

ISEC2010 – Inclusive and Supportive Education Congress
Promoting Diversity and Inclusive Practice
2-5 August 2010 – Queen's University Belfast

Maria Teresa Pereira dos Santos
Escola Superior de Educação (Instituto Politécnico de Beja - Portugal)
msantos@ipbeja.pt

Title: **Diversity and Acceptance: views of children and youngsters**

Conference Theme: **Diversity**

Format: **individual presentation**

Summary

Modern societies are becoming more heterogeneous, multiethnic, multicultural, and schools have to deal with an increasing number of children whose characteristics are distinct in a multiplicity of aspects. Reflecting this social reality, the public school is challenged to answer with quality in order to promote the full potential of its population (Ainscow, 1997; Morgado, 2004; Rodrigues, 2006).

Human history is full of examples of segregation and humiliation of individuals and groups whose characteristics did not fit the social patterns and rules. This mechanism of categorizing some as different and deviant, upon which many prejudices were built, are still present in contemporary societies, though in more subtle and dissimulated ways than in the past (Vala & Lima, 2003; França & Monteiro, 2004).

School is the ideal context to provide the opportunity to contact with diversity. Young people realize this and are aware of the meaning of school for social development. But when diversity comes in very evident features, how do they see it and react to it?

Inscribed in the field of inclusive education, this study focuses on children and youngsters' perceptions of different aspects of diversity in people (e.g., skin colour, handicap, ethnicity, violent behaviour, social-economic status) on their experience of contact with individuals of the referred groups and on the way they see and conceive relationships with them.

The theoretical framework puts into perspective various approaches concerning education and difference, the perception of the self and of others the interpersonal and group relationships, stereotypes and prejudice and also the strategies to promote positive attitudes towards others.

A group of 85 children and youngsters (10, 13 and 16 year-olds) of Beja (Portugal) elementary and secondary schools were interviewed. The data analysis was centred not only on the qualitative aspects of the content but also submitted to statistical procedures.

As supported by the literature, it was expected that age, gender and parents' academic level (independent variables) would influence children's and youngsters' perceptions, therefore bringing to light distinct patterns of thought and behaviour. However, in this study, there was no statistic evidence of such differences.

As a whole, the results show a group whose perceptions of others, who belong to usually stereotyped and discriminated social categories, are mainly positive and so are the relationships established or foreseen with members of those groups.

If skin colour, handicap and social-economic status are considered by the great majority as not offering any problem to relationships, the same doesn't happen regarding the Gipsy ethnic group and here the prejudice is more evident, with many stating how difficult they find to relate with members of this group. In fact, when we look into the various studies, the Gipsy ethnic group is the minority group most rejected by the Portuguese Society (Fonseca *et al.*, 2005; Mendes, 2005; Dias *et al.*, 2006).

Therefore, this presentation will analyse some of the results and discuss the role of school to promote the acceptance of diversity.

INTRODUCTION

As humanity we have developed to a very sophisticated degree and we have the technological instruments to control most of our lives as never before. But, when we look into the human development of interpersonal and group relationships we do still face many ambiguities and contradictions. If, on the one hand, we claim the openness to the other, to his acceptance, on the other hand, we tend to confine that difference within certain limits, as long as it does not balance our rules. It seems there is often a border between **I/We** and the **Other(s)**.

Public school reflects the diversity of social life and is required to give a quality answer to its population, promoting the potential of children and youngsters who differentiate from each other in many aspects, like age, gender, social, economic and cultural status, religion, ethnicity, linguistically, skills and development (Ainscow, 1997; Morgado, 2003b, 2004; Rodrigues, 2001, 2006).

From a broad spectrum of differences there are some that appear to have more visibility given by the educational system itself when it introduces selective or compensatory measures for certain categories of pupils (either with a disability, learning difficulties or maladjusted behaviour among others). However, there is still a great number of students for whom school is not able to find an adequate educational answer showing how difficult it is to deal with those who do not find there a meaning (Niza, 1996; Barroso, 2003; Canário, 2006).

