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STIGMAS AND DISCRIMINATION: A CASE STUDY IN PORTUGAL

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Abstract
The purpose of this article is to analyse the phenomena of stigmatization and discriminatory processes in a school cluster that brings together seven schools in the North of Portugal. The text specifically addresses issues arising from the presence of immigrant students in public schools in that country. The research was anchored in Erwin Goffman's concept of stigmatization. Comprehensive interviews were conducted with the school cluster's director, the class director, and the coordinator of the Priority Intervention Educational Territories Program. The results indicated difficulties in dealing with families and students, structured in groups participating in social networks that confront each other, increasing conflict situations and incivil attitudes at school.
Keywords: School management, Stigma, Social networks, Cyberbullying, Conflicts.

ARTIGO

INTRODUCTION

This text presents and discusses data from a study conducted as part of a series of research projects carried out between 2014 and 2025, funded by the São Paulo Research Foundation (Fapesp) and the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), which examined situations of conflict and violence caused by a variety of factors, among which ethnic-racial, cultural, and socioeconomic issues of public school students located in vulnerable contexts stand out (Martins; Bravo; Oliveira, 2018; Martins; Alves, 2018).

In these previous investigations, among other aspects, the role of the media in disseminating facts involving young people, teachers, principals, and staff in situations of conflict and violence was discussed, which heightens the collective feeling of insecurity, fear, and helplessness for educational institutions to coordinate coherent actions to address these situations.

In any case, when we refer to the emergence of conflict situations that can degenerate into violence in public schools, the literature in this area presents a vast field of research and essays with different conceptions on the theme of school violence, which may refer to deviant behavior; incivility; bullying and cyberbullying; attitudes of indiscipline common among young people; and delinquent behavior (Charlot, 2002; Debarbieux; Blaya, 2002; Melo, 2013; Becker, 2008; Muñoz; Miguel, 2020; Slonje; Smith, 2008; Silva; Assis, 2017).

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The study presented here - funded by the São Paulo Research Foundation through a Foreign Research Grant (Fapesp/BPE) – was based on the assumption that schools are social facilities that occupy territorial relevance, especially in vulnerable regions, in terms of welcoming students and communities that carry with them unique cultures forged in their ethnic-racial, social, and economic origins.

To mention just a few elements of these school contexts, it is not uncommon for public schools to create potentially challenging and/or hostile environments for students who, until recently, were considered to belong to minority groups. Studies have shown, for example, that the expansion of migratory movements, as well as the demands arising from Black, LGBTQIAP+, women´s, and Indigenous movements, have a direct impact on the space and dynamics of public schools. Furthermore, these segments may not carry the norms of the so-called cultured language and the expressive elements of the more privileged segments of the society in which they live (Silva; Vilella; Oliveira, 2024; Scott; Prola; Siqueira; Pereira, 2018).

Thus, the heterogeneity of students attending public schools—in any situation and community—promotes differences in linguistic expressions, values, and cultural norms. As Cyranka and Pernambuco (2008) state, the presence of students from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic-racial backgrounds leads to linguistic variety and cultural attributes, which take on a value-laden character and establish a hierarchy among social groups.

According to Silva and Mello (2017), the presence of immigrant students encourages “prejudiced and stigmatising practices, usually based on [...] physical appearance, ethnic characteristics, manner of speaking, accent [...], status [...] or simply because society sees immigrants as some kind of threat” (p. 293, *our translation*). In the state of São Paulo, for example, some studies show that Bolivian students have been the focus of bullying and hostile jokes because they do not master the cultural norms in the context of the São Paulo public school system (Silva, 2017).

We agree with Dubet (2020) when he points out that there has been a significant increase in dynamics that incite stigmatization, discrimination in public schools, and cyberbullying practices involving students who do not fit the “norms dictated” by the society in which they live because they are different: overweight; beauty standards; vulnerable segments with much lower socioeconomic status; homosexuals; transsexuals; people with learning difficulties; people of other races and religions.

The evolution from face-to-face bullying to cyberbullying has occurred rapidly and represents the creation of an adverse and worrying scenario, especially for children and young people. The latter remains indefinite and does not depend on the presence of people to be widely disseminated; it is anchored in corrosive values regarding ethical and moral issues between aggressors and their victims.

