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Toward decolonizing methodologies: intersecting points of view of teachers and newly arrived immigrant students regarding inclusion

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Abstract. Although children's voices are now widely recognized and prioritized by many researchers across disciplines (Sudarsan et al., 2022), this approach remains controversial (Espinosa, 2022), especially when working with migrant and displaced children (Due et al., 2014). It remains unclear to what extent such research is truly attuned to children's lived realities and prioritizes a decolonial methodological logic in its interpretation (Smith, 2021). *Objectives:* This article aims to explore this question through a research project examining the intersecting points of view of teachers and newly arrived immigrant students (NAIS) in elementary schools in Quebec, regarding pedagogical practices that promote their sociocultural and academic inclusion. *Methods:* Data collection methods included comprehensive interviews, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews conducted in three classes across different schools in Quebec of three teachers and seven NAIS. By presenting different practices-each involving the teacher and one or more students-we explore the extent to which the concept of student inclusion is articulated and perceived by both groups. *Results:* Preliminary results reveal a divergence in points of view between students and their teachers, and show that the priorities identified by students differ from those emphasized by teachers. *Conclusion:* This illustrates that inclusion cannot be defined only from the teachers' point of view, but instead, needs to attend to its articulation by teachers and students. The study also highlights the importance of creating 'safe' spaces in educational research where students can fully express their perceptions and needs, which speaks to the urgent need to attend to the decolonization of methodologies, in this case implying a form of deep listening and attunement to diverse voices.

Keywords: Decolonizing Methodologies, Inclusion, Student Voice.

Introduction

In the past decade, many studies have been conducted with the aim of taking students' voices into account, using various methodologies and data collection tools. This relates to efforts to enhance students' agency and empowerment in the school context by recognizing their points of view in research to inform education policies and practices. However, this requires specific data collection tools that allow students to express themselves freely and without constraints. This also requires researchers to critically reflect on their positionalities and approaches before, during, and after data collection. In fact, despite developments in the field, research "about" students and "for" them, representing their voices or silencing them, rather than "with them" as partners in the research still dominates educational research (Lyons et al., 2022). In the field of educational research, important questions are being raised about the approaches and tools necessary to create safe spaces for students' voices in research. Researchers are increasingly questioning how to interact with students in ways to uplift their voices, and how to analyze and disseminate results without undermining or marginalizing students' discourses. These concerns highlight the responsibility of researchers to contribute to the transformation of dominant narratives of research and attend more deeply to the manner minority and marginalized youth narratives are centered in research in ways indicative of a decolonial logic in research (Datta, 2018; Ewing, 2022). In this regard, this article aims to explore the intersecting points of view of teachers and newly arrived immigrant students (NAIS) in elementary schools in Quebec (Note 1) concerning pedagogical practices that promote their sociocultural and academic inclusion, with a focus on the students' points of view.

Students' Voices in Research

Students' voices in research (SVR) are now widely recognized and prioritized by many researchers across disciplines (Fortier et al., 2024; Fournier-Dubé et al., 2024; Koubeissy et al., 2023; Lachaine, 2019; Lafantaisie et al., 2022; Malo & Rahm, 2014; Papazian-Zohrabian et al., 2024; Rahm et al., 2022; Steinbach, 2015; Sudarsan et al., 2022; Timmis et al., 2024). Attending to students' voices in research today can be understood as implying a paradigm shift that positions students as having agency and a voice, and as having the capacity to act and reflect on their own experiences in their own terms (Espinosa, 2022), reflections that are also understood as key to improving schools' practices and policies (Brasof & Levitan, 2022 a). From a methodological standpoint, student voice research or SVR calls for thoughtful strategies to collect data and gain a deep understanding of students' experiences and points of view by doing research *with* and not about youth (Fournier-Dubé et al., 2024; Lafantaisie et al., 2022). According to Brasof and Levitan (2022 a), SVR can offer rich insights into their educational experiences, a point of view, however, that has remained obscured in much research still today due to an enduring reluctance to engage directly with students and learn from their lived experiences. This

reluctance is explained in part by the still prevalent positivist epistemologies deeply rooted in colonial methodologies (Smith, 2021). These methodologies, through their tools, objectives, and emphasis on objectivity, have limited engagement with and access to students' experiences and realities. It resulted in research driven by objectives put forth by researchers themselves rather than objectives that are co-created with students and teachers in practice. Yet, such approaches to research have become increasingly questioned, as it does not foster researchers' critical reflections about their research objectives and their own positionings in research and also rejects "Other" ways of thinking (Thambinathan and Kinsella, 2021). In educational research, such research imaginaries have consistently overlooked students' perspectives (Messiou, 2017). This, in turn, has limited knowledge production related to students' voices about their learning, interests, and experiences in school, thus compromising advancement and adaptation in teaching practices.

However, SVR still remains controversial (Espinosa, 2022), especially when working with children who are marginalized, such as those who are migrants and displaced (Due et al., 2014). Smith (2021) argues that, to this date, even SVR grounded research is often not well attuned to children's lived realities nor does it prioritize a decolonial methodological logic that fully recognizes the richness and diversity of knowledge produced by students as essential for understanding and depicting reality. For instance, Brasof and Levitan (2022 a) emphasize the importance of interviews as open spaces for students to offer critiques and develop a critical reflection about their own experiences, which is not necessarily the case in most research. Students need to be conscious about their own reality and the systemic factors that perpetuate oppression and injustice, both at the societal and scholar levels. They also need spaces to express the injustices they experience. This can be particularly challenging for immigrant students with recent histories of immigration and coming from linguistic and cultural backgrounds that differ from those of the host society where the project is taking place. Marginalized students too might struggle to make their voices heard in cases where methodological tools are not fully adapted to their realities. The challenge of SVR is to free students from conformity to the system, especially when they are just beginning to navigate it, in order to collect authentic data produced by them through meaningful tools that allow them to fully express their points of view about their experiences.

