

**Microexclusion and immigrant students**

**Microexclusão e estudantes imigrantes**

**Microexclusión y alumnado inmigrante**

**Microexclusion et étudiants immigrants**

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**Abstract**

This paper is theoretically driven by doctoral research data. The corresponding doctoral research involved fifteen participants who live in Brazil: immigrants and parents of immigrant students from Haiti and Venezuela and mathematics teachers in schools with immigrant students in São Paulo (Brazil). The research aims to consider socially and racially structured exclusions, to discuss perspectives and approaches, and to challenge mathematics education with immigrant students towards inclusive actions. Thinking about what inclusion and inclusive mathematics education with immigrant students could mean goes toward glimpsing the roots of what can obstruct such a process, which means taking the path towards unwrapping the processes of exclusion and violence against the immigrant population. Immigrants' and teachers' voices will be heard in this article to support discussions about the issues around inclusive mathematics education. I present situations that illustrate that microexclusions may accompany the inclusive context in subtle practices. Microexclusions tend to isolate people in a given environment, even if that environment is considered inclusive. This paper aims to discuss a crucial situation: the barriers to including immigrant students have to do with various levels of oppressive social structures. I identify four types of microexclusion related to immigrants having to do with exoticization, misleading identification, second-class citizen treatment, assimilation, and mispraise.

**Keywords:** Immigrant students, Inclusive mathematics education, Normalization, Orientalism.

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## Resumen

Este artículo está impulsado teóricamente por los datos de la investigación doctoral. La investigación doctoral correspondiente involucró a quince participantes residentes en Brasil: inmigrantes y padres de alumnos inmigrantes de Haití y Venezuela y profesores de matemáticas en escuelas con alumnos inmigrantes en São Paulo (Brasil). La investigación tiene como objetivo considerar las exclusiones estructuradas social y racialmente, discutir perspectivas y enfoques y desafiar la educación matemática con estudiantes inmigrantes para acciones inclusivas. Reflexionar sobre lo que puede significar la inclusión y la educación matemática inclusiva con el alumnado inmigrante se dirige a vislumbrar las raíces de lo que puede entorpecer tal proceso, lo que significa emprender el camino para desentrañar los procesos de exclusión y violencia contra la población inmigrante. Las voces de los inmigrantes y los docentes se escucharán en este artículo para apoyar las discusiones sobre temas relacionados con la educación matemática inclusiva. Presento situaciones que ilustran cómo el contexto inclusivo puede ir acompañado de microexclusiones en prácticas sutiles. Las microexclusiones tienden a aislar a las personas en un entorno determinado, incluso en ese entorno considerado inclusivo. Este artículo tiene como objetivo, en particular, discutir una situación crucial: las barreras para la inclusión de estudiantes inmigrantes tienen que ver con varios niveles de estructuras sociales opresivas. Identifico cuatro tipos de microexclusión relacionados con los inmigrantes relacionados con la exotización, la identificación errónea, el trato de ciudadano de segunda clase, la asimilación y el descrédito.

**Palabras clave:** Estudiantes inmigrantes, Educación matemática inclusiva, Normalización, Orientalismo.

## Résumé

Cet article est théoriquement guidé par les données de la recherche doctorale. La recherche doctorale correspondante a impliqué quinze participants résidant au Brésil: immigrés et parents d'élèves immigrés d'Haïti et du Venezuela et professeurs de mathématiques dans des écoles accueillant des élèves immigrés à São Paulo (Brésil). La recherche vise à examiner les exclusions socialement et racialement structurées, à discuter des perspectives et des approches et à remettre en question l'enseignement des mathématiques avec les élèves immigrants pour des actions inclusives. Réfléchir à ce que peut signifier l'inclusion et l'enseignement inclusif des mathématiques avec les élèves immigrés vise à entrevoir les racines de ce qui peut entraver un tel processus, ce qui signifie prendre le chemin pour démêler les processus d'exclusion et de

violence contre la population immigrée. Les voix des immigrants et des enseignants seront entendues dans cet article pour soutenir les discussions sur les questions liées à l'enseignement inclusif des mathématiques. Je présente des situations qui illustrent comment le contexte inclusif peut s'accompagner de micro-exclusions dans des pratiques subtiles. Les micro-exclusions ont tendance à isoler les personnes dans un environnement donné, même dans cet environnement considéré comme inclusif. Cet article vise, en particulier, à discuter d'une situation cruciale : les barrières à l'inclusion des étudiants immigrants relèvent de différents niveaux de structures sociales oppressives. J'identifie quatre types de micro-exclusion liés aux immigrants liés à l'exotisme, à l'identification erronée, au traitement des citoyens de seconde classe, à l'assimilation et au discrédit.

**Mots-clés:** Élèves immigrants, Éducation inclusive en mathématiques, Normalisation, Orientalisme

### Resumo

Este artigo é teoricamente conduzido por dados de pesquisa de doutorado. A correspondente pesquisa de doutorado envolveu quinze participantes residentes no Brasil: imigrantes e pais de alunos imigrantes do Haiti e da Venezuela e professores de matemática em escolas com estudantes imigrantes em São Paulo (Brasil). A pesquisa visa considerar exclusões social e racialmente estruturadas, discutir perspectivas e abordagens e desafiar a educação matemática com estudantes imigrantes para ações inclusivas. Pensar o que pode significar a inclusão e a educação matemática inclusiva com estudantes imigrantes vai no sentido de vislumbrar as raízes do que pode obstruir tal processo, o que significa trilhar o caminho para desvendar os processos de exclusão e violência contra a população imigrante. As vozes dos imigrantes e dos professores serão ouvidas neste artigo para apoiar as discussões sobre as questões em torno da educação matemática inclusiva. Apresento situações que ilustram como o contexto inclusivo pode vir acompanhado de microexclusões em práticas sutis. As microexclusões tendem a isolar as pessoas em um determinado ambiente, mesmo naquele ambiente considerado inclusivo. Este artigo visa, em particular, discutir uma situação crucial: as barreiras à inclusão de estudantes imigrantes têm a ver com vários níveis de estruturas sociais opressoras. Identifico quatro tipos de microexclusão relacionados aos imigrantes relacionados à exotização, identificação enganosa, tratamento do cidadão de segunda classe, assimilação e desprestígio.

