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

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Abstract: This issue 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 deficit thinking of school staff 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 issue suggest fertile ways to improve inclusion in the school context, stressing the importance of giving voice to the various actors to move toward institutional transformation.

Keywords: Educational inclusion and exclusion; Canada; Switzerland

1. Introduction

In the context of the diversification of immigration and identity polarization at local and international levels, the question of inclusion in education requires reflections and concrete actions [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 educational system [2]. The following purposes are associated with it: (1) the establishment of equitable practices adapted to the specificities and needs of students to promote the educational success of all, and (2) the recognition of individual and collective

differences, aiming at institutional transformations for educational justice and the fight against discrimination. Thus, inclusive schools and classrooms belong to all students. The teaching-learning processes implemented therein should enable each individual to receive an education that takes into account their identities and is tailored to their experiences, personal characteristics, and particular needs [3]. This conception of inclusion considers that differences are part of human diversity and should be expressed for the unique character of community members to flourish [4]. Built upon the acknowledged failure of the assimilation paradigm in terms of equal opportunities [5,6], inclusive education proposes to make necessary changes in institutions, particularly schools, to enable the participation of all individuals, with and in their differences [7]. It thus aligns with a principle of reciprocity in the adaptation process between the school, the student, and their family [8,9].

However, international studies highlight the segregations to which immigrants are subjected in the school systems of host countries [10], even their direct marginalization in some contexts [11,12]. In societies with democratic institutions, certain modes of organization and regulation of the educational system facilitate the reproduction of inequalities and exclusion [13]. The stratification of offered pathways, the separation of students based on their socioeconomic profile and academic performance, as well as competition among educational institutions, contribute to this [14]. At another level, evaluation and screening practices, standardized ranking tests, models of services offered to students learning a second language, the organization of school transitions, the choice of curriculum content, teaching practices and devices, selection practices for school personnel, types of relationships maintained with families and communities, and symbolic violence through identity imposition also participate in this [15-17]. Depending on configurations specific to the socio-historical context, practices, and decisions that appear neutral can particularly prejudice individuals and groups whose experiences, history, and realities are not reflected in the organization of the educational system [18]. It is primarily young people who are further removed from the codes associated with the culture of the host society and its elite who experience forms of discrimination. Certain groups appear more likely to experience difficulties in school or feel exclusion and discrimination at school, including young people belonging to minority groups, whether immigrants or not [19-21]. According to major international surveys, young immigrants perform less well than their native peers, although nuances are necessary depending on immigration categories (e.g., refugees, economic immigrants, etc.) [22,23]. Vulnerable populations are often those that combine recent immigration with low parental educational capital [24].

Despite the weight of social determinants on the success paths of young people from immigrant backgrounds, studies have shown that, in comparable school settings, some schools fostered greater educational success in multiethnic environments [25]. The school effect, related to the leadership of the management and the practices of the school staff, mainly explains this result. In addition to these findings, sociological research conducted in many Western countries on educational inequalities and young people from minority groups has focused more on individuals and their educational paths rather than on school action [26]. These quantitative and qualitative analyses, focused on "publics," have the advantage of identifying obstacles due to social anchors such as family educational and economic capital, ethnocultural background, gender, etc. [27,28]. For example, the majority of research on the academic success of young people born to immigrant parents has identified the regions of origin of those for whom the dropout rate is higher. This approach, although enlightening, focuses on processes related to individuals and their "origin," and may carry the risk of essentializing inequalities based on migratory characteristics. It certainly allows for observations on the gap between the school and certain individuals, but it limits the advancement of scientific and social knowledge on the policies and actions of the school institution and its agents in the production of an inclusive school or the reproduction of inequalities and discrimination.

