The school has a relevant role in the adaptation of these children and their families in the host community. Appropriate school practices are relevant in the social adjustment of these children.

We have analyzed an Elementary school in California where coexistence between majority group students with minority responds to an appropriate model of what should be a good relationship between schools-house and community.

Demography of the research: The entire school community population of an Elementary school in the county of Los Angeles (California), United States of America.

Research: The research aims to analyze the goodness of a model of intercultural and bilingual school which exist correct practices for integrating students from different cultures and their families within the community. The research was conducted over a school year.

Methodology: Methodology used to conduct the research is a case study. Assessment instruments were: Teachers’ group discussion, Semistructured survey directed at teachers, Official Exams. Students’ sample work, Recording video of the school life: class work, parent’s interviews.

Data collection and analysis: We will present some concrete ideas based on the case study research about what should be a good school-house-community relation.

Children who live between two different cultures (Pollock and Van Reken, 2001) are not new, and they are not few. Their significance has increased because their number has increased and their public voice has grown louder. They are normal children with the usual struggles and pleasures of childhood. But because they have grown up with different experiences (Banks, 1992) from those who lived primarily in one culture, they are sometimes seen as slightly strange by the people around them.

One of the major developmental tasks that help us form our sense of identity (Cummins, 1996) and belonging is to successfully learn the basic cultural rules of our society while we are children, to internalize those principles and practices as we move through adolescence, and then use them as the basis for how we live and act as adults. When people, adults and children, migrate to another culture they experience “culture shock” and need a period of adjustment.
Migration is an international phenomenon. Throughout the world, populations are dislocated by wars, famine, civil strife, economic changes, persecution, and other factors. The United States has been a magnet for immigrants seeking greater opportunity and economic stability (Díaz-Rico and Weed, 1995). In the twentieth century immigrant groups from all over the world poured into the United States. Minorities now constitute the majority of public school students in most of the country’s largest school system.

Schools are faced with the challenge of helping mainstream teachers incorporate teaching techniques that meet the needs of bicultural students (Banks, 1989; Goldstein, 2003; Gomez Dacal, 2003). Schools have a relevant influence in migrant families (Crawford, 2001) to help them to adjust to the new community. We propose to look at the good practices of one of the public Elementary Schools in California through the case study (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2001) to transfer some ideas to our European context.

Keywords:
Immigrants at school, Minorities, Parent’s involvement, School community, Cultural shock.