

Relations between schools and immigrant and refugee families: the role(s) of school principals as seen through a territorial approach

Relazioni tra scuola e famiglie immigrate e rifugiate: il ruolo dei dirigenti scolastici secondo un approccio territoriale

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Abstract

A previous meta-analysis of Quebecois studies highlighted the ways in which considering the diverse profiles and needs of families can positively impact the socio-educational experiences of immigrant-origin students. However, it has also been documented that many school staff view immigrant and refugee families through a lens characterized by tension or even from a deficit-based and essentializing perspective. While school principals must play a certain prescribed role in relations between schools and families, little attention has been given to how they actually assume this role. In this article, drawing from a corpus of stories of practice collected from primary school principals (n=9), we identify nine roles these individuals assume in their relations with immigrant and refugee families. We then interpret these roles through the lens of a territorial approach, allowing us to identify three types of territorialities (benevolent, ambivalent, and hostile) which offer a renewed perspective on the prescribed role of principals with these families.

Keywords: school principals, immigrant and refugee families, territorial approach, prescribed roles, assumed roles.

Sommario

Una meta-analisi condotta in Quebec ha evidenziato come la considerazione dei diversi profili e bisogni delle famiglie possa avere un impatto positivo sulle esperienze socio-educative degli studenti di origine immigrata. Tuttavia, è stato anche documentato che il personale scolastico tende a vedere le famiglie immigrate e rifugiate attraverso una lente caratterizzata da tensione o perfino da una prospettiva deficitaria ed essenzialista. Sebbene i dirigenti scolastici debbano svolgere un ruolo prescritto nelle relazioni tra scuola e famiglia, ancora poca attenzione è stata prestata al modo in cui assumono effettivamente questo ruolo. In questo articolo, attingendo a un corpus di *racconti di pratica* raccolti da dirigenti scolastici di scuole elementari (n=9), identifichiamo nove ruoli che questi individui assumono nelle loro relazioni con le famiglie immigrate e rifugiate. Interpretiamo poi questi ruoli attraverso la lente di un approccio territoriale, che ci permette di identificare tre tipi di territorialità (benevola, ambivalente e ostile) che offrono una prospettiva innovativa sul ruolo prescritto dei dirigenti scolastici con queste famiglie.

Parole chiave: dirigenti scolastici, famiglie immigrate e rifugiate, approccio territoriale, ruoli prescritti, ruoli assunti.

Introduction

Currently, over one-third of Quebec's students are first- or second-generation immigrants (Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 2023), meaning that school personnel increasingly need to interact and collaborate with immigrant families. In this regard, there are prescribed roles both for teachers, who are required to collaborate with families and community partners (MEQ, 2020), and for school principals, who are encouraged to «[s]upport the development of collaborations and partnerships focused on student success, [notably] by promoting families' engagement [...] in student success» (Ministère

de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2008, p. 39). In 2015, a meta-analysis of Quebecois studies highlighted the way in which considering the diverse profiles and needs of families can positively impact the educational success of students from immigrant backgrounds (Mc Andrew *et al.*, 2015). However, these studies generally examine relations between schools and families from the perspective of teachers or other school staff (Audet *et al.*, 2024). Little is known about how principals help to promote families' engagement (MELS, 2008) in their children's educational success. It is in this context that we conducted a study aiming to document the practices of school principals in their relations with immigrant and refugee families¹. In this article, we present the results of an analysis of principals' stories of practice (Desgagné, 2005), which shed light on the role(s) they assume in their relations with immigrant and refugee families. These roles are discussed through the lens of a territorial approach (Haesbert, 2004; Di Méo, 1998; Koga, 2003). We begin by outlining the context of our research before explaining the key aspects of the study's theoretical framework. We then outline our methodological framework, present the main findings, and conclude with a discussion of the results.

1. Context

Studies have documented that the views of many school staff towards immigrant refugee families are characterized by tension (Archambault *et al.*, 2019) and often based on a deficit-based and essentializing perspective (St-Pierre *et al.*, 2024). Additionally, the literature reveals that school actors rarely acknowledge newcomer families' vulnerabilities, their pre-, peri-, and post-migration experiences (Papazian *et al.*, 2018), or the socioeconomic challenges they may face (Vatz Laaroussi *et al.*, 2008). Consequently, immigrant parents are often not recognized as competent (Audet, 2008) or as legitimate partners (Audet *et al.*, 2016), and there appears to be limited awareness that these perceptions can influence the quality of school-family relations (Audet *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, the *invisible* strategies that families employ to support their children's educational success are often unknown to school actors, which contributes to a certain denial of these families' agency (Charette, 2016).

