

**THE INCLUSION PROCESS IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT:
strategies of migrant children and adolescents in Rio de Janeiro¹**

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Abstract: In this qualitative study conducted with 11 Latin American migrant children and adolescents who are students in the basic education network in the city of Rio de Janeiro, our aim is to understand how the group develops inclusion strategies within the school environment. We hereby seek to understand the broader insights that these strategies may provide regarding the migration experience of this community in Brazil. Initially, we discuss the distinction between including and integrating migrants. Subsequently, we propose an intercultural methodology, child-centered approach and grounded on Socio-Historical Psychology, for analyzing such phenomenon. Finally, we identify and discuss three inclusion strategies that the participants mobilize in their interaction with peers, teachers, and the Brazilian social context: marking of differences, attempting to blend into the group, and demanding equity. These strategies provide us with indications of their initial impressions in Brazil, challenges of their inclusion in the school, and the challenges faced when learning Portuguese.

Keywords: Children of Migrant Workers. Communication and Education. Educational Inclusion. Psychosociology of Education. School Environment.

**O PROCESSO DE INCLUSÃO NO AMBIENTE ESCOLAR:
estratégias de crianças e adolescentes migrantes no Rio de Janeiro**

Resumo: Neste estudo qualitativo realizado com 11 crianças e adolescentes migrantes latino-americanos estudantes da rede de educação básica da cidade do Rio de Janeiro, temos como objetivo entender como o grupo cria estratégias de inclusão no ambiente escolar. A partir disso, buscamos compreender as pistas mais amplas que essas estratégias podem oferecer sobre a experiência migratória dessa comunidade no Brasil. Inicialmente, debatemos a diferença entre incluir e integrar migrantes. Em seguida, propomos uma metodologia intercultural, não adultocêntrica e baseada na Psicologia Sócio-Histórica para a análise do fenômeno migratório. Finalmente, identificamos e discutimos três estratégias de inclusão mobilizadas pelos participantes na interação com seus pares, professores e, além disso, com o contexto social brasileiro: a demarcação da diferença, a tentativa de se diluir no grupo e a demanda

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por equidade. Essas estratégias nos dão indícios sobre primeiras impressões no Brasil, dificuldades de inclusão na escola e os desafios de aprender a língua portuguesa.

Palavras-chave: Inclusão Educacional. Filhos de Trabalhadores Migrantes. Ambiente Escolar. Psicossociologia da Educação. Comunicação e Educação.

EL PROCESO DE INCLUSIÓN EN EL AMBIENTE ESCOLAR: estrategias de niños y adolescentes migrantes en Río de Janeiro

Resumen: En este estudio cualitativo realizado con 11 niños y adolescentes migrantes latinoamericanos que son estudiantes en la red de educación básica de la ciudad de Río de Janeiro, nuestro objetivo es comprender cómo el grupo desarrolla estrategias de inclusión en el ambiente escolar. A través de esto, buscamos entender las perspectivas más amplias que estas estrategias pueden ofrecer en relación con la experiencia migratoria de esta comunidad en Brasil. Inicialmente, debatimos sobre la distinción entre incluir e integrar a los migrantes. Posteriormente, proponemos una metodología intercultural, no centrada en los adultos y basada en la Psicología Socio-Histórica, para el análisis del fenómeno migratorio. Finalmente, identificamos y discutimos tres estrategias de inclusión movilizadas por los participantes en su interacción con sus compañeros, profesores y, además, con el contexto social brasileño: la marcación de diferencias, el intento de desaparecer en el grupo y la demanda por equidad. Estas estrategias nos proporcionan indicios sobre las primeras impresiones en Brasil, los desafíos en la inclusión a la escuela y las dificultades de aprender el portugués.

Palabras-clave: Comunicación y Educación. Entorno Escolar. Inclusión Educativa. Hijos de Trabajadores Migrantes. Psicología de la Educación.

Introduction

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2022), the percentage of people living in a country different from where they were born increased from 153 million (2.87% of the world population) in 1990 to 281 million (3.6% of the world population) in 2020. This increasing trend in migration has sparked academic debates that encompass various aspects, as migrations are a "social fact in its entirety" and a convergence point for subject matters (Sayad, 2006, our translation).

