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# VIEWING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION THROUGH THE LENS OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY: AN ANALYSIS OF TEACHING/LEARNING SITUATIONS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES

VER LA EDUCACIÓN INCLUSIVA A TRAVÉS DE LA LENTE DE LA DIVERSIDAD CULTURAL: UN ANÁLISIS DE SITUACIONES DE ENSEÑANZA/APRENDIZAJE EN ESTUDIOS SOCIALES DE LA ESCUELA PRIMARIA

VENDO A INCLUSÃO ESCOLAR PELAS LENTES DA DIVERSIDADE CULTURAL: UMA ANÁLISE DE ATIVIDADES DE ENSINO-APRENDIZAGEM EM ESTUDOS SOCIAIS NO ENSINO FUNDAMENTAL

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#### **Abstract**

In Quebec schools, cultural diversity is addressed, among other things, by the Broad Area of Learning entitled "Citizenship and Living Together", whose educational aim is to enable students to "take part in the democratic life of the classroom or the school and develop an attitude of openness to the world and respect for diversity" (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001, p. 50). However, fulfilling this aim requires subject-specific learning in school, particularly within social studies (history, geography, and citizenship education) (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001). Yet teachers greatly struggle to understand the Broad Areas of Learning (BAL) and to take them into account in their everyday practices (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 2007), and no concrete means for addressing BAL on an everyday basis seems to be officially set forth for social studies instruction. This article proposes a preliminary reflection on the issue of cultural diversity in schools based on a consideration of cultural diversity within the Quebec school curriculum and instructional ways of addressing this diversity. The article's purpose is to outline a conceptual framework that will help devise a model of the instructional treatment of diversity within social studies education at the elementary level and, subsequently, to analyze prescribed (official discourse and textbooks), reported (teachers' own discourse on their planned and actual practices) and actual (practices implemented by teachers) teaching practices within the same subject.

**Keywords:** Cultural diversity; Social studies instruction; Elementary education.

#### Resumen

En las escuelas de Quebec, la diversidad cultural se aborda, entre otras cosas, en el Área Amplia de Aprendizaje titulada "Ciudadanía y convivencia", cuyo objetivo educativo es permitir que los

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estudiantes "participen en la vida democrática del aula o la escuela y se desarrollen una actitud de apertura al mundo y respeto por la diversidad" (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001, p. 50). Sin embargo, el cumplimiento de este objetivo requiere el aprendizaje de una asignatura específica en la escuela, en particular dentro de los estudios sociales (historia, geografía y educación ciudadana) (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001). Sin embargo, los docentes luchan enormemente por comprender las Áreas Amplias de Aprendizaje (BAL) y tenerlas en cuenta en sus prácticas cotidianas (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 2007), y oficialmente no parece existir ningún medio concreto para abordar BAL a diario. establecido para la instrucción de estudios sociales. Este artículo propone una reflexión preliminar sobre el tema de la diversidad cultural en las escuelas basada en una consideración de la diversidad cultural dentro del plan de estudios escolar de Quebec y las formas de instrucción de abordar esta diversidad. El propósito del artículo es esbozar un marco conceptual que ayude a diseñar un modelo del tratamiento instruccional de la diversidad dentro de la educación de estudios sociales en el nivel elemental y, posteriormente, analizar lo prescrito (discurso oficial y libros de texto), reportado (discurso del propio docente sobre sus prácticas planificadas y reales) y prácticas docentes reales (prácticas implementadas por los profesores) dentro de la misma asignatura.

Palabras clave: Diversidad cultural; Instrucción de estudios sociales; Educación elemental.