**Palabras Clave:** Estudantes imigrantes, Educação matemática inclusiva, Normalização, Orientalismo.

## Microexclusion and immigrant students

The United Nations (UN)<sup>2</sup> 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development addresses interconnected goals and targets with a strong focus on the inclusion of vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)<sup>3</sup> points to the need to promote inclusive learning environments that include immigrant students.

The diversities intensified by the international immigration context lead to investigation and reflection on the challenges and possibilities of inclusion for immigrant students. Educational systems in Brazil, as well as around the world, are rethinking their policies and structures to incorporate their growing understanding of the dichotomy of inclusion and exclusion (Soares, 2015; Kollosche et al., 2019)

Inclusion is a contested notion. It can be accompanied by problematic discourses and various approaches and interpretations (Figueiras, Healy, & Skovsmose, 2016). Exclusion processes continue to exist even when students are “included” in the educational system (Moura, 2020). “Being inside” may be different from “being part of.” Students often share the school space but experience isolation and exclusion (Barros, 2017), as represented by Figure 1, where students do not necessarily belong to the whole group; they are not joined or connected.

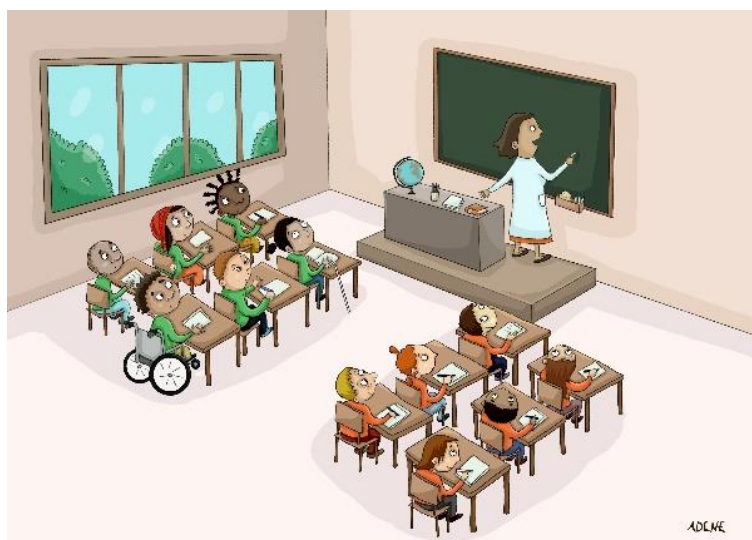


Figure 1.

*“Being inside” is different from “being part of”* (<https://world-education-blog.org/2020/07/08/all-teachers-should-be-prepared-to-teach-all-students/> )

<sup>2</sup> See more in: <https://brasil.un.org/pt-br/sdgs>

<sup>3</sup> See more in: <https://www.unhcr.org/what-to-expect-working-for-unhcr.html?query=inclusion>

Discussing inclusive mathematics education with immigrant students leads to discussions about the implications of language on the development of mathematical cognition (Barwell et al., 2016). However, I also find it crucial to discuss such inclusion in terms of the socio-political conditions of power relations, which means turning attention to systems that generate the exclusion and violence to which immigrant student populations may be subjected (Baber, 2012; Valoyes-Chávez, Montecino, & Guzmán, 2021).

Systems of oppression are established through intersections with other forms of oppression; that is, the oppression experienced by immigrants is linked to race, age, social class, language, and gender, all of which generate and maintain social hierarchies (Tummala-Narra, 2020). Exclusion, discrimination, and marginalization may be deeply rooted in a system of oppression. The root of exploitation lies outside of education, in a system of economic power and privilege in which racial distinctions play an essential role (Kalwant & Preston, 2012). Furthermore, education may also be a means to maintain economic power and privileges.

Mathematics education may be related to social exclusion, in which people can be systematically pushed to the edges of society (Skovsmose, 2005; 2023). Exclusive mathematics education, environments, and practices reflect a socially racialized system<sup>4</sup> (Martin, 2013). Mathematics learning and participation can be typified as racialized forms of experience. Black students, immigrants, and other groups of marginalized students have experienced constant acts of violence and exclusion inserted into racist practices of school mathematics (Martin, Price, & Moore, 2019; Valoyes-Chavez & Andrade-Molina, 2022). Immigrants and their families are vulnerable to exclusion and aggression inside and outside the school, which can jeopardize their mathematics learning.

In Brazil, immigrant students with specific phenotypes and cultural characteristics tend to be accepted more quickly, while other immigrant groups encounter more difficulties, even when Portuguese is their mother tongue (Oliveira, 2019). Indeed, speaking the local language is essential in learning, but it does not guarantee that immigrant students are considered equally in mathematics classes worldwide (Baber, 2007). Brazil is known for welcoming immigrants (Carneiro, 2018 a). In this sort of context, seen as inclusive, it is still critical to identify and address exclusion and aggression and reflect on how such violence may impact immigrant students' sense of belonging. Such concerns apply to every educational context, including mathematics education.

