

The Barrier of the Child and Parent Expected Models for Entering the School System — A Secondary Publication

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Abstract: The recognition of the positive value of student diversity and their right to full participation are key aspects of inclusion as a means of managing heterogeneity of the school population from an equality perspective. As the school cannot welcome the diversity of children without including their families, the same logic needs to apply to the relationship between the school and parents, particularly in the current environment where the school-family partnership appears as a privileged institutional leverage in the fight against inequalities at school. Based on an ethnographical study exploring how the relationship between the school and the families builds up in a Swiss school located in a context of strong cultural diversity, this paper interrogates how the school norm can be the main limitation to the inclusion of students and parents who are unfamiliar with the school. Derived from field observations and interviews, our results show how the teachers tend to approach their relationship with new students and their parents from the standpoint of narrowly defined expected models, leading them to engage in a vain attempt to conform the students and parents when they deviate from these models. The possibility of entering the school system for students and parents unfamiliar with school is hindered by the exclusive and excluding normativity on which the models of the child and the parent expected by the teachers are grounded. Based on these observations, we discuss how an inclusive approach seems to us to require in the first place a necessary process of decentering from the school and teachers, as a condition for recognition of the actual child and parent.

Keywords: Educational inclusion and exclusion; Family and education; Norms and regulations; Primary and elementary education; Switzerland

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1. Introduction

Starting school is a major transition for the child, it is a period marked by instability and disruption, the experience of which has long-term consequences for schooling^[1]. As a result, schools and families are called upon to work together to reduce the discontinuities between the family and school contexts and to ensure a smooth transition for the child^[2]. In addition to the time of school entry, schools and families are more widely called upon to act in a close relationship that is seen as essential to the child's educational success^[3]. In this context, when a

child starts school, especially the eldest child in the family, this is the moment when the foundations are laid for a relationship between parents and school that will last throughout the child's schooling ^[4]. Parents find themselves engaged in a process of changing their role and constructing a new meaning in relation to their new status as parents of students. They have to strike a new balance between their involvement in the family and the school environment, which requires changes at an individual level: taking on their role as a parent of a student (contextual); finding their place in a new environment (the school); and establishing new relationships, primarily with the teacher (interactional) ^[5].

Not all parents approach this transition with the same resources. It is particularly difficult for parents who are unfamiliar with the school world to take on the role of parent in a way that both meets the school's expectations and makes them feel at ease ^[6-8]. Such a lack of familiarity with school often affects parents from migrant and/or disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, although this is not exclusive or automatic. Through ethnographic research supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) ("COREL: When the child becomes a student, and the parents, parents of students. Building the relationship between families and the school upon entry at school," directed by Tania Ogay [Project no.: 152695]), we wanted to understand how these parents entered the role of a parent of a student. In a school in the canton of Fribourg in Switzerland, where the majority of students come from migrant families with modest incomes, we explored the process of building the relationship between teachers and parents at the beginning, when the eldest child in the family starts school. In Switzerland, children start school at the age of four. This article focuses on the way in which the first-year teachers in the school in question (all women) approach their relationship with their new students and their parents on the basis of narrowly normed expected child and parent models, and on the problems that this seems to pose from an institutional perspective of equity and school inclusion.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. The call for a school-family partnership caught in a paradox

As research has established that the quality of the relationship between school and family is essential to a child's success at school, the role of the parent is now being called upon to be that of a partner of the school ^[9]. This call for a school-family partnership has become an integral part of the discourse on educational success and is part of an attempt to equalize opportunities ^[10], starting with those of children from migrant and/or socioeconomically disadvantaged families. However, there are questions about how this is actually put into practice. Research has shown that those involved in schools most often approach the partnership they advocate on the basis of relatively standardized expectations of parents ^[11], in line with what Changkakoti and Akkari ^[12] describe as the sociocultural logic of the educational institution and its players, which leaves little room for frames of reference other than that of the school. In these circumstances, far from achieving its laudable aim of equalizing opportunities, the school-family partnership seems to favor above all a form of connivance between the school and parents who are already close to the school world, who have mastered the codes and practices of the expected partnership, and conversely leave out parents who are unfamiliar with the school, such as parents from migrant and/or disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds ^[13,14].