#### Resumo

Nas escolas do Quebec, a diversidade cultural é abordada, entre outras maneiras, pela Grande Área de Formação (GAF) intitulada "Cidadania et viver-juntos", cujo objetivo principal é "permitir que os alunos participem da vida democrática da sala de aula ou da escola e desenvolvam uma atitude de abertura ao mundo e de respeito pela diversidade" (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001, p. 50). O cumprimento desse objetivo requer diferentes aprendizagens escolares, particularmente aquelas realizadas nas disciplinas específicas aos estudos sociais (história, geografia e educação para a cidadania) (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001). No entanto, é necessário reconhecer a grande dificuldade dos professores em compreender e levar em consideração as GAF em suas práticas cotidianas bem como a ausência de propostas oficiais para o tratamento didático da diversidade no ambiente escolar (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 2007). Este artigo propõe uma reflexão preliminar sobre a questão da diversidade cultural nas escolas a partir de uma análise crítica do lugar ocupado pela diversidade cultural no currículo escolar do Quebec e tratamento didático a ela reservado nas atividades de ensino-aprendizagem planejadas por futuros professores. O objetivo do artigo é traçar um arcabouço conceitual que permita delinear um modelo de tratamento didático da diversidade no ensino dos estudos sociais no nível fundamental e, posteriormente, analisar as práticas docentes prescritas (no discurso oficial, nos livros didáticos), declaradas (discurso dos professores sobre suas próprias práticas planejadas) e efetivas (práticas implementadas concretamente pelos professores) dentro desta disciplina.

Palavras-chave: Diversidade cultural; Estudos sociais; Ensino fundamental.

#### Introduction

The 19th Congress of the World Association of Educational Sciences (WAES), held at Stefan cel Mare University in Suceava, Romania and themed on the role of education in



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the face of rising inequality, called for a collective reflection on the many issues surrounding inclusive education policies and practices. It also stimulated discussion on the different epistemological positions used to implement interdisciplinary research and sought to establish the most favourable conditions for consolidating an international network of researchers producing knowledge on this highly topical issue (Association mondiale des sciences de l'éducation, 2018).

This initiative foregrounds the multiplicity of challenges connected with educational inclusion (in terms of representations, conceptions, practices, policies, teacher education, instructional mechanisms, assessment, etc.), and above all the need to take a critical and objective look at these challenges by developing and disseminating new knowledge (Prud'homme et al., 2011). There are three components involved in this respect. The first is to address economic, political, philosophical, social, cultural, anthropological, geopolitical and other issues that come into play in the reproduction, or even exacerbation, of inequalities in the field of education. This in turn invites reflection on the conceptual frameworks that guide inclusive pedagogical and instructional practices in the various school subjects and at various levels of education. Lastly, one must examine the different practices of educational inclusion.

According to UNESCO, inclusive education "is central to the achievement of high-quality education for all learners and the development of more inclusive societies .... In several countries, inclusion is still thought of simply as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings. Internationally, however, it is increasingly seen more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners" (UNESCO, 2008: 5-6). In this article, inclusive education will be examined from a perspective of diversity, and more specifically cultural diversity (Akkari & Gohard-Radenkovic, 2002) given that in Quebec it would be inconceivable to speak of inclusive education without taking account the cultural pluralism of society and the socio-educational issues it brings into play (McAndrew, 2001).

This article proposes a preliminary reflection on the question of cultural diversity in schools in two parts: 1) an examination of how cultural diversity is considered in the Quebec education program, and 2) a look at how this diversity is addressed from an instructional



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standpoint<sup>2</sup>. The goal is to outline a conceptual framework for modelling how diversity is treated in social studies education in elementary school. The article begins by presenting a brief portrait of cultural diversity in Quebec, before looking at how this diversity is taken into account in the Quebec education program. It then highlights three distinct perspectives on the instructional treatment of diversity in elementary social studies instruction that emerged from a systematic analysis of teaching/learning situations developed by future elementary school teachers as part of a course on social studies teaching.

#### **Cultural diversity in Quebec**

Diversity manifests itself in different ways in Quebec society and in Quebec schools. Just a few examples include citizens' ethnocultural background, mother tongue and main language spoken at home, family culture, religious affiliation and belonging to social and cultural groups.