The challenges of an inclusive school launched by the Salamanca Statement in 1994 demands a reconfiguration of the concepts of difference and also of school role in order to fulfill its mission of offering children and youngsters stimuli and opportunities for development and for a feeling of welcome and belonging, albeit the diversity of interests and needs (Ainscow, 1997; Porter, 1997; Morgado, 2003a, 2003b; Costa, 2006; Rodrigues, 2006).

Many efforts have been put into breaking down some of the barriers to inclusion by different sectors of society and a most significant role has been played by those who transport the mark of their difference in the eyes of that same society, through acts of "rebellion" (Stöer & Magalhães, 2001) or the "stigma inversion" (Wieviorka, 2002). Their voice and their acts contribute for a critical overview of our usual way of thinking and doing, can generate a change

of attitudes and practices and must not be ignored, even if, at a first glance, they may seem violent or inadequate.

This research will reflect upon the way some differences are seen by a group of school children and youngsters and how their diverse social experiences can help us to look into school environment as a privileged place to educate for the acceptance of diversity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptualizing the Differences

Every human being is unique and to be different is the rule, not the exception. However, there are some differences that seem more easily to conduct to rejection and discrimination.

According to Vayer and Roncin (1992), the differences that we accept and those we reject depend on the way we perceive others, the feeling of strangeness we experience, mainly the strangeness of their discourse which interferes with the communication process, essential for the understanding of the other person.

Many authors consider the concept of difference as a product of social construction, resulting from the insecurity of the individual and his group, which tend to see this other as a menace to established interests (Stöer & Magalhães, 2001; Rodrigues, 2006). As stated by Wieviorka (2002: 17) "The experience of otherness and of difference was, at all times, followed by tensions and violence".

Stöer and Magalhães (2001) support that one should talk about differences and not difference, due to its plural configuration and the difficulty to put such concept within a specific frame. To look into differences in individuals one must also take into account the contexts they live in and relate to, as they are essential to the development of personal and social identity and will provide us with a better insight into intra and intergroup relationships (Ornelas, 2001).

Stereotypes and Prejudice

Since the 50s of the last century, many social researchers have been studying with interest this subject. Allport's publication in 1954 marked the beginning of a cognitive based approach on stereotypes formation and functions and has inspired many of the recent studies in the field, which support the view that stereotypes prevalence in society are due to their utility and efficacy as cognitive instruments of simplification (Garcia-Marques & Garcia-Marques, 2003; Macrae, Milne & Bodenhausen, 2003).

However, such cognitive processes cannot be conceived as isolated from the influence of social factors as Tajfel (1969) tried to prove through his theory of Social Identity, stating that it is in the process of social categorization that stereotypes are activated (in Garcia-Marques & Garcia-Marques, 2003).

As this activation brings along, quite often, prejudice and discrimination, it may be useful to make a distinction between concepts such as **stereotypes** and **prejudice**. The former is a system of beliefs based on the attribution of certain traits (psychological, ethnic, cultural,

biological ...) to characterize a certain group and to extend it to all its members, therefore making it possible to compare and evaluate individuals and groups. On the other hand, **prejudice** is a negative attitude towards those individuals and groups as a result of the attribution of negative evaluation (Vala, Brito & Lopes, 1999).

Many researches reveal that the characteristics of the social groups children and adults belong to can influence attitudes and behaviours in their relationships with others and such effects can often be nocive to individuals and minority groups of low social-economic status and generally discriminated (Smith *et al.*, 1999; Vala, 1999; Weinger, 2000; Madge, 2001; Carvalhosa *et al.*, 2002; Vala *et al.*, 2003; França & Monteiro, 2004).

Stereotypes and Prejudice in Children

In a review of several studies, Smith, Cowie e Blades (1998) state that around the age of 8 there are not many differences between children and adults in what respects stereotypes.