Based on these initial notes, we seek to understand, from the perspective of actors within the management structures of a group comprising seven schools in Portugal, how dynamics are formed that encourage stigmatisation, discrimination in public schools, and cyberbullying, driven by students' and families' participation in social networks.

NOTIONS OF STIGMA AND SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION

As discussed in a previous study (Martins; Bravo; Oliveira, 2018), the University of Chicago, founded in 1892, developed a set of multidisciplinary studies known as the "Chicago School," as it involved research in sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science, philosophy, economics, and architecture. The Department of Sociology and Anthropology, which remained united until 1929, produced seminal works in the humanities and social sciences, some based on ethnographic research. These studies legitimised and consolidated techniques that are still used today: analysis of personal documents (letters and diaries); analysis of public records (newspaper articles, archives, files, minutes, reports); fieldwork based on structured and semi-structured questionnaires; interviews (including autobiographies); case studies; participant observation; discussion panels (Haguette, 2005).

In the early days, George Herbert Mead structured the concept of symbolic interactionism. However, the term itself only came into public use in 1937, coined by Herbert Blumer, who was responsible for systematizing the work of the American pragmatist philosopher, influenced by social psychology and by George Simmel (1858-1918), a German thinker who was concerned with developing original themes on sexuality, money, and sociability, with an emphasis on the relationship between the modern city and tradition (Corcuff, 2001).

The term "fieldwork" and participant observation began to be used by anthropologists who opposed research conducted behind closed doors and who defended the need to seek "the meaning of things to understand the functioning of a primitive society better." In sociology, participant observation came to be used as a less conventional and more appropriate technique for grasping the meanings of individuals' and groups' actions, developed through the symbolic interactions of everyday life (Haguette, 2005, p. 67).

In summary, the pioneering studies of the Chicago School consolidated fieldwork and incorporated other currents, such as phenomenology, Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, and the social dramaturgy of Erwing Goffman (1922-1982) – a Canadian author who also drew on the work of W. I. Thomas and G. H. Mead in the field of interactionism – becoming a central reference for studies conducted on the constitution of identities and stigmas.

Dedicated to analysing the roles of social actors, Goffman (1992) developed models of dramatisation, one of his best-known and most widely used works being The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1992). The work analyses how social actors construct roles and images based on the Other's reaction to their actions. According to the author, the structure of society causes people to appear to be what they are not, enabling the construction of social masks and performances that facilitate adaptation to the current context. In his words, "interaction [...] can be defined, in general terms, as the reciprocal influence of individuals on each other's actions when in immediate physical presence" (Goffman, 1992, p. 23).

At the end of the book, the author summarises the two roles that individuals assume in representing themselves: the actor, "a tormented impression maker involved in the all-too-human task of staging a performance

[...] and the character, an admirable figure whose spirit, strength, and excellent qualities the performance was intended to evoke" (pp. 230/231).

Another seminal work by Goffman is Stigma: Notes on the Manipulation of Damaged Identity (1981), which defines the term as a distortion between the subject's identity and the social identity constructed by the social context, a characterisation by the Other of how the person should be. From this perspective, stigmatisation processes contribute to consolidating socioeconomic inequalities; to difficulties for stigmatised subjects to exercise their rights as citizens and enter the world of work; and to other discriminatory aspects of life in society.

The term "stigma" originates from the Greek word "stigmata," referring to marks and/or scars on the body, especially those resulting from branding with hot irons on slaves, members of the lowest classes of Greek society, and individuals who committed crimes. In religions, stigma is the name given to the wounds that religious figures or saints bear on their bodies, such as the wounds of Jesus Christ.

The stigmatisation of the stranger (the Other) comes from the gaze that considers them different and,

> [...] in an extreme case, a completely evil, dangerous, or weak person. Thus, we cease to consider them a normal, complete creature, reducing them to a damaged and diminished person. This characteristic is a stigma, especially when its discrediting effect is very great—sometimes it is also considered a defect, a weakness, a disadvantage—and constitutes a specific discrepancy between virtual social identity and real social identity (Goffman, 2008, p. 12).