2.2. Preparing children for their first day at school

The crucial nature of the transition period from school entry to the rest of the child's education reinforces the perceived need to foster a logic of continuity between the family and school environments ^[2]. In so doing, it is a context that is particularly conducive to the emergence of normative expectations on the part of the school and teachers towards parents. From the moment they arrive at school, children tend to be regularly

assessed by teachers in terms of their degree of preparation and their “school readiness”^[15], in other words, their prior acquisition of the skills deemed necessary for school entry. This assessment goes hand in hand with a feeling that it is up to the child to adjust to school, and up to the parents to prepare him or her for it^[6]. In these circumstances, the moment when a child starts school increases the normative pressure on parents, as a kind of assignment is made to them to guarantee a child is deemed “school-ready”^[16,17]. Brown and Lan^[18] emphasize the persistence of this tendency to assess a child’s degree of readiness for school, on the part of both teachers and education systems, even though research highlights the unreliability of assessment approaches and the limits of their predictive nature due to the lack of consensus and criteria that are often vague as to what constitutes a child who is ready to start school.

2.3. Recognition of diversity at the heart of inclusive schools

The inclusive school paradigm has developed precisely in opposition to a normative approach which, based on the assimilation paradigm, turns school into a selection mechanism leading to the educational and social exclusion of those who do not correspond to the expected norm^[19]. Positive recognition of students’ diversity, with a view to guaranteeing their right to full participation in school life and, more broadly, in society, is the cornerstone of inclusion as a means of managing heterogeneity in schools with a view to equity and social justice^[20]. Since an inclusive school cannot aspire to welcome the child in his or her uniqueness without including his or her family^[21], the school and those involved must also recognize, at the heart of the legitimization of diversity mentioned above, the individuality of parents with a view to encouraging their own participation in the relationship with the school^[10]. More so in the current context, where the school-family partnership appears to be a key institutional lever in the fight against educational inequality^[22]. The principle of positive recognition of diversity at the heart of inclusive schooling is therefore likely to result in the establishment of a logic of reciprocity in the adaptation between school, child, and family^[23,24]. In this sense, it entails a necessary revision of a normative approach to what is expected of the child or parent in their relationship with the school.

2.4. Cross-analysis of the child and parent models expected on starting school

This article analyzes the expectations that teachers (in this case, first-year teachers in a Swiss school) may have of both children and their parents at the time of the child’s entry into school. While the literature on the school-family partnership generally focuses on the expectations that school actors have of parents, and research on preparing children for school focuses on the expectations that school actors have of children, the originality of the article lies in this comparison of the child and parent models expected by teachers at the very start of the relationship between the student, the school, and the family.

3. Research context

This research was carried out in a school in the Swiss canton of Fribourg, where the majority of children come from migrant families with low incomes. Switzerland has a federal system, with each canton having its own school system. Nevertheless, the Harnos agreement introduced around ten years ago has harmonized a number of practices between the cantonal school systems, such as setting the age of entry to compulsory school at four years^[25]. The emergence of inclusive schools reflects the diversity of the Swiss federal system. At present, although the term “inclusion” is regularly used in speeches by those involved in the Fribourg school system, it cannot be said that the canton of Fribourg has made a formal commitment to inclusion, unlike, for example, the commitment made since 2015 by the education authorities in the canton of Geneva (<http://ge.ch/>

dip/lecole-inclusive-geneve). Nor does the concept of inclusion appear at all in the new cantonal school law recently drafted ^[26]. Regarding the role of the school in relation to the diversity of its students, it only states that “integrative solutions are preferred to separative solutions” ^[26]. As for the relationship between schools and families, the law stipulates that “parents shall collaborate with the school in its educational task, and the school shall assist parents in their educational action” ^[26]. The following paragraphs define collaboration primarily in terms of reciprocal information, the lowest level of collaboration according to Larivée ^[27], far from the logic of real partnership, and paragraph four even states that “parents shall comply with the expectations of the school, in particular the instructions of the teaching staff.” In short, collaboration appears to be formulated above all as a duty on the part of parents, involving compliance with the instructions of the school and teachers. Despite the increasing use of the concept of inclusion by institutional actors, the articles of the new school law do not seem to be imbued with the logic of reciprocal adaptation that is characteristic of the inclusive approach. This discrepancy between the emergence of an inclusive discourse and an institutional prescription that is little in step with it makes the context of our research particularly interesting, as it allows us to question, from the perspective of the inclusive school, the way in which teachers approach their relationship with the diversity of students and their families.