Monteiro (2002) and Nesdale *et al.* (2003) put in evidence that children of 5 show a perception of ethnic differences and relate it with a lower or higher social status. This kind of sensitivity would explain the ambiguities and difficulties often found in social identity processes of children belonging to minority and lower social status groups.

Inspired by Aboud and colleagues' Social Cognitive Theory, Nesdale *et al.*, (2003; 2005) propose the theory of Social Identity Development to explain ethnic attitudes in children, which would go through four stages: **non differentiation**; **ethnic perception**; **ethnic preference** (attained by 4-5-year-olds of multiethnic communities) and **ethnic prejudice** (highest point around the age of 7, increasing or decreasing by the influence of social contexts).

The authors found that the preference for a group does not necessarily brings along prejudice and rejection of the out-group, since this will depend on identification with the in-group, its attitudes towards out-groups, competition or conflict among both groups and real or perceived menace from the out-group to the stability of the in-group. A greater identification with the in-group and perceived threat from the out-group was strongly related to rejection of the out-group. The studies of França and Monteiro (2004) with Brazilian white and black children made them question Aboud *et al.*'s thesis which defended a decrease in discrimination behavior in children over 8 years old on the basis of cognitive development. According to França and Monteiro (2004), older children do express discriminatory behaviour, but they tend to do it in an indirect way in order to avoid criticism and social punishment. This indirect form of discrimination can be observed in contexts that justify it by other motives that are not apparently linked with racial traits or where explicit anti-racist norms become less evident and therefore there is a reduction of control upon children's behaviour.

Studies with adult population in many European countries have shown that the persistence of racism in formal anti-racist societies can be explained by the fact that racist theories have been replaced by cultural theories and new forms of racism are emerging - modern, symbolic, subtle or latent racism in the language of different authors - as expressed by Vala and Lima (2003).

Thus, being skin colour no longer a valid or acceptable difference to discriminate others, societies develop arguments linked either to very different cultural values and practices or social behaviour, or even skills and abilities, among many others.

For instance, in Portugal, as also in many other European countries, the most rejected group is the Gipsy ethnic group and this rejection is quite often attributed to the extreme cultural differences from the mainstream values in society (Moscovici & Pérez, 1999; Cortesão *et al.*, 2005).

Persecuted since the 15th century, this group has been able to preserve its strong identity and this resistance may be the only way out from a historical and permanent persecution and the multiple attempts to destroy or assimilate such a culture (Moscovici & Pérez, 1999; Liégeois, 2001).

However, there are signs of some mutual understanding among both dominant and dominated cultures and the Gipsy one cannot be seen as completely closed in itself as many movements towards adjustment/integration have been observed. The raise of academic level of Gipsy children is seen as most relevant for the improvement of their social status and citizenship (Mendes, 2005).

In what concerns disability, since the initial debates in the 70s on integration versus segregation of children with special educational needs, as a result of different types of disability, many studies have tried to evaluate the effects of integration. An important dimension to be studied was, at the time as it is today, the relationships with the other colleagues. Many have proved that children with special needs do seem to have a lower status in school and seldom are among the most popular.

Discussing today the inclusion concept, the last 30 years have produced quite a number of important results and much evidence of the benefits of an inclusive environment for the development of acceptance relationships among peers and how these can influence the success of being part of a group/institution (Simon, 1991; Lewis, 1995, 2002; Maras & Brown, 2000; Bunch & Valeo, 2004; Monchy, Pijl & Zandberg, 2004; Laws & Kelly, 2005 among many others).

School contexts that have been able to transform the supposed weaknesses of differences into richness experiences for all involved (children, teachers, parents, other professionals and communities) do really make a difference in the lives of all and are accomplishing an important role - taking part in social transformation and breaking down cycles of poverty and exclusion.