2. Theoretical framework

To examine the practices of school principals, it is important to clarify that we choose to see practitioners as competent actors (Giddens, 1987) with professional know-how (Schön, 1983), meaning they possess the agency to act upon structures. Due to their sense of competence and the leeway they afford themselves, practitioners – in this case, school principals – are capable of acting upon contextual constraints and transforming them into resources. It is here that they exercise their professional know-how, an expertise that they develop by navigating problematic situations both through their actions and through the judgments they make when regularity is disrupted (Schön, 1983). Stories of practice (Desgagné, 2005), the methodology employed in the study, provide access to school principals' professional know-how.

To examine the practices of school principals, we will analyze relations between schools and immigrant and refugee families through a territorial perspective (Di Méo, 1998; Haesbaert, 2004; Koga, 2003). This approach aims to illuminate the participation of families in building relationships with school principals, while also taking into account the contextual challenges within the studied context, considered here as a territory, which refers to a material and symbolic appropriation of space (Melé, 2012) where the social participation of actors (Koga, 2003; Silva, 2012) is manifested through power relations

(Haesbaert, 2004). Using a territorial perspective, the notion of territoriality refers to the different ways of symbolically organizing the territory and arranging territorial possibilities (Lafitte, 2017) based on context. Third, territorialization describes the processes by which actors (Melé, 2012) anchor themselves in this territory to ensure control over it. Analyzing the interactions between families and school principals from a territorial perspective allows us to understand the dynamics underlying negotiations, tensions, and power relations while considering principals' perspectives on the specific challenges and issues related to the presence of the families, enabling us to identify different territorialities.

To interpret the territorialization practices of school principals, specifically how they exercise their professional know-how – their territoriality – based on the limits and the leeway they give themselves, we will also draw on the framework of inclusive education (Magnan *et al.*, 2021). We will aim to analyze the extent to which the practices of school principals align with the goals of inclusive education: equity, which aims to consider the realities, pathways, and needs of students and their families to provide them with the appropriate resources; and inclusion, which emphasizes the necessity of ensuring the genuine participation of every member of society. This framework also enables us to assess how the practices of school principals towards immigrant and refugee families actualize inclusive education's goal of social transformation (Potvin, 2014).

3. Methodology

To access the practices of school principals, we collected stories of practice (Desgagné, 2005) through interviews inspired by the explicitation interview method (Vermersch, 2017) and by the comprehensive interview approach (Blanchet and Gotman, 1992). Participants were invited to chronologically recount a problematic situation involving an immigrant or refugee family and identify a lesson they had learned from it. Eleven principals participated, all working within the same multiethnic school board in the Montréal region of Québec, Canada. The interviews were conducted in French via Zoom between February and June 2023, lasted between 30 and 80 minutes, and were subsequently transcribed. After being formatted, the transcripts were sent to participants for validation and then compiled into an online collection. From the gathered narratives, we selected a corpus of nine stories in which the described situations occurred in primary schools.

To identify the professional know-how reflected in these narratives, we conducted a progressive data analysis (Paillé, 1994). A first transversal analysis of the stories of practice allowed us to identify elements which seemed to illustrate different roles principals were assuming in the situation they recounted. It appears that, in trying to give the recounted situation a certain coherence, principals assigned themselves a particular role in the narratives they constructed. A second vertical and sensitive (Glaser, 1978) analysis of the narratives led us to identify nine ways in which principals assume their role with immigrant and refugee families and their children. These nine roles are presented in the following section and subsequently interpreted through the lens of the territorial approach subsequently.

4. Findings

Participants' narratives are presented and organized alphabetically according to the pseudonyms they chose for themselves. All quotations from participants have been

translated from French.

In her narrative, Alice chooses to share a situation involving a family «of Syrian origin». Recounting this situation, Alice appears to take on the role of a negotiator, within which she tries to find «a balance» in her relationship with this family, despite the challenges she faced when trying to collaborate with the parents. She explains that the younger child in the family had «significant needs which had not been identified during centralized registration» and details the various things put in place for the family and their child, even though some were «not part of [her] job». After putting all these measures in place, the following year, she felt she had reached «a breaking point»: the school was «really too greatly affected by the presence of this student». An urgent reassignment was therefore requested, but the parents refused. This refusal altered Alice's perception of her relationship with the parents, changing the power dynamic. She explains:

When the parents started refusing the various steps, I changed my approach. Sometimes I get a bit angry with them. «This is not a negotiation here. I manage the case, not you!» and I even had to tell them: «I understand your point, but you will not tell me how to run my school» (Alice).

