

PROBLEMS INVOLVING THE REINTEGRATION OF SCHOOLCHILDREN WITH MIGRATION EXPERIENCE IN THE STATE OF TLAXCALA, 2009

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Abstract

Education becomes a problematic issue for migrant families crossing into the United States, especially when their children need to be educated in the place of destination. Children face a difficult and adverse educational environment; not speaking English prevents them from communicating with teachers, and incompatible programs can prevent them from moving forward and learning a different culture. This paper preliminarily addresses the problem facing state education systems in countries of origin that deal with migrant children who have been in the United States, and the various issues to consider. The study focuses on Tlaxcala.

Keywords: children with migration experience in United States, educational reintegration in states of origin, teaching problems in basic education, international education, incomplete cultural assimilation.

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INTRODUCTION

For a number of decades, international migration has had socio-economic consequences in countries of destination (e.g., the United States) and origin (e.g., Mexico). Problem areas include health, housing, work and education. Nowadays, the state of Tlaxcala has a low international migration flow compared to the rest of Mexico, but some specialists (Binford, 2004; Marchand, 2006; Jiménez and González, 2008; Romero, 2008: 175-194; Huerta and Corona, 2008: 153-172; Zapata and Suárez, 2008: 311-342; Herrera and Calderón, 2008: 251-267), have found evidence of migration from Tlaxcala towards the United States and Canada, especially undocumented.

Education becomes a problematic factor for migrant families crossing into the United States, especially when their children need to be educated in the place of destination. Children face a difficult and adverse educational environment; not speaking English prevents them from communicating with teachers, and incompatible programs can prevent them from moving forward and learning a different culture. For example, in the case of migrant children from Hidalgo taught by U.S. professors, peers from Pachuca, Hidalgo, recommended they take into account “that children come with their parents to have a better life; that they have left their home and all familiar things, including friends and relatives, for a new way of life. This separation is often accompanied by an initial culture shock and sadness the children are not expecting and do not know how to handle. They also face racism and discrimination, which increases their disappointment and discouragement” (Rippberger, 2008).

If educating children who move across the border is complicated, educating those who must return with their families to their place of origin is even more so and entails all the cultural problems they encountered living abroad.

At the time that children resume classes in a country of origin like Mexico (and, specifically, in the state of Tlaxcala), they face some of the following problems:

- There is no compatibility with the programs they pursued in the other country.
- They have problems with the Spanish language
- Their parents do not have documents that certify their education level

This is why teachers in places of origin have little chance of regularizing these pupils and face leveling problems. In short, the problems faced by teachers from another country are also faced by their colleagues in places of origin: language problems involving Spanish for returning students, as well as cultural learnings acquired abroad.

This paper presents some of the results of the *Diagnóstico Estatal del Programa de Educación Básica Sin Fronteras* (State Diagnostic for the No Borders Basic Education Program) carried out in the year 2009¹¹ with the goal of acquiring general information to guide decision-making and strategic planning regarding basic education for returning migrant children in Tlaxcala with previous schooling in the United States. The Educación Básica sin Fronteras program has been implemented across almost half the states in the country²² (El Siglo de Torreón, 2009), encouraging the construction of information databases that can lead to its implementation in Tlaxcala.

The paper has three sections: the first considers some approaches to immigration as an incomplete assimilation process; the second shows the methodology used for collecting the data in Tlaxcala; and the third deals with the results obtained from fieldwork.

APPROACHES TO THE CULTURAL IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION

Bajos Santos (2007) locates the cultural aspect of immigration within two schools: the U.S. assimilation or Americanization school, and cul-

1. Project managed and conducted by the author and commissioned from the College of Tlaxcala by the Tlaxcala Ministry of Public Education. The current version is presented exclusively by the author.