The author defines three different types of stigmas. First, he cites physical defects. Second, individual faults, including "tyrannical passions [...], false or rigid beliefs, dishonesty, mental disorder, addiction [...], homosexuality [...], unemployment, radical political behaviour." Third, "tribal, national, and religious stigmas" (p. 14). When referring to the self-isolation of stigmatised people who increasingly distance themselves from face-to-face contact in social relationships, Gofmann (2008) explains that there is a tendency for them to become confused, hostile, depressed, and anxious. In the age of social media—when interaction occurs virtually — these individual characteristics and feelings have gained societal space worldwide, transcending borders.

Furthermore, media convergence has altered the structure of social relations worldwide through virtual platforms and networks, complicating the bureaucratic processes of public policy and business management, thereby significantly changing interactive processes — no longer face-to-face —and intensifying daily work in private organisations and public education (Lima, 2021).

We refer to the words of Da Ampoli (2023, p. 175) to shed light on the context to which we refer:

> [...] in quantum politics, the version of the world that each of us sees is literally invisible to the eyes of others [...] According to popular wisdom, to understand, one must "put yourself in the other person's shoes," but in the reality of algorithms, this is impossible. Each person marches within their own bubble, where certain voices are heard more than others, and some facts are more prevalent than others. And we have no way of getting out of it [...] it is not our opinions that divide us, but the facts themselves.

For the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), stigma and discrimination are different concepts, but they complement each other, especially in the contemporary scenario. For the organisation, stigma is a mark that excludes a person from others and diminishes their value in the social group to which they belong. It can also refer to negative behaviours toward people with mental health problems. Discrimination is defined as an action that threatens a person or group of people and may be based on race, nationality or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or physical or mental disability.

Individuals who experience discrimination encounter difficulties finding and keeping work, education, safe housing, and health care services, which affect their social interactions with family, school, friends, the school community, and society in general. This situation is aggravated by the loss of social protection and increased social vulnerability (Castel, 2005).

In this regard, in the field of social sciences, the concept of social stigma is related to the particular characteristics of a group of individuals who do not fit into the cultural norms of a society, which ultimately results in discriminatory and stigmatizing processes against mentally ill people, black people, homosexuals, members of religious doctrines, people of other races and ethnicities, different from the society in which they live, often considered to engage in deviant behavior (Becker, 2008; Dubet, 2020).

In this regard, one of the most challenging aspects for public schools is dealing with conflict situations caused by cyberbullying, a global phenomenon that can occur in any public space — condominiums, neighbourhoods, associations—but the literature points out that the place where this type of crime occurs most often is at school, where children and young people spend most of their time.

In the specific case of the European continent, the migration process has intensified, resulting in special attention being paid to welcoming and including students of other nationalities, languages, and cultures, a challenge that, in the contemporary scenario, highlights cyberbullying and its consequences. These elements call into question the socializing function of schools, where students from other countries and/or more vulnerable segments may perceive it as a hostile space, unaccustomed to dialogically coexisting with differences and different people (Klabunde; Willekens, 2016).

However, guidelines and measures to support students displaced by humanitarian crises within education systems, networks, and institutions are not new. In the early 1960s, the United States launched a compensatory education campaign, and a few years later, Great Britain created the Educational Priority Areas (1968). In France, the Zones d'Éducation Prioritaires

(ZEP) were established in 1981. Against this backdrop, in Portugal, the Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária (TEIP) emerged in 1996, with subsequent reorientations.

METHODOLOGY

We conducted a case study, following Yin's (2015) recommendation, in which the author states that "using case studies as a research method" (p. 3) requires that they be generalisable to theoretical propositions, not represent a sample, as the method draws on analytical generalisation. Therefore, we understand that case studies enable deeper analysis and generalisations, not necessarily resulting in new knowledge, but somewhat modified and expanded knowledge, as Stake (2011) also indicates.

It should be noted that qualitative research does not seek explanatory causes for a phenomenon, but rather an understanding of the complex relationships presents in the social situations studied, with special attention to the analysis of the particular context in relation to the broader context.

Among the initial procedures, we analysed official documentary sources, taking Cellard's (2012) propositions as a reference, especially regarding the meaning of the document for the researcher, given their level of knowledge.

