

Addressing multicultural challenges and promoting equity in education: A Case Study

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Abstract

This paper addresses the challenges that arise in a multicultural school environment and focuses on the promotion of educational equity. Through the analysis of a scenario involving a student with a migrant background attending the fifth grade of primary school, issues of assessment, educational equity, and discrimination are explored, as well as the need for a school that embraces diversity. The scenario reflects real-life conditions found in multicultural classrooms and is discussed based on three main axes: (a) educational equity and justice, (b) the attitude of the family and the school community toward diversity, and (c) appropriate pedagogical practices for preventing and addressing such phenomena. Through the study and interpretation of these issues, the aim is to highlight ways in which educators can act supportively, fairly, and encouragingly for all students, regardless of origin or social biases. The paper concludes with specific intervention proposals aimed at strengthening the values of empathy, respect, and inclusion.

Keywords: Inclusive Education; Intercultural education; Educational Equity; Multiculturalism; School Climate; Diversity; Educational Policies; Empathy; Educational Justice

1. Introduction

In recent years, modern classrooms have been characterized by heterogeneity, as they include students with diverse cultural and cognitive backgrounds. Educators are called to manage a range of challenges, which extend beyond teaching itself to the broader handling of this diversity. Against this backdrop, two key concepts have emerged Intercultural education and inclusive education which have been extensively examined in academic literature. These two concepts are often mistakenly used interchangeably.

This paper, based on the above framework, critically examines a scenario set in an intercultural classroom, informed by a literature review. The scenario involves an incident of bullying directed at a student with a migrant background. The paper is divided into four sections. The initial sections attempt a conceptual clarification of the core terms. The subsequent sections provide a critical analysis of the principles of intercultural and inclusive education as applied to the scenario. In the third section, a critical perspective is offered on the school climate, while the fourth section proposes interventions aimed at preventing similar incidents. The paper concludes with a summary of the main findings.

2. Conceptual Clarification of Key Terms

2.1. Intercultural education: Conceptual Delimitation

The term *intercultural education* has been extensively discussed in both Greek and international literature over the past decades. A review of the literature reveals that Intercultural education encompasses a wide range of theoretical approaches. Its meaning and content have evolved over time, both theoretically and practically. However, a universally

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accepted definition does not exist, as the concept and content of Intercultural education are often adapted to the specific educational context (1).

The term emerged in Europe in the 1970s as an attempt to address the difficulties faced by the children of migrant workers. Initially, the concept was described using the term "education for foreigners." According to Kanakidou and Papagianni (2), Intercultural education is defined as a set of processes aimed at achieving a balance between the tensions and discriminations observed among citizens with different cultural identities. Based on this definition, Intercultural education extends beyond the realm of schooling and concerns the broader participation of these individuals in society.

A few years later, Markou (3) emphasized that Intercultural education constitutes a reformative process with the ultimate goal of transforming both the school and society, so they can allow all members to express themselves freely and preserve their cultural identity. Banks (4) argues that a primary aim of Intercultural education is to help students learn about the histories of other peoples and feel equal to one another. He also stresses that Intercultural education aims to reduce educational discrimination and improve the academic performance of foreign students. Along similar lines, Damanakis (5) highlights that Intercultural education targets cultural equality and is addressed to both immigrant and native students equally. It seeks to foster awareness, mutual tolerance, and the recognition of diverse cultural groups.

From the above definitions, it is evident that there is a multiplicity of interpretations regarding the goals and significance of Intercultural education. Some definitions focus on cultural equality, while others emphasize the similarities among cultures. In all cases, however, the common ground is the principle of accepting equality among all members of society (5).

Regarding the goals and principles of Intercultural education, these vary. According to the literature, it is emphasized that the principles of Intercultural education should be a target of every educational curriculum. A core tenet of Intercultural education is the principle of cultural equality. Additionally, one of its objectives is to provide equal opportunities to all students (5). According to Evangelou and Palaiologou (6), Intercultural education maintains that each school unit should recognize the social, cultural, and educational background of foreign students. Furthermore, Damanakis (5) supports the idea that Intercultural education should activate students' prior knowledge and experiences derived from diverse cultural environments. Finally, according to Evangelou and Palaiologou (6), key principles of Intercultural education include empathy, solidarity, and intercultural respect.