4. Methodology

The results presented here come from the research conducted at a school in a suburban area of the city of Fribourg. We explored the early stages of the relationship between the school and 22 families whose eldest child was starting school. We followed this process from the spring before the child started school through to the end of the child’s first year at school, adopting an ethnographic approach that allows us to develop, in the sense of Geertz ^[28], a dense description of a social fact, to grasp how issues are experienced and interpreted by the actors “in the course of ordinary action” ^[29].

In 18 of the 22 families taking part in the research, both parents, or only the mother in the case of single-parent families, had migrated to Switzerland. In three families, one of the parents had migrated, and in only one family that both parents were born in Switzerland. The length of time they had been in Switzerland ranged from 1 year to 24 years. The countries of origin of the migration trajectory are diverse, with Portugal and the Balkan countries at the top of the list, also including the Maghreb countries, Turkey, Sri Lanka, and various countries in South America, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East. Most of these parents have modest incomes and belong to the lowest socio-professional categories ^[30]. The six female teachers of the school’s four first-year classes also took part in the research (**Table 1**). They were all women who had received their schooling and training in the Swiss system.

Table 1. Teachers who took part in the research

Teacher	Age	Years of experience	Percentage of work
Anne	50 years old	Approximately 30 years	50 (couple with Emma)
Béa	60 years old	Approximately 40 years	100
Cathy	30 years old	Approximately 5 years	50 (couple with Julie)
Diane	60 years old	Approximately 40 years	100
Emma	50 years old	Approximately 30 years	50 (couple with Anne)
Julie	30 years old	Approximately 10 years	50 (couple with Cathy)

Both parents and teachers indicated their consent to participate in the research:

- (1) Repeated semi-structured interviews with parents and teachers at different times during the observation period (three months before the child started school; after six weeks of school; in the middle of the school year; at the end of the first year).
- (2) Regular observation of their formal interactions (meeting to prepare for school entry, back-to-school day, annual parent-teacher interview) and informal interactions (exchanges in front of the school building at the start and end of the school day), using an open participatory observation strategy^[31].
- (3) The collection of documents sent to families by the school and teachers.

In total, 197 observation reports on interactions and 101 interviews were conducted, including 30 with the six teachers concerned. The purpose of repeating the interviews was to capture the process of building the relationship between the players over time.

We then conducted a mainly inductive content analysis, cross-referencing the data from the observations, interviews, and documents collected. A thematic categorical analysis was first carried out, using a mixed approach to developing categories^[32]. This thematic analysis was then used as the basis for a content analysis “using conceptualizing categories”^[33], the aim of which was to gradually bring out an interpretative framework for the data, using categories that were no longer based on themes, but on phenomena and processes.

In this article, we focus on the female teachers and analyze, in terms of the inclusion paradigm, the conceptions that underpin their practices. In response to the lack of consensus and clear criteria as to what would characterize a child ready for school^[18], we focus more specifically on analyzing the child and parent models expected by teachers. These models emerged as two categories from the cross-analysis of the material collected. In this respect, our results show trends that are largely common to the different teachers in our field, with the exception of one teacher whose particularities we will discuss. This leads us to articulate the results presented around the processes identified rather than according to a case-by-case analysis, as we have proposed elsewhere^[34].

5. Results

This part of the results is organized around three key phases identified in the process of building the relationship between the school’s teachers and their new students and their parents. By looking at the expected parent and child models from which the teachers approached their relationship with the children and their parents, the first part focuses on the foundations of this relationship. The second section highlights how initial contacts then provide an opportunity for new students and parents to confront these expected models. The third reveals how students and parents tend to fail, over time, to match these expected models because of their exclusive and narrowly normed nature.

5.1. Models of children and parents expected by teachers

5.1.1. A child already in pre-school

The teachers in our field are no exception to the observations made in the literature, and they have high expectations of their students as they start school. In concrete terms, these expectations focus primarily on autonomy, or more precisely certain forms of autonomy. The child should arrive with the ability to be independent in everyday activities such as “washing their hands, going to the toilet, blowing their nose” (Anne), “being relatively self-sufficient in all aspects of hygiene and the cloakroom” (Diane). This autonomy is essential in the eyes of the teachers, who stress that they have to manage the classes on their own. In addition to this, the expected autonomy also means that the child enters school emotionally ready to separate from his parents, that

there is “a break already made” (Diane).