2. The program has been implemented in 15 states of the Mexican Republic between 2009 and 2010. Tlaxcala is one of the 17 states where future implementation is expected; the programs were still being designed in 2009 (SEP, 2009).

tural pluralism or multiculturalism. The first is also known as Anglo-conformity and implies cultural assimilation in the country of destination, which has been the predominant U.S. attitude since the colonial era until the second half of the 20th century, and is not always related to racist attitudes but, rather, fear of large immigration waves among emerging American institutions—namely, democracy and Republicanism. R. Park and E. Burgess (quoted in Santos, 2007) have pointed out that the “cycle of race or inter-ethnic relations” went through four stages: a) contacts, b) competition, c) accommodation and (d) assimilation.

Due to industrialization, subjects would be moving from the countryside to cities, competing with each other, having contact with other people, competing for jobs, looking for accommodation and, finally, assimilating into communities. Those less lucky would be left in the middle, i.e., between the old and new cultural systems, in such a way that inter-ethnic struggles (i.e., whites against blacks) would in time be transcended via assimilation. The latter is understood as a process of interpenetration and fusion during which individuals and groups incorporate and acquire the memories, feelings and attitudes of other individuals and groups, on the understanding that the sharing of these will lead to a common cultural life. While still under debate, this gave way to what today is known as the “melting-pot.”

Cultural pluralism or multiculturalism questioned Americanization and the melting-pot concept, stating that immigrants who settled in a given area or region had a tendency to preserve their original language, religion and customs. Horace Kellen (Bajo Santos, 2007) called this “cooperation between diverse cultures” or a “federation of national cultures” rather than melting-pot; in short, cultural pluralism.

These schools have one thing in common: they studied immigrants from Europe. However, after the Second World War, a second great wave came from America itself and its underdeveloped or third world countries, such as Mexico. These immigrants possess “new” features: they range from low-skilled manual workers to entrepreneurs, professionals, and even exiled politicians. Those who arrived first, even if they were not totally assimilated and were regarded as alien by other ethnic groups due to the exploitation to which they were subject, still saw themselves part of

this geographical area and acquired a certain membership when they were not discriminated against; i.e., they stayed to work (Bajo Santos, 2007).

In short, the assimilation is incomplete in both major U.S. processes: a) European immigration and b) Latin American immigration, including that from Mexico. This also has to do with sub-processes where there is more acculturation than structural assimilation given that immigrants adapt to certain processes but not wholly—i.e. they do not completely relinquish their language, customs, traditions and even vices even though, upon arrival and at the beginning of the process of assimilation, there is a partial renunciation of the original culture and values. This responds more to the need to engage in labor, student and professional relationships, among many other processes, than the final wish to join a completely different culture. In fact, studies confirm that customs and traditions have been maintained since the arrival of the first Mexican immigrants to the United States, as have their reasons for migrating (Weber, et al., 2002; Durand and Massey, 2009).

In that regard, the theory of international education according to specialists such as Rippberger (2008) requires several conceptualizations; she points out that such a notion should contain multicultural education, critical racial theory, social activism and diversity-inclusive reform. This idea proposes alternatives to the education model of assimilation based on European and U.S. thought (Ibid: 324). The theory of international education posits that countries' education systems should take into a link between practical theory and reform in the pursuit of improvements to local and global education, addressing diversity and equity with the aim of improving the human condition (Ibid: 325).

This paper preliminarily addresses the great problem facing education systems in countries origin, the specific case of migrant children who return from the United States, and the many issues education institutions must take into account.

METHODOLOGY

Out of a total 299 schools comprising 259 preschools and 40 grade schools, sampling was determined for preschools and a census was undertaken in

the case of grade schools. A resultant 132 instruments were examined as a census on the preschool level and 40 on the grade school level, with a total of 172 survey instruments to be applied in selected schools. It should be noted that junior high students were not considered given that, at the time of fieldwork, the staff was still putting together that list.