Involving students' voices in research therefore requires an "activist stance" (Lyons et al., 2022, p. 98) by researchers in order to develop strategies to consider students as partners in the research process. To that end, Lyons et al. (2022) draw on Mitra and Gross's Student Voice Pyramid (SVP) to understand the level of student involvement in research. Based on a review of 200 articles related to studies centered around student voice, they found that the majority focus solely on the first level, which is "students being heard", while the second level, "collaborating with adults", and the third level, "building capacity for leadership", are much less

frequently addressed. This means that students still act as passive participants whose points of view are collected to serve the research objectives rather than their own interests or needs. In this regard, Messiou et al. (2022) have argued that studying the diversity of students' points of view in research needs to be seen as different from simple collections of viewpoints; instead, student's visions have to be valued in their own right and guide the transformation and improvement of education. However, several obstacles persist limiting this kind of construction of knowledge, such as the power dynamics, stated above and further discussed in the following section.

The Student Voice Research Framework (SVRF)

The Student Voice Research Framework (SVRF) was developed in order to challenge the power dynamics between researchers and students, repositioning both as participants (Brasof & Levitan, 2022 b). In other words, the SVRF is intended to prepare researchers to conduct studies with youth and consists of four interconnected elements: intersubjectivity, reflexivity, power dynamics, and context.

Intersubjectivity refers to the mutual understanding that needs to be developed between researchers and students. It requires researchers to listen more attentively and engage meaningfully with students. Reflexivity involves researchers being not only aware of their own biases and recognizing how their personal histories—particularly their childhood and schooling experiences—may influence their interpretation of student voices, but also how their biases and positionings color knowledge production and the dynamics with others in research. Reflexivity, understood here as a level of awareness about ones' biases and positioning can then contribute to a deeper understanding of power dynamics between researchers and students. Acknowledging that students are part of a non-dominant group is essential for addressing these imbalances. Finally, researchers must choose methodological strategies that align with students' lived contexts, including their experiences, cultures, points of view, and forms of knowledges (Brasof & Levitan, 2022 b). In this regard, Frick (2022) evokes the concept of the ethical researcher, noting that researchers always hold certain privileges that affect the co-construction of relationships with students, thereby limiting their agency and voices. Hence, to create safe spaces for dialogue is something to work towards jointly with youth.

In alignment with the SVRF, Wall et al. (2022) argued that recognizing power dynamics is a first step towards addressing the imbalance that usually exist in research with students. They identified eight interrelated factors to consider in research with students: definition of students' voices, power distribution, inclusion of all students, listening, time and space for students to feel comfortable, approaches, processes and purposes. That said, involving students' voices in research is not only about soliciting their participation, but about transforming the entire research

process, both relationally and physically in order to allow students to express themselves in ways that then become agents of change. We situate this transformation within a decolonial perspective, which we will explore in the following section.

Decolonization and Decolonial Methodologies in Education

Decolonization “critically examines the underlying assumptions that inform the research, and challenges the widely accepted belief that Western methods and ways of knowing are the only objective, true science” (Datta, 2018, p. 11). According to the same author, decolonization is becoming an increasingly important imperative for research to contribute effectively to participants’ communities and address community needs through responsible, ethical and empowering research practices. Decolonizing research is best understood as a long and progressive process that involves critical reflection enabling researchers to recognize their privileges as well as the power they hold in research and over knowledge, awareness of their potential instrumentalization by the system, and to adopt more situated approaches that are sensitive to the dynamics of the studied groups and uplifting to the involved members (Koubeissy & Audet, submitted). Smith’s (2021) view of decolonizing research calls on researchers to engage with theories and data generated from marginalized points of view, in ways that serve the interests and purposes of those communities. She defines decolonization as “a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels. For researchers, one of those levels is concerned with having a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practices” (Smith, 2021, p. 22).

This being said, decolonization does not mean researchers should reject all Western methods and tools, but rather that they need to break down the barriers between themselves and research participants and favor horizontal rather than hierarchical relations (Datta, 2018; Smith, 2021). Zavala (2013) explains that the focus of decolonizing research is not primarily on inventing new methods of data collection or analysis. Instead, it implies the creation of the conditions that make decolonizing research possible. It goes beyond selecting tools or techniques; it involves setting the agenda *with* participants, valuing their knowledge production, and critically examining who benefits from the outcomes. It is going beyond extractive research practices. Datta (2018) identified many challenges embedded in the initial training of researchers within Western research traditions. These include a disconnection from practical life and culture; a lack of clarity around researchers’ responsibilities toward participants; an emphasis on Western forms of neutrality that create distance from participants; and the disregard for participants’ cultural protocols and everyday realities in favor of formal research guidelines. This is rooted in a colonial research culture that claims objectivity and neutrality, often at the expense of social

engagement, and risks reducing the researcher to a mere technician, disconnected from societal issues.