In addition to autonomy, the teachers expect the children to have other skills that will enable them to participate in school life, such as mastering “the rules of life and discipline” (Anne) and “the rules of politeness” (Diane). These are all elements that the teachers summarize in one concept, that of “socialization,” which they believe was developed before the child started school. Some teachers also expect children to have mastered skills such as how to cut or hold a pencil, although they do not expect them to have done so completely. In these cases, it is more a question of “knowing how to cut nicely with a pair of scissors, that the child tries by playing, not that he is really capable” (Béa). In fact, teachers’ expectations appear to be more flexible towards skills that could already be described as academic, compared to the more normative expectations they have regarding autonomy or the child’s ability to respect certain rules of life. In fact, with regard to the former, Anne even says that expecting the child to “know how to cut, no, I do not agree with that, because it is our job to teach them that.”

In this neighborhood, where most of the families are allophones, mastery of the school language is not one of the prerequisites expected by the teachers. Even though they see it as an essential issue for the child’s schooling, they believe that school is the place where the child will be able to develop his or her language skills, and that the resources are available there to do so. The lack of language proficiency on the part of some of the students therefore seems to them to be less of a problem than the elements mentioned above, “it is not a language problem, it is really a problem of first learning” (Diane).

5.1.2. A compliant parent

The teachers in our field expect parents to be the guarantors of the expected student, particularly in terms of autonomy. This expectation is reflected in the negative portrait of the practices of a large proportion of parents in the neighborhood. “Some parents forget to let them fend for themselves” (Diane). Unsurprisingly, given what they expect of their new students, teachers also expect parents to prepare their children for school life and learning. For example, by taking care to teach them “to make gentle contact with a pair of scissors or a pencil” (Béa), or by instilling in them the expected rules of life. For Diane, parents should have begun to prepare their children for school by getting them “used to not messing about at home, i.e. when we ask them to eat, we stay at the table and when we have finished eating, we go outside. So, they have already set him a few requirements.”

In this way, parents are expected to “provide” the teacher with a child who conforms to the expected model, and so they themselves adjust their educational practices accordingly. Once a child has started school, teachers also have relatively precise expectations of how parents should interact with them. In front of the school building, for example, teachers expect parents to take the initiative sometimes—but not too often either—to ask them how things are going with their child at school, to “have the simplicity to do it” (Béa). The teachers saw this as a sign of the parents’ involvement in their child’s schooling, of “parents who are concerned, who care about their children, who discuss when the children are picked up or taken downstairs” (Cathy). However, this expectation of initiative is not made explicit to the parents by the teachers, who see it as something “natural,” something that goes without saying.

Overall, the model of the parent expected by the teachers is that of a parent who is both compliant and conforming, who shares their educational standards, and even knows them in advance so as to be able to prepare the child for them, and who, at the same time, grasps the expected standards, even when these remain implicit.

5.1.3. A special teacher

What sets Julie apart from her colleagues is her less-than-standardized expectation of how her child should

be prepared for school, and therefore of the role parents are expected to play in that preparation. Rather than considering elements such as independence in everyday activities or respect for the rules of group life as prerequisites that the child should have at the outset, Julie considers that these are skills specific to the first year of school, during which it is normal, in her view, for there to be “a lot of social learning, being together, walking in pairs, sharing a snack, getting dressed, going to the toilet, respecting codes and rules.” We will be coming back to this particular feature observed in Julie.

5.2. Starting school as a confrontation with expected models

The narrowly standardized nature of the child and parent models expected by the teachers—with the exception of Julie—resulted in a negative judgment on their part towards their new students, and even more so towards their parents. The teachers linked this negative judgement to the particularities of the school’s neighborhood, and to the fact that most of the families there came from migrant and low-income backgrounds. The children’s aptitudes at the start of their schooling, and in the background their parents’ educational practices, are assessed as not being in line with the expected models, for example in terms of autonomy. Emma deplores the fact that she is faced with “children who arrive at school with nothing. You really have to teach them everything, the basics, washing their hands, going to the toilet, going to the playground.” The teachers associate what they consider to be the child’s shortcomings with inadequacies in their parents’ educational practices. Still on the question of autonomy, Béa denounced the fact that in this neighborhood, she was faced with “parents who tend to do everything for their child.” They are criticized not only for not doing enough to encourage the autonomy expected of their children, but also for not caring about them. “These are things that should be done beforehand. As parents, we want our children to be able to dress themselves, look after themselves, and be independent, but some do not realize that, they just give them to us. We see children who should be doing everything” (Anne).