In the other stages—which took place simultaneously—comprehensive interviews were conducted, representing an ethical stance between interviewer and interviewees, in search of the horizontality necessary during the development of the research, as it enables attentive listening, anchored in the notion of otherness and the ethical commitment of the study.

In contrast to the idea of pre-established hypotheses and/or a priori categories, the comprehensive interview can cause a rupture, in which the final theoretical elaboration emerges from the production of data. Kaufmann (2013) states that the field can be the birthplace of a unique analysis and advises researchers to avoid delaying access to it.

We also welcome Kaufmann's (2013) recommendation that oral style is the central element in establishing a horizontal conversation, thereby avoiding superficial exchanges. Thus, we are aware that the best question may emerge from the interviewees' speech, as direct contact is always an exceptional opportunity to deepen understanding of the problem. From this perspective, the interviews fit into what Kaufmann (2013) calls research as craftsmanship, given the creativity required throughout the study and the unpredictability encountered along the way.

With this in mind, we worked with the *Agrupamento Verde*[4], which brings together seven schools in northern Portugal. Data were produced in collaboration with the principal, the coordinator of the Priority Intervention Territories (TEIP) program, and the teacher who serves as class director (DT), which served as the basis for the artisanal construction of the analytical process.

It should be noted that we did not transcribe the speeches in full, considering that oral communication is more complex and allows for deeper immersion in understanding the proposed theme. To this end, we prepared

[4]Fictitiousname.

three files comprising evolutionary tables of speeches and gestural expressions, enabling the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of the content.

CASE STUDY: LEGAL AND REGULATORY SCOPE

The TEIP program was launched in 1996 as a national government initiative, inspired by similar policy measures implemented in France (*Zones d'éducation Prioritaire*) and the United Kingdom (Education Action Zones). The common feature of this set of educational policy measures is the attempt to leverage facilities, services, and resources to develop specific strategies in schools in segregated areas, with a view to minimising the effects of the disadvantaged socioeconomic context on students' academic performance.

In this regard, TEIP schools in Portugal have access to resources that are not always available in other public schools, such as more equipment and teachers, as well as support from other professionals (psychologists, social workers, and mediators). A qualitative assessment of the program conducted by the Ministry of Education in 2010 showed that, in Portugal, the program has positive effects on reducing violence and school dropout rates. However, there was no evidence of significant improvements in academic results, with students' grades in national exams remaining clearly below the national average (Portuguese Republic/DGE/MEC/PT, 2010).

With regard specifically to conflict situations in schools, the assessment carried out in 2010 highlights an increase in the number of reports of indiscipline, but with a reduction in the severity of these incidents, which indicates a possible improvement in both the ability to identify and report incidents of indiscipline and in the response to these situations[5]. This assessment focused on the first two phases of the TEIP program, with the third phase beginning in the 2012/13 school year. According to Normative Order No. 20/2012, published in the Official Gazette on October 3, 2012,

> [...] the creation of a third TEIP program is justified, one that is more focused on the actions that schools have identified as promoting learning and educational success, to ensure greater efficiency in the management of available resources and greater effectiveness in the results achieved (Portuguese Republic/DGE/MEC/PT, 2012).

Within the framework of the TEIP program, each school draws up its own Improvement Plan, which identifies measures and actions to be taken in the school and community to ensure that the objectives of the TEIP program are achieved: promoting "the quality of learning and academic results of students"; "reducing dropout rates, absenteeism, and indiscipline among students"; fostering the "transition from school to working life"; affirming the "intervention of the school as a central educational and cultural agent in the life

[5]Information retrieved from: http://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/EPIPSE/teip_em_numeros_outubro_2010.pdf, accessed on 12/10/2024.

of the communities in which it operates" (Article 3 of Normative Order No. 20/2012).

The Improvement Plan must be coordinated with the Intervention Project of each school's principal, presented when the professional applies for this management position, elected by the school community, and aligned with the School's Educational Project (Portuguese Republic/DGE/MEC/PT, 2012).

