Inclusive Education in the Context of Ethnocultural Diversity: Understanding the Process of Exclusion to Act in the School — A Secondary Publication

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Abstract: This paper reveals that the implementation of inclusive education is an unfinished challenge, both within the system and for individual self-improvement. This process of changing practices, by continually questioning the school's responsibility for the (re)production of inequalities, exclusion, and unequal social relations, is riddled with obstacles, unpredictable situations, and strong emotions. In particular, the researchers point out that many systemic mechanisms of school culture contribute to replicating and reifying hierarchical school experiences and exacerbating processes of institutional discrimination against immigrant backgrounds and/or racialized students. The empirical research presented also highlights the school staff's deficit thinking toward immigrant students and their parents. The results show that staff tend to use linguistic and cultural gaps between students and the school system to explain academic failure. Be that as it may, the researchers as well as the school actors and students interviewed in this paper suggest multiple ways to improve inclusion in the school context, stressing the importance of giving voice to the various actors in order to move toward institutional transformation.

Keywords: Educational inclusion and exclusion; Canada; Switzerland

1. Introduction

In the context of immigration diversification and identity polarization at both local and international levels, the issue of inclusion in education requires reflection and concrete action [1]. Long associated with the school integration of students with disabilities or learning difficulties, inclusive education tends to broaden to take into account the reality of all underrepresented and marginalized learners in the education system [2]. The following goals are associated with it: (1) the implementation of equitable practices adapted to the specificities

and needs of students in order to promote the educational success of all, and (2) the recognition of individual and collective differences, with the aim of effecting institutional transformations aimed at school justice and the fight against discrimination. Inclusive schools and classrooms belong to all students. The teaching-learning processes implemented there must enable everyone to receive an education that takes account of their identities and is adapted to their experiences, personal characteristics, and particular needs [3]. This conception of inclusion considers that differences are part of human diversity and that they must be expressed if the particular character of the members of a community is to flourish [4]. Built on the proven failure of the assimilation paradigm in terms of equality of opportunity [5,6], inclusive education proposes making the changes deemed necessary in institutions, particularly schools, to enable the participation of all individuals, in and with their differences [7]. It is thus part of a principle of reciprocity in the adaptation process between the school, the student, and his or her family [8,9].

Yet international studies highlight the segregation to which immigrants are subjected in the school systems of host countries [10], and even their direct marginalization in certain contexts [11,12]. In societies with democratic institutions, certain ways of organizing and regulating the education system are conducive to the reproduction of inequalities and exclusion [13]. The stratification of educational pathways, the separation of students according to their socioeconomic profile and academic performance, and competition between educational establishments all contribute to this phenomenon [14]. On another scale, aspects such as assessment and screening practices, standardized placement tests, service models offered to second-language learners, the organization of school transitions, the choice of curriculum content, teaching practices and devices, school staff selection practices, the types of relationships maintained with families and communities, and symbolic violence through the imposition of identities also contribute to it [15-17]. According to configurations specific to the sociohistorical context, seemingly neutral practices and decisions can be particularly detrimental to individuals and groups whose experiences, histories, and realities are not reflected in the organization of the educational system [18]. Certain groups appear to be more likely to experience difficulties or exclusion and discrimination at school, including young people belonging to minority groups, whether immigrants or not [19-21]. According to major international surveys, immigrant youth have poorer performances than their native-born peers, although nuances emerge according to immigration categories (e.g., refugees, economic immigrants, etc.) [22,23]. Vulnerable populations are often those who combine recent immigration with low parental educational capital [24].

Despite the weight of social determinism on the success of young people from immigrant backgrounds, studies have shown that, for comparable school populations, certain schools are more conducive to educational success in multi-ethnic environments [25]. The school effect, linked to management leadership and school staff practices, is the main explanation for this result. In addition to these findings, sociological research on school inequalities and young people from minority groups conducted in many Western countries has focused more on individuals and their educational pathways than on school action [26]. These quantitative and qualitative analyses, focused on "publics," have the advantage of allowing the identification of obstacles due to social anchors such as those of families' educational and economic capital, ethnocultural origin, gender, etc. [27,28]. For example, most research on the educational success of young people born to immigrant parents has identified the regions of origin of those with higher dropout rate. This approach, while enlightening, focuses on processes linked to individuals and their "origin," and runs the risk of essentializing inequalities according to migratory characteristics. While it allows us to draw conclusions about the gap between schools and certain individuals, it limits the progress of scientific and social knowledge about the policies and actions of schools and their agents in the production of inclusive schools or in the reproduction of inequalities and discrimination.