Setting aside the First Nations who came to the continent 15,000 years ago and the Inuit who likely arrived about 5,000 years ago, two major historical waves of immigration to Quebec are acknowledged to have taken place (McAndrew & Audet, 2016). The first, which originated in the 17th century, consisted of the European, French and British colonizers who dominated what was to become Quebec and Canada. Specifically, they made up the French Regime that developed in New France from 1608 to 1763, marked by a diversity of French colonists from various regions of France, and then the British Regime that grew out of the British conquest in 1763. The population was further diversified with the arrival of the loyalists (Anglo-Saxon settlers who remained loyal to the British Crown after American Independence in 1776), and the introduction of the *Quebec Act* in 1774 allowing Francophone Catholics to speak French, practice their religion and maintain their institutions (seigneurial system, judiciary and school system). The second wave began in the mid-19th century (after Canadian Confederation in 1867) and continues to this day,

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> This article builds on a preliminary reflection on cultural diversity that the author published in the CREAS bulletin.



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when a number of groups have joined our society. However, while prior to the post World War II Quiet Revolution, most immigration was white and of European heritage, the cultural scenario has become more diverse with the introduction of immigration policies that promote greater ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity (McAndrew & Audet, 2016; Toussaint, 2010a).

Today, Quebec welcomes approximately 50,000 newcomers per year, divided into three categories of immigrants: economic immigration, which includes self-employed workers, skilled workers, entrepreneurs and investors (60.3%); family reunification, which is aimed at reuniting families and allowing Canadian citizens or permanent residents to sponsor relatives by committing to provide for their needs for a set period of time (22.4%); refugee, a category seeking to reunite people who have sought the protection of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, often for humanitarian reasons (15.6%); and other immigrants (1.7%) (Gouvernement du Québec, 2020).

The preponderance of economic immigration makes for not only a high level of education among newcomers that far exceeds that of the native-born population (32% of newcomers have a university degree compared to 20% in the general population), but also proficiency with one of Canada's two official languages (nearly 55% of newcomers already know French upon arrival). Moreover, 80% of these newcomers come from non-European or North American countries, further accentuating the presence of religions other than Judeo-Christian (Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, etc.). In addition, 25.2% choose to live elsewhere than Montreal, thus generating a greater diversification of places of residence (Gouvernement du Québec, 2020).

In schools, cultural diversity is just as marked, although much more visible and concentrated in specific regions (McAndrew, 2001; Toussaint, 2010b). The vast majority of students with an immigrant background attend schools in the metropolitan region (66% in Montreal and 24% in the surrounding suburbs), while only a tiny proportion attend a school in a neighbouring region such as Estrie, the Capitale-Nationale or Outaouais (7%) or in a remote area (3%). In Montreal, which welcomes about 75% of newcomers, more than half of students currently enrolled in public schools have an immigrant background: 20% of Montreal students were born outside Canada to parents born outside Canada, 23% were



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born in Quebec to parents born outside Canada, and 10% were born in Quebec to parents born outside Canada.

The distribution of these students by type of immigration closely matches that of their parents. Seventy percent immigrated for economic reasons and generally have parents with high educational attainment, while 20% immigrated for family-unification reasons and 10% have refugee status. The refugees are children whose schooling has been disrupted, or who have experienced traumatic events. They therefore constitute a high-risk group with very high needs. Moreover, 40% of the students have a mother tongue other than French or English, and 26% speak neither French nor English at home. More than 50% of students whose parents were born outside of Canada live in an area considered to be disadvantaged.

This diversity, brought about in particular by more diversified immigration and the less discriminatory immigration policies implemented since the 1970s, contributes much to Quebec society—helping to develop the regional economy, offset low birth rates, counter population ageing, etc.—but also brings with it a number of persistent integration challenges. Economically speaking, for example, immigrants are seen to be struggling to integrate into the job market and to secure recognition of their diplomas obtained outside Quebec, and the under-exploitation of their acquired skills has been resulting in a loss of human capital (Lenoir-Achdjian & Potvin, 2007). Socially, the relationship between immigrant families, schools and society is often fraught, among other things because of a clash between the respective values and expectations of families and the Quebec school system (Lenoir-Achdjian, Lenoir, Pudelko & Steinbach, 2008; Vatz-Laaroussi, Kanouté & Rachédi, 2008). The integration challenges seem most pronounced in education: 20% of children of immigrant origin fall behind academically by two years or more, and this category shows an excessive dropout rate (32%), further contributing to lower graduation rates than those of the general population (McAndrew et al., 2008; McAndrew, 2000).



