

The enigma of inclusion: from the intentions to the pedagogical practices*

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Abstract

This research has sought to weave a web from theories and experiences with the purpose of generating some knowledge about “school inclusion”. Based on a qualitative approach, and taking as a point of departure the foundation in and of the daily life, the study had as its main focus a year-long investigation in a Center of Integral Child Care (CAIC) in the city of Juiz de Fora (MG). The objective of this investigation was to observe the procedures adopted, transformed or adapted by the institution in its attempt to include handicapped children and adolescents into regular teaching. Observations were conducted at various moments: pupils’ entrance, break, and exit; in different environments: classrooms, staff rooms, courtyard; and in several occasions: classes, council meetings, pedagogical meetings, and celebrations. The study also included 34 interviews with teachers, administrative and technical staff and some students directly involved in the study, along with their mothers. Seven handicapped students had their daily routine observed in classes of Child Education and Fundamental Schooling. This research allowed us to see that working, innovating, and daring to implement an inclusive education that caters for all students indistinctly, with or without handicaps, in Regular Education is not a mission impossible, but a challenge that can be met. It is all a matter of thinking and wishing, “thinking and doing” a school that inspires the exchange between students, that confronts unfairness in thinking and life styles, that seeks interactive methodologies, and that makes out of the recognition of diversity strategies for a new learning. In short, a school that recognizes differences and, respecting them, lives together with them.

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The outlook possible before the tangle of ideas and the reality

The observations and reflections I have made throughout my academic and professional experience have inspired the main themes of this study. I have observed that society has, in the recent years, undergone several changes. The world seems to be changed, values are no longer the same, people are different, the lifestyle appears to be other. At the beginning of this 21st century much is said about the Third Millennium, new age, new conscience, globalization, quality of life, ecology, cybernetics. At the same time, we associate to the customs created by the culture along the centuries the new discoveries and different experiences in the fields of sexuality, religion, moral, education, and social life in general.

We live, indeed, a peculiar moment. As believed and said by Prigogine (1996), we are, in a certain way, reaching “the end of science” because it is no longer possible to continue to speak exclusively of “extra-historical universal laws”. We now have to add “the temporal and the local” (p. 25), which implies moving away from the ideals of traditional science. It is necessary to review our concepts about the laws of nature, society, the pedagogical meaning of the school, the individual, the notion of equality and of difference.

The history of the attempts at pedagogical changes has directed educational innovation towards the reform of methods, techniques and programs, leaving untouched the practices, the structure of the institution, the school relations, the professional attitudes, the times and spaces where the education of the pupil takes place and, still, the rituals that give concrete existence to the intellectual and formative contents of the school. To Arroyo (2001), changing this tradition means “shifting the focus to where education occurs” (p. 161) in multiple and diverse places. Also, according to Garcia (1994) education needs to be

disseminated in the social field, “so that experiences can be exchanged in a creative process of mutual feedback” (p. 63).

With the present work I have tried not just to outline the recent progresses proposed in studies about the teaching challenges concerning the practical aspects of the pedagogical encounter, but also to articulate a wider framework for Education in order to unveil, and therefore decode, the obstacles faced by handicapped students in their conquest of a real possibility of learning. Considering what has been developed in a committed and serious way by the proponents of Inclusive Education, it is reasonable to adopt a frame of reference for this issue with some general applicability to research and study this process of inclusion in regular schools, particularly those of the public school system in urban centers, where the enrolment and presence of EVERYBODY1 seeking the school is already a reality, regulated by the Act 9394/96.

As much as possible, I have tried to take this investigation beyond the simple presence of pupils with physical, sensory and/or mental handicaps inside a regular classroom. I have sought to understand and record how this presence is perceived and represented in pedagogical meetings, in festivities, at entrance and exit times, during break times, in Physical Education classes, and in the teachers' common room.

Trying to understand the representation of deficiency at school required much care and the familiarity with some axioms which, as far as I could see, belong to the labyrinthine attributes of the symbol. In other words, it is imperative to add to the analysis of the behavior inside the classroom, which constitutes the theoretical field of the prevailing traditional research in Education, the semiotic, dramaturgical and phenomenological interpretations. The main line in this investigation consisted in expounding the representations of these pupils' daily lives at school, and in examining the relations implicit

within the wider cultural system. An analysis of the cultural institution based on the experiences of the social actors and subjects involved with the research suggests important explanations and unveilings of a wide variety of behaviors and standardized transactions that take place inside the public, urban, and so-called inclusive school.