Sample size

Given that this research intends to provide information on the characteristics of migrant children incorporated into the Mexican education system after being educated abroad, we decided to use the following formula to determine the size of the sample:

$$n = \frac{NZ^2_{\alpha/2}(p_n q_n)}{Nd^2 + [Z^2_{\alpha/2}(p_n q_n)]}$$

Where:

N = Population size: students enrolled in the corresponding level (1.96)

Z = Level of reliability. In this case, a reliability of 90% (0.9).

d = Accuracy or maximum permissible error. In this case, 5% (0.05).

$p_n q_n$ = *Sample variance*. Because there is no prior information regarding the characteristics of the population we used the “Maximum variance” criterion, i.e. $p = 0.5$; $q = (1-p)$.

Substituting:

$$n = \frac{(259)(1.96)^2(0.5 * 0.5)}{(259 - 1)0.06^2 + [(1.96^2)(0.5 * 0.5)]}$$

$$n = \frac{(259)(3.8416)0.25}{(258)(0.0036) + (0.25 * 3.8416)}$$

$$n = \frac{(994.97)(0.25)}{0.9288 + 0.9604}$$

$$n = \frac{248.7436}{1.8892}$$

$$n = 132$$

Each instrument was divided into three sections³³: one for preschool principals, one for parents of preschool children, and one for teachers, considering that children of that age would not be able to provide the desired responses. The same thing was done for the grade school level, but adding the above actors (principals, parents, teachers) to children in 3rd to 6th grade⁴⁴ in compliance with the data obtained from the Tlaxcala Ministry of Public Education-Tlaxcala Unit of Educational Services (SEP-USET).

DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN WITH SOME MIGRANT EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE IN THE UNITED STATES: TLAXCALA, 2009/2010 SCHOOL YEAR

Hispanics in the United States have the lowest enrollment levels at both ends of the school year: they begin the 1st level late and drop out earlier than other population groups. In this regard, preschool education plays a key role in their subsequent academic career. “For some Mexican children, such early first encounters with school failure given that they do not speak English generate negative feelings; these are reinforced across the years, until they drop out or are forced to leave school” (Levine, 2008: 268). Here we attend to children who, having attended (or not) preschool or grade school in the United States, must continue studying in the state of Tlaxcala.

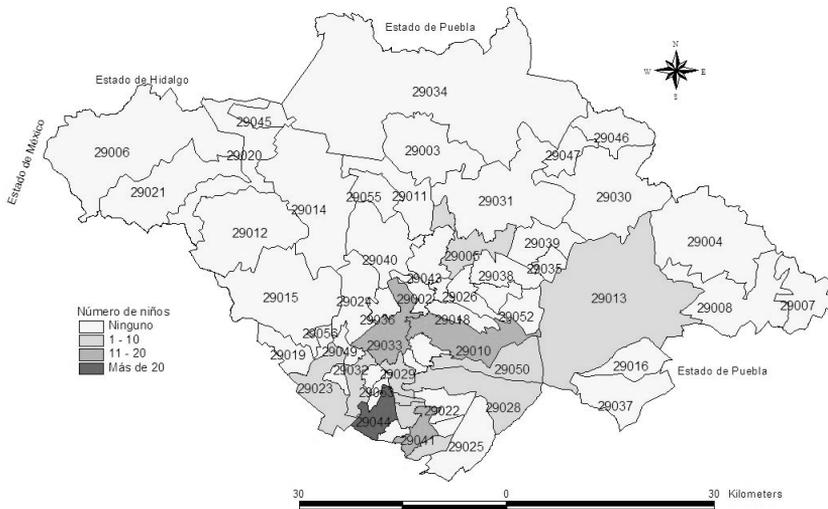
Below, we examine the main results of the survey applied to the various actors directly involved in the education of these migrant children. A number of them were enrolled for the first time in a school in Tlaxcala, entering the Mexican education system. This must be noted because some answers do not match the total number of informants; the migrant experience of the child might not include educational experience.

3. This only shows some results of the survey: a) problems principals and teachers have with preschool level children; b) problems with grade school children, the role of the parents, and problems detected by teachers and principals.