The case of education and its interfaces with international migrations is no different. The issue emerges as a social concern that demands the use of qualified theoretical and methodological frameworks to address the material, ethical, and psychological challenges involving migrant students (Brenner & Alvarenga, 2022) and other individuals who are part of the processes in which these foreign subjects are involved.

From 2019 to 2021, there was a significant increase in the registration of migrants aged 0 to 18 in Brazil (Oliveira & Tonhati, 2022). In 2021, they totaled around 44,350 people, nearly 30% of the total of 151,155 migrants who were granted permanent or temporary residence permits in the country (Oliveira & Tonhati, 2022, p. 11). The main national groups of children and adolescents were Venezuelans (around 67.5 thousand), Haitians (around 6.5 thousand), and Bolivians (around 2 thousand) (id., p. 13).

The presence of migrant students in basic education schools has led to actions aimed at reducing their supposed school failure, as well as promoting their social and educational inclusion (Kohatsu et al., 2020, p. 2). Recent contributions from the literature in this field have addressed important topics, including: a) *migrant children and their access to education*, from the perspective of the interaction between migrant families and schools (Assumpção & Rossini, 2020), as well as the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic (Martin & Piccolotto Galib, 2021); b) *young people's perception of their reception in Brazil*, considering issues related to racism and cultural diversity (Russo et al., 2022); c) *the role of education professionals in welcoming young migrants*, within their historical and social context (Azevedo & Amaral, 2021), and in promoting activities in favor of the diversity of migrant groups participating in the school environment (Kohatsu et al., 2020).

This article discusses the inclusion strategies⁵ adopted by international migrant children and adolescents who study or have studied in public schools in Rio de Janeiro. Until year 2020, the School Census released by the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP) reported the nationality of students enrolled in Brazilian schools. The most updated version of this data, referring to 2019, indicates that 2,240 students aged 0 to 19 were enrolled in basic education institutions (Núcleo de Estudos de População Elza Berquó, 2020).

We adopted a non-adultocentric perspective for our qualitative analysis, informed by the concept of interculturality, (Moscoso, 2008). We understand that, despite the increasing attention given to migrant children and young people in academia in recent years, adults and society in general still neglect this group. Children and young people are often not consulted by

⁵ We understand strategy as the "art of effectively applying the resources at one's disposal or exploiting favorable conditions that may be enjoyed, with the aim of achieving specific objectives" (OXFORD, 2023, our translation)

their families about their desire to migrate and are not prepared for the challenges they will face ahead; furthermore, there is no effective promotion of public policies for the inclusion of this group in Brazilian schools; and further, most schools are not prepared to welcome them. (Assumpção & Aguiar, 2019). Oliveira (2020, p. 12) supports our broader perspective, noting that "foreign students are absent from the Brazilian education agenda, even at times when more attention is given to diversity in the education system" (our translation).

Our article is a contribution to migration studies and to education studies, aiming at answering the following questions: Is it possible to identify specific strategies created by migrant children and adolescents interviewed to facilitate their inclusion in the school environment? If so, what are these strategies? If the answer is yes, what broader insights can they offer about the reception experience of this community in the context of the city of Rio de Janeiro?

In the next section, we discuss the difference between "integrating" and "including" migrants, as well as the reasons why we chose the latter over the former. We then present our methodology, which describes a non-adultocentric and intercultural approach to the study of migrant children in the school environment, as well as the concept of meaning cores, which guided the data classification. Finally, we present three types of inclusion strategies mobilized//employed by the participants: marking differences, attempting to blend into the group, and advocating for equity.

To integrate or to Include?

The way in which we refer to the process of reterritorialization imposed on migrants in host societies (Appadurai, 2019, p. 560) has been the subject of heated debates. Even though the discussion is fragmented in conceptual terms – incorporating several different schools of thought, such as antiracist, feminist, and post-Marxist – and there is no consensus concept or theory to define nationality, citizenship, and ethnicity, integration is the hegemonic way (Favell, 2001, p. 12) to describe this phenomenon.

We are concerned about the language used to define the contours of this process. We do not intend to reinforce language as a tool for creating a dual, idealized society of "us" (locals) versus "them" (migrants) and thereby made into an excluding tool of international migrants (Schrover;

Schinkel, 2014). We agree with Schinkel (2018), who describes "migrant integration" as a "conceptual quagmire," and so we chose not to adopt this perspective. Instead, the term used to address the participation of migrant children in schools will be "inclusion." Before conceptualizing inclusion and its operationalization in this paper, we will substantiate our choice.