2.2. Inclusive Education

The concept of inclusive education has equally engaged researchers and the educational community. In international literature, the term is referred to as *Inclusive Education*. According to the literature, inclusive education is understood as a continuous and evolving process (7). It represents a different approach to education. Stasinou (8) states that inclusive education refers to an educational model that combats marginalization and exclusion while promoting the equal participation of all students in the educational community.

According to the principles of inclusive education, the educational system must function in a way that promotes the educational well-being of all citizens, regardless of physical, intellectual, or any other form of difference (8). Inclusion is a constant effort to change not only the content and structure of education but also the approaches applied within the educational framework (8).

3. Critique of the Scenario in Relation to the Goals of Intercultural and Inclusive Education

3.1. Case Study

In a 5th-grade classroom, students come from various backgrounds: many of Greek origin, several Roma students, and others of migrant/refugee backgrounds. One student from a migrant background, Daniela, who was born in Greece, consistently shows strong interest, fulfils all her academic responsibilities, and is considered an "exemplary" participant in the learning process. At the same time, Christos, a local student, is an excellent pupil but never submitted any assignments for the "Social and Political Education" subject, despite the teacher's requests. Daniela was the only one who submitted all the required work for this subject. To be fair, the teacher gave Daniela a grade of 10 (the highest possible) in all subjects, while Christos received a 9 in that specific subject and 10 in the rest.

After the grades were released, Christos' father came to school, expressing strong complaints to the teacher for grading his son with a 9, even though he is an outstanding student. Shortly afterward, a threatening message was found outside Daniela's home. The note was written in red ink resembling blood and read: "You've messed with the wrong people."

This scenario describes a multicultural classroom including students from Greece and various other countries. The grade assigned by the teacher to a student from a migrant background seemingly triggered threatening behaviour outside her home, presumably by the father or the student himself. The local student received a 9, while the student with a different cultural background received a 10 due to her consistent performance this disparity sparked the father's anger. The teacher aimed to reward Daniela's consistent engagement, whereas Christos did not meet the assignment expectations.

Based on the above, both inclusive and Intercultural education aim to combat racism, marginalization, and ensure equitable treatment for all students, regardless of their differences. Specifically, inclusive education's core objective is to transform the educational system to meet the needs of all students (8). This includes redesigning educational spaces, curricula, and teaching methods to reflect and support the diversity of learners (9). Other goals include fostering collaborative learning environments and adapting content delivery to match the learners' cognitive profiles (9). A key aim is also to challenge and dismantle prejudice (8).

As for Intercultural education, its objectives go beyond mere cultural coexistence. It seeks mutual respect, understanding, and acceptance of others' cultures. Kesidou (10) states that Intercultural education promotes empathy, which enables individuals to understand others' perspectives and to develop compassion for them. Another fundamental aim is the cultivation of solidarity, to strengthen collective awareness and prevent marginalization. According to Kesidou (10), a core principle is respect for all cultures, aiming to eliminate nationalistic thinking and ethnic prejudices.

Thus, both intercultural and inclusive education aim to fight exclusion and marginalization while promoting the acceptance of diversity. The scenario described includes a case of bullying against a foreign student following the assignment of grades. Such an incident is directly contrary to the principles and goals of both inclusive and Intercultural education. Specifically, the scenario suggests a lack of respect, empathy, and efforts to eliminate prejudice among students. It also reveals a failure to uphold the principles of inclusive education, such as teamwork, community spirit, and systemic educational reform. The occurrence of such hostile and bullying behaviour contradicts the values of respect, solidarity, empathy, acceptance, and inclusion. Regardless of who was responsible for the incident, such actions are inconsistent with the foundational principles and objectives of modern educational practices.