The parents in our field are also regularly seen to deviate from the expected norm in the way they interact with the teachers, for example in the way they initiate exchanges in front of the school building. Most of them very rarely took the initiative of approaching the teacher in this informal interaction area, not because they were not interested in knowing how their child’s schooling was going, but because they felt that a “good parent” did not bother the teacher for no real reason. “We are not going to approach her, bothering her by always asking how things are going, we only do it when we have to” (father of A, Portuguese). Feeling that they were available for discussion, the teachers were unaware of this difficulty with parental initiative, and therefore interpreted the parents’ lack of initiative negatively, since it contradicted their model of the expected parent. “Parents ask very few questions about how things are going with their child. I deeply regret that” (Diane).

In the end, these observations fed into the teachers’ conception of the families in the neighborhood as “other” families, particularly in terms of their educational concepts and practices. “There are big differences of opinion with the families, about things that are obvious to us but not at all so” (Anne). Perceived otherness is blamed on cultural differences associated with the fact that the families have migrated. “It depends on the different nationalities, the beliefs, what can be expected of a child” (Béa). This awareness of a form of cultural otherness does not, however, go hand in hand with what might be described as intercultural sensitivity on the part of the teachers. Considered in a unilateral and essentializing way as a characteristic of families, otherness appears to be apprehended from the angle of deviation from the norm deemed adequate, that of the school. “Education is not always done. At least, it is done in their own way, but it does not meet the school’s requirements” (Diane).

Here too, however, Julie differs from her colleagues. By pointing out that “different cultures need more time to adapt”, she emphasizes the difficulties for the child and his or her parents when different cultural frames of reference are encountered between the school and the family, and places greater emphasis on the relational

dimension of otherness. “It is just that they certainly do not have the same codes as us, they are not stimulated to play games, do puzzles, or do things that we are going to use at school. And because that is what we base our knowledge on, they have more difficulty.” With this more centered vision, Julie moves away from her colleagues’ deficient view of the educational practices of parents in the neighborhood. We will analyze this particularity of Julie’s in the discussion section.

5.3. Students and parents fail to fit the expected models

The pervasiveness and normative force of the child and parent models expected by the teachers in the research led them to invest the relationship with the parents largely as a space for prescriptions with a view to modifying parental educational practices. The aim is to bring parents, and indirectly their children, into line with the expected models. For example, during an informal interaction on the first few days of school, Diane told P’s mother (a Portuguese mother) that she and her son would have to watch “because he does not know how to put his shoes on, it is always wrong,” while Emma told V’s mother (an Albanian mother) that “V gets into fights at school, you have to tell him no at home.” During the formal interview in the middle of the school year, Béa explained to the researcher that she wanted to tell K’s parents (Lebanese parents) that “it would be good for his well-being, for him to grow up, if they gave him a break,” while Diane asked D’s mother (Portuguese mother), “Do you have any coloring books? Then really work on that at home, the coloring, the cutting, so that it goes quicker.” For Emma, the aim of these instructions is for parents “to know what to do with their children, instead of leaving them in front of the computer or the TV, and to situate them in relation to what the school expects, such as knowing how to cut and hold a pencil.”

We note differences in the degree of directivity with which teachers address these educational prescriptions to parents^[35]. But over and above the differences in form, which have an impact on the way the message is received by parents, the substance of the message is broadly the same: that the child and the parents’ educational practices must conform to the expected norm, which the teachers see as an essential condition for their relationship with the student and his family.

Compared to her colleagues, Julie set clear limits to her role in relation to parents’ educational practices, believing that it was a matter of “expressing the school’s expectations without getting involved in their education.” As a result, she rarely engages in the kind of prescriptive discourse observed among her colleagues. “Sometimes I lend out games and say ‘Here, you can do this at home with your mum,’ but I am not necessarily going to go up to a mum and say ‘Oh, here, I have got a great game, you will have to do it with your child at home.’” Her conception of otherness as an element to be dealt with in the relationship with the student and his family, rather than a lack on the part of the students and their families in relation to an expected norm, leads her to focus more on her own role in reducing this otherness. “It is up to us to get back to them, to stimulate them with games, and I try to take them with me when there is time for free play. We have to work on our way of seeing things as much as possible.”