4. We ignored the first two years of grade school for general convenience, which entailed acknowledging the educational experience of such children in another country. In total, we had 6 sections in a single instrument.

The methodological part indicates that at least 170 preschool and grade school children had some educational experience in the United States, and at least 132 preschool children did. The municipal and geographic distribution is as follows: preschool children are mostly found in the southern area, specifically in the municipality of Zacatelco, followed by Tlaxcala, Chiautempan and Papalotla de Xicotencatl (Figure 1). Apizaco, Tetlanohcan and Huamantla are also emigration areas; this is where the schools the children currently attend are located.

FIGURE 1.
Geographical distribution of preschool pupils

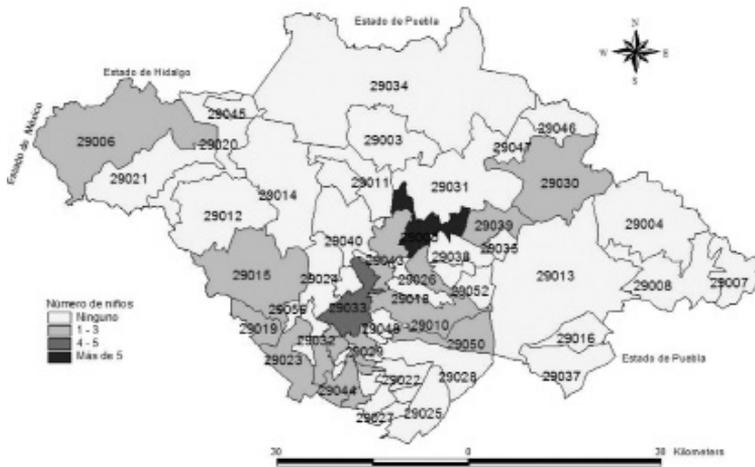


Source: The College of Tlaxcala, A.C. with survey information, 2009

Although fewer in number, children enrolled in grade school are geographically located in the central part of the state, particularly the Apizaco and Tlaxcala municipalities (Figure 2). At least 39 children with some previous educational experience in the United States can be found in Terrenate, in the eastern part of the state; Xaloztoc and, to the west, in Calpulalpan, Ixtacuixtla and Tetlanohcan, among others. Knowing this distribu-

tion will allow the state to deal with the problem of reintegrating children with foreign educational experience and, in some cases, focus its attention.

FIGURE 2.
Geographical distribution of grade school pupils



Source: The College of Tlaxcala, A.C. with survey information, 2009

Principals’ problems with preschool children with migrant experience

Principals closely follow the problems of the institutions they head, so we questioned them about the relatively novel situation of having migrant children with educational experience in another country.

The first question posed to preschool and grade school principals addressed parental access to the documentation required to enroll their children, because the schools must request officially valid documents and this and other procedures are far from simple for both principals and parents. A total of 138 principals say they ask parents for the following registration documents (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Documents requested by principals, 2009

TIPO DE DOCUMENTOS REQUERIDOS	FRECUENCIA
Identificación o acta de nacimiento	21
Actas originales, cartilla de vacunación, CURP(*) y nacionalidades mexicana y extranjera	18
Acta de nacimiento, CURP, cartilla de vacunación, entrevista a padres	11
Acta de nacimiento, cartilla de salud	33
Actas originales, cartilla de vacunación, CURP, boletas de calificaciones	24
Acta de nacimiento mexicana, CURP, cartilla de vacunación, pasaporte	4
Acta de nacimiento, CURP, cartilla, fotografías	2
Acta de nacimiento, CURP, certificado médico, cartilla de vacunación, comprobante de domicilio	2
Acta de nacimiento, cartilla de vacunación, CURP, acta de nacionalización	4
Documentos extranjeros originales, acta de nacimiento (apostillado)	7
Actas originales, cartilla de vacunación, CURP y evaluación psicopedagógica de USET (*)	1
Acta de nacimiento, registro, cartilla nacional actualizada de vacunación, CURP y certificado médico con biometría hemática	8
Acta de nacimiento, CURP, solicitud de ingreso	3
TOTAL	138

* Clave Unica de Registro de Población.