The theme of this paper is the role of the school and its practitioners in implementing inclusive practices in a context of ethnocultural diversity. The content in this paper focuses on two aspects: (1) the implementation

of the principles of inclusive education in school institutional practices, such as the recognition of individual and collective differences, and the deployment of equitable practices adapted to the specificities and needs of students; (2) the school experiences of learners belonging to minority groups. The first section focuses on actual practices in schools (teachers, principals, other staff, etc.). It aims to present empirical research that has identified interpersonal and social skills that contribute to the inclusion and educational success of all students or, conversely, interpersonal and social skills that need to be critically questioned. The second section deals with the learners' point of view on the following aspects: educational institutions, their structure and the practices of school staff; possible solutions to improve their school experiences. The young people's view of their socialization process at school, and of the many stages along the way, highlights the strengths and limitations of the institutional practices deployed in schools.

Before presenting the findings of this paper with regard to these two aspects, we will first describe the evolution of the notion of inclusive education over time, from a focus on the school integration of students with disabilities or learning difficulties to a perspective of taking into account social and ethnocultural diversity in the school environment. After outlining the current aims of this approach, i.e. to combat racism, injustice, and social exclusion [29-32], the article will focus on how these aims have been put into practice, based on the findings of the selected seven articles. It will summarize the avenues and challenges identified, as well as the empirical results gathered with regard to the characteristics expected of inclusive education.

2. Inclusive education: Sociohistorical evolution and aims

During the 19th century, a vast movement to democratize access to education began throughout the West, leading to the creation of the first public schools [33]. However, it was not until the end of the Second World War that another movement got underway, with a more concrete impact on the consideration of diversity in schools [34]. It was at this point that the traditional model for dealing with so-called "maladjusted" students at school began to undergo transformations [35]. In the United States and several European countries, a network of special schools, support classes, and special classes was gradually set up so that so-called "different" children could be supervised by programs appropriate to their needs [35]. For Prud'homme *et al.* [34], this period marked the beginning of a real desire to make schools accessible to as many students as possible, despite their differences. For a long time, however, mainstream schools remained inaccessible to many children. From the 1950s onwards, more and more parents fought for children with special educational needs to be educated in mainstream schools [36].

For Vienneau [37], it was the 1970s that marked the real beginnings of the school integration movement and, consequently, of the mainstream school's acceptance of diversity. The author explained that it then became increasingly common to seek to integrate students with special educational needs into the same schools as all other children. Gradually, more and more special classes were created, enabling the physical and social integration of a growing number of students with special educational needs into the same schools as their peers.

The 1970–1980s were thus marked by the rapid development of integration practices, a movement which then stagnated. Despite their more frequent integration into mainstream schools, there are still various arrangements in place for the separate education of certain young people, on the grounds that their needs are too great to enable them to follow the mainstream curriculum [36]. The greater the needs of these learners, the greater the "segregative detours" [31]. In addition, integration practices were criticized for asking students with special educational needs to adapt to the model in place in regular schools; the aim was to "assimilate" them, rather than truly integrate them [38]. Despite several changes, diversity was still not really taken into account by schools at that time. For Prud'homme *et al.* [34], the democratization of education, "centered on the universal

accessibility of education," resulted in a phenomenon of "identical teaching for all students, regardless of the heterogeneity of the school population."

Then, in the early 1990s, there was growing social and political pressure to ensure that all students had access to the same educational pathway [37]. Gradually, interest grew in inclusion pedagogy, defined by theorists in the field of special education as the full-time integration into ordinary classes of students excluded because of disabilities or learning difficulties. This interest is fueled by proponents of socioconstructivism, who maintain that learning is a social process and that interactions are important in the construction of knowledge [34]. Proponents of inclusion therefore advocate the creation of communities of learners with diverse profiles in the ordinary classroom [29]. Normally segregated students are not "integrated" into mainstream classrooms; they belong there like any other young people their age [36].

