



Immigrant Youth in Canada and their Inclusion in the School System: the Case of French Language Schools in Ontario

Diane Gerin-Lajoie¹

Abstract

The paper will engage in a critical examination of the existing official discourse on the inclusion of immigrant youth in the school system. The inclusion of students from diverse racial, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds in the schools of the majority has been a preoccupation for decades now. Often described as “students’ integration”, the notion is firmly inscribed in the official policy education discourse in North America and in many countries around the world. In countries with a high rate of immigration such as in Canada, governments have had to examine how their institutions would integrate the newcomers in the host society. Schools which are under provincial and territorial jurisdiction in Canada have faced the challenge of working with increasingly diverse students’ populations over the years and they had to adapt to the new demographic reality of the classroom. Ministries and departments of education, as well as school boards have, over the years, developed policies on immigrant students and their integration in the system. The notion of integration is seen by many critics as being assimilationist and concepts such as “students’ inclusion” and “inclusiveness” have emerged to replace the former notion. The paper will critically examine the official discourse in government policies of inclusion in education and how the policy measures of inclusion are perceived by immigrant students. My discussion will be based on an analysis of the Ontario (Canada) policy on school inclusion and on preliminary results of an ongoing 3-year program of research on immigrant youth living in francophone minority communities in Toronto and Edmonton. The objective is to study how these youth experience the process of social and school integration. Participants are first generation immigrant youth aged between 18 and 24 who have recently completed their high school in a French minority language secondary school outside of Québec. Using the qualitative research approach of life trajectory, through in-depth interviews with 30 participants (15 in Toronto and 15 in Edmonton), the study will result in a series of portraits on their life trajectories and school experience. The paper will discuss results from the Toronto participants.

Keywords: youth, immigration, inclusion, minority education, qualitative research;

¹ OISE, University of Toronto, Canada