To bridge the gap, several researchers opted for participatory and collaborative methodologies. An analysis of numerous articles related to SVR revealed a variety of methodologies and data collection tools used by researchers, including collaborative inquiry projects (Brasof & Levitan, 2022 b) that focus on what students want to learn and why; participatory approaches that emphasize working with students rather than on them (Koubeissy, 2019; Koubeissy et al., 2023; Montesano & Papazian-Zohrabian, accepted; Borja et al., 2017; Brasof & Levitan, 2022 a; Due et al., 2014; Fournier-Dubé et al., 2024; Lafantaisie et al., 2022; Muela et al., 2019; Timmis et al., 2024); and case studies with students aiming to deeply understand their experiences (Fortier et al., 2024;). This diversity of approaches reflects the various ways researchers engage with students' voices, considering many factors such as the research context, the study's objectives, the researchers' own positionality, as well as the students' interest and their willingness to contribute to the study according to their own points of view. For instance, Zavala (2013) opted for participatory research with marginalized communities, learning from their experiences and developing praxis to change the status quo. This stands in contrast to the values and cultural norms of mainstream researchers, which allow them to neglect the voices of marginalized and oppressed groups and avoid their "epistemic responsibility" (Banks, 1998). The epistemological question is therefore one of the facets of decolonial thinking, which aims to give marginalized populations back their voices, while recognizing and valuing their history and experiences (Koubeissy & Audet, submitted).

This distance between positionalities calls for critical reflexivity as a central approach to decolonizing research, particularly for those working with populations oppressed by colonial legacies (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). In addition to critical reflexivity, these authors propose other decolonial practices when conducting research with such populations: fostering reciprocity and respect for self-determination, embracing "Other(ed)" ways of knowing, and embodying a transformative praxis. This methodological reflection allows researchers to question the status quo in research standards and norms from a critical and reflective lens and enables them to adopt a broader perspective on what it means to participate in and take to heart decolonization in light of the conduct of research and research methods (Koubeissy & Audet, 2025).

In terms of decolonial methodologies, Zavala (2016) identified three major, interrelated, and dynamic strategies in education projects: counter-storytelling, healing, and reclaiming. Counter-storytelling involves engaging participants in dialogue and reflection, helping them name their social worlds in order to understand and disrupt their present situations as shaped by colonialism and its structural dimensions. It is closely tied to forms of remembering within/against colonality. This practice of remembering includes aspects of healing that involves two practices:

social/collective healing and spiritual/psychological healing. Finally, reclaiming involves recovering who people are in terms of cultural identities, practices, and relation to place.

In our article, decolonizing methodology is conceptualized as amplifying the voices of newly arrived immigrant students (NAIS) in elementary schools in Quebec. In conformity with Lyons et al. (2022), the activist stance in this research is about challenging the traditional relationship between teachers and students through drawing on students' narrative to better understand teachers' inclusive practices in place or adaptations through the integration of meaningful tools and pedagogies. This is done by exploring the intersecting points of views of teachers and NAIS, regarding pedagogical practices that they jointly understand and identify as promoting their sociocultural and academic inclusion and well-being in a classroom. In the following section, we explore research methodologies that engage with students' voices from such a decolonial perspective.

Methodologies for Engaging with Students' Voices in a Context of Diversity, within a Decolonial Perspective

In Australia, Due et al. (2014) examined the educational experiences of children aged 5-7 who recently arrived as refugees or migrants and for whom English is not their first language. The study follows a participatory methodology aiming to understand how these children define and interpret the idea of "succeeding" at school. Visual methods for data collection were used such as drawings, photographs and "smiley face" scales to enable children to share their school perceptions, including their sense of belonging, social relationships and educational preferences to bypass language barriers.

In Greece, Kefallinou and Howes (2024) employed a qualitative approach based on multiple case studies to explore in depth the inclusive experiences of 12 students in two English and two Greek secondary schools. Data was collected over a two-year period (2015-2017) through several collection tools, including individual interviews and participatory methods. The latter included photography activities, allowing students to visually share their perceptions and delve deeper into their own experiences of school inclusion.

Similarly, in Quebec, Steinbach (2015) highlighted the experiences of young immigrants in their process of social integration in Quebec, focusing on their own voices and the challenges they face. She adopted a qualitative and longitudinal approach based on three series of group interviews with 31 newly arrived immigrant students aged 12 to 16. The first series focused on migration experiences, language learning, and academic and social integration. The second series, conducted a year later, explored students' perceptions of the host class, the school system and the welcome they received from Quebec students. The third series, conducted

two years after their arrival, examined the integration strategies adopted by the students.

Similarly, Lachaine (2019) gave voice to refugee youth through the cocreation of digital stories of their immigration trajectory. Documenting this process helped center the youths' voices, offering a healing experience as their complex journeys were no longer silenced but shared with others in a safe space. The stories also make visible a vision of hope and future imagining giving voice to dreams yet to be accomplished.

Malo and Rahm (2014) explored youth voice in an afterschool science program for girls only, documenting at the time with them the learning opportunities that setting offered over time, as they pursued science fair projects and later contributed to a scientific newsletter. Given an interest in mobility and learning trajectories of young women with histories of immigration, that initial study was transformed into a longitudinal case study with six youth, now young adults, offering rich insights into their navigations of the educational landscape over time through youth-centered participatory arts-based methods, resulting in the co-creation of a video summarizing their histories in person and navigations of the school system and out-of-school activities over time as first generation immigrants. The co-creation process of that video led to deep conversations about their identity struggles and integration, the ongoing challenges travelling to their home countries imposed on them as they came to see themselves as foreigners once in their home country, or as living between two worlds. Co-creation and dialogue circles also led to the voicing of future dreams and the sharing of uplifting and challenging educational experiences in higher education. While this work focused on youth voice, it also introduced decolonizing methods, opening up the space for youth to own the research and contribute to its diffusion at meetings and through joint publications (See Malo & Rahm, 2014).