Following this refusal, Alice admits that she «reported the situation to Child Protection Services». She explains: «we are aware that the more limits we set, the more we break the trust, and the more the possibility of neglect becomes prominent in our minds...». The parents eventually agreed to have their child transferred to a school better suited to meet his needs.

Antoine chooses to speak about a «family that came from Ukraine». In the situation he describes, Antoine positions himself as a facilitator for the reception of this family, particularly for the mother, who was «caught off guard» when it came to enrolling her daughter in school. Antoine notes, «even though registration is centralized at the school board, you have to go through the website in French to book an appointment... That can be difficult for these families». Faced with this difficulty, the mother came to the school, and Antoine was the one who assisted her.

I spent an hour and a half with her using a translation tool. We listened to each other, we were talking and translating, so we could upload the documents to the website and she could get an appointment for centralized registration. I ended up doing the work that should have been done at the head office or with the support of a community organization or another resource (Antoine).

At the end of the narrative, when Antoine reflects on what he learned from this situation, he states that it taught him «to set boundaries» and the importance of «clarifying everyone's roles without making the parent or the teacher feel excluded. It's essential to maintain a balance among all the people involved in a given relationship». In facilitating the reception of this family, Antoine also ensured that he acted as an intermediary, without replacing the other individuals involved, so that responsibility was shared between all parties.

In her story, Carole chooses to recount a «particular situation» involving a «student [...] who drew mangas in which she killed her teacher». She adds: «from an artistic standpoint, it was quite remarkable, but it was still concerning to us». One day, this student came to school with a small knife. Carole's reaction was to try to understand the situation. «What I felt at that moment was that this child was using the school, albeit

clumsily, as a place where she could be helped to break free from the constraints imposed on her». Carole notes that in addition to having artistic talent, the child was a top student and came from a family of doctors. Her parents, who were «of Chinese origin», wanted her to attend a highly selective private school. «They said they hadn't left China for her to pursue an artistic career». Carole then met with the parents, along with the psychoeducator. The teacher was not invited because she had not been «informed of the situation». Carole clarifies:

usually, when parents arrive, the child sits next to their father and mother. But this time, she left her parents sitting at one end of the large table and she sat completely at the other end, near us, far from her parents. The parents spoke to us in English and communicated with each other in their native language. The student spoke to us in French because her parents did not understand French (Carole).

Reflecting on this meeting, Carole reveals that she believed the child had «brought us into her world» and, in doing so, «wanted us to validate what she was trying to communicate to her parents. She must have felt that we could serve as intermediaries between her and her parents». This interpretation leads us to believe that Carole, in this situation, assumed a protective role for the student.

In her narrative, Catherine describes a situation that led her to question how francophone newcomer students and families are welcomed at her school. Her role within the story is that of a vigilant principal who avoids blind spots by never letting her guard down. According to Catherine, «when children arrive in a *welcoming class* [for newcomer students learning French], the school staff is very attuned to their needs and makes sure they receive support». However, the student in question «entered a regular second-grade class». As Catherine explains, «we welcomed her as a regular student, as if there was a distinct *regular student* format and a *welcoming class student* format». However, «a week later», the teacher noticed something was amiss. The child did not have her school supplies, hid in the bathroom during lunchtime, and did not respond when staff members asked her questions. «It was concerning», Catherine admits. It seems that this situation made her realize a certain oversight or lack of vigilance in the way this family had been welcomed: «she completely slipped under the radar». Catherine then implemented a series of actions to address this oversight, particularly regarding the relationship with the mother. She personally invited the mother to school events, met with her extensively to learn how their settlement was progressing and to understand their migration journey, and leveraged her own contacts to provide the family with furniture and food. Catherine also encouraged the mother to participate in school activities in order to feel less isolated and so that Catherine could keep an eye on her. The child ultimately developed mental health issues and had to receive schooling in a hospital for a time; even during this period, Catherine ensured that she maintained contact with the mother. Reflecting on what she learned from this situation, Catherine confides that it taught her to «trust her instincts». She adds, «we can't get bogged down in procedures because they don't apply to everyone». She seems to suggest that people should not hesitate to deviate from the beaten path or to reassess their methods when the situation demands it.