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<sup>4</sup> See more about socially racialised system in Bonilla-Silva (1997; 2015).

Although every student is potentially subject to systemic exclusion and aggression in the school environment (Padilha & Oliveira, 2013), the consequences for many immigrant children are specific due to their dislocated conditions. Immigrant people may deal with several borders during the immigration process. Exclusion and aggression are just one such social border, and they are representative of the *We-Other dichotomy*. Exclusion and aggression may shape immigrants' lives by making them feel "unwanted" and lacking a sense of belonging, increasing their social disadvantage and sense of injustice.

Such a situation needs theorization to enhance counter-hegemonic processes in the onslaught of the struggle for effective inclusive education. This chapter aims to bring theoretical concepts to the surface, explore the covert layer of exclusion, and discuss what lies behind the discrimination that immigrant students often face. Thinking about the meaning of inclusion and inclusive mathematics education with immigrant students goes toward glimpsing the roots of what can obstruct such a process, i.e., taking the path towards unwrapping the processes of exclusion and violence against the immigrant population. This also means going beyond looking at mathematics classes and reflecting on social issues.

This paper is theoretically driven by doctoral research data, which involved fifteen participants who live in Brazil, namely, immigrants and parents of immigrant students from Haiti and Venezuela and mathematics teachers in schools with immigrant students in São Paulo (Brazil). The research aims to consider socially and racially structured exclusions, discuss perspectives and approaches, and challenge mathematics education with immigrant students towards inclusive actions.

The data was produced by semi-structured interviews (Laville & Dionne, 1999), consisting of a series of questions asked verbally in a foreseen order, following the guiding thread based on the research aim. The interviews aimed to construct the research participants' reports on international immigration and their perceptions of the role of mathematics in this scenario. Reports on school and non-school life situations were considered to help reflect on the possibilities of inclusive mathematics education. Through the *reports*, teachers who teach mathematics to immigrants can open "windows," making it possible to discuss and understand a social scenario and consider injustice and social inequalities (Yosso, 2005).

In the next section, I present the *inclusion/exclusion iceberg* and organize critical concepts such as *normalization*, *orientalism*, *microexclusion*, and *microaggression* and their impact on immigrant mathematics education, discussed in the following section. Then, focusing on microexclusion, I present a range of cases of the situation in the Brazilian reality inside and outside mathematics classes, through mathematics teachers' and immigrants' voices. Finally, I

concentrate on critical concepts for inclusive mathematics education taking immigrant students into consideration.

### Inclusion/Exclusion iceberg

I propose the *inclusion/exclusion iceberg* (Figure 2) as a metaphor to discuss concepts related to the duality of inclusion and exclusion, going beyond the surface of manifestations and evident effects. Positioned in a conceptual organization, some concepts are represented in covert layers of the system and discourses, and others in the overt layer of actions. Such concepts will be discussed in the following subsections.

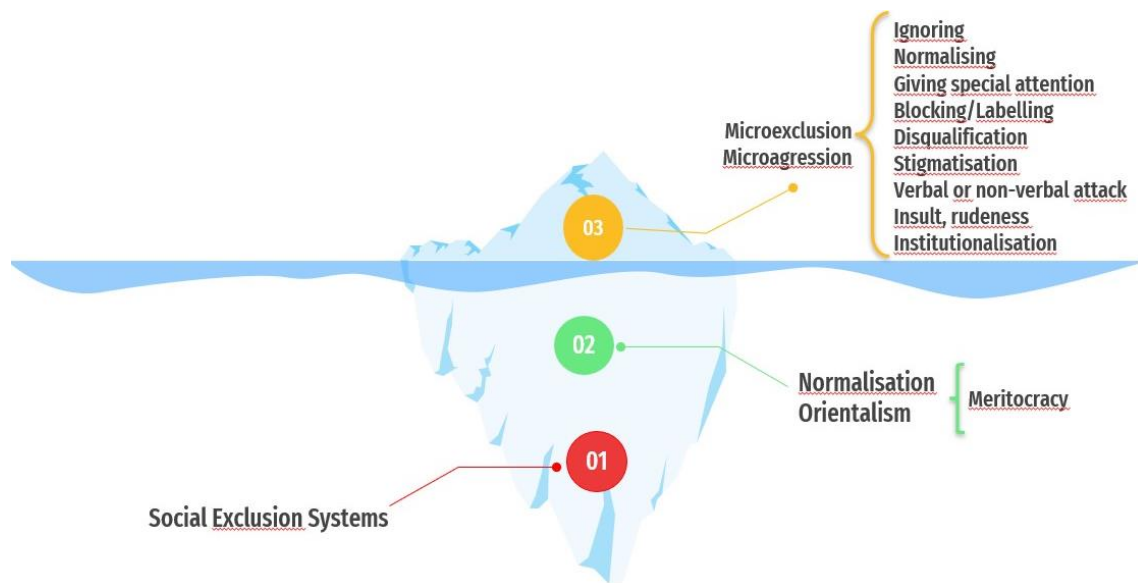


Figure 2.

*Inclusion/exclusion iceberg (Produced by the autho)*

In Figure 2, the image of an iceberg is used to illustrate the structural constitution of the inclusion and exclusion relations that present covert and overt layers (i.e., that have visible and invisible aspects). The figure of an iceberg exemplifies that those apparent manifestations (Layer 03), taken as individual attitudes and behaviors of exclusion and aggression, are just small parts of a larger and more complex structural contingent.