Also, in Quebec, Montesano (2023) conducted a multiple case study examining the inclusion of three French-speaking newly arrived immigrant students aged 11-12 in elementary mainstream classrooms. The study involved semi-structured interviews with each student accompanied by their parent, as well as several members of the school staff including their teachers. The findings revealed that each inclusion can present challenges, regardless of the student's strengths and characteristics, and requires reciprocal adaptation on the part of the school.

In a Canadian case study exploring the inclusion of marginalized students' voices in educational research, Fortier et al. (2024) used a multiple case study of six to eight adolescents aged 12-17 years with a focus on how they reintegrated into mainstream classrooms following a stay in a specialized school. The researchers structured their approach around 4 pillars: offering a culturally safe space for expression (the space), using adapted tools to support expression such as the chronological grid and concept maps (the voice), guaranteeing active listening (the audience), and ensuring that testimonies concretely influence educational policies (the

influence). Interviews were conducted with each student using a chronological grid of his or her school career and a concept map. The latter enabled the student to record in images and words the themes concerning his or her reintegration aligned with their own concerns. Then, based on the concept map, a participatory narrative interview was conducted with the students to describe in depth their experience in the mainstream classroom. Drawing on this selective methodological overview, the next section presents what the students themselves reported during the research.

What do students from different contexts have to say about their sociocultural and academic inclusion?

A literature review on SVR has identified several factors that contribute to a good school experience for students, including those from a migrant background, based on their own points of view.

In a qualitative study based on focus groups with secondary students experiencing difficulties in Quebec, discussing educational mediation (Kalubi & Houde, 2008), students primarily spoke about their relationships with teachers and the impact these relationships had on their learning. They emphasized that kind gestures from teachers not only supported their academic progress, but also fostered their motivation and identities as learners. From their perspective, it is the teachers' attitudes, pedagogical choices, and approaches to classroom management that make the difference. Students valued teachers and classroom environments that offer opportunities to be actively engaged and responsive to their needs.

These findings are supported by other research in different contexts. According to Kefallinou and Howes (2024), students reported that having positive relationships with both peers and teachers has a strong influence on their commitment to school. In the same vein, Scarparolo and MacKinnon (2024) found that students' engagement depends largely on the attention they receive from their teachers and the value placed on what they say in class. Students' inclusion, particularly their engagement, also relies on a supportive school climate and teacher support, both inside and outside the classroom (Pazey et al., 2024). This last study revealed that when teachers actively support students, particularly by implementing real-life activities, these take on a deeper meaning for students. Pazey et al. (2024) also highlighted that students feel free and more creative when they have the opportunity to choose what they want to learn, as well as to participate in class discussions. This approach fosters greater autonomy and involvement on the part of students, contributing positively to their learning. Similarly, Dimitrellou and Male (2020) concluded that in order to foster student participation and engagement, it is essential to provide interesting and stimulating lessons. Without this, students may feel unheard, and their points of view may be overlooked. Hulme et al. (2024) suggested that students who feel seen, heard and recognised in their learning environment, and who have access to a safe space or a trusted person to confide in, are more likely to develop a sense of closeness with adults, which in turn boosts

their motivation. Finally, on a larger scale, Hassani and Kanouté (2023) reported that while some students pointed to the efforts of school actors, particularly teachers, as having a positive impact on the quality of their socio-educational experience, others highlighted the contribution of their community in developing their resilience.

Other elements can be obstacles to a good school inclusion. In her study, Steinbach (2015) revealed that beyond the language barrier, other obstacles persist such as personal challenges, shyness, fear of rejection and discomfort when approaching Quebec peers. These factors can hinder immigrant students' willingness to make connections, even when they want to interact with their peers. Differences in culture and values also play an important role in inclusion challenges. Some immigrant students perceive discrepancies between their cultural norms and those of their Quebec peers, which can create distance and make interactions more complex. Also, in their article that addresses the voices of immigrant students through an analysis of teacher-student interactions in multiethnic elementary classrooms, Koubeissy et al. (2023) highlighted the complexity of students' appropriation of support tools, which is influenced by their cultural and linguistic experiences, as well as by the quality of their relationships with teachers. The students reported various elements related to what they liked or disliked in terms of classroom support. While one shared that she did not like being supported in front of the whole class and felt embarrassed, another appreciated small-group support, where she could ask questions among a few peers. A third student explained that she preferred working on her own. Moreover, Montesano and Papazian-Zohrabian (2024) identified several obstacles to the inclusion of French-speaking newly arrived immigrant students in elementary mainstream classrooms, including differences in teaching and evaluating methods, contrasting conceptions of student-teacher relationships, and challenges in forming and maintaining friendships with peers.

Methods. How did we engage with student voice in a context of primary schools in Québec?

Methodology and epistemological posture

The main study (Note 2) explores the pedagogical practices that promote sociocultural and academic inclusion of newly arrived immigrant students (NAIS) in Quebec by centering the students' point of view while also considering that of their teacher. The study draws on qualitative methodology (Savoie-Zajc, 2011), implying multiple interpretative case studies (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). A larger study focuses on three teachers working with NAIS in their mainstream classroom, whether or not these students previously attended a welcoming (Note 3) class, implying both advantaged and disadvantaged schools. For the purpose of this article, we focus on a grade 6 teacher, Cara, and her two NAIS: Naomie and Eva (Note 4). Our methodology enables a cross-examination of the intersecting points of view of Cara and the students, with particular emphasis on their

voices and their experiences at school. We thus aimed for a more inclusive approach within decolonial perspective that centered student voice. We focused on the elements raised by these students in order to better understand how they experienced their inclusion. We believe that amplifying the voices of NAIS in research enhances their agency and informs both teachers and researchers about which practices they perceived as inclusive. For example, one of the students raised several times situations of bullying experienced at lunchtime, that could have had an effect on her sense of inclusion and belonging. The intersection between her voice and her teacher's enabled us, as researchers, to move away from the normative approach to documenting inclusive practices and to redefine this concept based on the perceived realities of the ground. Divergence in points of view between students and their teacher illustrates that inclusion cannot be defined only from the latter's point of view but also needs to consider the students' and as such, forms a dialectic between the two. This implicated that the study provides students with spaces to express their opinions and ideas free from the influence of the teacher and the constraints of established school and societal norms.