Examined in the context of symbolic action, schools should be studied as transmitters of cultural codes that reveal human perceptions and also the way in which deficiency is understood in our cultural system. This observation must be taken into account by the educational researcher when examining how the school representatives – headmasters, teachers, technical and administrative staff, supervisors, other staff, parents and pupils – codify their self-images, images of the other, images of equality and of difference.

The essence of this investigation lies in the irrefutable fact that it is only after a new paradigmatic vision of Education, school, curriculum and subject that we shall be able to establish a debate about quality education for all in regular schools. This work tries essentially to supply a fruitful basis for a theoretical-critical incursion into the knowledge of the inclusive proposal.

My challenge has therefore consisted in identifying, apprehending and understanding the representations about the insertion of handicapped children in the non-restrictive regular school – something that until now has been decorated with ostensible associations – and try to replace them with perceptions and reflections obtained in an immersion in the school daily life, conjugated to the ideas of the authors that deal with the issue of deficiency and Inclusive Education in contemporaneity.

Objectives and questions to investigate

My purpose was thus of identifying the procedures adopted, adapted or transformed at

a Center of Integral Child Care (CAIC) in the city of Juiz de Fora – MG in its attempt to work with a proposal of insertion of all pupils that come to it.

Within the parameters of this research, I tried to investigate several questions, namely:

- * Has inclusion become a reality amongst us?
- * How do the professionals understand and evaluate the pupils' learning process at a school where handicapped children are included in regular teaching?
- * What are the technical-pedagogical, psychopedagogical and social alternatives created in the Regular Teaching System that can contribute to the learning process for all children?
- * How have headmasters, supervisors, tutors and technical-administrative staff related with pupils inside this non-restrictive school environment?
- * What are the factors affecting the pupils' failure or success in the classroom?

Methodology

Weaving the threads connecting the complexity of the real in accordance with daily life

Based on the assumption that the present situation of the research about the school is lacking microsocial explanations to further the knowledge of concrete and theoretical questions, I have chosen, when seeking to reconstruct processes and relations permeating the daily school experience, to develop a study in and about the school daily life because, in addition to the fieldwork, these studies require an intense involvement and constant interaction between researcher and object of research, allowing me to gain closer knowledge of the school.

Studies about the school daily life have contributed much to the understanding of what goes on inside the schools, demonstrating the

need for new perspectives of work, both on the part of teachers in the classroom and by psychologists, pedagogical supervisors, and other professionals involved in the issue of schooling. These studies are therefore more concerned with the educational processes than with their products.

Recently, the study of daily life has been used as a viable model of investigation within the perspective of qualitative paradigms considered in the field of Education, especially in studies that propose to investigate complex and subjective relations and behaviors, such as those occurring in the school space.

Along these lines, Alves and Garcia (2000) have been pointing out “the space/time of knowledge created in the daily life as irreplaceable in what concerns specifically the knowledges of practice” (p. 13).

From the educational reality of the city of Juiz de Fora – MG, I tried to select the school to be researched and studied considering some particular features, such as:

- * Being located in the city of Juiz de Fora – MG;
- * Having experience in working with handicapped children attending regular teaching;
- * Having the acceptance and collaboration from the direction, from the pedagogical supervision, from teachers and other staff for the conduction of the study.

The institution that fulfilled these criteria was a Center of Integral Child Care located in a peripheral borough of the city.

During a year, in contacts that happened at least once a week, I tried to understand the fabric of the knowledge about the insertion of handicapped children within that school context.

The selection and analysis of just one school from the city public school system can be justified by considering that the study in and of the educational daily life demands a

significant period of interaction in the field, and such task takes a long time.

Coming into contact with this school reality allowed me to understand more clearly the role and action of each component of the educational process, perceiving the forces that stimulate or hold back the relationship and interaction between the subjects, as well as affording a view of the power structures and of the way the school is organized.

Daily life should not be translated through general explanations of its dynamics and slippery richness. Organizing and translating in comprehensible language what happens in it has been a challenge for researchers and scholars from the most varied areas. We can observe attempts to select and organize, systematize and analyze, ordain and explain in understandable terms complex, interrelated, mixed and articulated information, often in incomprehensible ways (Oliveira, Alves, 2001).

As shown by Geertz (1989), trying to study the daily life is “to establish relations, select informants, transcribing texts, building genealogies, mapping out fields, keeping a diary, and so on” (p. 15). These are the viable instruments to compose the data gathered in the daily routine of the work.