I see the many mechanisms that produce exclusion and social injustice as being centered on a structural base (Layer 01), through which the social difference markers (such as those related to racism, gender, age, and differences in physical and intellectual abilities) permeate. In this sense, Layer 01 is one of the core ideologies that underlie *normalization* and *orientalism* discourses (Layer 02), which may establish models and paradigms. Therefore, normalization

and orientalism may justify the meritocracy, for instance, and make the operationalization of apparent manifestations of exclusionary violence represented in *microexclusions* and *microaggressions* (Layer 03) possible in all different ways and themes.

The conceptual tangle, represented by the *inclusion/exclusion iceberg*, brings a general representation of concepts that help reflect on the mechanisms inherent to social inclusion and exclusion. Indeed, other layers and concepts could be considered relevant to this illustration. For the following subsections, I focus on discussions around such concepts in an exercise on critical reflection on a structural whole.

### **Normalization and Orientalism**

For Fromm (1970), the pathology of normality is an alienated existential of contemporary capitalist societies, where they are portrayed as a rational and mentally healthy standard. According to Fromm, society refers to “deviant” or “inadequate” people as diverging from the perspective of normality, determined in terms of lack of alignment with a dominant collective lifestyle.

According to Marcone (2015), concepts of normality are contextual; they are socio-politically and historically defined and establish what is meant by disability. According to the author, people do not have a disability a priori; instead, they are considered disabled within and through the context in which they are inserted. Thus, the dichotomies *normal/abnormal*, *normal/disabled*, *normality/abnormality*, among others, permeate social definitions.

Fromm and Marcone point to normality as a concept constructed by people. Those who consider themselves “adjusted” to the environment, “normal,” create criteria for what can be considered normal or abnormal. What is considered normal today may not have been normal in the past. One can think of past and current societies in which women wearing pants were and are seen as abnormal with abhorrent behavior, for example.

Accordingly, another social concept is orientalism. According to Said (2007), the Orient is merely imaginative. The author points to orientalism as a Western attempt to dominate, restructure, and have authority over the Orient. Orientalism depends on a position of superiority that places the West in a series of possible relations with the East without ever taking away its dominance. For the author, the Orientalist perspective is intrinsically linked with a colonialist vision, where the Orientals are seen as “barbaric” or “uncivilized,” and the West must bring them social advancement, which only comes from the colonial domination of its territories and loss of autonomy of its population. Orientalism justifies dominance over other peoples.



Discussion on the concept of normality can broaden the perspectives of inclusive education (Marcone & Penteadó, 2019), as well as on orientalism, which may broaden the understanding of inclusion and its contested nature. A perspective of inclusion based on normality goes towards researching, understanding, and healing “abnormal” people, which means seeking to “help the less fortunate” under the rule of disability (Lima, 2022). Even if, sometimes, visibility is given to the “abnormal,” this process occurs hierarchically. Similarly, a perspective of inclusion based on orientalism follows precepts of colonial domination in the sense of curing the uncivilized and bringing them social advances. The concepts of normality and orientalism are deep under the scene (Layer 02 in Figure 2), supporting exclusion discussions and actions.

Definitions of normality and orientalism permeate, among other things, racism, class prejudice, gender prejudice in narratives, and discourses of oppression and domination of people (Marcone, 2019). I see such features intersecting with the context of immigrant people and their different ways of being in the world. Such differences can be confined to the perspectives of normality and orientalism. For instance, talking about normal and abnormal concerning groups of immigrants might mean referring to differences in phenotypes, religions, customs, behaviors, or ways of communicating. Thus, the terms normality and orientalism may permeate an ideology based on nationalism and racism as social markers of difference.

Bishop and Kalogeropoulos (2015) refer to growing diversity –also represented by students with different backgrounds, languages, religions, social statuses, contexts of poverty and trauma, etc– as profoundly impacting educational systems. The local context can affect the learning of these students in several ways. For the authors, immigrant students need to adjust to a new set of values that are sometimes conflicting, which can affect performance in mathematics classes. Civil (2012) refers to surveys in several countries criticizing educational policies pushing immigrant students to assimilate. These policies convey a view of deficits in immigrants’ language and culture rather than promoting diversity as a resource for learning.

Nevertheless, immigrant students are likely to be considered abnormal in mathematics classes. They may differ from a standard of normality in the face of the expectations of a dominant group: this includes variations in language, clothing, physical and cultural differences, and religion, for example. These non-standard characteristics may make non-immigrant students uncomfortable and create exclusionary gaps, separating what is accepted and embraced from what must be ignored and submitted.

Therefore, I see that for such students, the “disability diagnostic report” has to do with being an immigrant. In other words, being an immigrant represents a salient point of

differentiation –the “deformity,” the “disability” that places them outside a possible standard of normality expected for a student– outside the ideal of normality existing in the more extraordinary collective imagination.

Such a “report” is obviously inserted in a range of intensity degrees. One can consider different groups of immigrant students with varying degrees of “being out of normality”; they can be at different levels of distance from the social standard where they live. As a reflection of a socially racialized system, specific groups of immigrants may have characteristics considered normal for the context of the destination country. However, other groups present strange differences, causing fear and aversion that expand into a range of possibilities since such differences exist between groups and people from the same gathering of immigrants.

In this path, the ideal of what is expected of a mathematics student in the face of a pattern of normality and orientalism can create exclusionary environments and impose ways of thinking and assimilation of immigrants. This has to do with a colonizing perspective in which the colonizer, in a position of superiority, teaches the other person how to be civilized. This directly impacts the teaching and learning of mathematics for immigrant students. Such students, “included” in school systems in the host country (such as in Brazil), may suffer microexclusions and microaggressions in their various forms of manifestation.