** Unión de Servicios Educativos del Estado de Tlaxcala.

Fuente: Trabajo de campo, 2009.

While they did not mention having many administrative problems to incorporate or reincorporate the child into the education system, they did specify issues involving enrollment, especially regarding the lack of official paperwork or birth certificates (Table 2).

TABLE 2
Problems involving requested documents

PROBLEMA	FRECUENCIA
Ninguno	96
Falta de acta de nacimiento mexicana	10
Falta de documentación de legalización	14
Falta de segundo apellido en algunos documentos	1
No dio datos	17
TOTAL	138

Source: Fieldwork, 2009

Most principals said reincorporated children do not have major difficulties socializing with peers, since most of them have not detected serious problems. The level of socialization in school and with classmates can be assessed by teachers based on the attitude and performance of the students.

The data regarding the last place of residence for the migrant children's families are interesting. Much stated they resided in Georgia, California, New York and New Jersey, among other places. The predominant destination was New York, which indicates a large migrant presence originating in southern Tlaxcala, a subject which has not been adequately addressed by specialists in the subject. U.S. cultural influence

on the children involves not only their experience as migrants but also a necessary process of at least partial cultural assimilation, as already noted. This is, indeed, only partial: the data indicate that less than a quarter of them learned English.

The stay in the United States was, at some point, abruptly cut by the economic crisis in that country, causing migrants to return to their places of origin for reasons involving family affairs, followed by the nostalgia and, finally, lack of work in the United States, among others.

Due in large part to their young age, not many children get enrolled in school in the United States; very few have studied some level of preschool and received official proof, a diploma or certificate. In fact, most begin school in Tlaxcala and have not studied in the United States. Only in 2 cases did pronouncing the English language not become an issue.

The main problems noticed by parents upon reintegration into Tlaxcala's education system involve adaptation, speaking Spanish, and lack of attention to school activities. However, most of them do not have problems with school activities because they did not attend school in the United States.

One of the most important issues, beyond the educational aspect, is to know if the return has led to changes in the child: barring problems with the Spanish language, general improvements in adaptation and health are apparently noticed, as is greater freedom.

The challenge, as noted, is getting the necessary documents; most of the children had no preschool experience in United States, and registration in Tlaxcala becomes increasingly difficult if proper registry was not undertaken in the place of origin. On the other hand, one should not ignore affective issues involving language and adaptation in Tlaxcala's education institutions.

Problems faced by preschool teachers regarding children with migrant experience

Teachers are directly in touch with the learning and socialization processes of students, so we asked their opinions regarding the development of children adapting and reintegrating into the Tlaxcala education system. They noted the following issues in at least 61 students with prior educational experience:

- students have problems speaking Spanish and talk in what is commonly known as Spanglish;
- they are inhibited, do not interact enough with their peers, and are shy and insecure;
- they have different ways of learning;
- they receive little support from their parents when doing their homework;
- some exhibit rebellious behavior.

Unlike the rest of their classmates, newly arrived children proved more sociable and autonomous, although others were shy; in general, they were more secure, and only few were overprotected by the parents. In addition and among other attitudes, there are signs of solidarity regarding experiences and acquired knowledge.

Among the main problems identified by teachers are emotional issues and sociability, as well as lack of independence, an issue that requires special support from the parents. To work with these children, teachers require colleagues who teach English as well as educational, material and ludic resources, including:

- teaching materials,
- malleable materials,
- musical materials,
- psychological support, among many others.