The inclusion of the view of the researcher, in opposition to the distancing proposed by the positivist theory, is regarded as fundamental to establish the starting point for the proposition of the analysis of the facts he/she observed. It thus becomes indispensable to combine data gathering techniques, such as: participant observation, non-directing interviews, documental analysis, field diary, house calls, photography, and filming.

The field diary turned out to be a fundamental tool, making present and palpable to me what had been carefully observed. I wrote the field notes after each visit to the school, describing people, objects, places, events, activities, conversations, ideas, strategies, and reflections. These notes were used in the

analysis of the data, and associated to the literature.

To compose the data collected in the school daily life I made use of participant observation, a technique that affords, more than any other, a deep contact between researcher and researched, making it easier to apprehend both the latter's world view and the meanings attributed to the surrounding reality.

Thirty-four interviews were carried out, ordered as follows: 23 workers from the Center of Integral Child and Adolescent Care, the coordinator of the Special Education Service – SEE/PMJF, four mothers of handicapped children, and six pupils from the school, randomly chosen.

Data from the interviews were fully transcribed, giving elements and complementing the observations conducted in the school context.

I studied the pedagogical practice in the classrooms, physical education classes, and break times, considering the pedagogical mediation proposed by the teachers and the handicapped children. I tried to highlight the dialogical relations in the daily lives of these pupils in their school context.

Analysis of the results: from intentions to pedagogical practices

On the one hand, we know that there has never been so much talk about the importance of the participation of social minorities in spaces previously reserved for those that fit into the preestablished and perverse ideals of strength, beauty, wealth, youth, productivity and perfection. On the other hand we know that man has always been trying better ways of being in the world, of dealing with himself and with the other. This situation is part of the history of the human being, and it seems to me to be a process that will extend indefinitely.

During the last decades, the discourse about the social insertion of EVERYBODY seems

to have invaded all corners of society. It has become truly fashionable and a platitude to speak for or defend inclusion. It is no longer acceptable not to think about the real participation of EVERYBODY, that is, the brave and authentic inclusion of those who, mistakenly, figure in the statistics as if they were already included in the educational, cultural, political, economic and social contexts. We have to stop thinking about education under a simplistic and reductionist perspective, and understand it through a vision in which the access to the school institution for EACH AND EVERY student, and the permanence therein in viable and satisfactory conditions, are spontaneous and natural rights and a social and political duty of the State and of every citizen.

In Brazil and the world there are a growing number of researchers and educators interested in the discussion about the integration of handicapped students into regular teaching. Renowned international authors such as Chaffin (1975), Fierro (1987), Garcia (1989), Houck; Sherman (1979), Renau (1984) and Toledo (1984) present arguments in favor of an inclusive education.

Similarly, during the last decades, this has been perhaps the most frequently discussed question of Special Education in our country, Cardoso (1992); Edler (1996; 1997; 1998); Ferreira, J. R. (1993); Ferreira, M. E. C. (1995); Glat (1988; 1991; 1995; 1997; 1998); Goffredo (1992); Ide (1994a; 1994b; 1995; 1997; 1999a; 1999b); Januzzi (1985; 1992; 1997); Mantoan (1987; 1988; 1991; 1994a; 1994b; 1995a; 1995b; 1996; 1997a; 1997b; 1998a; 1998b); Mazzota (1997); Mendes (1994); Omote (1994); Sasaki (1997; 1998), and many others. Authors such as these present many arguments in favor of a more humanitarian and just education, aiming at a child-centered pedagogy based on their abilities, and not on their deficiencies, incorporating concepts such as interdisciplinarity, individualization, collaboration and increased conscience/

sensibility, making it easier for students with special needs to be included, and turning this inclusion into a positive experience for everybody.

I believe, however, to be mistaken those who think about inclusive education only for the handicapped children, as if ALL the other children were already an effective part of the educational system.

The existence of a fragmented, disarticulated, discontinuous and compartmentalized policy that has prevailed in this country has contributed to maintain the current rates of illiteracy, dropout and failure, the low quality of teaching, and the exclusion of those who cannot learn at the same pace and in the same way as the others.

Broadly speaking, the educational system seems to be crystallized and organized to deal only with homogeneity, since the latter does not present any danger, for it does not put in question values, truths and, especially, traditional habits. The situation in Juiz de Fora was no exception to this rule.

Consequently, one observed the separateness that exists between two parallel teaching systems: the regular and the special. To this day, they compete with each other, not just with respect to the low quality of the teaching offered, but also in relation to the disarticulated projects and programs, which clash with each other, producing waste, inefficacy, inefficiency, and inequality of opportunities.