When drawing up improvement plans, which are necessary for obtaining support from the central government, the specific interests of the community surrounding the school must be taken into account, as well as the interventions of various partners, parents' associations, municipalities, health and social action centres, companies, cultural and sports associations, among others. However, the implementation of a new management model and the reorganisation of the network — with the creation of **school clusters** and the position of principal — aimed to rationalise resources and promote greater curricular coordination between different levels of education (LIMA; SÁ; TORRES, 2020; LIMA; SÁ; TORRES, 2020; MARTINS; MACEDO, 2019; MARTINS; MACEDO, 2020). This restructuring, however, **did not extinguish the TEIPs**, as the program began to be implemented at the cluster level rather than solely at the individual school level.

Schools cluster TEIP continued to have access to targeted support, additional funding, and improvement plans to combat school failure and dropout rates in contexts of greater social vulnerability. Some schools were already part of the program. In the third phase, which began in 2012/13, the Ministry of Education (through the Directorate-General for Education) invited other schools to participate, based on an analysis of their performance indicators and the social characteristics of the contexts in which they are located (Article 6 of Normative Order No. 20/2012).

Thus, the Program has been gradually expanded: 53 units in the north; 17 in the centre; 51 in Lisbon and Vale do Tejo; 28 in Alentejo; 16 in Algarve. It is currently in its fourth generation, in accordance with Order No. 7798/2023, to be developed between 2024/2025. It has basically the same objectives as before, with differences in implementation procedures: aimed at school clusters and non-clustered schools located in areas with a high number of children and young people at risk of social vulnerability, with a view to ensuring inclusion and educational success, improving the quality of learning, and combating school dropout, covering a total of up to 170 schools in the five geographical regions of mainland Portugal.

The Group studied comprises, as already mentioned, seven educational and teaching establishments, specifically: a school with 2nd and 3rd cycles that serves as the Group's headquarters; a kindergarten; and five 1st-cycle elementary schools, three of which have kindergartens. It has six support programs: Integrated Education and Training Program (PIEF); Multidisciplinary Support Team for Inclusive Schools (EMAEI); Student and Family Support Office (GAAF); Multifunction Room; Educational Territories for Priority Intervention Program (TEIP); Network of Schools for Intercultural Education (REEI).

THE VOICE OF THE INTERVIEWEES

The principal has been teaching since 1992, has a master's degree in educational administration, and has held this position for eight years (second term in 2024). Among his motivations for becoming and continuing as principal of the school, he states that there was "encouragement from colleagues because they thought he had the right profile for school management." In fact, the principal demonstrates a calmness in facing the challenges of his intensified workload and, by all accounts, has a broad view of the problems not only of the group under his responsibility, but also of the political and social context that plagues the country in the current scenario.

Portugal has been receiving immigrants from various regions and countries, in the context of increased global migration due to political crises and climate disasters, religious persecution, and ethnic and racial problems, which cause hunger, suffering, and slave labour. Contemporary migratory movements originate most strongly from underdeveloped countries or regions towards developed countries, as people migrate believing they will leave behind conditions of economic, social, or moral misery to experience dignity and respect in "other lands."

Table 1 clarifies the presence of immigrant students in public schools in the locality analysed.

Table 1 – Nationality of students in the location examined

Nationality	Nº of students	Nationality	Nº of students	Nationality	Nº of students
Andorra	1	Guatemala	1	Pakistan	13
Angola	29	Guiné-Bissau	2	Peru	2
Argentina	11	India	3	United Kingdon	2
Brazil	544	Iran	1	Romania	5
Cape Verde	9	Iraq	2	Russia	10
China	7	Itaty	8	São Tomé and Príncipe	1
Colombia	17	Jordan	1	Sweden	1
Ivory Coast	4	Marocco	2	Switzerland	2
Cuba	2	Nepal	4	Tunisia	1
Egypt	1	Nicaragua	4	Turkey	1
USA	2	Nigeria	1	Ukraine	15
Filipinas	1	Norway	1	Venezuela	7
França	3	Netherlands	1		

Source:https://www.dge.mec.pt/bullying-e-ciberbullying.

Table 2 shows the significant presence of immigrant students from different countries in the school group studied.