Firstly, from a sociological standpoint, it is inconsistent to apply the concept of integration, a Durkheimian functionalist notion, to international migrations. Asserting that integration can be defined in terms of degree – i.e., analyzing whether a migrant is more or less integrated into a host society – does not make sense, because integration is a property of a social system, not an individual (Favell, 2021, p. 58). The smallest possible variable in a system with Durkheimian contours would be a system composed of two individuals interacting in society (Favell, 2021). Thus, the usual lack of criteria and theoretical depth of the term would justify its mixed use in common parlance, politics, and academia (Schinkel, 2018).

The concept is also used in a very broad sense, making it difficult to understand what is being discussed. When reviewing what "successful integration" meant in academic papers, Ager and Strang (2008) found over 40 definitions of the word, in addition to identifying that the word was used for practically all aspects of a migrant's life in the host society. Whenever a concept is overly elastic, it loses the specific characteristics that justify its use over some other (Schrott, 2009).

Lastly, there is an inherent ethnic-racial selectivity in the application of the concept. The need to be integrated is usually directed at non-white bodies from the Global South. White migrants typically do not have the legitimacy of their presence abroad questioned by the state and the local population. They enjoy an "institutional whiteness" (Lundström, 2018) that naturalizes their presence and safeguards them from needing to earn their belonging in the host country.

Regarding the word "inclusion," we should refer to two of its definitions. First, the definition "educational policy that consists of including individuals with special needs in classes considered regular, involving them in not only educational but also community, sports, and social activities."

This definition can be related to the use of the word "inclusion" in the education field,

when it is used to promote participation of individuals with physical and/or intellectual disabilities in school (see Farias et al., 2009). However, the meaning of the word has been expanding and now encompasses other types of differences at the school environment, including foreignness – or even the intersection of more than one, as in the case of Araújo and Bentes' paper (2022) on deaf Venezuelans in the educational system in Roraima.

This leads us to the second definition of inclusion, which will be adopted in this paper to refer to the process of migrant children's participation in school: "the act or effect of including oneself; the introduction of one thing into another, of an individual into a group, etc.; insertion." Here are some observations about the nature of inclusion.

Including migrant children in the school environment involves a multitude of actors. Migrant and Brazilian children and their families, school professionals, and society at large. Inclusion also encompasses the will of migrant children to participate in this process and in the spaces where it takes place. Moreover, to understand the effects of inclusion attempts – or lack of such attempts – it is necessary to listen to young migrants themselves and analyze their discourse regarding their participation in school.

Similarly, inclusion in the school environment cannot be interpreted as a teleological process. Schools change, as do societies and individuals. Inclusion depends on active opposition to its opposite, exclusion, and therefore, "an inclusive school is one that is evolving, not one that has already reached a perfect status" (Ainscow, 2009, p. 20).

Kohatsu, Ramos, and Ramos (2020) refer to school inclusion but also to social inclusion of migrant children. Understanding school inclusion as part of a broader process of social inclusion implies agreeing with Russo, Mendes, and Marcelino (2022, p. 21), who describe and apply it as a broader, multidimensional process involving culture, language, society, and economics, broader aspects of the host society.

These aspects must certainly be considered here, with special attention given to the importance of migrant children and adolescents learning the Portuguese language, how some of their cultural habits may be considered unusual by their peers and educators, as well as the racism and elitism inherent in Brazilian society. School experience is crossed by these aspects of migrant experience in Brazil.

Methodology: An Intercultural and Anti-Adultcentric Approach

Our methodological perspective aims to counter the prevailing adult-centric trend in academia (Gornik & Sedmak, 2021). Therefore, we incorporated two principles: childhood and adolescence as categories of thought, as well as the understanding that individuals of such an age can be considered subjects of transnational practices (Moscoso, 2008, p. 262). We focused on the perception and accounts of children and adolescents regarding their own migration processes (MICREATE, 2019), as part of an effort to see them as "experts in their own lives" (Gornik & Sedmak, 2021, p. 101).

It requires *conducting research* with the participants of such task, an approach that allowed them freedom to discuss their subjective experiences of education and well-being (Due et al., 2014, p. 210). They actively participated in the construction of the research project "Meu português fala: sentidos produzidos por crianças e adolescentes migrantes latino-americanos nas escolas brasileiras," a doctoral dissertation defended in 2023 at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro by the first author of this paper (Aguar, 2023). Her research gathered the data that made it possible to write this article.