Fabienne, in her narrative, reflects on a situation that occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic involving a family from Bangladesh, with whom the relationship was already somewhat complicated. «The administration knew that this family did not have access to the internet», so activities for the child were printed and delivered to their home. However, no one ever opened the door. Confronted with this situation, Fabienne confesses, «it was a red flag for me. I suspected that this was a family with whom we

would need to work more closely to develop a relationship». Fabienne made considerable efforts to find a Bengali translator so she could speak with the father. «Until the very morning of the meeting, I wasn't sure if he would show up. But he did», she shares. Fabienne had high hopes for this new collaboration and hoped it would continue.

From the day of that meeting and several times afterward, I also told the mother and father about French language classes, hoping to help the family. [...] I explained to the father that if he wanted to work, learning French was very important. But he didn't really want to work, because he kept saying that he and his wife were too sick and that it was too dangerous for them to go out (Fabienne).

The assessment she provides during the interview is rather bleak. She did indeed meet with the father again, «but not much has changed». She admits that «in response to the father's lack of engagement», she has also «limited [her] own involvement in this case», while still «remaining present for this family». For her, the issue is one of cultural clash: «what I take away from this situation, with a family like this, is that we have a very different understanding from theirs... Our way of seeing life is not the same as theirs».

In the situation he describes, Frédéric undergoes a process of self-reflection. This introspection begins when the mother he discusses in his narrative reacts to his intervention with her children. Frédéric remarks that for the students at his school, «academic learning is challenging because there is not much support at home for homework», and that they «often come from culturally poor backgrounds where books are often absent in the home». His encounter with the mother took place the day after an altercation on the school playground between one of her daughters and another student. He explains:

the next day, just before lunch, they called me in, saying, «Come quickly, Frédéric, there's a hysterical mother in the school entrance»! So I went. I didn't suspect it would be the mother of the girl from yesterday.

He describes this mother as being from Niger, with «a history as a child soldier». He adds: «she's a woman with [...] very little education and some cognitive limitations». When Frédéric encountered the mother that day, they had a rather intense exchange in English, as she had come to inquire about the reason for her daughter's suspension. To Frédéric, the fact that she was shouting «shows that this mother is a bit too defensive» and that she «takes things very literally». During this conversation, the mother told Frédéric that he was biased. For him, this was a shock. He questioned himself afterward:

«did I really have an unconscious bias? Even if you tell yourself, «I don't have any biases, I've worked on myself enough», when someone puts it right in front of you, you start to wonder, «am I wrong? Do I have biases? Do I not have any»? (Frédéric).

He had failed to follow up with the mother directly after the altercation, and she had come to the school seeking an explanation. He admits to having made «a mistake» by not contacting the mother, adding: «had I known all of this, I wouldn't have let them feed off each other all evening, because it was during the evening, once at home, that things escalated». He then apologized to the mother «for making assumptions».

In her narrative, Maria talks about a kindergarten student born in Quebec, with a family that she believes «comes from the Caribbean». From the first meeting with the mother, Maria learned that a social worker had been involved with this family. «We understood

that the daycare had reported the family to Child Protection Services, and the social worker had been following them ever since». Within the first week of school, the child's teacher was «no longer able to handle the situation». Maria says she also noticed that the teacher had «a rather unhelpful attitude» toward the mother when she came to pick up her child. When Maria met with the teacher, she admitted to being overwhelmed. For Maria, «what is important in particular situations like this is to create a connection with the parent», so she set up meetings «every two or three weeks» during which they would «check in with the teacher, the social worker, the psychoeducator, the special education support worker, and the mother». According to Maria, these meetings «helped improve the relationship between [the teacher] and the mother». In some cases, however, Maria admits to having excluded the teacher from these meetings «to avoid the mother hearing [...] continuously that things were not going well», which speaks to the mediator role she adopted in this situation. At the time of the interview, Maria, even though she admits to «lacking [...] some keys to understanding», wishes to «continue to create and maintain the connection with the mother». She adds that «[...] the administration can act as a buffer in the relationship with the family when teachers become more stressed».