### **Microexclusion and microaggression**

Martin (2021) highlights how inclusion and exclusion interact at different levels in society. For example, reform efforts at the *macro* level (e.g., education policies) can interfere at the *meso* level (e.g., educational systems and schools) and *micro* level (e.g., classroom and individual levels). I focus on specific forms of exclusion at the micro level but without losing sight of the racialized social system, which means that such actions are not the result of individual behavior but the result of systematic factors.

*Microexclusions* are forms of violence operating at a micro level, thus focusing on an individual and/or local level. They are practices of subtle and veiled violence and, in many cases, ordinary and non-physical, which can occur in “inclusive” spaces. They occur consciously (or not) and tend to isolate and oppress people. These are instances of aggression that occur through stigmatizing speeches, hostile attitudes, and subtle practices that are often covered up and not easily identified (Faustino et al., 2018; 2019). Microexclusions can be split into eight types: ignoring, normalizing, paying special attention to, barring, labeling, disqualification, stigmatizing, and institutionalizing (Faustino et al., 2018; 2019). I see microexclusion as apparent manifestations (Layer 03 in Figure 2).

Reflecting on microexclusions leads to reflection on the concept of microaggressions. *Microaggressions* are interpersonal verbal and non-verbal exchanges in which the aggressor causes harm to a target, intentionally or unintentionally; they are a form of systemic violence used for marginalization. Microaggressions can be racial and align with explicit racial derogation through a verbal or non-verbal attack. Action that makes people feel unwanted and insecure for being considered inferior or subhuman represents subtle contempt and hidden insults and is defined by interpersonal exchanges that convey stereotypes, and rudeness that demeans a person's racial identity (Sue & Spanierman, 2020).

Microexclusion and microaggression are manifestations of structural violence rooted in the structures of society and which are reflected in the most different contexts, whether educational or not (Silva & Skovsmose, 2019). They “often go unnoticed and unacknowledged because they seem so familiar in everyday settings, such as classrooms, shopping malls, restaurants, hotels, and offices” (Sue & Spanierman, 2020, p.28).

Structural racism is a source of microexclusions and microaggressions, which helps to continue racial oppression in ways that are often invisible (implicit bias) (Solórzano & Huber, 2020). The precepts of microexclusion and microaggression are fundamental for the institutionalization of exclusions, downplaying inequalities, and justifying the exclusionary actions and competitive individuality of the meritocracy that assert that racism plays a minor role.

In mathematics classes, microexclusion and microaggression are still underestimated problems, despite negatively affecting processes related to teaching and learning mathematics (Silva, Lautert, Carmo, Santos, & Santos, 2023). These phenomena can interfere with students' motives to learn mathematics (Silva & Powell, 2016; Faustino et al., 2019). “Microexclusions deprive the individual of equal participation in contexts of social life, including with regard to learning. In addition, microexclusions contribute to highlighting even more the differences between students” (Faustino et al., 2018, p. 910).

Accordingly, microexclusions and microaggressions impact immigrant students' lives inside and outside schools. Furthermore, such violence may gradually push them toward the margins of groups through covert actions that communicate (implicitly or explicitly) that they do not belong to those spaces.

## Immigrant inclusion/exclusion iceberg

Reflecting on a conceptual framework in terms of the immigrant people's contexts, I propose the *immigrant inclusion/exclusion iceberg* (Figure 3) as an organization that considers specific concepts with regard to immigrants.

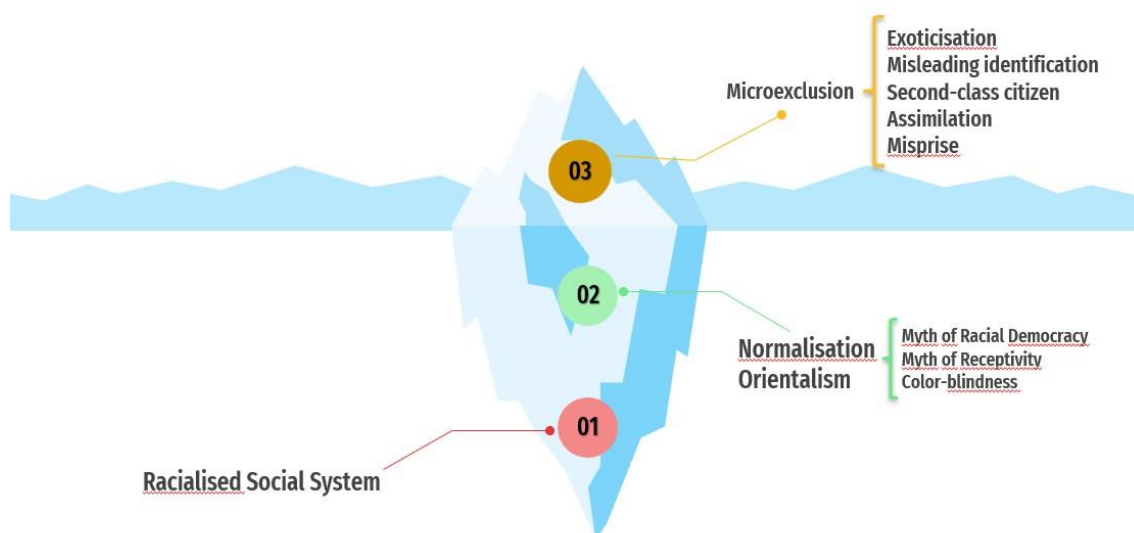


Figure 3.