We have highlighted three moments in the project where the active participation of children and adolescents took place. First, when they chose their fictional names for the research. Secondly, by consistently guiding the direction of in-depth interviews. Finally, by contributing to the construction of the two main products of the dissertation: the Atlas for the Promotion of Intercultural and Welcoming Classroom Environments and the illustrated book "Eu Sou Daqui e de Lá - Encontros Interculturais entre Estudantes Brasileiros e Migrantes na Escola," with the latter already translated into Spanish and English. Both are support materials for the inclusion of migrant children in Brazilian schools.

A total of 11 people participated in the study - Latin American migrant children and adolescents aged 5 to 17, enrolled in the public school system of Rio de Janeiro. Their accounts were obtained through semi-structured interviews and psychosocial support workshops. The interviews were conducted between August 2021 and June 2022, therefore, during the COVID-19 pandemic. And that is why the meetings were conducted to accommodate the comfort of the children and their families and in accordance with what was possible during the progression of the pandemic and the gradual reopening of public spaces. Contact varied among video calls,

voice calls, indoor and outdoor meetings.

The semi-structured interview script included topics such as the participants' biographies, their preparation for migration, the journey to Brazil, the arrival in the country, and, specifically, in Rio de Janeiro. Special attention was given to their relationships with peers and the experience of attending Brazilian schools. In this article, the main topic is the inclusion strategies indicated by them in their discourses.

We analyzed the discourse of the interviewees from a Socio-Historical Psychology perspective, using nuclei of meaning for such task. These nuclei are identified as an initial step in data analysis, within the contents brought by the interviewees that contain "greater emotional charge or ambivalences" (Aguiar & Ozella, 2013, p. 309). After a broader analysis of the nuclei of meaning found, we selected only those that indicated the strategies used by the children and adolescents to include themselves - socially and, especially within the school environments.

In our analysis we also employed an intercultural perspective. Interculturalism is based on sharing what is common among different ethnic groups, as well as being an affirmation of cultural pluralism, hybridization, and the differences that constitute diversity among individuals (Rhéaume, 2017, p. 81). This notion takes into account that humans need to feel that they belong to one or more groups, that this belonging is not static, and, through interpersonal and symbolic interactions conducted by the subject//individual, it is prone to change (White, 2015, p. 49-50).

It confirms that identity must be analyzed here as metamorphosis (Ciampa, 1996). Migrants also need to see identity as fluid, processual, and continuous, the result of a series of intersubjective negotiations carried out by migrants throughout their migration trajectories (ElHajji, 2023, p. 115). In the case of migrant children and adolescents, their identities mix, overlap, and blend among their family's country of origin and Brazilian culture, varying according to the closeness and distance they establish with the references present in each of them throughout their social experience. Such references can be equated to grids or schemes for interpreting reality, through which our view and interaction with the world is influenced by our culture (Schütz, 2010).

The migrant children and adolescents, we studied, are aware of their foreignness. They show signs of understanding their own reference points, as well as some of the rules and values that shape their social perception (White, 2015, p. 50), and that is from which that they elaborate

and narrate their experiences in school.

Considering the need and/or desire of the child or adolescent themselves to participate in the social life of the destination country, i.e., to be included, participating in important activities and spaces in their daily lives and being respected in their uniqueness, it is important to pay special attention to what happens in school and how young students perceive this inclusion process.

By identifying nuclei of meaning and weaving intra and extra nuclei relationships, we apprehended the meanings produced by children and adolescents regarding the inclusion process in Rio de Janeiro schools (Aguiar, 2023). In the data obtained, we identified that young students seem to use three major strategies in their relationships with peers and adults, whether at school or broader social environment: demarcation of difference, attempting to blend into the group until becoming invisible, and demanding equity.

Demarcation of Difference

The demarcation of difference, and thus identity as a migrant or foreigner, can be done in several different ways, depending on diverse purposes and intentions, not always entirely consciously.