A Place for the Differences: strategies for Acceptance and/or Assertion

A significant number of authors do introduce optimistic perspectives and consider that in spite of the apparent inevitability of stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination are not a fatality (Bodenhausen & Moreno, 2000; Deschamps, 2003; Macrae *et al.*, 2003; Nesdale *et al.*, 2003).

Some other put in evidence the positive effects that intervention strategies focusing either on cognitive and social skills or on the characteristics of contexts can have towards the acceptance of others (Devine, 1998; Bigler, 1999; Levy, 1999; Houlette *et al.*, 2004).

Bodenhausen and Macrae (1998) reflect that albeit the automaticity and unconsciousness of stereotyped answers, it is possible to control them through higher and complex cognitive processes (hierarchical control) based on supra individual values (like equity values) which can mobilize attention and motivation of the subject and lead him to regulate his thoughts and actions.

The belief in individual cognitive flexibility has also something to offer to the issue of intervention, specially, in school settings, and Levy (1999) takes us on a trip through various ways of approaching it to introduce changes in children's way of thinking and behaving, either following information processing theories or the Cognitive Dissonance Theory formulated by Festinger in 1957. The ultimate objective is to give the individual an opportunity to go deep inside himself and his believes, to be aware of discrepancy among thinking processes and actions and build a coherent pattern.

Other studies have been observing how the affective factors can influence the intergroup perception, being friendship links of uttermost importance for mutual acceptance behaviours (Vala, Brito & Lopes, 1999; Bodenhausen & Moreno, 2000).

Most of these researches emphasize that the fact of belonging to a group, does not mean the subject is a "manipulated doll on the hands of the group" and a great individual variability has been found in the way people (adults or children) react to difference. So, the issue is far from being inscribed in a simple or linear logic (Bigler & Liben, 1993; Bigler, Jones & Lobliner, 1997; Devine & Vasquez, 1998).

The complexity of relationships among individuals and groups raises the importance of going beyond a simple contact. Only in equal conditions, people can communicate at the same level of trust and build a common culture that can be transferred to different contexts out of the borders of social categorization (Slavin & Cooper, 1999; Madge, 2001; Vermeulen, 2001; Houlette *et al.*, 2004).

The organizational features of school contexts are also extremely relevant and many do call our attention for the way schools define criteria for the groups/classes formation, the group dynamics, the collaborative and cooperative climate in opposition to the competitive one (Khmelkov & Hallinan, 1999).

Public school is recognized to be one of the privileged environments for the encounter with others who are much different but with whom children learn to grow together. Therefore, any projects and programmes to develop positive attitudes in children and youngsters towards others who are often victims of stigmatization, cannot loose sight of the need for an intervention both at individual, group and organizational level, that faces differences as a resource for the development of everyone's potential and affirmation of citizenship.

Wieviorka (2002: 154) challenges us to look this assertion of differences through what he calls the "stigma inversion", or to say, "the inversion of stigma is constituted necessarily by two

interlinked dimensions. It is, at the same time, the work of the actor on himself and the confrontation with society, a reaction in face of the depreciation stare society focused on him till then, or at least as he perceived it. It puts an end to, in Sartre's words, the shame as 'consciousness of the self in the eye of other'".

To bring the individual to the centre of action and mobilize his inner resources in a search of existential sense with consequences on social change is the author's appeal. This will probably lead us to the need of the reinvention of discourse and practices on differences among human beings.

METHODOLOGY

Problem context and research goals

On many occasions, through History, Portugal made efforts to meet the Other, the Strange, the Different, in waves characterized both by attraction and rejection. In the last two decades many immigrants coming from different continents have chosen Portugal as a destiny to live and with them a greater diversity was introduced in our social and school landscape.

Even though Beja is an inland small town, it is not immune to these migratory movements and a new dimension of diversity, along with the challenge of the Gipsy ethnic group education have to be added to the social economic differences, the rural and urban origin of pupils, learning difficulties and handicap (physical, intellectual, sensory), which school had, to a certain point, managed to integrate.