For a long time, the educational practice in which Special Education is immersed represented a parallel educational system, distinct and marginalized. This procedure reveals the attitude of a society that is satisfied in offering the minimum, covering up the fear represented by pupils with special needs.

Segregated teaching institutions have existed for a long time, and continue to this day. If, on the one hand, they have constituted for decades the only path to schooling open to handicapped people, on the other hand they

still contribute to legitimize the exclusion of these students from regular schooling.

There was a recurrent complaint in the interviews that schools frequently fail to fulfill their role; that it is totally removed from the contemporary world and modern life. Parents, teachers, educated and society in general are unhappy about the quality of the teaching offered and, worst of all, see no hope ahead. Consequently, according to the reports, pupils have left the institutions without qualification or any preparation to integrate society and face its dynamics. Regrettably, govern offices, schools and we, the educators, have refused to see this situation.

With these observations as a backdrop, my ideas took shape and organized themselves in the process of construction of this work. I now begin to present answers to the questions guiding the study, as they appear in the problematization, without, however, intending to put them in a closed and finished form.

Has inclusion become a reality amongst us?

The research demonstrated that the current education proposal is still unable to provide satisfactory conditions that would allow it to be regarded as effectively inclusive.

Authors such as Glat (1995; 1997; 1998); Goffredo (1992); Mazzota (1994) and others point out that the school policy of integration does not work in practice because, among other factors, the teacher in a regular class is not prepared to receive a special student. Thus, according to these authors, considering the school proposal as inclusive requires that teachers are effectively trained to transform their educative practice.

Glat (1998) believes that total inclusion may well be regarded as utopia and, like every utopia, it has "its symbolic value and affective investment that must be nurtured". To that author inclusive society "is the utopia of a perfect world", similar to the utopia of

socialism: “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” (p. 27).

When discussing her arguments, the author remarks that these are essentially of a pragmatic and operational nature, and not theoretical-ideological. And she adds that:

Although the literature about total inclusion is quite extensive, there are no data confirming, except on specific cases, that handicapped pupils inserted in regular classes present better cognitive and social development than when part of special classes (Nunes, unpublished). On the contrary, several studies have indicated that school integration does not lead necessarily to social integration (Gibbons, 1986; McMillan, 1977; Stafford, Scott, 1986), and that ‘handicapped children and youngsters, even studying in regular classes, remain segregated in their communities, and their personal relationships are limited to their families, the professionals, and people with similar disabilities’. (Glat, 1995, p. 15)

Ferreira (1993), referring to the issue of integration, calls attention to the fact that, because the latter is regarded as a politically correct proposal, more effort is invested in its justification than in its practical application. Glat (1998) believes that the same happens to the issue of inclusion, that is, that we spend more time talking and writing about inclusion, discussing the 1994 Salamanca Declaration, than actually researching and experimenting alternative forms to adapt it and implement it.

Commenting on integration, Schwartzman (1997) adds that:

Placing in the same regular class children with very sharp differences as to their learning possibilities can jeopardize everyone’s learning. [...] all efforts must be channeled to integrate to the school system the larger part of the children; but it seems to me that a significant part of the

handicapped individuals shall have better opportunities to learn and to development in an optimized form their potential in a learning situation different that what our regular educational system can offer today. (p. 65-66)

Once again Glat (1998) calls the attention of Education authorities, especially at the State and Municipal levels, which are responsible for direct action upon the school system, “that they should be very careful with radical structural changes based on theories and ideological proposals, and with importing case-based experiences and models originated in educational realities different from our own” (p. 28). She emphatically suggests that

[...] all projects to implement new educational models or proposals should be followed and evaluated systematically and scientifically, so that we reformulate what did not work and reproduce successful experiences. (p. 28)

At the institution researched inclusive education was not implemented, despite the effort and political-pedagogical project based upon principles of solidarity, cooperation and respect for the educated, prescribing the collective work of teachers and coordinators, and implying meetings for the discussion, analysis and review of classroom practices, as well as planning common activities, exchanging of materials and assessment of works. In practice, what can be seen is that all these mechanisms were not enough to promote the insertion of ALL students that came to this school.

The speech of one of the teachers interviewed is emblematic and demonstrates one of the many difficulties experienced by the school:

I do not defend the inclusion into the regular teaching. Although I enjoy working with

the pupils I have ... This is personal, because at my age ... I should have retired long ago, but I decided to go back to work at the state and municipal school systems ... I'm tired and if I could go back twenty years now, my Goodness ... I'd do the impossible ... Because working so hard and stretching myself with this handicapped pupil I think I had some success; if I was younger ... (CAIC, 05.10.2006, Interview 22 – Pr)2

In order to bring forth the inclusive school we need to continue pursuing a long and arduous path. It is indispensable that the educational institution become more aware to interests, characteristics, difficulties and resistances displayed by the pupils in the daily life of the school and during the learning process. In this way, the school environment has to be built as an open, receptive space, ready to cater for the peculiarities of each one.