Maria, 5 years old, believes it is important for teachers to be aware that she is a migrant. For her, it is necessary to make her Venezuelan origin clear to the educational team. This would be a way to facilitate her adaptation to teaching situations, "because she [the teacher] has to help."⁶ Her sister, Sofia, 9 years old, shares a similar view. She had to ask her teacher for help because she "didn't understand something (...) it was... the alphabet." And only after this request did the teacher discover that Sofia had arrived from Venezuela and became aware that she needed more specific assistance.

Ainscow (2009) advocates for a process of mutual collaboration between inclusion agents and those to be included, as well as the need to recognize and value individuals in their own uniqueness. Carla, a 12-year-old Venezuelan, reports an initiative in this direction. One of her teachers explained to the classmates in the classroom that she was very quiet because she

⁶ The interviews cited throughout this work were conducted in Portuguese and Spanish, with some parts in Português, an informal mix of both languages.

didn't understand much of what they were saying in Portuguese. Carla repeats her classmates' reaction: "Aiiiiii, that's cool!" "(...) and they would ask me how to say this and that..."⁷.

Thus, marking the difference can mean, for a migrant student in basic education, having easier access to help from educators and the school, including being introduced to classmates. It is especially important when students are newcomers to the educational system. This is usually the most critical moment of reception. Marking the difference can, therefore, be a survival strategy during a difficult period of time that can even lead to psychological suffering.

Regarding the suffering of arriving at school, we have the account of Alana, a 16-year-old Venezuelan. At the beginning of her interaction with Brazilian peers: "Well, at first, I was alone all the time [during recess and breaks between classes] because I had no friends. I didn't like anyone in my class... at first"⁸.

Eleven-year-old Ecuadorian Vitoria seems to take responsibility for what she sees as a failure to learn to write in the standard form of Portuguese language, as required in school. "I feel angry with myself. Because... (...) I understand what they say in Portuguese, so why **can't** I write (emphasis added by the interviewee). The pre-adolescent understands that part of her identity is distinct from that of Brazilians and emphasizes the importance of learning the predominant communication code in the country for her inclusion.

Emphasizing differences regarding Brazilian students not only helps survive during the most difficult periods by drawing attention to the need for support from others, especially teachers. Further, it can protect against the fatigue generated by the cognitive effort to understand cultural codes and what is required during the learning of a non-native language. Even after acquiring a high level of proficiency, bilingual individuals expend more effort in managing both languages (Cargnelutti et al., 2019).

We can see an example of the latter in the speech of the 16-year-old Venezuelan Alana. She indicates that at school, she uses her foreignness as a Spanish speaker to have more control over how she will participate in certain situations that occur in that space. She is aware that she is strategically using her migrant identity to avoid attending classes she does not like, especially at the beginning of her experience in the Brazilian school system.

⁷ "(...) y se iban y comenzaban a preguntarme como é que se decía eso y eso ..." (original dialogue).

⁸ "Bueno, al comienzo yo me quedaba todo el tiempo sola [in the recess and between classes] porque no tenía amigos. Los de mi salón no me caían bien... al comienzo." (Original dialogue).

Alana strongly states that she "can't stand" History class. She then mentions, laughing, that she pretended not to understand some of what the subject teacher was saying during class. This attitude can be interpreted not only as a way to avoid attending a class she doesn't like but also as a way to choose the moments when she conserves energy and effort to understand what is being said.

Stressing the difference and delimiting the space between "self" and "other," in the case of the participants we observed, is also a way to strengthen the "imagined community" (Anderson, 2008) from which migrant students come, by reinforcing the connection with the homeland. Rafael, 17 years old, reports that teams for playing soccer when he was still in school in Roraima – where he had many Venezuelan classmates – were formed according to the nationalities of the students:

Rafael: (...) I remember that when we went out [inaudible] to play soccer, we always formed a Venezuelan team and a Brazilian team, we couldn't be together because we didn't... (laughs) like to play like that... (...).

Researcher: Why?

Rafael: I don't know, it was more competitive, right?⁹.

Thus, reinforcing the connection with their original identity can also provide the safety needed for their inclusion process, in view that young migrants feel that they don't have to renounce what they know and, therefore, feel secure in embracing a hybrid identity and promoting intercultural relations.

The Attempt to Blend into the Group until Becoming Invisible

Another inclusion strategy we identified is the attempt to blend into the group until becoming invisible. This attitude is linked to the children and adolescents' attempt not to attract unwanted attention from other students and the school community in general. This attention is usually based on the fact that they bring practices, symbols, and forms of expression distinct from the majority of their peers.