In the story she shares, Marie chooses to speak about a family with two children where the father «is not an immigrant» but had been living in South America. Shortly before schools closed in 2020 due to the pandemic, they «decided to return to Quebec», but «the mother stayed there with her older children. [...] At a certain point», Marie specifies, the younger of the two children exhibited «very intense reactions» that required staff members to «sometimes physically restrain him». In order to better understand the situation, Marie sought the father's cooperation. However, in her view, the father «has difficulty getting moving». Moreover, she repeatedly emphasizes that the father and two children have no contact with the mother. For her, there is «an instability, a lack of information, and a lack of clarity regarding what is happening within the family and the family's decisions». At the time she tells this story, the older of the two children «is no longer attending school». For her, there is a direct connection between the child's decision to stop attending school and the family situation. «He never really came back in the end. [...] It was clear to us, the school team, that there were underlying issues behind his non-attendance, including the fact that his mother stayed in her country of origin». When she reflects on the situation, Marie emphasizes that, in her eyes, «the father was not able to do anything; he made small steps, but they were too small» for what the situation required.

At the time of his interview, Robert is the newly appointed principal of the school where the «particular situation» he experienced took place. The situation involved «a father of two or three children, originally from Pakistan, who seemed unable to afford the lunchtime supervision service». Every day at noon, this father would pick up his children from school to take them home for lunch, then drive them back in a manner that was not very safe and always late. After having discussed the situation «regularly» with the father, Robert became irritated and decided to impose «consequences, such as giving his children detentions». He wanted the father «to change this bad habit», which resulted in the father becoming «very aggressive». One day, after having «set limits», Robert found himself having to leave the school to confront the father, who was once again late. «He became very aggressive toward me, really very aggressive». The father subsequently filed a complaint. For Robert, this was a «conflict with a parent», but for the parent, it was a matter of racism. Faced with this situation, Robert wanted to find «a solution». Because he «suspected that they couldn't afford to pay for the lunchtime service» he proposed to the parents that they could leave their children at school during lunchtime for free. However, midway through the following school year, Robert «decided that enough was enough». He then called the father to «warn him: [...] I told him that we had been very

kind, very generous to them, but from now on, if he wanted to keep his children in the lunchtime service, he would have to pay». According to Robert, the father «tried to plead his case». However, he notes: «Even though he had been kind to me, even though he had given me gifts, I stood my ground. He even continued to give me gifts [afterwards]. Taking away this privilege didn't break our relationship». He continues: «it's as if, all of a sudden, the father finally recognized my authority and learned to respect me as the principal».

5. Discussion

In this section, we interpret the roles assumed by the school principals which emerged from our analysis of their stories of practice using the territorial approach (Haesbert, 2004; Di Méo, 1998; Koga, 2003). This interpretation led us to group these nine roles into three categories, each of which reflects, in its own way, the relationships negotiated within a territory marked to varying degrees by power dynamics. We therefore have identified three types of territorialities, which represent three ways in which the principals responded to challenges related to the territorialization processes of families.

The stories told by Antoine, Catherine, and Maria highlight a first category: benevolent territorialities, within which the principals' responses to the territorialization processes of families create space for the agency of all actors involved. The principals view the families as *competent*, (Giddens, 1987), meaning they are capable of transforming constraints into resources (Audet, 2008). The participation of families is encouraged; the principals see them as legitimate partners (Audet *et al.*, 2016). For instance, Antoine takes on the role of facilitator when he acts as an intermediary, offering his help to a mother to enroll her child in school, even though this is not part of his official duties; this action aligns with the importance he places on being accessible in his role as principal. Catherine assumes a role of vigilance towards both the mother and the child when she realizes that the new francophone immigrant student she is welcoming to her school requires special attention. This situation led the school leadership team to reassess their perspective on welcoming francophone newcomer children, demonstrating the importance of this particular child's experience in improving the school's inclusion practices. Maria, meanwhile, uses the trust she has built with the mother to support her as best as possible in the face of tensions that her presence in the territory creates with the child's teacher. In these benevolent territorialities, the three roles assumed by these principals have in common a strong emphasis on the potentialities within the territory to address challenges. These three principals have, in response to the context and the demands of the situation, expanded their scope of action and reconsidered their usual ways of doing things, thereby deploying their professional know-how, their territoriality. In doing so, they are able to actualize the goals of equity and inclusion inherent in inclusive education (Magnan *et al.*, 2021): their actions are aligned with the needs of the families, allowing them space to participate and thus encouraging a certain social transformation (Potvin, 2014).