This issue focuses on the role of the school and its stakeholders in implementing inclusive practices

in the context of ethnocultural diversity. Two aspects are addressed by the articles composing it: (1) the implementation, in school institutional practices, of the principles of inclusive education, such as recognizing individual and collective differences and deploying equitable practices adapted to the specificities and needs of students; (2) the school experiences of learners belonging to minority groups. The first aspect focuses on actual practices in the school environment (teachers, management, other types of staff, etc.). It aims to present empirical research identifying know-how and skills contributing to fostering the inclusion and educational success of all students or, conversely, know-how and skills to be critically examined. The second aspect deals with the perspective of learners on the following aspects: educational institutions, their structure, and the practices of school staff; possible solutions to improve their school experiences. This view of young people on their socialization process at school and the multiple stages marking their school journey highlights the strengths and limitations of institutional practices deployed in schools.

Before presenting the findings related to these two aspects in this issue, we will first describe the evolution, over time, of the notion of inclusive education, from a goal of school integration of students with disabilities or learning difficulties to a perspective of considering social and ethnocultural diversity in the school environment. After emphasizing the current goals associated with it, namely the fight against racism, injustices, and social exclusion [29-32], the article will focus on the realization of these goals in light of the findings from the seven articles in this issue. It will summarize the emerging paths and challenges as well as the empirical results collected regarding the expected characteristics of inclusive education.

2. Inclusive education: sociohistorical evolution and purposes

During the 19th century, a vast movement towards democratizing access to education began across the Western world, leading to the creation of the first public schools [33]. However, it wasn't until the end of World War II that another movement began, with a more concrete impact on addressing diversity in the school environment [34]. It was at this time that the traditional model of addressing students deemed "unfit" for school began to transform [35]. In the United States and several European countries, a network of special schools, support classes, and special classes was gradually established so that children labeled as "different" could be provided with programs tailored to their needs [35]. According to Prud'homme and his colleagues [34], this period marked the beginning of a real desire to make schools accessible to the greatest number of students, despite their differences. However, regular schools remained inaccessible to many children for a long time. From the 1950s onwards, more and more parents fought for children with special educational needs to be educated in regular schools [36].

According to Vienneau [37], it was the 1970s that marked the real beginnings of the school integration movement and, therefore, the consideration of diversity by regular schools. The author explains that it 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, allowing for the physical and social integration of a growing number of students with special educational needs within the same schools as their peers.

The 1970s and 1980s were thus marked by the rapid development of integration practices, a movement that later stagnated. Despite their more frequent integration into regular schools, various arrangements allowing for the separate schooling of some students, under the pretext that their needs were too heavy to follow the general education provided, still existed [36]. The greater the needs of these learners, the more "segregated detours" there were [31]. Furthermore, integration practices were criticized because students with special educational needs were asked to adapt to the model in place in regular schools; there was an attempt to "assimilate" them rather than truly integrate them [38]. Diversity was therefore still not truly addressed by the school at this time, despite

several changes. According to Prud'homme and his colleagues [34], the democratization of education, "focused on universal access to education," resulted in a phenomenon of "teaching identical to all students, regardless of the heterogeneity of school enrollments."

Then, in the early 1990s, increasing social and political pressures were felt for all students to have access to the same educational path [37]. Gradually, interest in inclusive pedagogy grew, conceived by theorists in the field of adaptation and school integration to refer to full-time integration in regular classes of students excluded due to disabilities or learning difficulties. This interest was fueled by proponents of socioconstructivism who argue that learning is a social process and that interactions are important in knowledge construction [34]. Proponents of inclusion advocate for the creation of communities of learners with diverse profiles in regular classrooms [29]. Normally segregated students are not "integrated" into regular classes; they belong there like all other young people of their age [36].

2.1. Updating the inclusive approach in education

The inclusive approach in education is now being employed to address diversity more broadly, beyond the exclusive consideration of situations involving disabilities or learning difficulties [32,39-43]. Several researchers now ground their reflections in this approach to discuss any student who risks being marginalized and to delineate the management of challenges related to diversity in general within school environments.