Camilo describes the fear he felt on his first day at school in Brazil because he believed

⁹ "Rafael: me recuerdo que cuando salíamos en la [inaudible] a jugar al fútbol siempre hacíamos equipo venezolanos y brasileños, no podíamos estar juntos porque no... (risos) nos gustaba jugar así pues... (...) Nos gustaba jugar así. Researcher: ¿Por qué? Rafael: No sé, era como más competitivo, pues. (Original dialogue).

they would consider him strange, but "they were nice to us." He recounts that:

When I arrived at school, I was very nervous because I didn't know what language I would speak; I always spoke Spanish. Just that. So, I arrived, and [the teacher] introduced me to... the whole class. So, I was very nervous; I didn't know, I didn't want to say anything. I arrived and didn't say anything. Just said 'hi,' just that. (Camilo, 15 years old, Peruvian)¹⁰

The insistence of others in constantly placing the migrant in a position of being different, the one who stands out, can often be irritating and/or bothersome, as Lucky, a 14-year-old Colombian, explains regarding her friends' request for her to speak in Spanish: "Because we are talking, having a good time, and then they suddenly want me to start speaking in Spanish and interrupt our conversation and ruin it."

We know that migrants are individuals in motion, bearers of mixed subjectivities and interculturality (ElHajji, 2023), and that the cultural clash experienced upon arrival in a host society will promote cultural and social adaptations (Alencar-Rodrigues et al., 2009) on their part. However, being highlighted because of differences can be discomforting, as Sofia, a 9-year-old Venezuelan, explains: "I feel embarrassed" when friends ask her to speak in Spanish. Her 5-year-old sister, Maria, says that she is also asked to do so. "For me too," something she likes "more or less."

Some of the interviewees are asked by their classmates to speak swear words in their native language, which they report to dislike: "They speak and ask for many of those words [swear words]. No, I can't. 'Why?'" Then they get angry with you, that you are boring..." (Alana, 16 years old, Venezuelan¹¹). Alana also mentions that she is afraid that the teachers will find out such requests and accuse her of encouraging her classmates to use swear words. This is an example of being in the spotlight without having requested it.

One might think, then, that it is better to try to blend into the group to become part of the ethos of the school community that aims to be homogeneous. Thus, staying quiet in the

¹⁰ Quando cheguei na escola estava muito nervoso porque eu não sabia qual que eu ia falar, eu sempre falava espanhol. Só isso. Aí eu cheguei e [a professora] me apresentou na... toda turma. Aí eu estava muito nervoso, não sabia, eu não queria falar nada. Eu cheguei e não falei nada. Só falei "oi", só isso. (CAMILO, 15 anos, peruano) (Original dialogue).

¹¹ "Hablan y preguntan muchas de estas palabras [swear words]. No, no puedo. '¿Hay, por qué?' Después se van todos bravos contigo, que eres chata, que..." (Original dialogue).

classroom so that no one realizes you are from another country, to combat the feeling of being excluded. It is not standing out among what can be experienced as "The loneliness of being in this new city, without knowing it, without understanding it. And being in a classroom with a bunch of strangers who knew each other"¹² (Robles, 2021). Carla, a 12-year-old Venezuelan, reports: "So, like, I never used to talk to them, I would always crouch down like this and stay like that because I didn't know what to say [lowers head to demonstrate]".

The possibility of experiencing bullying can also drive the attempt to become invisible. Steven, a 14-year-old Venezuelan, indignantly recounts that "(...) they would ask if we ate dogs", which seems absurd, as there is no such custom in Venezuela. We identified that group assignments can serve either as instruments of inclusion or producers of the feeling of exclusion, as explained by 12-year-old Venezuelan Carla:

Because I couldn't speak [a] word well, and they corrected me, so, 'you can't speak, so why did you join this group?' [inaudible]. So, they would also say, when the teacher gave us a low grade, they used the excuse that they got the grade because of me, because I didn't understand.¹³

Furthermore, Carla also mentions that her classmates physically kept her out of the circle by closing it with chairs so she couldn't enter. This is the concreteness of being excluded. Against this, there can be the movement of blending into the anonymity of the classroom and, thus, being protected from unwanted exposure.