How do the professionals understand and evaluate the learning process of the pupils in this school that included handicapped children in regular teaching?

The school researched has tried to question the traditional model of quantitative assessment, proposing a different one in which the qualitative aspects are predominantly taken into account. Thus, this school understands assessment as “an instrument of investigation and diagnosis, one that must be employed throughout the teaching-learning process”.

At the start of each school year, the pupils' assessment records prepared by their teachers in the previous year are discussed and analyzed. This manner of understanding assessment makes it possible to identify the progress and problems, thereby redefining the educative actions, understood as a continuous formative process.

Various assessment instruments are used to follow up this process: the pupil's performance in daily individual activities, their oral and written production, and also the results of tests and exams.

According to the Political-pedagogical Project, these assessments were carried out without a systematic schedule, with the objective of observing what needed to be improved, both in the pupil's formation and in the work of the teacher. These aspects were aligned with the school's vision, when seen under the paradigm of the inclusion, in which one seeks to evaluate the pupil according to his/her potential, valuing the daily learning. Let us look at the testimony of a teacher that worked with one of the handicapped pupils:

Dimas is at the CA 11, the last stage of the second cycle, corresponding to the 5th series. He began here at the 1st series. He doesn't do everything just like the others, we know he won't. But ... he keeps up with his own results.

[...] In my own area, Portuguese, his problem is that he doesn't write ... But we are always looking for alternatives for that ... A colleague writes for him, I write for him ... But, although it is a difficulty, we can get around it because his orality is well structured ... This is not a problem in the work with him. The exercises involving grammar or spelling he does orally. In the production of text, he speaks his ideas, the complete sentence, just like he wants me to write it down ... And I write it down. (CAIC, 21.08.2006, Interview 15 – Pr)

Any person under education, handicapped pupil or otherwise, can at some point experience difficulties in the learning process resulting from the interaction of the features of the pupil and the demands, programs and assessment instruments used by the institution.

Mantoan (1998b) draws attention to the

fact that inclusion is a modality of education for all, with a teaching specialized to the pupil. The difficulty in putting in practice such a revolutionary choice lies in dealing with an even bigger challenge, which has to do with the human factor. The relevance of physical resources and material means for the realization of a quality school process gives way to the development of new attitudes and forms of intention at the school, requiring changes in the personal and social relationships, and in the way the teaching and learning processes are conducted. In this context, the formation of the personnel involved with education is of paramount importance, as is the assistance to the families. Lastly, there must be support for those implicated in the changes, so that these are not imposed upon them, but rather emerge as a result of a more evolved conscience of what education and human development are.

Education under a new paradigm, quality education for all in the era of relationships constitutes a bilateral process, in which people who are still excluded and society seek in partnership to define the problems, find solutions and realize the equality of opportunities for everyone. It has to stop being just proposed to become a reality in our schools.

We have to (re)think and (re)structure the system and structure of conventional education, so as to reduce, as perhaps eliminate, the obstacles that prevent ALL those under education to advance, making the educational system more just, coherent, efficacious and equal. This conception of school performance and of didactic plans, under the inclusive perspective, undoubtedly revolutionizes what is traditionally practiced in school today.

What are the technical-pedagogical, psychopedagogical and social alternatives created in the Regular Teaching System that

might contribute to the learning process of every child?

Apart from the reorganization of school times and spaces in cycles, replacing the traditional ordering in series, an alternative observed at the school research when collecting the data was the close relationship between school and community, and also a significant openness to the participation of parents in the activities and discussion of pedagogical questions. It was evident that there was much effort from the school management to get to know and solve the difficulties encountered in the daily routine, apart from the preoccupation with issues that went far beyond the school walls, involving problems and interests of the community through the constant contact with the Coordination of Special Education Service of the City of Juiz de Fora Secretariat for Education (SME/PJF).