Table 2 - Children and students of non-Portuguese nationality, by school cycle and nationality

Schooling cycle	Nationality	Total
Preschool	Angola, Argentina, Brazil, China, Colombia Ivory Coast, United States, India, Iran, Jordan, Nicaragua, Russia, Sweden, Venezuela, Peru.	89
1º Cycle	Angola, Argentina, Brazil, Cape Verde, China, Colombia, Ivory Coast, Cuba, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Russia, Venezuela, Ukraine, Italy, France, Nepal, Norway, São Tomé and Príncipe; Romania, Philippines, Guatemala, Morocco, Switzerland, Peru, Turkey.	297
2º Cycle	Angola, Argentina, Brazil, Cape Verde, China, Colombia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Pakistan, United Kingdom, Russia, Venezuela, Ukraine, Italy, Egypt, France, Netherlands, Iraq, Nepal, Switzerland.	164
3º Cycle	Andorra, Argentina, Brazil, Cape Verde, Colombia, Ivory Coast, United States, Guinea-Bissau, Cuba, India, Nicaragua, Pakistan, United Kingdom, Russia, Ukraine, Iraq, Nepal, Nigeria, Tunisia.	172
	Total AEFS	722 (+/- 42,5%)

Source: Internal Evaluation Report. Provided by *Agrupamento Verde*, 2024/2025.

ARTIGO

As can be seen, the location examined has a significant number of foreign students, with a strong presence from Brazil. It should be noted that contingents of Portuguese immigrants settled in America, Africa, and other parts of central Europe. However, today there has been a reversal of this migratory flow, with Portugal receiving immigrants from former colonies and other countries, including Brazil, which has been one of the leadingcentres of emigration there in recent years.

The *Agrupamento Verde* has 722 foreign students, out of a total of 1,500 students, from preschool to the 3rd cycle. These students come from 38 different countries, representing around 42.5% of the total student population. This challenge is compounded by the School Group's possibilities and limitations in offering education that meets the needs of students who carry cultural symbols—language, habits, customs—that are foreign to Portuguese society. The principal says that the school's history of ethnic diversity goes back some time:

> The biggest problem at this school [...] was the Romani ethnic group, which was very large. At present, their numbers are negligible. And in this regard, there is a way of working [...] you passed by ten today and didn't notice. And this is the school's goal: there is no distinction [...]

> they are integrated, and we have the Student and Family Support Office. [...] The biggest task begins here, working with families. With the work of the Student and Family Support Office and the Class Directors (DT), we are able to integrate the students. Not all problems are eliminated [...] we have the Reception and Learning Recovery Team [...] the main work is with the parents.

The director points out problems of coexistence and a lack of tolerance, particularly among parents in the Brazilian community. It can be inferred that the incidence of violence in Brazilian schools, historically analyzed in studies in the field (Sposito, 1998; Ceccon et al., 2009; Martins; Machado, 2015), has created a culture of fear and daily reactions from parents facing problems of different kinds, transferring this feeling of helplessness to schools in Portugal, whose reality is very distant and different from what occurs in Brazil. In the principal's words:

> Parents in Brazil are always on alert... at the slightest thing, they turn up at the school gates saying, “I don't know who hit my child.” There are always conflicts between kids, and they almost always start like this: “We're pushing each other, we're playing,” and five minutes later, they're throwing real punches at each other. The other kid calls his dad, and his dad comes to the school. They call me and say, “I'm going to file a complaint against the school.”

The director adds:

> Parents create WhatsApp groups... And sometimes people come here and say to me, ‘Do you want to see what they wrote to me here?’ [...] And then I've had three or four parents from one class come here. ‘So, is something going on, is there a problem?’ 'No, everything's fine. We've come to ask for help in resolving conflicts on WhatsApp.'

The principal's statement also indicates situations of self-segregation among students, and insults and humiliation among parents via WhatsApp, behaviors that take on the contours of incivility (Melo, 2013) and that can also be classified as flaming, that is, “sending angry, rude, and vulgar messages about a person to an online group or to that same person via email or other text messages” (Amado; Matos; Pessoa; Jager, 2009, p.309).

Regarding the formation of student groups, the principal states that students from other nationalities, such as Chinese and Russian, tend to form small groups, partly because learning Portuguese is difficult. In contrast, Brazilian students do not want to attend Portuguese classes because they believe that the language is the same, but there are idiomatic expressions that must be considered.