Data collection tools

Data was collected through 1) comprehensive interviews (Kaufmann, 2007) (one interview per participant); 2) classroom observations (three days/month); 3) semi-structured interviews (Fortin, 2010) with each participant after each day of observation (three interviews per participant). The comprehensive interviews (N=3) took place at the school: the one with the teacher lasted about 60 minutes, focusing on her profile, her definition of the inclusion, her practices that she believed promoted the inclusion of NAIS, and her relationship with these students, and the three others with each NAIS lasted 25-30 minutes, focusing on their profile and their academic and sociocultural experience (what they liked about school, the educational activities and tools they enjoyed, etc.). The interviews were preceded by informal classroom visits to meet students in a casual setting and to develop an informal relationship with them. Consent forms were signed by parents and explained to them as needed. These interviews were followed by classroom observations spread over one month, at a rate of one full day per week (three observation days were analysed). The aim was to deepen our overall understanding of inclusive practices and to better situate them within the real context of the classroom. We used an open observation grid to document activities and pedagogical practices. We took notes about participants' postures and engagement, classroom climate, and other relevant elements. Finally, a semi-structured interview (post-observation) was conducted with almost each participant (20-30 minutes; N=8) at the end of each observation day (except the last day for all participants). The aim was to understand the different participants' points of view on the practices and activities during the school day. For example, teachers were asked to describe their inclusive practices

as well as why and how they implemented them. Students were invited to describe the activities they enjoyed during the day, what they learned from them, what they would like to change, and so on. We adapted the post-observation interviews and kept them open to allow participants to share what they felt was important, without being constrained by our observation grid.

Participants' profiles

In this section, we present how the participants described themselves during the comprehensive interview.

Cara has been teaching for 20 years and has worked at her current school for the past 14 years. She used to teach combined 5th/6th grade classes, but now enjoys teaching solely 6th grade because of the type of relationships she can develop with students at that age. For example, she loves joking with them and tries to show her human side while teaching.

Naomie is an 11-year-old student originally from Tunisia. She joined a mainstream classroom two years prior to the research, after spending a brief two-month period in a welcoming class at the end of the school year. She reports working hard to demonstrate her skills in French. She speaks Arabic at home. She enjoys being in a culturally diverse class, as she believes she can learn new things from other students. She has friends and participates in the school choir. She explains that she experienced intimidation during her first year in Quebec. Nonetheless, at the time of the study, she shared that she finally has a good reputation at school, like the one she had in Tunisia, and that she is confident about secondary school.

Finally, **Eva** is an 11-year-old student from the Ivory Coast who has been in Quebec for two years. She didn't attend a welcoming class as her native language is French. She finds the Quebec curriculum relatively easy, as she had already learned most of the content in her native country. She has friends and enjoys playing basketball, although she used to take swimming classes in Ivory Coast. She has experienced intimidation at recess (such as comments on her clothes and hair), and she says that she can always count on her sister for support if she encounters trouble with other students.

Analysis

The aim of the article is to explore how both the NAIS and their teacher perceive pedagogical practices that promote academic and sociocultural inclusion, with a specific focus on the students' points of view. To explore this question, we conducted a thematic analysis (Paillé & Muchielli, 2021) consisting of multiple levels. First, we carried out a horizontal analysis of each interview, both comprehensive and post-observation, supported by an analysis of class observation notes. Next, we did a transversal analysis for each observation day (observation notes, the teacher's and the students' post-observation interviews), intersecting both teacher's and students' points of view. Finally, we conducted a transversal

analysis across all three observation days, including all observation notes and post-observation interviews, intersecting the points of view of all participants. We identified two general themes reported by the students: 1) classroom elements related to NAIS's sociocultural inclusion, including pedagogical practices and activities; 2) out-of-classroom elements related to NAIS sociocultural inclusion. As mentioned before, during the post-observation open-interviews, students reported several situations taking place inside and outside the class, particularly during lunchtime. For the purpose of this article, some results were selected and presented as sub-themes. The selection is based on the recurrence of the sub-theme across interviews, as well as their relevance to the article question.

Results

What did the students report about their experiences?

1. Classroom elements related to NAIS sociocultural inclusion

In this section, we present three elements that were reported by the students during the interviews: flexible participation structure in the classroom, sexual education lessons and cultural activities. The interviews allowed them to share various experiences which we categorize as positive, challenging and aspirational experiences, based on their own points of view.

Positive experiences. Flexible participation structure in the classroom

Our class observations indicate that the students had the option to work either individually or in groups during class activities, including problem solving activities, classroom discussions, homework corrections, etc. In one of her interviews, Cara mentioned that she always gives them the option to choose: "I'm flexible about the group work because sometimes you don't want to be with other people, you want to be in your own bubble." (Note 5) Her flexibility and understanding of student needs seem to suit the key informants of this study who expressed feeling comfortable with this approach. For example, Naomie mentioned that she likes working individually, because it is "quicker" and she finds it "very difficult" to concentrate when working in a group. In contrast, Eva prefers teamwork as it allows her to discuss with her classmates and choose her own team: "I always prefer teamwork, [...] I chose my team too. I like working in a team sometimes because I can share and discuss things with friends".