2.1. Updating the inclusive approach to education

The inclusive approach to education is now being used to address the issue of diversity more broadly, beyond the exclusive consideration of disability or learning difficulties [32,39-43]. Ainscow and Miles [29] explained that, although some authors use the term "inclusive education" to refer to the schooling of children with disabilities in mainstream education, internationally, this perspective is now more often seen as "a comprehensive reform that promotes diversity among all learners." According to Mercier [44], "immigrant populations are often subject to the same mechanisms (social representations) of exclusion" as individuals with disabilities. Inclusive education, as it is now more commonly understood, is therefore aimed at everyone, regardless of origin, socioeconomic background, language, culture, etc. [32,45,46]. The ultimate aim of this perspective is to combat racism, injustice and social exclusion, attitudes, and behaviors that manifest themselves in certain human beings when they come into contact with diversity relating to multiple social classes, ethnicity, religion, gender, and ability [29-32].

2.2. Adapting to the diversity of learners and the needs they create

It is recognized that schools play a role in the mechanisms of social reproduction [33]. Perrenoud [47] placed the emphasis on the school's responsibility for academic failure, rather than on individual students. According to the author, the causes of failure can be found in the interpretation of the curriculum, the way learning takes place, and assessment. Inclusive education is a paradigm based on the school's responsibility for the educational success of all learners. This perspective is in line with an epistemological posture of social constructivism, in the sense that we consider that the difficulties a student experiences are not attributable to him or her; they are the result of his or her encounter with a school situation that has been designed for him or her, but which does not always correspond to him or her. Theorists of the inclusive approach consider education to be a fundamental right; it is a school model that meets the needs of all, whether or not students have learning or adjustment difficulties [32,37,43,48].

Inclusive education is rooted in democratic and humanist principles [34], supported by values of equity and social justice [7,49,50]. According to humanist principles, human beings are born equal and inequalities are the product of various circumstances and social constructs. For Carlson Berg [40], "equity is about recognizing the presence of multiple and fluid identities without valuing one way of being more than another." More broadly, in schools, equity can also mean distributing resources according to students' needs, rather than ensuring that everyone has equal access to them. Social justice here refers to "the elimination of institutional domination and oppression of marginalized groups" [38]. Inclusive education is based on an ethical principle and refers to the right to otherness; proponents of the approach see social, ethnocultural, linguistic, and religious diversity as an asset rather than a weakness [46,50,51]. The aim is to avoid falling into the indifference to differences that Bourdieu [52] was

already denouncing; instead, we seek to transcend these differences by integrating them and building on them [31].

2.3. Transforming schools to cater for all students

Interest in the inclusive approach is paving the way for a major paradigm shift in school equity. The goal is no longer equality of access (school massification) or treatment; rather, it is about employing equitable practices and adapting to the differentiated needs of students in order to support the success of each individual [6,53]. Inclusive education thus requires a process of cultural [54] and structural transformation of the school [55].

Other authors believe that the development of an inclusive school environment does not necessarily emerge from drastic transformations in the existing organization or the radical introduction of specific practices [39]. Ainscow and Miles [29] suggested that teachers and school administrators make "coordinated and sustained efforts to embrace the idea that students will not achieve better results unless adults change their behavior."

Inclusive education therefore requires a certain break with more traditional school practices (teaching, pedagogical, management), since it implies seeking to actualize the full potential of all students by employing practices that are differentiated, innovative [56], and specific to their needs [7]. In this way, schools respond creatively to student diversity. In these environments, "children who are difficult to educate in mainstream schools are not seen as 'having problems,' but as an opportunity to challenge methods [...] to make them more appropriate and flexible" [29]. The focus is on empowering young people and actively involving them in their learning, in order to boost their self-esteem and academic success [46]. School staff are encouraged to have high expectations of students and to make them feel they have the right to be different [30].