In practice, the attempt by Julie’s colleagues to bring parents’ educational practices into line tends to fail. We have observed, however, that the parents do their utmost to implement the instructions they receive. Even when what they were asked to do was at odds with their own ideas of education, they never expressed their disagreement to the teacher, and tried to do as they were told. This was partly because they wanted to have a positive relationship with the teacher, and partly because most of them clearly saw the teacher as the expert. C’s mother (a Portuguese mother) describes her role as “listening to the teachers”: “There is always something that needs to be corrected at home so that things go well at school. So, I will always be listening, even to criticism, and I will do my best to put things right.” However, despite the parents’ efforts, their educational practices

continued to be generally perceived as inadequate. The teachers therefore persisted in their educational prescriptions, which tended to engender in the parents a feeling of powerlessness and non-recognition of their efforts, as expressed by K's mother (Lebanese mother): "Bea always pushes us to get her to do things. Sometimes I cannot! We really try at home! What more do we need to do?" Some of the parents' underlying criticism was that their own practices and ideas about education were not recognized. "Here, there is a method that has to be followed, but the important thing is that we get the result, each in our own way" (father of A, Portuguese).

What we observe is that the failure to bring parenting practices into line is largely due to a dual characteristic of the child and parent models expected by the teachers: on the one hand, their exclusive nature, which makes it difficult for parents and children alike to conform to them when they are unfamiliar with them; on the other hand, their largely implicit nature, which complicates matters further. One example of this is the unspoken expectation of teachers regarding the initiative of informal exchanges in front of the school building. However, what is meant by a child who is "sufficiently" autonomous, what exactly is meant by the notion of socialization that is recurrently associated with the question of living rules, or how playing certain games with the child at home will help him or her learn at school, are all aspects of the expected child and parent models that are never explicitly discussed with the parents.

6. Discussion

The consequences of such a dynamic for the experience of the relationship between parents and teachers in our field are discussed in greater detail elsewhere ^[34-36]. Here, we would like to examine how the existence of expected child and parent models such as those observed among the majority of female teachers in our field seems to us to be a major obstacle to a school that is inclusive of the diversity of students and their families.

6.1. Models imbued with an exclusive and excluding normativity

The fact that schools and teachers tend to expect parents to act on the basis of a narrowly defined standard model, which overlooks and disqualifies the many ways in which parents are involved in their child's education and schooling as soon as these differ from the expected norm, is not specific to our field ^[37,38]. In her work on autonomy, Durler ^[39] emphasizes how schools and teachers develop expectations of parents that are based on an absolute school standard, taken for granted and essential to the child's development. In these circumstances, parents are expected to adopt what Daniel Thin ^[11] describes as the role of pedagogical auxiliaries, which consists of establishing the child as a student, including in the family environment, with the main problem for parents unfamiliar with school being that this "presupposes parental practices based on school logic to which parents are, for the most part, strangers." The failure of teachers in our field to bring parental educational practices into line illustrates how parents unfamiliar with the world of school find themselves, in such a relational dynamic, prevented from appearing as "good" parents of students by the very fact of their lack of familiarity with the expected exclusive norm ^[40].

The originality of our results lies in showing how this highly normalized model of the expected parent can be present from the start of the child's schooling, and prove to be indissociable from an equally normalized model of the expected child. By linking these two models, the conceptions and practices of the teachers in our field are part of a normative perspective on the transition to school (a child entering school must have such and such abilities), on the child's development (a child of such and such an age must have such and such abilities) and on the parents' role (the parent must ensure that the child has acquired such and such abilities). With the strong feeling that it is up to the child to adjust to school and for parents to prepare him or her for it ^[6], there is a

tendency to evaluate children normatively when they start school, as if they were already pre-schooled or even in school ^[41]. In line with this logic, it comes as no surprise that the children who, in the eyes of the teachers in our field, come closest to the model of the expected pre-school child are either children who have attended pre-school structures, or the rare children who have a parent who has attended school. Like Durler ^[39], we note that the narrowness of the norm imposed by the teachers in our field appears to create deviance, instigating parents with little familiarity with school, starting with those from migrant and/or disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, as parents whose practices deemed unsuitable need to be “corrected.”