Ainscow and Miles [29] explained that while some authors use the term "inclusive education" to refer to the schooling of disabled children in the regular educational context, internationally, this perspective is now more often seen as "a comprehensive reform promoting 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. The same observation can be made for other groups of marginalized populations. Inclusive education, as it is now more commonly understood, therefore addresses everyone, regardless of origin, socioeconomic status, language, culture, etc. [32,45,46]. The ultimate goal of this perspective is to combat racism, injustices, social exclusion, attitudes, and behaviors that manifest in some individuals when they come into contact with diversity related to multiple social classes, ethnic backgrounds, religions, genders, and abilities [29-32].

2.2. Adaptation to learner diversity and the needs it raises

It is recognized that schools play a role in mechanisms of social reproduction [33]. Perrenoud [47] emphasized the school's responsibility for academic failure, rather than blaming the students. According to the author, the causes of failure may lie in the interpretation of the curriculum, the supervision of learning, and evaluation. Inclusive education is a paradigm based on the school's responsibility for the educational success of all learners. This perspective aligns with an epistemological posture of social constructivism in the sense that the difficulties student experiences are not attributable to them; they result from their encounter with a school situation that has been designed for them but does not always match their needs. The theorists of the inclusive approach consider education to be a fundamental right; it is a school model that meets the needs of all students, whether or not they are experiencing learning or adaptation difficulties [32,37,43,48].

Inclusive education is anchored in democratic and humanistic principles [34], supported by values of equity and social justice [7,49,50]. According to humanistic principles, humans are born equal, and inequalities are the product of various circumstances and social constructions. For Carlson Berg [40], "equity consists of recognizing the presence of multiple and fluid identities without valorizing one way of being over another." More broadly, in schools, equity can also refer to the distribution of resources based on students' needs, rather than ensuring that each of them has equal access. 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 alterity; proponents of the approach consider social, ethnocultural, linguistic, and religious diversity to be an asset rather than a weakness [46,50,51]. Thus, students are not stigmatized or labeled, while still acknowledging or not denying the differences that characterize them, to avoid falling back into the indifference to differences denounced by Bourdieu [52]; rather, the aim is to transcend these differences by integrating and drawing from them [31].

2.3. Transforming the school to address all students

The interest in the inclusive approach marks a significant paradigm shift in terms of equity in schools. The goal is no longer equal access (school massification) or treatment; rather, it involves employing equitable practices and adapting to the differentiated needs of students to support the success of each individual [6,53]. Taking into account the needs of all students require a certain reform of the school regarding the curriculum and pedagogy. Inclusive education thus necessitates 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]. They suggest first taking the time to reflect and discuss, evaluate existing practices, and possibly improve them to make them even more effective [29]. Ainscow and Miles [29] proposed that teachers and school administrators make "coordinated and sustainable efforts to adopt the idea that students cannot achieve better results if adults do not change their behavior."

Inclusive education therefore requires a certain departure from more traditional school practices (teaching, pedagogical, management) as it involves seeking to actualize the full potential of all students by employing differentiated, innovative practices [56] tailored to their needs [7]. Schools thus respond to the diversity of students with creativity. In these environments, "children who are difficult to educate in regular schools are not considered as having 'problems,' but as an opportunity to challenge the methods [...] to make them more adapted and flexible" [29]. The focus is on empowering young people and actively involving them in their learning to increase their self-esteem and academic success [46]. School staff are encouraged to have high expectations for students and to make them feel that they have the right to be different [30].

In scientific literature, inclusive schooling is not defined as an educational environment that has achieved perfection, but rather as a place in constant evolution whose goal is to consider the needs of everyone. It is a process that is never definitive or fixed, requiring time, energy, and ongoing vigilance [41]. Developing such a culture in a school setting involves implementing a clear vision guided by inclusive values and collaboration [30]. This ensures the sustainability of such changes to a school's culture. It is not a one-size-fits-all school model; each school must focus on what it needs to adjust to its students and support them [30].