Challenging experiences. Sexual education lesson

During class observations, we had the opportunity to attend a sex education lesson focusing on the concept of stereotypes and teenage romantic relationships. During the post-observation interview, Cara argued that this concept is vital to teach as it is rooted in everyday life situations. She thus emphasized the importance of creating a trusting classroom environment. To do so, she mentioned that she shared personal experiences with her students to make them feel more comfortable and to facilitate the classroom discussion: "It helped, the fact that I made connections with my

own experience". From the students' perspective, in general, the activity was well received. Although they reported that this sex education lesson allows them to learn new scientific content, they showed some reservations regarding the topics and the personal experiences that were shared in class. This is what Eva reported:

"In my opinion, today's activity was good, but I don't like to talk about it... Yes, it's important to learn about the body, but, well, we know the basics. But with all the things she [the teacher] explained, [...] there were some that I was embarrassed about, I was sitting, I didn't speak because I was embarrassed."

According to Eva and Naomie, such content was not covered in the classroom in their home countries. Given past experience, they also expected sex education to be taught in science classes at the secondary level. They explained in what ways covering such content in the school context is not aligned with cultural norms they were used to from their home countries. They were also surprised about addressing it at this age.

"They really want to put that in... Our school path but it's not important... At that age, it creates more and more problems. [...] Well, sometimes in this course, they say things that don't fit with my beliefs." (Naomie)

Aspirational experiences. Cultural activities

When asked how they would change the school, the girls expressed a desire to fully express their cultural identities. Naomie said she would like all religious holidays to be recognized in school. For instance, she explained that the school acknowledges the Chinese New Year, but not the Eid:

"I would have loved for Ramadan to have decorations... for Eid, or even for our teacher to tell us, 'We're celebrating Ramadan. We're celebrating Eid.' Like, we're a country of immigration, so we should accept all cultures. They accepted the Chinese, but not us. Not really." (Naomie)

Eva also shared that she would like to do more activities linked with her beliefs. For example, she mentioned that she does not dare ask for Christian songs in music class because it would not reflect the dominant white group at her school.

"At home, I listen to Christian music, [...] At school, I would like that. I haven't asked my music teacher because there are some who are Muslims. [...] In my opinion, the solution would be a song for Christian and Muslim world so anyone can sing". (Eva)

The girls expressed a wish for more opportunities, on a voluntary basis, for students to share about their countries, cultures, life experiences, and more, seeking both the chance to teach others about their own backgrounds and to learn about those of their peers. As for Cara, it seems her classroom management this year has taken a lot of her energy, so she did not plan any cultural activities. She reported:

“The other class, which is also a multiethnic class, they, [...] they talk about religions [...] and culture and after that, they have a kind of buffet. So, everyone brings a dish from their country, [...] I know it's a lot of management, so for me, especially this year when I find it exhausting, I choose my battles. [...] I choose what I do [...] So, sometimes, I put activities aside because they don't work. I can't do it.”

However, she gave her students the opportunity to present their culture if they asked for. This is what happened with Naomie, who gave a presentation to the class about Ramadan, and to Eva, who gave a presentation to the class about her country of origin, the Ivory Coast. Both shared during their interviews how happy they were in doing so. From the students' points of view, recognizing diversity through activities as the above should be part of classroom routine. They were convinced that the teacher could do more to acknowledge and mobilize this diversity.

“If I were the teacher in the class, [...] if it was me there, they [the students] would do something like do an activity at least, not like obligatory, but those who want to talk about their country, their culture, what they have experienced in their life, and stuff like that, who talk a little about life”. (Eva).

“If I were the teacher, I'll accept all questions. I'll do activities for all cultures. I understand that there are those who don't celebrate Easter, but others who do. So, I'll go with a mix of everything. Like, yes, [...] there is one person [...] who celebrates Easter, but at the same time, there is also Ramadan. Depending on the lunar month, it's at the same time, [...] I push myself towards the other culture, so I prefer all cultures.” (Naomie)

2. Out-of-classroom elements related to NAIS sociocultural inclusion

Although both Naomie and Eva said that they enjoyed being involved in extracurricular activities, such as a student-created school journal they initiated themselves, they also shared challenging incidents they experienced outside the classroom, during recess or lunch break. This led to a sense of injustice that they expressed.

Challenging incidents. Injustice, intimidation and cultural negligence

Eva took the time in each interview to describe challenging incidents that happened to her during recess or lunchtime. It is as if the interviews became her space to report what made her feel upset and make her voice heard. She described an incident that happened to her and “ruined her day”:

"Two boys were over there. [...] then, there was a boy who threw his Ficello [a chees stick] on the table. After, [...] he threw it at me. Then I picked it up and threw it back on the table. After, the lunch lady [the educator who supervised the students during the lunch] came to talk to me [...] even though [...] I wasn't even the only one [...] throwing. And then, I was the only one punished at that moment, and the others got nothing."

She also said that the educator didn't listen to her when she tried to explain what she had done. She added: “It's not the first time [...] that the educator does this”. She then decided to report the incident to Cara. Eva also mentioned that she confides in her sister and often shares what she has experienced in school. Regarding the same incident, Naomie evoked the same situation and qualified it as “really unfair for her friend”.

Naomie's incidents are more centered on the bullying she experienced in the welcoming class before integrating into the mainstream class. She attributed this incident to a lack of understanding due to cultural differences.