In such circumstances, parents who are unfamiliar with the school environment find themselves hampered in their entry into the role of students’ parent by the omnipresence of a school standard that is both exclusive (the parent is supposed to apply it strictly) and paradoxically largely implicit (the parent is supposed to know and understand it). This exclusive and implicit nature of the school norm underlying the expected student and parent models seems to us to be a manifestation of ethnocentrism—the fact of considering one’s own frame of reference to be the only legitimate one, the only possible one, and supposed to be shared by everyone ^[42].

6.2. Towards inclusion: Decentering as a condition for recognition

In contrast to the principle of reciprocal adaptation that is part and parcel of the inclusive approach, the relational dynamic observed between the teachers and parents in our fieldwork remains based on an assimilationist approach characterized by an expectation that students and their families will adapt unidirectionally to the school world. The attempt to bring parents’ educational practices into line with those of the school, which such an approach generates in the relationship between the school and parents unfamiliar with the school world, raises a number of problems in terms of equity and social justice, which in our view are similar to those raised by Neyrand ^[43] in his critical view of the practices of those involved in supporting parenthood:

- (1) A denial of recognition in the fact of (de)legitimizing parenting practices in the light of a single frame of reference, even though they are diverse.
- (2) Over-responsibilization of parents as the cause of and solution to educational inequalities, to the detriment of consideration of the social, cultural, and contextual factors that make up these inequalities.
- (3) School actors are absolved of their own role in inequalities, including the culturally rooted nature of teaching practices and systems ^[44,45] or the educational values that underpin them, such as autonomy ^[39,46].

The principle of equity and social justice at the heart of the inclusion paradigm seems to us to require a reversal of the focus in the eyes of teachers, so as to question how the school norm itself can be an obstacle to the recognition and inclusion of the diversity of students and their families. In this sense, the first condition for an inclusive school seems to us to be the commitment of teachers, and more broadly of the school institution, to an essential work of decentration, leading them to become aware of the real nature of the school norm. If all children and parents do not have the same proximity to school, it is not only because their frames of reference are “other,” but also because the school norm itself is culturally situated, for example in terms of the way in which autonomy is considered in development and learning. This awareness is a precondition for being able to explain the school norm to children and parents who are unfamiliar with it ^[47]. However, clarification alone can remain a normative imposition, at the risk of reinforcing the inequalities mentioned above. That is why decentralization, and the explanatory work it enables, must go hand in hand with the necessary recognition of the real child and parent ^[48], which requires schools and teachers to move away from the exclusive and

excluding normativity of expected standard models of children and parents, particularly around the crucial moment of transition when children start school.

In our fieldwork, Julie appeared to be the teacher most involved in such a process. She is a young teacher, recently trained, and a mother herself. As some of her colleagues share each of these characteristics, we find it difficult to see any explanation for her particularity. Julie explained her more off-center stance primarily as a result of travel experiences during which she had seen herself in terms of a certain alterity. She did not mention any link with her training. There is one point that particularly raises questions in relation to what appears to be above all a personal attitude to diversity on her part. At the time of the research, Julie had just taken up her new post, the aspects of which she was still discovering with her duet colleague. She had previously taught at higher levels, so she was starting out as a primary school teacher. Since the intercultural sensitivity she displayed seemed to stem from her personal experiences and to be little shared by her colleagues, one fear might be that her particularities would fade as the process of professional socialization with her colleagues progressed, and that her personal stance would not hold up against the institutional norm. All the more so in the absence of this sensitivity being anchored in her professional training.

7. Conclusion

In their initial contacts with their new students and parents, the practices of the teachers in our field remain marked by an assimilationist approach. The “good” entry of children and parents into the school world depends on their conforming to a narrow expected norm, with a strong feeling on the part of the teachers that it is not possible for them to act otherwise, that they find themselves obliged to demand this combined conformity necessary both for the child’s academic well-being and for their work as teachers. Based on the particular school context studied, characterized by the gap described between the emergence of an inclusive discourse and its lack of translation into institutional functioning at this stage, we see this as confirmation that inclusion cannot be decreed. It seems to us that a necessary condition for positive recognition of the diversity of students and families, and for the establishment of the principle of reciprocal adaptation constitutive of the inclusive approach, is for schools and teachers to engage in an indispensable process of decentering in relation to exclusive and excluding normative models likely to guide their practices towards students and parents unfamiliar with the school world.

Disclosure statement

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