By themselves, children integrate and interact in the social environment where they live. Thus, as put by Arendt (1997), "the essence of education is natality, the fact that beings are born into the world" (p. 223). It is of the nature of the human condition that each generation turns into an ancient world, so that preparing a new generation for a new world is a natural task. To Larrosa (1998), education "is the way in which the world receives those that are born". Education should then be "a letting happen of the truth that those born carry with them" (p. 73). Education is essentially the process through which we learn to be member of society. Education is socialization. For Durkheim (1978):

Education is the action exerted by the adult generations upon the generations that are still not ready for social life; its object is to raise and develop in the child a number of physical, intellectual, and moral states required by the political society as a whole, and by the moral milieu to which the child

is individually destined. (p. 16)

Valle (1997) compares education to a “faithful mirror that shows us clearly what a society is, what it wishes to do with itself, and what it says it wishes ...” (p. 8).

In practice, it is important to understand that the function of the school is to teach and show children what the world is like. Given that the world is old, always older than they are, learning turns its eyes inevitably to the past, no matter how much life is lived in the present. Secondly, the relationship between children and adults should be based on the principle that neither the child nor the adult are ready and finished as far as the learning process is concerned.

We know then that the teacher/pupil relationship must be dynamic, interactive, in order to enhance and allow renovations, for as Castoriadis (1999) warns us, society, in virtually all of its history, is driven by “closedness”; closedness of its logic, closedness of its imaginary significations. It produces

[...] closed individuals that think as they were taught to think, and thus evaluate and give meaning to what society taught them to have meaning, and for whom these manners of thinking, of evaluating, of ruling, of giving meaning, are by psychic construction unquestionable. (p. 277)

Here is the testimony of one of the pedagogical supervisors:

I live close to a special school, and I don't see boys coming in and out ... They come and go in group. There's no difference among them, they are the same. This equality is what signals their difference within society. So, there comes the group of the Down, there comes the group of the paralyzed. (CAIC, 20.04.2006, Interview 04 – Sp)

We are, in fact, used to working in schools under the paradigm of homogeneity. That is not surprising, for as Touraine (1999) points out:

[...] we live somewhat together in the whole planet, but it is equally true that everywhere the identity groups are being multiplied and strengthened, the associations based on common belonging, the sects, the cults and nationalisms. (p. 10)

Like all State institutions, the school is structured in a bureaucratic way, guiding the daily practice towards formalized and repetitive actions, which seek, according to Penin (1989)

[...] to homogenize what is different and mutable, to fragment what is continuous or follows a natural rhythm, and to put in hierarchy what must converge to a given end. (p. 111)

It is thus indispensable to work in the direction of constituting critical consciences, effectively autonomous and creative, capable of building more just societies – concerned with solidarity and respect for the other. This objective can be achieved through the constant nurturing of opportunities to discuss, plan, and face the differences among peers, in an attitude of cooperation and not of conformism.

How the school direction, supervisors, and technical-administrative professionals have related to pupils within this non-restrictive environment?

The advantages and benefits of this work of inclusion for ALL who are part of the school institution researched could be observed through the improvement and development of the school environment, something that became

clear in the testimonies of those interviewed. Similarly, the greatest benefit for the teachers could be seen in their co-participation in the transformation of the school in view of the cooperative support and advance of professional skills.

Working at a school that proposes to include handicapped children entails a whole range of values, of beliefs in education... In the words of the head of the CIAC:

We work with the idea, with the need, with the issue of solidarity, of citizenship, of rights... So these things are common sense at the school today. [...] There's a tone that the school has adopted, and that really is in everyone's heads, and it's nice to see someone excited about the progress of a handicapped pupil; be excited about the others, of course, but sometimes you don't think you'll succeed... and the little progresses are much celebrated... [...] I think the idea has changed... There's no more fear of the different, of the new, no one's disgusted at the boy that drools... It is only in the day-to-day that you'll see it's no big deal; everybody has a right to education. [...] We are taking this responsibility, perhaps not in everyone's head because that would be almost impossible, but the large majority of the professionals think like that. (CAIC, 14.02.2006, Interview 01 - D)

The specificities of the inclusion of handicapped pupils into regular teaching will depend on the social context in which it is articulated, on the commitment of the professionals to offer new opportunities of learning, relationships and independence to the students subjected to exclusion.

This way, it was possible to infer that the school and the education system as a whole can be understood as an instance of mediation between the meanings, feelings and conducts of the social community and the particular

development of the new generations. The school thus imposes, slowly but surely, certain modes of conduct, thought and relations proper of an institution that reproduces patterns and behaviors, oblivious to the radical changes taking place around it. It seems therefore clear that, by understanding the effects of social and economic inequalities, the school institution fulfils a complex and contradictory set of functions: socialization, cultural transmission, and preparation of human capital.