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#### Cultural diversity in the elementary curriculum

The cultural pluralism that birthed Quebec society was built over four centuries – first as a result of the diverse presence of Indigenous peoples and French and English colonization<sup>3</sup> and, more recently, of substantial and diverse migratory flows – and foregrounds the issue of cultural diversity in social debates and, by extension, in the education system (Ouellet, 2010; McAndrew, 2002). As the Quebec Ministry of Education states, "schools bring together students of diverse social and cultural origins. This makes the school an ideal place to learn to respect others and accept their differences, to be receptive to pluralism, to maintain egalitarian relationships with others and to reject all forms of exclusion. The school places students in situations that confront them on a daily basis with challenges related to cooperation in a spirit of mutual aid, solidarity, openness to others and self-respect. It gives them an opportunity to experience the democratic principles and values that form the basis for equal rights in our society" (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001: 50).

Within the Quebec education program, cultural diversity is addressed, among other things, by the Broad Area of Learning (BAL) entitled "Citizenship and Community Life", whose educational intent is to "ensure that students take part in the democratic life of the classroom or the school and develop a spirit of openness to the world and respect for diversity" (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001: 50). Broad Areas of Learning are places of convergence of subject-specific learning and refer to a set of issues that young people must face outside school (e.g., health, well-being, entrepreneurship, environment, consumer rights and responsibilities, media literacy, citizenship, etc.) by bringing the academic knowledge they develop in school subjects closer to their everyday concerns, thereby giving them more control over their realities. Three focuses of development are given in order to address this BAL:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The presence during the French and English colonization of black slaves, originating from the thirteen Anglo-American colonies but also from other French colonial territories such as the West Indies, Louisiana and Guinea, also contributed to the diversity of the population (Trudel & D'Allaire, 2004). The prestige and social standing of these slaves was reflected in the fact that they served mainly as domestic servants and were concentrated in large cities such as Montreal, Quebec City, and Trois-Rivières.



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- a) Awareness of the importance of rules of social conduct and democratic institutions: democratic process of making rules of conduct for school, municipal and national life; actors in the democratic process (individuals, elected representatives, ethnic and civic communities, etc.); respect for the role of each individual; rights and responsibilities associated with democratic institutions;
- b) Involvement in action in a spirit of cooperation and solidarity: principles, rules and strategies based on teamwork; decision-making process based on consensus, compromise, etc.; establishment of egalitarian relationships; debate and defense of opinions; leadership; interaction with peers in a spirit of mutual help; projects related to community life;
- c) Culture of peace: interdependence of individuals and peoples and their activities; recognition of the principle of equal rights for all and of the right of individuals and groups to express their differences; recognition of the negative consequences of stereotypes, discrimination and exclusion; action to combat poverty and illiteracy; familiarization with situations of cooperation and of aggression; peaceful resolution of conflicts; procedures based on agreement or contract.

Efforts to prepare students to exercise their citizenship and to develop attitudes of openness to the world and respect for diversity specific to the "Citizenship and Community Life" BAL are expected to be supported by school learning, particularly in the context of social studies subjects (history, geography, and citizenship education) (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001). The ministry's guidelines for textbook designers and textbook evaluation criteria also suggest the need to take the BAL into account in each of the subject-specific activities suggested to teachers (Gouvernement du Québec, 2004) and, consequently, the need for teachers to include the BAL in the teaching/learning situations that they have students engage in.

Yet the fact is that teachers struggle significantly to understand BAL and to take them into account in their daily practices (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 2007), in a context where government authorities have cited no concrete means of instructional treatment for diversity in social studies teaching at the elementary level. Teachers are thus



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left to integrate diversity as they see fit (Ouellet, 2010) even though their training seems to be very limited when it comes to the ins and outs of cultural diversity, living together, the multicultural and intercultural approach to education, etc. (Ouellet, 2010; Moldoveanu, 2010; Moldoveanu & Mujawamariya, 2007; Steinbach, 2012). How, then, do they go about doing so? How are the "Citizenship and Community Life" BAL and its focuses of development taken into consideration in social studies teaching? What are the ways in which diversity is treated from an instructional standpoint in the teaching of this subject? What place is given to situations associated with living together, citizenship and cultural diversity in the teaching of social studies? How is social studies knowledge used to address these situations?