With the main aspects of the inclusive approach presented, the next section will focus on its implementation in the context of ethnocultural diversity in light of the findings raised in the various articles on this thematic issue. We will discuss these findings in the context of the expected characteristics of inclusive education.

3. Implementing the principles of inclusive education: challenges and pathways

This issue consists of seven articles presenting empirical research conducted in Switzerland and Canada. They focus on school-family-community collaboration (articles by Xavier Conus, Marianne Jacquet, and Gwenaëlle André), on the processes of school classification regarding the transition from the welcome class to the regular class (article by Stéphanie Bauer, Nadine Aebischer, and Rachel Ribet) or concerning the special education sector (article by Tya Collins and Corina Borri-Anadon), on how school staff perceive practices of inequity

versus equity (article by Corina Borri-Anadon, Geneviève Audet, and Ève Lemaire), on the implementation of inclusive education through a continuous training initiative (article by Diane Farmer, Christine Connelly, and Miriam Greenblatt), as well as on the process of decolonization in higher education (article by Jean-Luc Ratel and Annie Pilote). The data presented involve teachers, stakeholders involved in school classification processes regarding students' "difficulties," school administrations, non-teaching staff members, representatives from community organizations working in schools, parents, students, and post-secondary students. These studies address both practices that need critical review and inspiring practices, as well as the voices of learners. Several strong lines of action and fruitful pathways for intervention in the school environment emerge from all the articles, which we will synthesize in the following sections.

3.1. The strong presence of deficit thinking in school culture

The empirical research presented in this issue highlights deficit thinking, or even morbid benevolence, among school staff towards students from immigrant backgrounds and their parents. Conus's article, addressing school-family collaboration with immigrant families in the canton of Fribourg, Switzerland, discusses the challenges of decentering teachers as they uphold a specific prescriptive model of the ideal student and parent, attempting to "correct" attitudes and behaviors deviating from the school norm, both on the part of the student and their parents. However, this largely implicit model proved difficult for families and students to decipher, as it is rooted in an ethnocentric view of the school norm or even a monocultural view of the school institution [57] – a perspective emphasizing the importance of developing autonomy and various habits in children, contributing to a negative portrayal of students and their parents' educational practices. 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 raises similar deficit thinking toward students and their parents among school-based establishment workers in the province of Alberta, Canada. Even though the interviewed workers recently immigrated to Canada and come from racialized groups themselves, they internalize the valued school norm (the dominant discourse) and deficit thinking when addressing challenges encountered in their practice. They notably indicate that recently immigrated students struggle to adapt, their parents have communication difficulties with the school, and they have a different view of school and their children's education. Thus, school-based establishment workers seem to perpetuate an individualizing view of students, explaining the challenges experienced by families more in terms of their "origin" than by questioning how school staff could act differently, particularly by questioning their practices and the school culture.

Taking a critical perspective inspired by DisCrit [58], Collins and Borri-Anadon's article shows how ableism and (neo)racism intersect in the practices of school interveners and sheds light on the overrepresentation of immigrant students in special education in the Quebec context. The authors highlighted the deficit thinking used by interveners to identify difficulties based on a medicalized interpretation, or even frequent use of markers related to (dis)ability, an interpretation coupled with the more insidious use of markers related to "culture." Once again, the deviation from the ethnocentric school norm, due to sociocultural considerations, seems to be used to negatively label immigrant parents' educational methods and explain students' "difficulties." The authors associated this stance of interveners with a certain blindness to racism [59] and the impact of unequal racial social relations on classification processes.