Most of the schools of the town express in their educational projects the aim of building an inclusive environment and propose strategies to overcome school failure and drop-out tendency, considered the open doors to school and social exclusion.

Having this social and school climate as a background, it was considered important to hear children and youngsters' voices in the domain of reacting and relating to the differences in others, since pupils are key actors for a feel of inclusion in the educational settings and they are often ignored in educational research designs.

So it was decided to do this research focusing on school children and young people in order to understand what they think when one talks about difference, how they see and relate to it.

Thus the objectives defined were: a) To know how school children and youngsters perceive differences in others; b) To identify their experiences with diversity; c) To understand the ways they conceive relationships with people, whose difference can be more obvious (e.g.: handicap; skin colour; Gipsy ethnic group; violent behaviour; economic status); d) To analyse the sources of influence for the way they think about people from those groups.

Instrument, procedures and data analysis

The methodological approach is based on a qualitative research model that tries to put in evidence the role of the individual and his experience as a main source of knowledge and understanding (Bogdan & Biklen, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

To collect data it was decided to use a semi-structured interview to apply to a smaller group of individuals (N= 85) selected from a bigger sample (N= 607) studied 1 year earlier, to whom we asked for written information.

The interview was seen as the ideal instrument to verify, explore and expand such previous data (Ghiglione & Matalon, 1992) and was organised in themes such as: a) Characterization of someone considered different in multiple aspects – economic, cultural and ethnic, skin colour, disability, violent behaviour; b) Experience and relationships with persons from those groups; c) Influences in the way of thinking and feeling.

Children and youngsters' answers to the questions at the interview were submitted to a process of content analysis in which the categorization grid was built from the meaning units which emerged from their speech (Bardin, 1991).

Besides this qualitative treatment, the data was also object of statistic procedures (descriptive and inferential) using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (Maroco, 2003).

SAMPLE: Constitution and Characterization

Children and youngsters selected for the interview were part of an earlier larger study of 607 students studying at elementary and secondary schools of Beja (Portugal). A sample of 90 was considered ideal to have the representation of both genders, 3 age groups (10, 13 and 16 year-olds) and 3 parents' academic level (elementary, secondary and higher education), however it was only possible to interview 85, due to the refusal of some of the older students.

Table 1 shows the characterization of the students considering their age and gender and as observed, the feminine and the older groups are smaller.

Table 1 – Age and Gender Distribution

Age Group	Gender		Total
	Masculine	Feminine	
10 year-olds	16 (50,0%)	16 (50,0%)	32 (37,6%)*
13 year-olds	14 (46,7%)	16 (53,3%)	30 (35,3%)*
16 year-olds	14 (60,9%)	9 (39,1%)	23 (27,1%)*
Total	44 (51,8%)*	41 (48,2%)*	85

* % of N=85

Regarding parents' academic level (Table 2), the biggest group is the one with a secondary educational level. The explanation for a number of unknown situations is because the information was given by children and youngsters themselves and 14 were not aware of their parents' academic level.

Table 2 – Parents' Academic Level

Parents' Academic Level	Nº	%
Elementary (1st to 9th year)	21	24,7
Secondary (10th to 12th year)	27	31,8
High (> 12th year)	23	27,0
Unknown/Unanswered	14	16,5
Total	85	100

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Relationships and Differences

In this chapter, some of the most relevant results from the data collected in the interview will be presented, mainly those referring to the real or perceived relationships with members of groups who are usually the most rejected in school and society.

Disability

As shown in Table 3, the majority (57,6%) considers possible to develop a *Good/Normal* relationship with a person having a disability, while 30,6% see it as a *Support/Help* relationship.