#### Cultural diversity in teaching/learning situations within elementary social studies

Teaching/learning situations planned by students in the context of a course on social studies instruction at the elementary level helped shed light on these questions by sketching a model of the instructional treatment of diversity.

The course Didactique de l'univers social au préscolaire et au primaire is offered to all students in the bachelor's degree program in preschool and elementary education at a French-language university in Quebec. The course allows students to deepen their social studies knowledge. It enables them to explore concepts and conceptual networks related to time, space, society and the comparison of various environments and societies; to appropriate the approaches, techniques and specific tools (timelines, etc.) used in social studies; and to translate social studies content into teaching/learning scenarios. The course also aims to identify the goals and orientations of citizenship education at the preschool and elementary levels and, using a reflective and critical approach, to analyze the various dimensions of citizenship, known or to be discovered; the components and main lines of development relating to citizenship education; as well as the pedagogical principles and models associated with it. Finally, the course aims to promote the use and assessment of various instructional resources, historical sites and technological materials (websites and CD-ROMs). Visiting a cultural site is a mandatory course requirement.



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Among the assignments required of students in this course, developing a teaching/learning situation for the 2nd or 3rd cycle of elementary school makes up a full 40% of the final mark. This teaching/learning situation must take into account the current orientations of social studies teaching at the elementary level, the grade level addressed, and components of the conceptualization process in social studies. It must also incorporate the Citizenship and Community Life BAL. The situation developed must be the subject of a critical analysis of the potential methodological or psychological obstacles or challenges that the teaching/learning project might raise. The critical analysis must lead to identifying related measures to be implemented in order to help students overcome these obstacles.

For this study, we analyzed 253 teaching/learning situations developed by students in the *Didactique de l'univers social au préscolaire et au primaire* course. Systematic analysis of these situations based on a content analysis inspired by Bardin (2007) uncovered three distinct perspectives on the instructional treatment of cultural diversity, which will be explained in summary form in the following pages: the "self-evident" perspective, the juxtaposition perspective and the interactionist perspective.

- The "self-evident" perspective: From social studies to the Citizenship and Community Life BAL

The analyses first of all reveal a way of dealing with cultural diversity that will be described here as "self-evident". From this standpoint, addressing the major issues relating to living together and citizenship first and foremost involves learning social studies knowledge that may potentially have an immediate application in life outside school.

In teaching/learning situations that come under this perspective, social studies teaching merely provides students with the content to be studied (e.g., history, the conditions and meaning of voting, etc.) in order to fully understand a given social reality (e.g., the right to vote as a tenet of democracy). Only by transferring their learning or making subsequent concrete use of it in their everyday life contexts (e.g., convincing young people to vote in upcoming municipal elections) will students be able to coherently exercise citizenship and implement attitudes of openness and respect for diversity.



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The logic behind this perspective—in which the school subject is predominant—is that one must start from social studies knowledge in order to then find potential links with situations experienced outside school in relation to living together and citizenship (SS toward BAL). From this perspective, everyday life situations constitute a place for applying subject-specific school knowledge.

- The juxtaposition perspective: From the Citizenship and Community Life BAL toward social studies

In the juxtaposition outlook, the "Citizenship and Community Life" BAL and social studies are two parallel entities that are treated completely independently, as can be seen in the following example of a teaching/learning activity for cycle-two [grades 3-4] elementary students on the topic of Canadian society on the West Coast.

In teaching/learning situations under this perspective, real-life situations provide an example or examples of various problem situations that constitute current issues related to living together and citizenship (e.g., the situation of immigrants crossing the Canada-U.S. border illegally). Often topical, these problem situations connect to varying degrees with the disciplinary content set out in the school curriculum. However, once they have been presented and discussed in class, they merely serve as a pretext for specific-subject learning (Canadian Confederation in 1867, the building of the railroad, the development of the western provinces, etc.).