Based on the stories of Alice, Fabienne, and Marie, we can identify a second category: ambivalent territorialities, within which the principals' responses to the territorialization processes of families oscillate between distrust and rejection. Indeed, it seems as though these principals are caught between the desire to support families and their wish for families to become involved – but only according to modalities determined by the school, which leads to a struggle for control of the territory. For instance, after implementing several measures to try to support the child and negotiating with the family for solutions adapted to their child, Alice faces the parents' refusal to have the student transferred to a specialized school. At this point, she admits to feeling irritated and changing her attitude

towards the parents. She even goes so far as to file a report with Child Protection Services for neglect; in doing so, she asserts her authority and control. Fabienne, after attempting to support the family and making significant efforts to build a relationship with them, ends up feeling discouraged and ultimately becomes less involved in trying to resolve the situation. For her, this decision is the result of cultural shock, different perspectives that she believes to be irreconcilable. Marie, after trying various solutions and employing different resources to bring back the child who decided to stop attending school, continues to attribute the children's problems to the parents, specifically to the father's lack of involvement and the mother's absence. In these ambivalent territorialities, the three roles assumed by the principals share a common trait of viewing the families with mixed feelings (Archambault *et al.*, 2019). It is as though the families who attempt to exercise their agency become undesirable in some way because they no longer meet the principal's expectations in terms of engagement for their child. The principals thus end up asserting their control and power, which in turn hinders the territorialization process of the families, who lose their status as legitimate partners. As a result, the goals of equity and inclusion (Magnan *et al.*, 2021) become increasingly overlooked. This ambivalent perspective, oscillating between distrust and rejection, affects the principals' recognition of the families' realities and needs, ultimately hindering the families' possibility of genuinely participating.

Finally, based on the stories of Carole, Frédéric, and Robert, we can see a third category of roles played by principals: hostile territorialities, within which the principals' responses to the territorialization processes of families are immediately characterized by prejudice against the families. This deficit-based and essentializing perspective (St-Pierre *et al.*, 2024) contributes to delegitimizing these families as having agency. They are considered inadequate, and the relationships appear to unfold in a territory where power is not intended to be shared with the families. In her narrative, Carole assumes the role of a protector of the student. By doing so, she seeks to protect the student from her family, which she deems almost unhealthy for the child, and her prejudices towards the family prevent her from forming a relationship with them. Her reaction to the child bringing a knife to school is therefore biased by her stereotypical judgment of «Chinese parents», who she believes imposed their dreams on their children, dreams she sees as a heavy burden. Frédéric, after being confronted by the mother who pointed out his biases, assumes the role of a principal who questions himself. However, his initial interpretation of the situation is strongly influenced by the deficit-based perception he has of this mother, who was once a child soldier. Robert, for his part, takes on the role of regulating the relationship with the family and bases his «solution» on demonstrating goodwill to a father who accuses him of racism. By offering free lunch supervision to the children, Robert believes he is granting the father a «privilege», which he associates with a loss of power in relation to this parent. He regains control of the territory, and in doing so, nullifies any process of territorialization of the father by revoking this «privilege» and treating the family like any other, without considering their specific circumstances. In these hostile territorialities, the three principals share the common trait of adopting an essentializing view of the families even before meeting them, which in one case leads to an open conflict with the family. By doing so, they deny these families the possibility of receiving equitable treatment, wherein their needs and realities would be taken into account, and the opportunity to participate in the territory and to experience genuine inclusion (Magnan *et al.*, 2021).

Conclusion

In this article, we have aimed to examine the practices of school principals in their relations with immigrant and refugee families. To do so, we invited them to recount a situation they had experienced, thereby providing access to their professional know-how (Schön, 1983) through stories of practice (Desgagné, 2005). The analysis of these narratives allowed us to identify various roles assumed by the principals in this regard, and then, using a territorial approach, to propose three categories of territorialities that reveal a dynamic understanding of the territorialization process of families. Whether in benevolent, ambivalent, or hostile territorialities, the participation and the influence of families are notable, as they compel principals to take action and assume a role. However, what differs across the identified types is the perspective through which principals view these families.

In light of these findings, we believe we have demonstrated that the territorial approach adopted here (Di Méo, 1998; Koga, 2003), and more specifically the territorialization (Melé, 2012; Haesbaert, 2004) of families, highlights the gap between the prescribed role (MELS, 2008) of principals and the roles they come to assume in each context. The reality of practice and the situations encountered on the ground necessitate a re-evaluation and redefinition of certain roles to better account for the diversity of families, necessitating new forms of territorialities that are more inclusive and better suited to the contexts and realities of these families. The needs that emerge from the presence of families, specifically immigrant and refugee families in this case, push principals to move beyond traditional interventions and reorganize their territory of intervention; it is now a matter of recognizing their competence (Giddens, 1987) by considering other forms of territorialities that will enable social transformation.

Notes

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Short Bio

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