"In Tunisia, people understand me. Here, not so much... [...] I even experienced bullying from the beginning until now. I talked to my mother about it. We tried to resolve it, but it still didn't work. [...] It was this year that I resolved the problem. I had been isolated in a class that laughed at me, at everything I did, if I answered incorrectly. [...] You were in the welcoming class, so you're not a good student, you don't speak French well, you're worthless."

Another incident relates to the school culture and the lack of awareness regarding students' cultural references and rituals as evoked by Naomie. This was particularly during Ramadan where Naomie felt that her ritual was neglected, almost unnoticed:

“At first, it was a little difficult since it's my first Ramadan, and like, during dinner, we weren't given any privacy [...] Then there were several students eating in front of us. Like almost [...] 100 or 200 students in a cafeteria eating. [...] it was [...] a little difficult, but after that, I got used to it." (Naomie)

Discussion and Implications

In this section, we discuss first, the implications of students' points of views and shared ideas about inclusive practices and then engage with issues that the methodology we had chosen raised for us, specifically using SVRF as an analytical lens. We end with implications for future research.

How did what the students report about their experiences inform inclusive practices?

Throughout the study, Naomie and Eva expressed positive feelings about their classroom, despite having reported certain challenging experiences both inside and outside the class. One element that emerged is the way the classroom work was organized. Given the flexible norms, it offered the two students a sense of independence and autonomy. They could shift between individual and group work depending on what suited them best in the moment. That openness on part of the teacher, resulted in a positive learning environment, which had a favorable impact on the students' sense of inclusion. This aligns with findings from various studies (Ferguson-Patrick, 2020; Gay, 2010; Koubeissy et al., 2017; Yilmaz & Yeganeh, 2021).

The second element that emerged is the sex education lesson, which both girls described as particularly challenging. This issue has been the subject of ongoing debate in Quebec since the program's mandatory implementation into the school curriculum in 2018. It remains controversial due to the tensions that can surface between the values promoted by the mainstream society and those held by certain immigrant families and communities. Although sex education is part of the official curriculum, some teachers and school leaders approach it with caution, adapting their approach to avoid discomfort among students and parents as well (Thibodeau, 2024). However, our results reveal a gap between the teacher's pedagogical intention to adhere to the curriculum, foster openness and demystify sensitive issues, and the students' cultural reception and appropriation of the content. In addition to feeling "embarrassed" and remaining silent during the lessons, the girls expressed a desire for cultural recognition. This raises important questions about how inclusion is defined in such situations, and to what extent the school system enables students to critically engage with curricular content that does not reflect their cultures and experiences (Banks, 2020; Dover & Rodriguez-Valls, 2022; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

This is also closely related to the students' desire for more cultural activities and recognition of their cultural identities within the classroom. They expressed a sense that their cultures were marginalized and that they were not represented in classroom activities or in the curriculum. This sense of what we call 'invisibility' can negatively impact their feelings of inclusion and belonging. As several studies have shown, students need to feel accepted along with their cultures, languages, and norms in order to fully engage in the school environment (Armand, 2013; Dover &

Rodriguez-Valls, 2022; Karsli-Calamak & Kilinc, 2021; Koubeissy, 2019; Montesano & Papazian-Zohrabian, 2024; Potvin, 2017). Both girls observed that the curriculum reflected norms and values that are different from their own, resulting in the silencing of practices part of their cultural repertoires, such as the absence of Christian songs or the lack of decorations during Ramadan. This does not mean that they rejected these norms; in fact, according to their teacher, both students appeared to integrate well into the school community. Instead, their comments reflect a personal perception of not seeing themselves represented in the content offered. Naomie, for example, used the expression “all cultures” to emphasize the importance of recognizing diversity and the desire to visibly be a part of it.

In addition, the challenging incidents they experienced outside of the classroom led to a sense of injustice and marginalization and feelings of cultural neglect. They felt that their experiences were not acknowledged by the educator. They sometimes found themselves isolated and subject to peer intimidation. Eva’s feeling of being repeatedly punished alone, without the educator being attentive to her perspective, gave rise to a deep sense of injustice. She shared during the interview that this had “ruined her day” and made her feel sad. Eva’s reported experiences of intimidation reflects a reality that has been documented in several studies on school life in Quebec (Collins, 2021; Montesano, 2023; Papazian-Zohrabian et al., 2024). A similar situation was encountered by Naomie, who experienced bullying in the welcoming class because other students perceived her as different and criticized her for not speaking French fluently. These situations highlight school dynamics that can undermine a sense of inclusion among NAIS. This illustrates how crucial it is for NAIS to develop a sense of security. This sense of security in relationships, whether with peers or with teachers, has been widely documented in the literature as a key facilitator of inclusion (Dover & Rodriguez-Valls, 2022; Kefallinou & Howes, 2024; Papazian-Zohrabian et al., 2024; Pazey et al., 2024). Conversely, uncertainty or instability in these relationships can hinder the inclusive experience and contribute to feelings of marginalization.

While these results highlight how important and different students’ perceptions are from the schools’ mainstream norms, we yet have to engage more deeply with these ideas with the participating teachers and schools to ensure that our research also leads to curricular transformation. As is, our research engaged only in the decolonization of the pursuit of the research and resulted in the centering of students’ voices, yet how to now enact change in practice and possibly also use this data in teacher education are steps we are still working on.

In what ways does this study speak to decolonizing methodologies and the student voice research framework?

The discussion above leads us to a methodological question: to what extent did our research methodology allow the students to express themselves? We draw on two key concepts that help us understand the level

of students' involvement (Lyons et al., 2022) in our research: "students being heard", "collaborating with adults", and "building capacity for leadership". To complement these ideas, we also refer to SVRF (Brasof & Levitan, 2022 b), which outlines four interconnected key elements central to youth voice driven research: intersubjectivity, reflexivity, power dynamics, and context. How did we in this project attend to these?