The logic behind this perspective, which also holds up the school subject as paramount, is that one must start from situations relating to Citizenship and Community Life and citizenship experienced outside of school, and then make links with social studies knowledge (BAL toward SS). From this point of view, everyday life situations are merely a pretext for learning disciplinary school knowledge.



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- The interactionist perspective: From the Citizenship and Community Life BAL to social studies and vice versa

Finally, in the teaching/learning situations described here as belonging to an interactionist perspective, life outside of school generates situations that are more than just a pretext for the study of planned subject knowledge. Indeed, concrete examples from everyday life offer a pool of situations that offer up problems to be approached from a disciplinary, or even interdisciplinary, point of view.

In these teaching/learning situations, school knowledge in the social studies context (e.g., immigration to Quebec and its evolution, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Bill 101, etc.) can shed light on and provide a better understanding of situations associated with community life, citizenship and cultural diversity (e.g., the Trump administration announcing its intention to end a temporary residency program that allowed some 60,000 Haitians to live and work in the United States; the growing number of Haitian asylum seekers at the St-Bernard de Lacolle border in Quebec; the discontent of certain citizens convinced of the "privileges" they think these immigrants received, etc.).

This perspective on the treatment of diversity requires that these everyday situations first be problematized and circumscribed within the school subject (Araújo-Oliveira, 2018). Everyday life, associated with the shared common-sense understanding of things that it generates, here represents a pool of situations and experiences that, once problematized and illuminated by academic subject knowledge, will be reinterpreted, nuanced, or even modified and transformed. Students will come to understand, for example, that Quebec is opening up to immigration not out of Christian charity, but mainly to counter low birth rates and an ageing population. They will also understand that despite having higher graduation rates than the general population, citizens with immigrant backgrounds often struggle to integrate into the job market. In short, they will see the need to better understand diversity and the complexity of its related socio-economic issues.

The logic supporting this perspective is one of interconnection and mutual complementarity between, on the one hand, social studies knowledge, and on the other,



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situations related to Citizenship and Community Life experienced outside school (BAL toward SS toward BAL toward SS...). In this third perspective, neither the academic subject nor the situations experienced outside of school is predominant. On the contrary, the two realities complement each other in an interchange between the problems faced by students in their everyday lives and the academic subject knowledge that helps understand these problems while at the same time giving new meaning to this freshly constructed knowledge.

#### Conclusion

This article has set forth a reflection on inclusive education based on a consideration of the issue of cultural diversity within the Quebec school curriculum and the ways in which this diversity is instructionally treated in social studies teaching at the elementary level. Concretely speaking, based on a systematic analysis of teaching/learning situations developed in the context of a course on social studies instruction at the elementary level, we have sketched an outline of a conceptual framework that helps design a model for the instructional treatment of diversity within this school subject according to three distinct perspectives. These are a) the "self-evident" perspective, which takes the school knowledge specific to social studies as a starting point in order to find potential links with situations experienced outside school; b) the juxtaposition perspective, which, conversely, takes the situations experienced outside school as a starting point in order to make links with social studies knowledge; and c) the interactionist perspective, which, while recognizing the key role of problematization in the knowledge construction process, emphasizes the interconnection and reciprocity between situations experienced outside school and social studies knowledge.

It would appear that, in order for the "Citizenship and Community Life" BAL to become a genuine place of convergence for disciplinary learning, as advocated by the Ministry of Education, it is important to move beyond the "self-evident" perspective (SS to BAL) and the juxtaposition perspective (BAL to SS) toward a perspective focused more on the implementation of a problematization process (Araújo-Oliveira, 2018). In this



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perspective, situations relating to Citizenship and Community Life experienced outside school no longer constitute a pretext for addressing subject-specific knowledge (as in the juxtaposition perspective), still less an opportunity for applying this knowledge (as in the "self-evident" perspective), but rather become the very genesis of the learning process as understood from the interactionist perspective (BAL to SS to BAL to SS...).

Although very preliminary and incomplete, this model is intended to serve as a reference structure that will enable subsequent analysis of prescribed (official discourse and textbooks), reported (teachers' discourse on their own planned and actual practices) and actual (practices actually implemented by teachers) teaching practices within this school subject by situating them in relation to these three perspectives on the instructional treatment of diversity.

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