A science teacher, who kindly welcomed us to explain how classes work, recounted a case that illustrates the problems arising from students' cultural and linguistic differences:

> The students submitted a written assignment. The work of a Brazilian student was smudged, and the teacher said, "Your work is smudged, you will have to redo it." The next day, the student's mother came to the school to speak with the teacher because the student had told her that the teacher had called him stupid (Record taken from an informal conversation with the teacher during a visit to the school).

The Class Director (DT) and the TEIP Coordinator report even greater difficulties for other foreign students with language, as they do not know Portuguese, but are also not fluent in English:

> They themselves have some difficulties, often with integration. We see this in primary schools [...] before, they learned more. When we received a Ukrainian student, he would immediately try to get along with the Portuguese children and learn Portuguese more easily. Now we don't see that happening [...] if there is a Ukrainian and a Russian, they communicate with each other. [...] When communicating with each other, they don't use Portuguese; they communicate with those who understand them (Interview DT).

The TEIP coordinator points out that the Group needs to join forces to welcome and guide parents as they reintegrate socially in Portugal, as they often lack legal documents, which can heighten their sense of "being a foreigner" and leave them without social protection. In his words:

> [...] there is a concern to try to understand the difficulties these people face, sometimes even legal issues, in terms of documents, health, and social security. If these issues are not properly resolved, it will undoubtedly have an impact on the student's socio-emotional well-being and academic success [...] we try as far as possible to integrate these situations into the reception equation (interview with TEIP Coordinator).

Concerning new students, the TEIP director explains the admission and orientation process and the role of the student mentor, who is responsible for welcoming newcomers:

> The support office works with the Class Directors. Generally speaking, if a student applies for a place and there is one available, they are admitted. There is a

> preliminary interview with the parent and the student. During the initial interview, they complete a short intake form. In addition to the usual personal and social information, we also look at the student's background, what year they are in, whether they bring relevant documents to the school, any medical reports, health centre reports, or psychological reports, and any learning difficulties, so that we can make an initial assessment. This interview is usually scheduled for the day of enrollment. First, to try to place the student in the ideal class, as far as possible. Where, for example, a student could be a student tutor. Imagine we have a boy from Ukraine, and we already have a Ukrainian student in a class who speaks Portuguese and Ukrainian [...] if there is a vacancy in that class, we place him there because he is an immediate reference student, especially given that great barrier: language. When they don't speak, if there is a student from their country who speaks the same language, he can serve as a translator, but he can also serve as a host, right?

The TEIP director goes on to explain the importance of students understanding their role in this initial welcoming process, and how the school seeks to encourage them:

> [...] We try to prepare the class beforehand, saying, “Guys, tomorrow, or in two days, a new classmate will arrive. It's important that he be welcomed. Let's be friendly,” that is, try to motivate them [...], so that he's not just a stranger who fell from the sky [...] First contact and first impressions often make all the difference. [...] This is a process that has been refined, and the Student and Family Support Office does it very well, not least because the volume of students is so large that practice helps, right? If it were a one-off thing... it almost becomes routine. We have requests nearly every day; we're talking about 42% of foreign students.

Finally, the TEIP director points out incidents that occur in the learning process of foreign students, because they do not master the Portuguese language, and many of them do not speak English either, which makes it difficult for teachers to deliver content that must be covered in a given time frame:

> We encounter difficulties in learning because it raises resource issues. There are never enough, and sometimes when we allocate resources to one class, we are taking them away from another. Another thing we have created, but which is still in its infancy, is what we call the learning support and recovery team [...] these are teachers who

> have a few hours of schoolwork in their timetable but are not part of the teaching component, so they are not teaching classes. These teachers are assigned to provide more individualised support to students who come from outside, especially those with language difficulties. I am talking about the case of a Chinese boy; we had a teacher who was with him twice a week. He does not speak English [...] The first strategy was to walk him around the school so that he could get to know the spaces, understand where the cafeteria is, understand where the copy room is, and where he can make photocopies.