Table 3 - Relationship with a person having a disability

Type of relationship	Nº	%
Good/Normal	49	57,6
Support/Help	26	30,6
Conditional	3	3,5
Difficult	6	7,1
Unknown/Unanswered	1	1,2
Total	85	100

As an example of this *Support/Help* relationship, which sees the other as someone more dependent, inscribed in the “charity model” proposed by Pthiaka (2005)

“I had to be very careful and could not have certain kind of play activities with her as I have sometimes with friends ... I had to be more healthy ... more friendly because she is disabled, does not have the same ... skills as we have” (boy, 10 years old)

“I had all the care, but also respect ... and ... if by any chance I had an opportunity to help that person, I would do it” (boy, 13 years old)

“with more respect ... another way of relating ... more positive to cheer her up, could forget her handicap” (boy, 16 years old)

“One has to have special attention ... we cannot treat the person in the same way, but one tries to treat in the same way for them not to feel different” (boy, 16 years old)

This type of *Support/Help* relationship was higher among the younger and masculine group, however the statistic tests did not reveal any significant differences in relation with age, gender and parents’ academic level of education. This concern with the need for help stated by boys seems to contradict other studies’ results which have found it to be more feminine related (Laws, & Kelly, 2005).

A great number of the subjects (62) said they had some contact and experience with someone having a disability (48 within school context as a colleague) and, as far as they understood, their teachers and their parents would have no problems in relating with persons in this particular situation. The main problems came from a small group of school children who could mistreat that colleague calling him/her names.

The majority thinks that relationship would be *Good/Normal* as with any other person in the line of “Human Rights Model” considered by Pthiaka (2005).

“would react well as I did with other colleagues. He is a person like everyone, the only difference is he has an handicap” (girl, 10 years old)

“they have to be treated in the same way because they are persons” (girl, 13 years old)

“I would get along perfectly ... besides that, he continues to be a person” (boy, 16 years old)

Some research has found that younger children show more positive attitudes towards integration of children with a disability (Lewis, 1995; Pthiaka, 2005), a fact that our data did not reveal, because as recognized by our interviewees they experienced positive contacts in social contexts as family and school, which have promoted the acceptance of such difference.

Skin colour

Though not too expressive in the region, the black community is, at national level, quite often a target group for prejudice and discrimination. Therefore, it was important to know what students thought about this group, their contact or experience and how they would relate to them. As expressed in Table 4, most of the answers (90,6%) state there would not be any problem, as can be seen by the following opinions:

“Colour for me is not important, what matters is to care for that person, if she is good, I’ll be good to her too” (boy, 10 years old)

“I am not a racist” (boy, 10 years old; girl, 13 years old)
 “Well, sometimes I like them more, because they seem to understand me better” (girl, 13 years old)
 “we are all equal” (girl, 13 years old)
 “I do not look at people for what they have, neither for what they represent, but for how they are” (girl, 16 years old)
 “that is not important, I had that education, because my mother is white and my father is mixed” (boy, 16 years old)
 “I think that what matters is how people are inside” (girl, 16 years old)

Table 4 - Relationship with a person having another skin colour

Type of relationship	Nº	%
Good/Normal	77	90,6
Support/Help	1	1,2
Conditional	3	3,5
Difficult	3	3,5
Unknown/Unanswered	1	1,2
Total	85	100

These were very unanimous opinions and once more it was not found any statistic evidence of difference of opinion among groups (age, gender or parents' academic level).

Many express that either at school, family or community they had already contacted with people with another skin colour, particularly black and, with few exceptions (as their own father and some colleagues), those who are close to them – parents, teachers, colleagues – do not discriminate or reject people due to skin colour.

Such unanimity may be related with the consciousness of anti-racist social norms present in western societies and also due to the fact of the black community in Beja, being so reduced, does not represent a threat for the local population (Vala & Lima, 2003; França & Monteiro, 2004; Nesdale et al. 2005).

However, one can interpret it in the light of Aboud and colleagues' Social Cognitive Theory, which stresses that due to cognitive and social developmental stages, from the age of 7-8, children show a better understanding of others and therefore a reduction in prejudice is expected (in França & Monteiro, 2004; Nesdale et al. 2003; 2005).