Thus, the results presented in this issue show that the interviewed interveners tend to still use linguistic and cultural gaps between students and the school system to explain academic failure – gaps are seen as the result of different socialization experienced by certain groups of students. Their background is judged deficient by the

school itself; it is up to the students to adapt to it rather than the reverse. Through a reparative, even curative approach, the school must overcome this deficient socialization linked to family, origin, and experience. This deficit thinking focused on an ethnocentric and class-centric pedagogy of compensation does not align with the implementation of inclusive education, especially regarding emphasizing the school's role in educational success, including the well-being and fulfillment of all learners [36]; considering that inequalities or exclusionary processes experienced by a student result from their encounter with a school situation that was designed for them rather than with them; considering social, ethnocultural, religious, linguistic, and aptitude diversity as an asset rather than a problem, or valuing and recognizing individual and collective differences while avoiding stigmatizing students [29,30,50,51]. The construction of a reciprocal adaptation logic between the school, the child, and their family [8,9] appears to be lacking in the empirical results gathered in some articles on this issue. Furthermore, the role of teachers and interveners does not seem to be conceived as actively contributing to the production of inequalities and shifting the responsibility for academic failure onto deficient socialization of the child contributes to absolving school actors of responsibility in this regard [60].

3.2. School actors aware of exclusionary processes

The article by Borri-Anadon, Audet, and Lemaire, based on semi-structured interviews with school principals, non-teaching staff members, and representatives of community organizations, reveals school actors who are aware of exclusionary mechanisms affecting students from immigrant backgrounds. Unlike individuals interviewed in other articles on the issue, they do not adopt a blind posture toward discrimination. The authors present "vulnerability zones" identified by participants and equity practices implemented or desired by them to counteract these issues. It appears that they are conscious of the structurally unequal effects of the functioning modes of school institutions on students from immigrant backgrounds, such as the transition between reception classes and regular classes, sometimes erroneous categorization of students as "challenged," routing towards relegation pathways, and lack of access to extracurricular activities. Participants even propose alternatives to address this (re)production of inequalities by identifying possible avenues for maneuver within their school.

However, despite the identification of possible avenues for maneuver within school culture, in their respective articles, Borri-Anadon, Audet, and Lemaire, as well as Bauer, Aebischer, and Ribet, highlight that numerous systemic mechanisms of school culture strongly contribute to reproducing and reifying hierarchical school experiences and exacerbating institutional discrimination processes against students from immigrant backgrounds and/or racialized students – mechanisms tinged with an ethnocentric, or even colorblind, approach, masking unequal social relations between majority and minority groups. The challenge of rethinking the organization of selective pathways for equal access of allophone students and/or students from immigrant backgrounds, and to avoid the segregation of school populations, as well as the challenge of reviewing evaluation, classification, and orientation practices to deconstruct mechanisms of inequality production and exclusion processes, would, all in all, be colossal and would require a certain managerial courage from educational authorities [61,62].

3.3. Students' voices on school

The articles in this issue underscore the importance, of implementing inclusive education, listening to the voices of students from immigrant backgrounds through various school and extracurricular activities, as well as fostering horizontal dialogue between school staff, families, and the community [63]. The article by Farmer, Connelly, and Greenblatt, focused on presenting an initiative for training and supporting inclusive education in two schools in the Canadian province of Ontario, shows how teachers continuously questioned the best way

to support the "voice" of the student in an inclusive approach to avoid the trap of speaking on behalf of the others [64]. To recognize social and ethnocultural diversity, it is important, according to the literature on inclusive education, to engage with the students in their reality [65,66]. Throughout the school year, teachers sought to adopt practices "sensitive to students' culture" and to deconstruct the idea that school is a space for conformity to the norm valued by teachers and the education system. They critically reflected on power dynamics between teachers and students from marginalized groups. Deconstructing these elements was challenging, as students had internalized the school form and found it difficult to break out of this normative framework, this mold of the ideal learner to which they had been previously socialized. Like Freire's critical pedagogy [67], teachers attempted to adopt a mediator role, and facilitator, and promote horizontal dialogue with students, thus moving away from the traditional role usually attributed to them, including by the students themselves. The article highlights the essential role of teaching staff in an inclusive approach to supporting students' voices while emphasizing the importance of institutional support in this regard.