In short, the statements show that foreign students – seeking to integrate into a society with different habits, customs, and daily practices from their country of origin – can, as Goffman (1992) points out, lead to a distortion between the subject's identity and the social identity constructed in context. Despite all the efforts made by the school team (which are not a few), there is still a process of stigmatisation underway, due to socioeconomic and ethnic-racial inequalities among students and their families. Added to this is the social issue of the difficulties parents face in asserting their rights as foreign nationals, in seeking new documents that confer social identity in the country where they live, and in entering the world of work.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS

The data indicate intense commuter mobility, linked to the evolution of migratory flows and the growing urbanization of the surrounding area, generating complex effects on the conurbation process, which promotes adverse developments that affect the difficulty of implementing social policies integrated with education, given the peculiarities of participation of the immigrant population, which has greater difficulties in social and economic integration into local society.

In the case of the cluster studied, the political justifications are similar and revolve around defending the educational project common to all schools in that group (a mandatory item for the establishment of clusters); the need for a sequential and more coordinated path for students as they move between cycles; strengthening the pedagogical capacity of schools; rationalizing educational resources; and exchanges between different cycles of basic and preschool education. Each member unit retains its name, and the grouping receives a different designation, with all units belonging to the same municipality (the responsible local authorities must justify exceptions).

Parents can express their enrollment preferences to the School Group, recognising that Portugal is experiencing two phenomena simultaneously: a decline in the young population (which affects enrollment distribution across the country) and an increase in the number of children and young people whose parents are immigrants.

However, the comments made by the Class Director (DT) clarify some problems: a lack of greater financial support for the development of some

activities; a need for greater administrative support; and a lack of support staff (insufficient number of employees). This dynamic makes it difficult for the Group to resolve social, economic, and immigration issues that resonate in the school more quickly. As mentioned by the interviewees, these are intense problems with immigrant students of various nationalities, with greater exposure to Brazilian parents. As the class director pointed out, the fact that it is the same language seems to facilitate, but in reality, it hinders, because terms that appearthe same are not.

However, the way the interviewee explains the social and economic problems affecting relations within the school demonstrates clarity and mastery of the community served by the Group, as there is a collective effort to internalise the school's management and operating mechanisms.

The physical space is worth mentioning as well. At the school visited, the physical spaces are well distributed and clean, with special rooms for assisting students outside class hours (spaces where they receive individual or small-group assistance for learning and assessment problems) and an organised library. The teachers' room has its own internal canteen; students also have their own canteen and do not use cash for payment, as they have a card on which their expenses are recorded. For “assisted” students, these expenses are subsidised by the government.

The data also revealed that economic and social inequality are worsening among a part of the population served by the Group, and that there is a poverty scale among parents, given the difficulty of achieving greater social mobility for specific segments of immigrants. For example, the TEIP director's statement is enlightening regarding conflicts arising from the stigmatisation of Brazilian parents who do not yet have permanent residence status or formal employment. Those who have already met these citizenship requirements make discriminatory statements about others. In other words, a framework (Goffman, 1992) of inequalities within the same group — in this case, parents of the same nationality—is established within a group of schools.

The organisational and pedagogical management aspects of the group are noteworthy—the flow of information, the organisation of pedagogical meetings, the organisation of meetings with students and parents, the development of plans, projects, and instruments requested by the Ministry of Education,and the maintenance of physical space and infrastructure— well coordinated across all seven units in the locality.

Another recurring issue in the statements refers to cyberbullying practices. Information technologies — through social media — enable everyone to spread insults to classmates, teachers, and families. Even if the management team tries to monitor situations that could be seen as cyberbullying, it is not always possible to grasp all the elements that permeate the relationships of groups of young people who often seem to be just having fun, but who mock their peers for being different in various ways: oral and body language; belonging to vulnerable segments; cultural values that differ from those that permeate Portuguese society, etc.

We agree with Dubet (2020) when he points out that we live and experience a scenario of multiple inequalities in school policies, as these “focus on poor neighbourhoods, immigrant students, dropouts, and students with physical disabilities” (p. 39). In short, the current scenario is marked by a lack of

outrage over humanitarian and climate crises and living and working conditions that drive increasingly intense migration processes, combined with the centrality of digital technologies, which exacerbate disruptive behaviours. From this same perspective, we can affirm that the escalation of poverty in public schools — as in the case analysed — is multifactorial, given that school territories are expressions of unique forms of inequality.

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