Problems with grade school students with migrant educational experience

Teachers working with migrant children in the U.S. education system face a number of problems that affect the Latino community. Generally speaking, we can point to the following: a) lack of understanding, on the part of immigrants, of the education system; b) low levels of parent participation in schools; c) high levels of student mobility; d) little support from the schools regarding the needs of Latino students; e) little incentive for young Latinos to remain in school; f) barriers to access to higher education (Tinley, 2008: 301).

This section addresses the problems involving children who attended grade school for some time in United States and that, having faced problems there, must face others upon returning to Tlaxcala.

It was vital to know the opinions of the children with educational experience abroad; we interviewed students from the third to the sixth grade; the type of questions required more or less elaborate responses. The opening questions regarded the grade they were studying at the time their parents decided to return to Tlaxcala; only two children had been enrolled in preschool, while another 21 were enrolled in some year of grade school. Some did not encounter major learning problems, but others had problems involving discrimination, speaking English, writing in English, learning mathematics and reading, as well as shyness and inhibition.

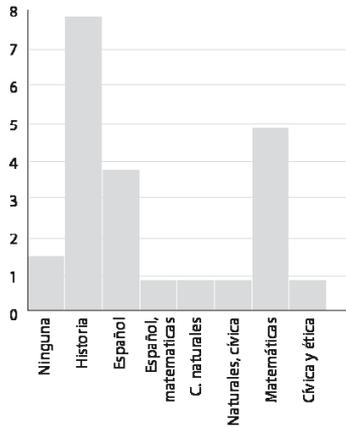
A minority had a good opinion of their teachers, because they stated that the latter were good at explaining subjects and made them work hard. They also had problems with subjects that at times became difficult for them, such as mathematics, English, and even learning Spanish (in a U.S. school).

Distractions in the classroom could make them neglect lessons or, even if they paid attention, the language barrier might complicate their understanding of certain subjects, especially mathematics and history. However, relationships with their peers inside and outside the classroom did not pose major difficulties; according to the children, relationships were good in the majority of cases, ranging from ordinary to respectful to very good.

Migrant children in Tlaxcala have encountered some problems regarding the schooling process—mainly, the Spanish language and the remoteness of the school they attend. Relations with their peers (which appear in the figure as a lack of group control) or integration did not pose important problems. The most difficult subjects were history, mathematics and Spanish; they seem to have less trouble in science, civics, and ethics (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3.

Most difficult subjects to learn



Source: Fieldwork, 2009

Why these subjects appear more difficult should be pedagogically taken into account by teachers. We must also analyze what is happening at home, because the education process is not exclusive to teachers and students, but must include their parents. The most illustrative responses include the fact that some are just learning Spanish, others do not understand the figures, and they also state they get bored in class.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS OR RELATIVES IN THE PROCESS OF REINTEGRATION

The relationship between the children and whomever answered the interview is important because it gives us an idea of who is responsible for their education, or is momentarily in charge of them while the father or mother are working. It should be noted that, in the majority of cases, it was the mother who answered the queries.

The children and their families come from various U.S. cities, most of them in the state of California.⁵⁶ A few come from Canada, China and, occasionally, Central America. Several of come from locations in Mexico such as Puebla, its northern mountain range or Tlaxcala (Table 3).

TABLE 3.
Last place where the child resided

LUGAR EN EL QUE ESTUVO	FRECUENCIA	%
Guatemala	1	2.56
Illinois	1	2.56
Kentucky	1	2.56
New York	6	15.37
Texas	2	5.12
California	14	35.99
China	2	5.12
Vancouver	1	2.56
México	1	2.56
Puebla	1	2.56
Tlaxcala	2	5.12
Connecticut	2	5.12
Florida	3	7.68
Georgia	2	5.12
TOTAL	39	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2009

The reasons for return include cultural links to Tlaxcala, followed by lack of work in the United States. The main problems detected by the parents in the school of origin, though minor, involved the language, partly because if the children already had a command of English, they encountered problems with Spanish upon returning to Mexico. The changes noticed by parents are mainly related to adaptation; some observe positive changes in the child.