4. Critique of the Scenario in Relation to the School Climate

The school climate within an educational institution significantly affects its effectiveness and development. School climate is a broad term that encompasses the attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs of educators concerning school routines, behaviours, and interactions. It also includes the perceptions and beliefs of students regarding the school environment. According to Read et al. (11), school climate reflects the extent to which teachers, students, and parents feel safe and accepted within the school context. Another definition by Cohen et al. (12) suggests that school climate is based on individuals' experiences of school life and is shaped by rules, values, goals, interpersonal relationships, and teaching and learning practices.

The literature has identified several dimensions related to the formation of school climate, such as the development of interpersonal relationships, provision of motivation, student behaviour, and effective school leadership.

Based on the scenario described earlier, significant shortcomings are evident in terms of the school climate, particularly in the dimension of interpersonal relationships. Specifically, the scenario reveals serious gaps in relationships between students' families and educators, as well as between educators and students. For example, Christos' father approached the school expressing strong dissatisfaction with the teacher who gave his son a grade of nine.

Furthermore, the descriptions suggest a lack of close relationships between the students and the teacher, as well as among the students themselves. There also appears to be a substantial lack of communication between students' families and educators an essential component of a positive school climate (13).

Another key aspect of school climate is students' academic performance and the guidance provided by educators. In this case, student performance shows certain issues, as Christos failed to meet expectations in the specific subject, while it also appears that the teacher did not provide the necessary support or guidance.

5. Interventions

Based on the above discussion, it becomes evident that the principles of inclusive and Intercultural education are not applied in the described incident, nor does a positive school climate prevail. Additionally, a bullying incident involving a female student from a migrant background is observed. All directly involved parties bear some responsibility for the occurrence of these events. In particular, significant responsibility lies with the teachers, school administration, students' families, and the teaching staff as a whole. Therefore, the proposed interventions should target all these stakeholders.

Firstly, regarding the teacher, they seem to play the most crucial role in the prevention and management of such incidents. In general, teachers play a key role in promoting inclusive and Intercultural education, as well as in shaping a positive school climate (8). In managing a culturally diverse classroom, a teacher must ensure the quality of relationships between themselves and the students and foster mutual respect among all class members (1). Teachers should cultivate relationships of trust and friendship within the school community. Furthermore, the principles of intercultural and inclusive education can serve as intervention strategies in such incidents (7).

Teachers should apply various teaching techniques and strategies that promote these principles. Some of these include differentiated instruction, action research, and cooperative group learning (8). Through these strategies, instruction is adapted to meet the needs of all students, while encouraging collaborative learning. It is also essential for teachers to build networks of cooperation with other school staff and with the families of all students (8,10). Additionally, teachers should receive training on issues related to Intercultural education and school psychology (14).

Equally important is the role of school leadership. School leaders also play a critical role in promoting inclusive and Intercultural education and are in a position to prevent the occurrence of bullying incidents. Like teachers, school leaders must be appropriately trained in Intercultural education and actively involve teachers and families in decision-making regarding the operation of the school (8,15,16).

Therefore, actions that could be implemented in response to the incident should primarily focus on the roles of the classroom teacher and school leadership. It is crucial to apply teaching methods and strategies that promote the principles of inclusion and Intercultural education, while also enhancing collaboration between teachers, parents, and the school administration to jointly plan appropriate actions and interventions. Lastly, cooperation between schools and the broader community is essential to raise awareness on managing interculturalism and bullying (10).

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this case study reveals an incident of bullying directed at a student with a migrant background due to her academic grade in comparison with a lower grade received by another classmate. The incident occurred outside the classroom, which is identified as a multicultural setting. The scenario illustrates that the principles and goals of inclusive and Intercultural education which emphasize respect, empathy, and solidarity are not being implemented. Moreover, certain aspects of the school climate, especially those concerning interpersonal relationships, do not seem to function effectively.

It is important to highlight that students with migrant backgrounds are often targets of bullying behaviors. To prevent such occurrences, comprehensive interventions must be implemented, requiring collaboration between the school and the students' families.

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