*Immigrant inclusion/exclusion iceberg (Produced by the author)*

The *immigrant inclusion/exclusion iceberg* is based on a socially racialized system (Layer 01) as a core structured system of oppression ideologies. Through normalization and orientalism (Layer 02) paradigms, the myth of racial democracy and receptivity of immigrants, as well as not seeing color or race (color-blindness), is sustained, especially considering Brazilian reality and similar contexts where microexclusion might lead to xenophobia and be engendered by a nationalist ideology. Subsequently, microexclusion and racial microaggression (Layer 03) are operationalized in a range of actions.

Mathematics classes with immigrant students must be analysed regarding inclusion and exclusion and the roots of social borders they may face. I address special attention to reflections on what may be related to the veiled and sometimes silent actions of *microexclusion against immigrants* and how the understanding of what is normal and abnormal is used to define them as targets of different modes of microexclusion.

As previously mentioned, Faustino et al. (2018, 2019) highlight that microexclusion can happen in several ways. Inspired by these different types of microexclusion and paying closer attention to situations in which microexclusion can happen with immigrants in Brazil, I identify

five types of microexclusion related to immigrants: *exoticization*, *misleading identification*, *second-class citizen treatment*, *assimilation*, and *mispraise* (Layer 3, Figure 3).

### **Instances of microexclusion**

In this section, I present examples of the microexclusion phenomenon through the immigrants' and mathematics teachers' accounts<sup>5</sup> of their lived experiences in Brazil as elements of the social and educational framework. I present some excerpts from interviews that can give an impression of what is taking place in Brazilian schools with immigrant students. The voices of the Venezuelan immigrant Frida and the Haitian immigrants Leo, Max, and Toni, as well as the mathematics teachers Miguel and Markus, will be heard in this paper to support discussions about immigrant students on the issues of inclusive mathematics education. The immigrant reports offer narratives that speak of various forms of microexclusion.

#### **Instance 1 Exoticization: Celebrating the eccentric?**

Frida relates how her daughter felt about the treatment of other students at the school in Brazil.

Frida: *I remember that my daughter, in her first year here (in Brazil), said: "Thank God that the school year is over. I couldn't stand everyone asking why I spoke differently." She also couldn't play because she couldn't understand people.*

It seems that the Venezuelan student felt awkward and inadequate. The differences she has, being an immigrant, seem to label her as unusual, eccentric, and outside what is considered normal in that context. She was also unable to feel included in playtime and felt *ignored* and *unwelcome* by her peers. In this case, although the student is included in the school environment, she is constantly reminded that she is "out of place," that she is different, and that she is (supposedly) inferior.

Teacher Markus reports on an initiative at the school where he works that involves moments of celebration to bring students together:

Markus: *We have many projects focused on integration because the culture is different. We have several festivities. We have several themed parties. Every year, we have a party called Brazil/Haiti. And at this party, we do all the decorations. Students parade and bring typical music. We have a mix of cultures, which is very interesting.*

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<sup>5</sup> The speeches were translated from Portuguese into English, and participants' names are fictional to ensure their anonymity.

This project seems to give room on the stage to immigrant students with the intention of inclusion. Teacher Markus describes a school initiative involving celebratory moments to unite students to celebrate differences in musical styles, dances, and outfits.

It seems to be a relevant project. However, with action like this, it is essential to avoid placing immigrants in the role of “exotic” in the sense of “folklorization”<sup>6</sup>—the stage is offered to immigrant students as a mode of inclusion, but behind the scenes, they remain in a marginalized or outdated place of consideration. Exoticization can be summed up as marginalization.

Furthermore, the characteristics of immigrant students can be presented instead of *stigmatization* through *labor* in a range of tones that go from the obsolete to the civilized irregular. More specifically, micro-exclusion may occur in the subtle format of exoticization in the face of differences that may be considered eccentric or abnormal.

### **Instance 2 Misleading identification: A label for the unimportant?**

Miguel reports a situation he experienced in mathematics classes and talks about non-immigrant students making jokes with immigrant students from South America.

Miguel: *We have 46 different nationalities at the school. More than half of the students are from South America, mostly Bolivians. But we have a considerable group of Argentineans, Paraguayans, Colombians, Venezuelans, and Chileans. I realize that Brazilian students make jokes, and they end up calling everyone who speaks Spanish Bolivian. It may happen that some students get offended. There was a situation where the student was Colombian. I didn't know. He was called a Bolivian and felt offended. He said, "I am not Bolivian. I'm Colombian. Don't call me that."*

In this report, Colombian immigrant students demonstrate that they feel offended at what seems to be deliberately intentional non-recognition by other students. By using a *label*, calling any immigrant student from South American countries Bolivian, non-immigrant students act hostile and place immigrants in the same group: “the foreigners.” This lack of correct identification seems to generate in this student a sense of lack of importance and lack of involvement with the group.

Furthermore, the teacher seems to witness the situation only as an observer. Also, he seems to minimize the situation by reporting it as a one-off fact: “Some students might get

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<sup>6</sup> I see folklorization as the opposite pole of folklorism, opposed to a performative practice composed of extracted fragments that include ideas, attitudes, and values that exalt cultures, manifestations in the sense of representing a tradition of a locality, region, or nation (McDowell, 2010).

offended.” He didn’t know much about this student: “There was a situation where the student was Colombian. I didn’t know. He was called a Bolivian and felt offended.”

It seems that certain people appear to be a catch-all term for people in a microexclusion related to *misleading identification*. It seems that those you do not know very well or do not appreciate much of can all be put in the same group: “the strangers.” Such discrimination can be linked to racism and xenophobia since it systematically places a particular group of people in a place of unimportance.

How can one explain the apparent distinctions given to people from different countries in Europe or between people from different states in the USA while ignoring the distinctions between people from other countries in South America or Africa, for instance? Indeed, the possibilities of recognizing differences between Italian and Portuguese people will be greater than the chances of identifying differences between Colombian and Bolivian people, as in the situation outlined by Miguel.