Demand for Equity

The third strategy we observed is the demand for equity. Acknowledgement of difference is at the very core of the equity concept, although such difference cannot be standardized, meaning that the treatment given to each person will always be individual. Equality is always relational and requires reference points obtained in relation to other people. Therefore, the need for distinct treatment at school should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

¹² "La soledad de estar en esta ciudad nueva, no conocerla, no entenderla. Y estar en un salón de clases con un montón de desconocidos que se conocían entre sí" (Original text/audio of the episode).

¹³ "Porque yo no sabía decir la palabra bien, que yo me corregían, entonces, que 'tú no sabes hablar, entonces ¿Por qué te metes en ese grupo?' [inaudible] Entonces, decían también cuando la profesora sacaba una mala nota, decían la excusa de que ellos sacaban la nota por la culpa mía porque yo no entendía." (Original dialogue).

If we only use equality criteria, we run the risk of not seeing any differences and, mistakenly, understanding them as uniformity, and using this in the name of a purported cohesion.

Migrant children and adolescents have "the need for an equality that recognizes differences and a difference that does not produce, nourish, or reproduce inequalities" (Santos, 2003, p. 56). Thus, they request equal treatment in situations where they are in equal conditions with their Brazilian peers, and at the same time, they request different treatment from what is given to them when they are in a situation of inequality compared to them (Barros, 2016).

Embracing an egalitarian and intercultural perspective is, therefore, to grasp the essence of equity, in view that difference is acknowledged in the intercultural encounter without one culture attempting to assimilate the other, following an ethno-relative stance – instead of an ethnocentric one (Bennett, 2004, p. 2).

Colombian Lucky, 14 years old, reports that it was not easy for her when she first went to school in Rio de Janeiro. She explains that three new boys in her class bullied her for being from Colombia, claiming, among other things, that the country was worse than Brazil and that the food there was not good. She asked her teacher for help, demanding a different treatment related to the fact that she is not Brazilian, and that, this treatment, at the same time, would allow the boys to see her as an equal individual, coming from a country as good as Brazil.

The teacher organized a cultural exchange in the classroom about both Colombian and Brazilian cultures. In the group dynamics, Lucky had to research about Brazil, and her friends had to research about Colombia, a country that received special attention in the activity. The nature of the assignment made her one of the sources of research because the group members researched about Colombia, "but they also occasionally asked me some questions", producing a paper (...) that was good, it turned out good. They talked about some typical Colombian foods and everything else."

Furthermore, as happens in intercultural encounters, the activity generated transformation. In her words: "And when they talked about typical Colombian foods and some foods from there, they saw that there were more foods... foods they hadn't tried, you know?" The result of this process is clear, as after this assignment, the bullying stopped: "So, they kind of stopped saying that to me since then," says Lucky.

Asking for help allowed for a better understanding of Colombian culture, thanks to the

activity proposed by the teacher. The collective effort bore fruit, motivating students to respect their differences without denying or hiding them. This can be understood as an intercultural attitude that promotes inclusion. Lucky notes a clear change in attitude from the group of Brazilian students towards her, and they "accept it just fine that I'm in their group." Regarding being Colombian, according to her, at the time of the interview, it didn't affect her interaction with the group much, as "people in my class have already gotten used to it and are fine with it, and so am I." She concludes, saying, "Actually, I'm even popular in my school (laughs)."

Another important point is the demand from Vitoria, an 11-year-old Ecuadorian, concerning the teacher's attitude: that the teacher respects migrant students as much as the others. She wishes that the teachers would "put themselves in the same place as the children." After all, as Freire (2003, p. 41) advises, "Teaching requires the recognition and assumption of cultural identity."

This is not what happens in Vitoria's classroom. There are moments when her teacher gets annoyed with some boys who are making noise, and among them, there is a boy who doesn't understand Portuguese because he is a migrant. The teacher "thinks he [the boy] is messing with him" because he doesn't react in a way that seems to understand the teacher's instructions. What happens next is something that seems to scare her, despite her laughter when recounting the situation: "He shouts. He doesn't curse much. But he curses. (laughs) ... Like... go to h... (smiles awkwardly).

Another way to demand equitable relationships is expressed by Rafael, a 17-year-old Venezuelan. He believes in the importance of encouraging, in the school environment, a connection between migrant students and their cultures of origin, valuing them on the same level as Brazilian culture. Since Rafael intends to migrate from Brazil to Spain one day, he understands that he needs to carry Venezuelan culture with him. Because, in such way, he will take his connections wherever he is. He believes that preserving the cultures of origin is a way for migrant children and adolescents to be able to "start another life here." In other words, they can feel socially and educationally included in Brazil.