What are the factors that determine the failure or success of pupils in the classroom?

It could be observed during the fieldwork that the failure or success of the handicapped child's learning is often a reflex of the pedagogical intervention and teacher's profile as a mediator in the teaching-learning process.

The inclusion of everyone in the school, regardless of their talent or deficiency, brought benefits to pupils, teachers and society at large. An example of this observation is the following testimony:

[...] here at the CAIC up to this day we usually deal with children that came to school at the age of six, seven. It is much easier to perform the inclusion of this child into the classroom than of a 13-year-old. This hasn't happened yet ... The child should stay in the classroom with his peers of the same age group. The biggest benefit would be the exposure to the subjects of his age group, together with the colleagues ... This child will certainly benefit more than if he/she went to a special school, because he would mature, would improve his development in some aspects, I'm sure ... It is hard, however, for us as teachers, coordinators, to see that this child may stay

in school up to the sixth, seventh, eighth grade, and still be illiterate ... And that's something that can happen ... We may be unable to teach him to read and write, this teacher may not be prepared. Under what circumstances will that happen? (CAIC, 24.04.2006, Interview 05 – Sp)

According to Sasaki (1997), inclusion is founded on principles hitherto regarded as uncommon, such as:

- * Acceptance and celebration of individual differences;
- * Appreciation of each person – right to belong;
- * Living together within human diversity represented by national origin, religious creed, gender, age, race and deficiency;
- * Learning through cooperation – human solidarity;
- * Citizenship with quality of life. (p. 17)

The contact between the children reinforces positive attitudes, helping them to become more sensitive, to understand, respect and grow, living with differences and similarities with his/her peers. Every child, without distinction, can benefit from the experiences of the educational environment. Handicapped children, in particular, when in inclusive environments, can display better performance in the educational, social and occupational spheres. They learn at to act and interact with their peers in the real world.

By the same token, the greatest benefit for teachers is the co-participation in the transformation of the school through the cooperative support and honing of professional skills.

The advantages and benefits of this work of insertion can be seen in the enrichment and development of the school environment and of all that take part in it.

As the exclusory educational practices of the past give room and opportunity to the

unification of regular and special education into a single system, we move towards a wider educational reform in which all pupils begin to have their educational needs catered for inside regular teaching.

Every child can learn. Learning, contrary to what many people believe, does not depend solely on internal condition inherent to the person: it constitutes the corollary of the equilibrium of internal conditions, proper to the learning subject, and the external conditions, inherent to the teaching individual (Fonseca, 1995).

By way of conclusion: end point or starting point?

For thousands of years human beings have carried out a relentless search for a meaning or sense for existence. They have thus produced – and continue to produce – different and complex mythological, religious, philosophical, and scientific explanations for the questions that make up life. Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? Why? What for? ...

There are always many answers, several outlooks, and multiple meanings to perceive, understand and interpret the world. Also, there are always many different ways to feel, touch, see and hear. There are, still, different ways to speak, to express, to communicate. One of these many ways of communicating and expressing is through scientific research.

I believe that the elaboration of a research emerges from a curiosity, restlessness, a disquiet about something that should not be as it is, or a feeling or thought that is not satisfied with the way the world or life have been. One seeks, for this reason, the opportunity to reformulate knowledge and to change paradigms.

The present moment points to the urgency to face the interconnectivity and complexity of paradigms hitherto well defined and delimited, and that now blend, forcing the

intercrossing of previously crystallized concepts: good and evil, beautiful and ugly, normal and abnormal, common and uncommon, advantages and disadvantages, productive and unproductive, right and wrong, fair and unfair, strong and weak, useful and useless, new and old, equal and different ... These notions cease to be opposite poles to become a tangle of threads and knots that henceforth constitute reality.

Faced with this picture, I met during the research with discourses of various orders, and with testimonies that confirmed, at every moment, the weight of the stigma and prejudice of society in general. What was valued above all was what was culturally agreed as beautiful, new, strong, useful, and productive.

The study made it possible to confirm the complexity that represents for the human being to stare deficiency in the face: because it is not necessarily part of the daily life of most people it is not spontaneously incorporated to it. It is not seen in a natural way: it brings discomfort and mobilizes internal issues, engendering effects and consequences difficult to analyze, and demanding, given the sensitivity of the problem, a careful and meticulous look.

Nevertheless, there is until now no criterion of the genetic engineering that prevent humans from giving birth to beings with physical, sensorial (auditory and visual) and mental deficiencies. And, next to such legacy, there are also the limitations and compromises due to accidents and illnesses, to which we are all subjected after birth.