Overall, it appears that both girls appreciated the opportunity to share their stories and felt that they were listened to. In relation to the feelings of injustice they experienced, the research process seems to have reinforced their legitimacy to speak out about what they value and what they dislike, providing them with a safe space for expression. For example, Eva shared during the interview that she felt the educator was being unfair to her. Although she had previously spoken to her teacher and the administration, the situation had not improved. The interview thus offered her a unique opportunity to voice her point of view. As mentioned above, in terms of decolonial methodologies, research can be seen, to some limits, as healing to marginalized youth as they get to share, speak about and thereby work through issues of marginalization (Zavala, 2016). The interaction between the students and the researchers is thus conceived here as a horizontal relationship rather than a hierarchical one. As researchers, we were aware of the power dynamics inherent in the research process and made conscious efforts to mitigate them.

At the same time, trusting relationships in research at the heart of intersubjectivity take time to develop. We took care to explain the research and its objectives to the students using accessible, age-appropriate language. However, intersubjectivity was not necessarily established during the first encounter; rather, it developed gradually over time. For this reason, conducting several interviews was crucial. Over time, the interviews also became more like dialogue circles which flattened still further the typical hierarchical structure of research. Informal visits intended to build trust and rapport with the students prior to interviews were also a crucial means to build rapport.

However, as mentioned above, while providing a safe space for research purposes and building strong relationships with participants are positive methodological tools to center students' voices, they do not necessarily constitute acts of transformation within the educational setting.

In light of the data collection tools favored in this project, we also contend that interviews alone cannot be considered fully decolonial or inclusive; they need to be complemented by other approaches that center horizontal relationship building among members of research endeavors. Language barriers among some participants made interaction more difficult as well, which in turn affected the depth of engagement in the interviews. Additionally, contextual factors—such as the timing and location of interviews—may have influenced students' willingness to engage, with some perceiving the interviews as a disruption to their usual

activities. This, again, impacted the potential for intersubjectivity to fully develop.

At the same time, the divergence in points of view between students and their teachers suggests that the research provided students with a meaningful space to express their perspectives. However, this dynamic did not unfold in the same way for all participants. In this article, we have chosen to highlight the most compelling narratives, which were not representative of all participants. These limitations were partly due to language barriers faced by some of the students.

That said, while students were “being heard” in this research, their level of involvement did not reach the higher stages of participation such as “collaborating with adults” or “building capacity for leadership” (Lyons et al., 2022). This initial level of involvement does not lead to a change in power dynamics or a shift in teaching practices, as the project was not truly co-constructed with the students. This limitation is also linked to the nature and objectives of the research itself. Clearly, the presented study was generally inspired by and aligned with SVRF and guided by the literature on youth voice research, which has led to rich counter-stories alike the ones presented here through a focus on two students and their supporting teacher. Such work, however, does not stop by simply listening to students, as this paper suggests, but moves forward to act and transform practice with them. As such, we wonder what other activities could have been pursued with the students in this study to make their concerns and raised issues public in a way that would then transform practice. It is challenging not to fall back on well-established practices of the mere consultation of students and instead offer opportunities to transform and act upon voiced concerns and position students as agentive and reflexive change agents. Making student voice visible has become common practice in some research cycles (Malo & Rahm, 2014). In light of that literature, one may wonder what is truly decolonizing about student voice-driven research: the manner in which different participants in a research project are positioned, the manner in which the project is grounded conceptually and theoretically, and the extent to which it may still be steeped in a Eurocentric vision of education that values a singular master narrative, in light of which difference is understood as a problem? The SVRF framework calls on us to engage with reflexivity, power dynamics, and context, and we believe that for research to be understood as decolonizing, much work still needs to be done along these lines.

Conclusion

As mentioned by Smith (2021), researchers should understand research from marginalized points of view and in ways that serve their purposes. In our case, we can say that the students’ perceptions of inclusion were generally tied to the ways in which their cultures were both acknowledged and mobilized as learning resources, to the quality of their relationships with their teacher and peers, as well as to their experiences

outside the classroom. The results speak to an inclusive and intercultural approach that values students' diverse experiences and cultural knowledges in the school community. The students clearly demonstrated awareness of the richness of their cultural experiences and norms, and reported feeling fulfilled when they were able to take an active role in both their own learning and their peers' education. Both Eva and Naomie shared that they had, at times, faced challenges to their inclusion, highlighting that inclusion extends beyond academic and linguistic abilities to also encompass cultural and social dimensions. Their discourse reflects a degree of agency and a willingness to participate in shaping their school environment, both inside and outside the classroom. This suggests that inclusion is not merely a physical act of placing a student in a mainstream classroom, but also a matter of social participation and the recognition of one's sense of belonging within the classroom and broader school community.

Note 1: Quebec Canada's predominantly French-speaking province.

Note 2: Les pratiques pédagogiques qui favorisent l'inclusion socioculturelle et scolaire d'élèves immigrants nouvellement arrivés au Québec: regards croisés d'enseignants et d'élèves (Koubeyssy, Papazian-Zohrabian, Rahm, 2023-2026, SSHRC).

Note 3 : In Quebec, particularly in Montreal, welcoming classes (classe d'accueil) are designated to support newly arrived immigrant students in learning French and integrating into Quebec society, before transitioning to a mainstream classroom.

Note 4 : Pseudonyms are used.

Note 5: Each verbatim excerpt in this article was translated from French to English.

Conflict of Interest

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N/A

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