### **Instance 3 Assimilation: Camouflage or disappear?**

Frida reports on the experiences of her immigrant son in a Brazilian school:

Frida: *When I enrolled my youngest son, the teacher didn’t want to understand that he was young. It was the first time he went to school. That he couldn’t speak Portuguese properly. And she said: “But avoid speaking Spanish at home.” And I said: “But I can’t stop speaking Spanish. And I know that in Brazil’s curriculum there are Spanish classes.” So, it was a question that was rejected, about our communication.*

This report evidences the imposition of the school context by indicating that the immigrant student was asked to deny his mode of communication within his own family life. In this case, microexclusion happens through *institutionalization* and *normalization*. The student finds themselves in an impasse of abandoning their differences and adapting to the normality the school requires. This is an explicit exclusion and a painful attack on immigrants’ sense of self and those with whom they identify most.

Understanding the language of the local country is certainly important for those at school. However, the specificity of the student seems to be understood as such an obstruction that the way out found by the teacher is embedded in the family subjectivity of the immigrant child. This report is in line with the reflections of Marcone (2015) when he says that:

Someone who does not believe that difference will one day be accepted, that only when some kind of transformation occurs, where the disabled person will

hide the horror of their deformity and manage to become invisible and no longer obstruct the path of normality, only then will they be tolerated. (p.53-54)<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, immigrant students may find themselves needing to camouflage to be accepted. Microexclusion takes place between the lines of *assimilation* actions. Students may not need to deny their diversity, but they may be silenced about their cultural identity and other manifestations of differences. Paraphrasing Marcone (2015), this translates into the normalization and orientalism impositions such as: “stay white or disappear,” “see or disappear,” “listen or disappear,” “speak Portuguese or disappear,” “dress like the locals or disappear,” “be normal, or disappear.”

#### **Instance 4 Second-class citizens**

Leo reports the lack of welcome his son experienced at school in Brazil:

Leo: *Before, I had the problem of my children not understanding what they were saying. But now they understand. He still has a lot of trouble reading and writing. But that’s not what makes it difficult for him to keep up with the other students, because there are students who have a lower level than him. But the problem is not that he is not Brazilian. The issue is lack of care.*

Leo points out that it is not his son’s language differences that are the main border to his inclusion in school. He points to “lack of care” as the most significant issue to consider. I understand he is referring to actions that relate to exclusion. In a way, this is related to microexclusion, where the son is made to feel uncomfortable and unwelcome.

Teacher Miguel reports on how immigrant students are accepted at the school where he works.

Miguel: *Acceptance is not the same. What I perceive is that there are some differences: for example, if the student is of Bolivian origin, acceptance is different from if he is Angolan or Nigerian or if he is Muslim. Acceptances are different in different contexts. Because many come because of the activity the family carries out here (in Brazil).*

Also, Markus reports a situation that happened during a conversation between teacher and students in one of his mathematics classes:

Markus: *In the small lines, we realize that there is (prejudice). There was a girl who said that she needed to find a new boyfriend because she had just divorced from her ex-husband. I suggested that the school had many boys. She replied that Haitians, she didn’t want any: “Ah! God forbid I date a Haitian!” One*

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<sup>7</sup> Translated from: Alguém que não acredita que a diferença será um dia aceita, que apenas quando ocorrer algum tipo de transformação, onde a pessoa com deficiência esconderá o horror de sua deformidade e conseguirá se tornar invisível e não mais obstruir o caminho da normalidade, somente assim serão tolerados (Marcone, 2015, p.53-54).



*of them (Haitian student) asked: “Why don’t you want a Haitian?” And she was embarrassed and didn’t answer. We know it is related to xenophobia and racism. Oh! If it were an American, a German, or a Japanese, it would be totally different. There’s the issue of skin color, right? And then there’s the issue of stereotypes.*

Markus talks about how these behaviors usually happen subtly, perceived “in the small lines.” Haitian students were treated as an inferior group of people. In attitudes based on racism, they were attacked as a group through discriminatory speeches that reflected avoidant behaviors. The messages made Haitian students feel unwanted and insecure because they are not considered people who belong to the same levels as others in society.

Max talks about an experience of exclusion:

Max: *I have several tests (experiences). I remember that I went to get my documents, I won’t mention the name of the place, and people treated Haitians differently from how they treated other foreigners, Japanese, German, American, for example. The way they treated each foreigner was different. It was possible to see the way they received people. I don’t have a word in Portuguese to describe it. We know when the person treats with difference.*

Max assumes that he has difficulty with the Portuguese language when he says he does not have a word in Portuguese to describe what he experienced. I say that words like microexclusion and microaggression describe what he experienced well. Treating others differently is a subtle behavior when approaching certain immigrant people as second-class citizens.

Toni reports what she experienced when walking through the streets of a city in Brazil:

Toni: *Sometimes it happens that I’m walking down the street, and the person crosses to the other side out of fear. Once, I called the girl and asked why she crossed. She apologized and said she was afraid of being robbed. She’d been robbed before and all. But later she apologized. I understand.*

Toni reports a situation of microaggression in which a person shows fear when passing by him on the street of a city in Brazil. Indeed, the fact that he was a black person was what caused this aggression, which shows harsh treatment based on valuation when assuming that Toni could be dangerous according to his physical characteristics. Aggression does not occur through insults or accusations. It may happen through subtle behavior that might go unnoticed.

As an example of microexclusion, we can imagine a situation where classmates are invited to a classmate’s birthday party. However, immigrant students are forgotten, possibly due to their inability to communicate in the local language or perhaps because they bring “discomfort” with their religious practices that do not match the style of music that will be played during the celebration, for example.