In the scientific literature, the inclusive school is not defined as an educational environment that has achieved perfection, but rather as a constantly evolving place whose aim is to take account of everyone's needs. It is a process that is never definitive or static, requiring time, energy, and ongoing vigilance [41]. Developing such a culture in a school environment therefore involves implementing a clear vision, guided by inclusive and collaborative values [30]. This is what ensures the sustainability of such changes to a school's culture. This is not a school model that can be transferred and applied to all environments; each school must focus on what it needs to adjust to and support its students [30].

Now that we have covered the broad outlines of the inclusive approach, the next section will look at how this approach is put into practice in a context of ethnocultural diversity, in the light of the findings in the various articles in this thematic paper. We will discuss these findings in the light of the characteristics expected of inclusive education.

3. Implementing the principles of inclusive education: Pitfalls and ways forward

This section discusses seven articles presenting empirical research conducted in Switzerland and Canada. They focus on school-family-community collaboration (articles by Xavier Conus, and Marianne Jacquet and Gwenaëlle André), school classification processes in the transition from reception class to regular class (article by Stéphanie Bauer, Nadine Aebischer, and Rachel Ribet), the special education sector (article by Tya Collins and Corina Borri-Anadon), the school staff's view of inequity versus equity practices (article by Corina Borri-Anadon, Geneviève Audet, and Ève Lemaire), the implementation of inclusive education through a continuing education initiative (article by Diane Farmer, Christine Connelly, and Miriam Greenblatt), and the decolonization process in higher education (article by Jean-Luc Ratel and Annie Pilote). The data presented covers teachers, those involved in the school classification process with regard to students' "difficulties," principals, non-teaching staff, representatives of community organizations working in schools, parents, students, and post-secondary students, as well as the voices of learners. A number of strong points and fruitful avenues

for intervention in the school environment emerge from all the articles, which are summarized in the following sections.

3.1. The strong influence of deficit thinking in school culture

The empirical research presented in this paper highlights the deficit thinking, or even morbid benevolence, of school staff towards immigrant students and their parents. Conus' article, which dealt with collaboration between schools and immigrant families in the Swiss canton of Fribourg, described the difficulties teachers have in decentralizing themselves when they value a very specific prescriptive model of the ideal student and parent, and try to "correct" attitudes and behavior that deviate from school norms, both on the part of the student and their parents. However, this largely implicit model proves difficult for families and students to decipher, as it is part of an ethnocentric vision of the school norm, or even a monocultural vision of the school institution [57], a vision that emphasizes the importance of developing children's autonomy and various habits, and contributes to the emergence of a negative representation of students and their parents' educational methods. In this way, Conus demonstrated how the school norm is culturally connoted, and how it can hinder the recognition of differences and the inclusion of students and families whose cultural frames of reference differ from the expected norm.

Jacquet and André's article raised the same deficit thinking towards students and their parents among school settlement workers (SSWs) working in the province of Alberta in Canada. Even though the workers interviewed had recently immigrated to Canada and were themselves members of racialized groups, it turns out that they internalize both the valued school norm (the dominant discourse) and deficit thinking when they discuss the challenges they encounter in their practice, noting in particular that recent immigrant students have difficulty adapting, that their parents have difficulty communicating with the school, and that they have a different vision of school and school supervision for their children. In this way, SSWs seem to reiterate an individualizing vision of students, explaining the challenges experienced by families more in terms of their "origin," rather than questioning how school stakeholders might act differently, notably by questioning their practices and the school culture.

From a critical perspective inspired by DisCrit (Disability Critical Race Theory) [58], the article by Collins and Borri-Anadon showed how ableism and (neo)racism are articulated in the practices of school practitioners and helps shed light on the overrepresentation of students from immigrant backgrounds in special education in the Quebec context. The authors highlighted the deficit thinking used by caregivers to identify difficulties, based on a medical interpretation, or even the frequent use of markers linked to inability, an interpretation combined with the more insidious use of markers linked to "culture." Once again, deviation from the ethnocentric school norm, due to sociocultural considerations, seems to be used to negatively label immigrant parents' modes of education and to explain students' "difficulties." The authors associated this attitude with a certain blindness to racism [59] and the impact of unequal race relations on grading processes.