These thoughts about existence, the human, the differences and deficiencies, in addition to a literature review, brought me face to face with the limitations and difficulties people have to deal with this aspect of life. This could be noticed in what was said, in what was not said, in the truncated speeches, in the silences, pauses, in the struggle to find the words and explanations for what is not easily

explicable when we touch upon feelings, emotions and reasons that have not been clearly identified and, therefore, have become hard to name adequately.

When working with the proposed theme – the school insertion of handicapped pupils into regular teaching – I chose to avoid mild and socially acceptable words, easier to hear, but which contribute to not facing, not perceiving, and ultimately denying deficiency, which is and will always be a real situation, part of human existence.

I do not refer here to the visible and conspicuous differences of gender, race, religion, age, color of skin, eyes, hair, which are perceptible at a first glance ... These were always acceptable without huge efforts or suffering. I speak, rather, of deficiencies of a different order, congenital or acquired, which can trigger situations of disorder, limitations or compromises, and which have been often denied or ignored by the institutional, social, economic and cultural settings.

Seeing from this angle, we were able to detect that we are permanently tied to the look of the other and, moreover, fantasizing this look through judgments, suppositions and deductions.

It is good to remember that we do not pass unscathed through our formation by family, school and media, all heavily influenced by history's legacy. These biases certainly encumber and compromise the simple, natural and spontaneous relationship with the body, with the other and with life in general.

A positive aspect of all this is that studying and analyzing the differences of any order means to learn something about ourselves. And knowing ourselves better is part of the construction of the citizenship.

In the present study, when observing the difficulties faced by people that showed any kind of difference, be it of physical, sensory or mental orders, to exercise their right in society I turned my investigation to the educational aspect, with the purpose of giving elements for

future programs of in school institutions with inclusive proposals.

The research about the puzzle constituted by school inclusion, analyzed and (re)thought on the basis of questions that covered from the pedagogical intentions to their practices, was made easier by the immersion into situations in and of the daily life of a school that already included handicapped children in its regular teaching. By analyzing it in its institutional, instructional-pedagogical and socio-political dimensions, I was able to depict a reality perceived from various angles, to rescue the school history, to understand its relations to the community, to investigate the power and decision mechanisms, and to analyze the relations between the structure of school work and the practices in the classroom. Based on the several testimonies, represented here by the one from a supervisor of the institution researched, it was possible to rethink the educative practice and to dare to implement inclusive education:

The school is used to work with homogeneity and not with diversity. But we have to change. We are working at the beginning of the third millennium. If you went to school in the 1970s ... under the military regime, you chanted hymns; everyone in your time will know that. What inclusive education proposes is that, inside the collectivity, the equality of opportunities is signaled, the equality of being, the equality of being a subject in the world ... (CAIC, 22.05.2006, Interview 08 – Sp)

By daring to work with these dissatisfactions and doubts, I could retell the past, analyze the present, and dream about the future, in a dialectical relationship, taking school inclusion as a thread to weave a web of ideas, reflections and knowledges about this subject. When closing the research I inevitably asked myself if that was an end point or a starting point.

Generally speaking, this study meant the possibility to perceive the dynamics of the school daily activities, making it possible to understand the contradiction found in a school that, despite its attempts to change paradigms via the investigation of the pedagogical reality, has still not broken with tradition and implemented the new model.

In specific terms, when discussing the daily life lived and felt at the institution, I tried to find answers to the questions put forward in the Introduction to this study, which directed and gave support to the fieldwork. Thus, I could, after two years of research, come out from the immersion in the school daily life with some inferences that proved relevant when associated to the search for information and knowledge in a constant dialogue with texts, articles, talks and books related to the issue, apart from participations in forums, symposia, seminars and congresses.

It is important to highlight that what made possible to compose the plot of the relations that take place along the experience with the school environment was a set of theoretical instruments that depicted school as a living, dynamic space, and not as a static and inert space. It was thus possible to come closer to the confrontation that characterizes all spheres of human practice, in the case at hand a school education that intends to be inclusive.

All these considerations pointed to the belief that working, innovating and daring to implement inclusion under an inclusive perspective is not a mission impossible. It is, indeed, a challenged that can be met. It is a question of thinking and wanting; of wanting and facing the arduous and somewhat tortuous road to change. Of wishing to think and make a school that inspires exchanges between pupils, that confronts unequal forms of thinking, that seeks interactive methodologies, that makes of the recognition of diversity strategies for a new learning, that conceives the pupil as a whole, and respects the dignity of each and every individual.

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