### **Instance 5 Mispraise: is this person capable?**

On the activities developed in mathematics classes, Miguel reports the experience of proposing different activities for an immigrant student:

Miguel: *We try to have a different look, although, in general, I apply the same activities that I give to Brazilian students so as not to cause a difference. I have already given an activity A for the class, and, for that immigrant student, I applied another activity. This immigrant student did not like it and said: “Why do I have to do a different activity? I want to do the same activity”.*

In this report, the teacher discusses his concern about offering the same activity to all students. Also, he recalls his experience when offering a different activity to an immigrant student who declared dissatisfaction with receiving activities different from those of other students in a mathematics class. Wrapped in an intention of inclusion, the teacher's conduct reveals an attitude of microexclusion that seems to have occurred through misprising. That is, the teacher may have had an unfavourable judgment in advance about the capacities of the student to engage in the activity together with colleagues, either for reasons of understanding the Portuguese language, or for cognitive issues assigning a degree of intelligence, or for other reasons. Perhaps the teacher wanted to offer special attention.

Mila report exclusion at work:

Mila: *I experienced humiliation at work because of religion. Also, a co-worker, afraid that I would take away her job, taught me the job the wrong way. They think that we, as immigrants, are not aware of our rights. [...] My brother-in-law is a musician. They hired him for music lessons, but when they found out he was an immigrant, they refused him.*

When she says: “they think that we, as immigrants, are not aware of our rights,” she points out the underestimation in the treatment she had. The same seems to have happened to his brother-in-law, who was dismissed from being a guitar teacher because he was an immigrant.

Teacher Lucas also comments in this regard:

Lucas: *I developed a chess project at school, which I think has a lot to do with mathematics. The number of foreign students who attended this project was very large. Half of the class was foreigners, which surprised me, even for their performance in mathematics. The South American students liked it a lot, they were more interested. I don't know if it's something cultural or if it's a general commitment to study, but their relationship with mathematics was better. Despite the fear of the language issue, it flowed well, they had a good understanding.*

From teacher Lucas's account, we perceived his underexpectation. When he said: "Half of the class was foreigners, which surprised me, even for their performance in mathematics," he highlighted his low expectations with the production that immigrant students would present in a project that he considered demanding mathematical knowledge.

Even if unintentionally and subtly, the teachers may have approached the student in a disqualifying way. A view under the rule of disability may have led teacher Miguel to attempt to help that student in need, due to his possible inability to complete the same activity as his peers, placing him in a place of underestimation and strangeness.

This type of proposal by the teacher, to offer a different activity, could cause another form of microexclusion: blocking. The class's isolation from the immigrant student would make it impossible to share ideas and discuss possible resolutions of math tasks in class. Moreover, other colleagues may have an underrated and questionable look at the student's capabilities. Thus, they can be downgraded and put in disrepute or labeled as having little or no learning ability. Consequently, these students may face isolation and obstacles in the mathematics teaching and learning processes.

### **Inclusive Mathematics Education**

Recapitulating the five types of microexclusion identified against immigrant students, they are *exoticization*, *misleading identification*, *assimilation*, *second-class citizens*, and *mispriizing*, I do not mean to make a classification, and I do not claim that these are the only forms of microexclusion that immigrants have to deal with. Rather, I illustrated subtle manifestations of exclusion hidden and unquestioned within normalized educational practices. This reminds us that "being inside" may differ from "being part."

These six types of microexclusion come from a broader structural exclusion system that has their unnoticed roots under difficult-to-identify levels, revealing markings in marginalization and inferiority. Such microexclusion practices are presented in a gradient of subtlety and dissimulation, conducive to reinvigorating racism and xenophobia.

Understanding the structures of the immigrant inclusion/exclusion iceberg has to do with inclusive mathematics education considering immigrant students. Many immigrant students demand attention in aspects that go beyond multilingual varieties. These are uprooted people who consequently feel inadequate in the face of standards imposed by discourses related to normalization and orientalism in movements with shapes and contours inside and outside the school space.

This text presents reports from immigrants and teachers in situations of microexclusion. The data reveals a context of microexclusion experienced by immigrants in Brazil and indicates that inclusion takes place in environments that intend to value differences but under discourses of education in standards of normality, which appears to point to the bottom of the issue.

These accounts are representative of a larger social context. However, they also reflect a context that needs to be considered by inclusive mathematics education discourses that may remain superficial if they do not delve deeper into the roots that generate exclusion in mathematics classes. Underestimating this complexity involves preventing the minimization or superficialization of such discussion. It is not easy to deconstruct microaggression in mathematics teaching in any context, as they are embedded in beliefs (Silva et al., 2023). However, more than changing beliefs, overcoming microaggression means challenging structured systems of oppression.

Coping with microexclusion in mathematics classes is just one of the aspects to be reflected and theorized upon when considering the inclusion of immigrant students. Being noticed and recognized in mathematics classes and not being perceived as less important or inferior is essential to inclusion and can motivate students to learn mathematics. Inclusion means action to make them part of learning environments –with no specific group of students being overlooked. Being pushed away from learning opportunities may place immigrant learners at risk of marginal participation in society.

This paper discusses crucial concepts for thinking about inclusive mathematics education for immigrants. More research is needed to unravel how systems of reason in different racialized systems shape and challenge discourses of inclusion and the materialization of reform efforts on inclusion in mathematics education. I hope this paper encourages discussions that stress inclusive mathematics education, moving towards raising demands and probing possibilities that encompass issues pertinent to the collectivities of immigrant students.

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