Thus, the results presented in this paper show that the practitioners interviewed still tend to use the linguistic and cultural gaps between students and the school system to explain school failure—gaps that are said to be the result of a different socialization of which certain groups of students are "victims." Their background is deemed deficient by the school itself; it is up to the students to adapt to it, not the other way round. Through a remedial or even curative approach, the school must compensate for this deficient socialization linked to family, origin, and life experience. This deficit-based thinking, centered on an ethnocentric and classocentric pedagogy of compensation, does not fit in with the implementation of inclusive education, particularly in terms of emphasizing the school's role in educational success, including the well-being and fulfillment of all learners [36]; considering that the inequalities or processes of exclusion experienced by a student are due to his

or her encounter with a school situation that has been designed for him or her and not with him or her in mind; considering social, ethnocultural, religious, linguistic, and aptitude diversity as an asset and not as a problem or, again, valuing and recognizing individual and collective differences, while avoiding the stigmatization of students [29,30,50,51]. The construction of a logic of reciprocity in the adaptation between school, child, and family [8,9] seems to be lacking in the empirical results gathered in some of the articles in this paper. Furthermore, the role of teachers and caregivers does not seem to be conceived as active in the production of inequalities, with the blame for school failure being placed on a child's deficient socialization, thus contributing to a mechanism whereby school actors are relieved of any responsibility in this regard [60].

3.2. Schools' awareness of exclusion processes

The article by Borri-Anadon, Audet, and Lemaire, based on semi-structured interviews with school principals, non-teaching staff, and representatives of community organizations, revealed school players who are aware of the exclusion mechanisms affecting students from immigrant backgrounds. Unlike the individuals interviewed in the paper's other articles, they are not blind to discrimination, and the authors presented the "zones of vulnerability" identified by the participants and the equity practices they have implemented or would like to see implemented to counter them. It turns out that they are well aware of the structural inequalities caused by the way schools deal with immigrant students, such as the transition between reception classes and ordinary classes, the sometimes erroneous categorization of students in "difficulty," the orientation towards relegation streams, and the lack of access to extracurricular activities. The participants even propose alternatives to mitigate this (re) production of inequalities by identifying possible room for maneuver within their own schools.

However, despite the identification of possible room for maneuver within the school culture, in their respective articles, Borri-Anadon, Audet, and Lemaire, as well as Bauer, Aebischer, and Ribet showed that many systemic mechanisms of school culture contribute strongly to reproducing and reifying hierarchical school experiences, and to exacerbating processes of institutional discrimination to the disadvantage of immigrant and/ or racialized students—mechanisms tinged with an ethnocentric, even colorblind approach, masking unequal social relations between majority and minority groups. The challenge of rethinking the organization of selective streams to ensure equal access for allophone and/or immigrant students, and to avoid the segregation of school populations, as well as the challenge of reviewing assessment, grading, and guidance practices in order to deconstruct the mechanisms that produce inequalities and processes of exclusion, would, all in all, be colossal and require a certain managerial courage on the part of educational authorities [61,62].

3.3. Learners' voices on school

The articles in this paper remind us of the importance, in implementing inclusive education, of listening to the voices of students from a migrant background through the realization of various school and extracurricular activities, as well as fostering a horizontal dialogue between school staff, families, and the community [63]. The article by Farmer, Connelly, and Greenblatt, which focused on the presentation of an inclusive education training and coaching initiative in two schools in the Canadian province of Ontario, showed how teachers continually questioned how best to support the student's "voice" in an inclusive approach in order to avoid the trap of speaking on behalf of the other [64]. According to the literature on inclusive education, in order to recognize social and ethnocultural diversity, it is important to reach the student in his or her reality [65,66]. Throughout the school year, the teachers sought to adopt practices that were "sensitive to the students' culture" and to deconstruct the idea of school as a space for conformity to the academic norm valued by teachers and the education system. They reflected critically on the power relationships between teachers and students from minority groups. Deconstructing these elements was difficult, as the students had internalized the school form

and found it difficult to break out of this normative framework, this mold of the model learner to which they had previously been socialized. Following the example of Freire's critical pedagogy [67], the teachers tried to adopt a posture of mediator, accompanist, and horizontal dialogue with the students, thus breaking away from the traditional role usually conferred on them, including by the students themselves. The article thus highlighted the essential role of the teaching staff in an inclusive approach to supporting the students' voice, while underlining the importance of institutional support in this sense.