The study by Bauer, Aebischer, and Ribet, for its part, gives voice to students in the canton of Vaud in Switzerland who had previously attended a reception class for allophone newcomer students and were enrolled in regular classes at the time of the survey. They highlight obstacles such as the lack of tolerance towards the fact that they are still in the process of learning French, even though they access regular classes. They also express a sense of injustice during evaluations when they are penalized for spelling mistakes and, consequently, a need for recognition of the specificity of their migration journey. They report that they do not feel comfortable expressing their original identities (languages, cultural references, history) at school and prefer to blend in by conforming to the requirements of school culture. In this regard, the researchers question the effective role of the school in creating a space that values students' resources and the expression of multiple identities.

Then, the article by Ratel and Pilote gives voice to Indigenous students attending a university in the Canadian province of Quebec. Although the authors speak of a partial decolonization of higher education, it turns out that the participants emphasize that they would like greater emphasis on Indigenous perspectives in university curricula – curricula largely dominated by Western knowledge [68]. They also highlight the invisibility of Indigenous cultures in the university space and the fact that staff and students often misunderstand their reality. They thus express a need for recognition from university institutions.

4. Conclusion: promising paths for inclusive education

In this thematic issue, researchers emphasize the need for formal educational policies that value inclusive education (beyond student integration) and the development of institutional cultures that collectively and continuously support the implementation of inclusive practices in schools (see the articles by Farmer, Connelly, and Greenblatt, Borri-Anadon, Audet, and Lemaire). On-site action in schools requires a review of evaluation methods, the organization of selective pathways, school transitions, and mechanisms to inform students about their choice of orientation and its consequences for their future paths, among other aspects. In this regard, researchers suggest that school staff critically reflect on achieving a balance between addressing specific needs and the demand for academic performance (see the article by Bauer, Aebischer, and Ribet). Developing recognition, sensitivity, and receptivity to the voices of students from diverse backgrounds (and experiences) in the school environment, even if it means revising the school culture, seems to be a promising approach. Training in interculturality leading to processes of decentering and mutual adaptation is strongly recommended by several authors in the issue – training that fosters awareness of privileges, moves away from essentializing characteristics of immigrant families, takes into account migration experiences, understands the construction of

difference and exclusion processes in schools, values linguistic and ethnocultural diversity, and then questions practices to instigate transformations leading to genuine inclusion in the school environment.

This issue highlights that the implementation of inclusive education remains a significant unfinished challenge, both at the systemic level and in self-work. This process of changing practices, continuously questioning the school's responsibility for (re)producing inequalities, exclusion, and unequal social relationships, is fraught with obstacles, unforeseeable situations, and strong emotions. School stakeholders need to feel institutionally supported collaboratively and collectively by school actors and authorities and by national educational policies. Furthermore, deploying inclusive practices requires critical ethical action. Continuous decentering involves welcoming others without speaking for them and recognizing the impact of unequal social relationships on educational and school socialization pathways. This requires being attentive and vigilant towards exclusion processes that occur in schools and are often considered implicit in school culture, often monocultural and difficult to decipher by some immigrant students and parents. This complexity highlights the importance of developing initial and ongoing training to support school personnel, as well as school leadership, on these issues and to promote collaborative exchange spaces for openly discussing these issues to implement changes. In this sense, giving a voice to immigrant or minority school staff and valuing their experience constitutes pathways [69]. Similarly, competency models to guide teacher and school leadership training have been suggested in recent years in Quebec to contribute to more inclusion, equity, and social justice in education [70,71]. However, the real and ongoing implementation of these inclusive and intercultural competencies by field actors remains a challenge that must be constantly supported in the school's daily life.

Editor's note

Due to editorial harmonization, the inclusive writing used in the editorial and some articles in this issue could not be accommodated.

Disclosure statement

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