Final Considerations

This discussion contributes to the field of migration studies and aligns with other efforts to highlight the importance of welcoming and supporting the social and educational inclusion of migrant students in basic education schools from an intercultural perspective. Through psychosociology, we can see a broader picture that shows the need to listen carefully to what migrant children and adolescents have to say about everything that concerns them.

To address a possible reflection at this moment, let us return to our initial questions: Is it possible to identify that the interviewed migrant children and adolescents create specific strategies to facilitate their inclusion in the school environment? If so, what are they? We have identified three strategies for social and educational integration used by the group of 11 Latin American children and adolescents interviewed: *demarcation of difference, attempt to blend into the group, and demand for equity.*

Each of these strategies has nuances and distinct purposes related to the young person who reports them, as well as the context in which they arrived in Brazil and joined the school. In many instances, we noticed that it was a way to protect themselves from possible bullying situations, to shield themselves to understand what was happening around them, or to seek help for a specific issue – from a doubt in a subject to a problem in peer interaction. These are movements that mobilize those around them and influence on how they will take a stand in front of the others. Therefore, these strategies are also related to their identity processes, meaning that migrant young people are influenced by elements of the new culture that modify their frameworks for interpreting reality, generating hybrid and intercultural identities.

We call the first strategy presented here "the demarcation of difference." It indicates acknowledgement of differences and, therefore, that there are special and unique needs that migrant students have that must be addressed. Being aware of this strategy makes it possible to identify the possible need to seek help from the teacher, justifying that the student might be quieter when they first arrive in the class, that they might try to protect themselves from possible suffering.

These feelings may be feeling excluded from the group, fearing bullying from peers, or having trouble dealing with difficulties in the new language and social codes that are not yet very evident and understandable. We also identified that the demarcation of difference can help

migrant children decide whether or not to participate in an activity – which, in turn, can represent an attempt to exert control, albeit partial, amidst the lack of control over the world in which they have been immersed since leaving their homeland.

The second strategy, "the attempt to blend into the group until becoming invisible," is closely related to the fact that, in many situations, migrant children and adolescents are brought into the spotlight without having requested that attention, especially in moments of apprehension about how their peers will receive them. Furthermore, standing out in a group can generate irritation or discomfort since they are constantly reminded that they do not speak Portuguese fluently or that they are not recognized as part of the group – everyone is equal, except them. Trying to blend into the group can also be a way to avoid conflicts with teachers and being accused of having done something wrong, as in moments when classmates ask them to say swear words in their native language.

"The demand for equity" appears as the third identified strategy, and like the first, "the demarcation of difference," it promotes strengthening the ties with the country and culture of origin. This strategy is essential to create the necessary security to venture into the new world they are now in, as it favors the opening for the establishment of new meaningful relationships and the realization that cultivating hybrid identities does not annihilate their origins. This last strategy also promotes fairer relationships, both within and outside the school environment, as it goes in the direction of demanding the recognition of differences and the specific needs of people in unequal situations.

This understanding encourages development of more ethno-relative views that understand intercultural encounters as carriers of transformations for all individuals involved. We also noticed that the demand for equity is based on human rights and respect for the limits and needs that migrant children and adolescents understand as important for their social and educational inclusion in the host country.

This brings us to the second research question: what broader clues can the identified strategies offer regarding the reception experience of children and adolescents in the context of the city of Rio de Janeiro? We understand that, despite the city being an important tourist destination and receiving migrants to live in it, there is little preparation to welcome people from other countries. The school environment is part of this larger context, which points to the

need for public policies designed with and for migrant students enrolled in basic education schools, circulating through the several different neighborhoods of the city.

Therefore, it is essential that there is prior work by the city and the country that intend to be welcoming to various cultures, in order to value, respect, and understand the specific needs of migrant students in terms of public policies. In such way, the responsibility for their processes of social and educational inclusion is removed from those who arrive and their families.

Moreover, it is necessary to investigate with teachers, both with those that have had contact with migrant students and with those that have not yet had such opportunity, what strategies they believe are useful for welcoming and supporting the integration of new students.

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