The study by Bauer, Aebischer, and Ribet, for its part, gave voice to students from the canton of Vauden Switzerland who had previously attended a reception class for newcomer allophones, and who were enrolled in a regular class at the time of the survey. The latter highlighted obstacles, such as a lack of tolerance towards the fact that they were still in the process of learning French, even though they had entered the ordinary class. They also expressed a sense of injustice during assessments, when they were punished for spelling mistakes, and a consequent need for recognition of the specificity of their migratory background. They reported that they feel uncomfortable expressing their identities of origin (languages, cultural references, history) at school, and prefer to blend in by conforming to the demands of school culture. In this respect, the researchers questioned the effective role of the school in creating a space that values students' resources and the expression of multiple identities.

Ratel and Pilote's article gave a voice to aboriginal students attending university in the Canadian province of Quebec. Although the authors spoke of a partial decolonization of higher education, it turned out that the participants emphasize that they would like to see a greater emphasis on aboriginal perspectives in university curricula—curricula that are largely dominated by Western knowledge [68]. They also highlighted the fact that indigenous cultures are invisibilized in the university space, and that staff and students are often unaware of their specific reality. As a result, they express a need for recognition by academic institutions.

4. Conclusion: Fruitful avenues for inclusive education

In this thematic paper, researchers emphasize the need for formal educational policies that value inclusive education (beyond the integration of students), and for the development of institutional cultures that can collectively and continuously support the deployment of inclusive practices in schools (see articles by Farmer, Connelly, and Greenblatt, and by Borri-Anadon, Audet, and Lemaire). *In situ* action in schools calls for a review of assessment methods, the organization of selective streams, school transitions, mechanisms for informing students in an informed way about their choice of orientation and its consequences for the rest of their career path, etc. Researchers suggest that school staff should think critically about how to strike a balance between taking account of special needs and the demand for academic performance (see the article by Bauer, Aebischer, and Ribet). Developing recognition, sensitivity, and acceptance of the voices of students from multiple backgrounds (and with multiple experiences) in the school environment, even if this means rethinking the school's culture, seems to be a promising way forward. Training in interculturality, leading to processes of decentralization and reciprocal adaptation, is strongly suggested by some of the authors—training that makes it possible to become aware of privileges, to move away from the essentialization of the characteristics of immigrant families, to take account of the migratory experience, to understand the construction of difference and processes of exclusion at school, to value linguistic and ethnocultural diversity, and then to question practices so as to bring about transformations leading to real inclusion in the school environment.

This paper shows that implementing inclusive education is a major unfinished challenge, in terms of both systems and self-improvement. This process of changing practices, which continually questions the school's responsibility for the (re)production of inequalities, exclusion, and unequal social relations, is fraught with

obstacles, unpredictable situations, and strong emotions. School practitioners need to feel institutionally supported in a collaborative and collective way by school actors and authorities, and by national education policies. Furthermore, deploying inclusive practices requires critical ethical action. Constant decentralization means welcoming the other without speaking for the other, and recognizing the impact of unequal social relationships on schooling and socialization. This means being attentive and vigilant with regard to the processes of exclusion that take place at school, and which are often taken for granted in an implicit school culture that is often monocultural and difficult to decipher for certain immigrant students and parents. This complexity underscores the importance of developing initial and ongoing training to support school staff and principals on these issues, as well as fostering collaborative forums for open discussion with a view to implementing change. In this sense, giving a voice to immigrant or minority school staff and valuing their experience are the ways forward [69]. Similarly, competency models to guide teacher and principal training have been suggested in recent years in Quebec to contribute to greater inclusion, equity, and social justice in education [70,71]. However, the real and ongoing implementation of these inclusive and intercultural skills by those working in the field remains an issue that must be constantly supported in everyday school life.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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