5. This preliminary information shows that children with migrant experience in the United States come mainly from New York and California. Preschool students are mostly in the south of Tlaxcala, while grade schoolers are mostly found in the north and center.

On the other hand, a number of them did not obtain documents that endorsed their children's studies before registering them in Tlaxcala. Those parents who presented certificates, records or diplomas, had no problems enrolling their children in Tlaxcala.

Problems detected by teachers regarding grade school children

According to 30.8% of staff, the main problem with grade school students coming from abroad is the language, because they sometimes combine Spanish and English, or their pronunciation is not very clear. A third of the students at this level have no problems, while close to 18% struggle adapting to conditions in Tlaxcala.

According to 14 teachers, there is not much difference between children who have not been abroad and those who have. However, for a substantial number of teachers, migrant children's level of culture is significant; similarly, children who studied some year in another country have skills above those of children with the same education level in Tlaxcala.

It should be noted that 41.1% of interviewed teachers state children require affective support regarding their bond with parents or guardians since, in the majority of cases, the family is incomplete for various reasons (e.g., the father, mother or both stayed in the United States). Some teachers also think that some children must go through a process of adaptation, while a third do not think there is any problem regarding affective issues.

The majority of teachers believe they do not require any additional materials to engage migrant children; others see a need to speak English, followed by support teaching materials (e.g., books, stories, and illustrations) that help children gradually adapt to the education system to which they are returning.

Problems detected by grade school principals

Most grade school principals did not have problems enrolling students because they asked the parents/guardians for previous grade reports, birth certificate, the Single Population Registry Number (CURP), and

immunization records issued by health institutions. Most of the parents carried out all the necessary procedures in order to comply with the requirements. However, parents or guardians who did not cover all of the requirements faced problems that were, in turn, passed on to principals; the most common were lack of a Mexican birth certificate or issues related to dual citizenship. This entails problems involving the requirements issued by the state's Ministry of Public Education. However, principals estimate this happens in less than 30% of all cases.

They think inability to adapt to the local context is the main problem faced by the new student, especially regarding the various mechanisms of teaching-learning in the state and mastery of the Spanish language. At the same time, most principals think the students have a good socialization process.

CONCLUSIONS

The problem of children with migrant experience in the United States and its impact on their educational reintegration in Mexico, specifically in Tlaxcala, has its origin in a lack of job opportunities and the lack of a comprehensive immigration reform on the part of both countries. This requires parents to migrate with their families, and children face problems with language and discrimination during their first educational foray. Upon returning to their places of origin and bypassing discrimination (more accentuated in the host country), both children and parents face a lack of services that enable them to reintegrate into the education system with greater ease.

In conclusion, the following aspects must be considered for the institutional implementation of the No Borders Basic Education Program, directed by the state Ministry of Public Education:

- The creation of a program coordination office that must have the necessary budget and powers to establish agreements and institutional relations with 1) the state education structure, specifically the directorate for preschools and grade and junior high schools, and 2) with federal institutions that operate pro-

grams related to migration problems and children.

- Joint collaboration between municipal authorities and the Tlaxcala Ministry of Public Education to regionally address (in the central and southern parts of the state) the problems involving the reinsertion of children with migrant experience into the basic education system.
- Attend registration or re-registration processes in regional offices with highly trained staff who can expedite the reintegration of the child into the education system.
- The education system must train its management and teaching staff across the different basic education levels to care for children with educational psychology problems such as shyness, insecurity and emotional issues, as well as help them with both English and Spanish. To do so, it should provide teachers with appropriate preschool materials. In the case of grade school, teacher training should focus on areas that involve learning problems and, above all, in the rehabilitation process of the child; problem subjects, in order of priority, are Spanish and English, mathematics and history.
- It is important that parents have access to attention by specialized personnel. They have to deal with the implications of return (e.g., bureaucratic procedures) at the same time that they must fight for their social reproduction; they are also forced to reinsert themselves and their children in an education system that is not yet ready to receive them.

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