Gipsy ethnic group

This region has been for decades on the route of nomadic members of the Gipsy ethnic minority, but also a residence place for those who are becoming sedentary, living mainly in a neighbourhood of strong social exclusion. Because social welfare and educational laws impose school attendance, the presence of students of this group in schools has increased.

When questioned about the way they would react or would relate to a person of another cultural group like the Gipsy one, we observe that if 32,9% say it would be *Good/Normal*, 35,3% consider it a *Conditional* type and for 27,1% a *Difficult* one (Table 5).

Relationships with members of this group show a greater division of opinion among interviewees and the difficulties are expressed more by the youngest, the male group and those who have parents with a elementary level of education, though such differences are not statistically significant.

The *Conditional* type of relationship is expressed as followed by boys and girls of all age groups:

“If they were nice and behaved well, I could be his/her friend”
 “If they respect me, I’ll respect them”

Table 5 - Relationship with a person of the Gipsy ethnic group

Type of relationship	Nº	%
Good/Normal	28	32,9
Conditional	30	35,3
Difficult	23	27,1
Impossible	3	3,5
Unknown/Unanswered	1	1,2
Total	85	100

As examples of a *Good/Normal* relationship we have:

“I have a friend who is Gipsy ... he does not do anything wrong, does not beat anyone” (boys 10 and 13 years old)
 “that Gipsy we have in class is very calm, he does not hurt anyone (boy 10 years old)
 “here in school we have Gipsies and they integrate well with the others” (boy, 13 years old)
 “I get along well with them all... they are like other people, do not have anything different” (girls, 10 years old)
 “I would learn new things, new culture ... I would get well” (boy, 13 years old)

These opinions reveal the importance of the contact with the other, as, when that happens within equal conditions, it can contribute to the decrease of negative stereotypes and lead to more positive attitudes. However, if conditions are not developed at the same level, contact can increase prejudice (Trentin *et al.*, 1996, in Vala, Brito & Lopes, 1999).

Many have or had colleagues of the Gipsy ethnic group and recognize that either colleagues, teachers or their parents seem to have more difficulty in dealing with this group than any other, which is similar to what has been found in other studies developed in Portugal (Fonseca *et al.*, 2005; Mendes, 2005).

A *Difficult* or even *Impossible* relationship is put into evidence in a very strong and rude way:

“they steel and can harm us” (boys, 10 years old)
 “they smell bad and they have no manners” (girl, 13 years old)
 “the Gipsy race is not worth anything” (boy, 16 years old)

The arguments that support this rejection are the aggressive behaviour, the disrespect for society rules and the fact “they do not want to change or integrate”. These types of reasons

have been observed in various studies which analyse perceptions about Gipsy people in different European countries (Moscovici & Pérez, 1999; Liégeois, 2001; Chulvi, & Pérez, 2003).

Violent Behaviour

The concept of violence can be different from one person to another and what an adult thinks about what he sees or hears is not the same as a child or a young being involved or observing the same scene, as a study of Gumpel and Meadan (2000) revealed.

Violence among peers in school contexts can assume either a physical or psychological form, but the latter did not capture yet the same attention by teachers or researchers (Yoon *et al.*, 2004).

When asked about the possible relationship with someone considered violent, the majority thinks it would be *Impossible* (44,7%) or *Difficult* (22,4%) (Table 6), but it is also curious to verify that 14,1% of the pupils state that their relationship would be of the *Support/Help* type, showing a consciousness of the changeable nature of human behaviour which can depend on context variables, as some opinions seem to reveal:

“I would try to help so he wouldn’t be very aggressive and try to keep him there to forget aggressiveness ... try to make him calm” (boy, 10 years old)

“I would try to talk to him, ask him why he behaves like that, if he has some problem ...” (boy, 13 years old)

“...when people are violent there is always that sensitive point, that in a certain way we can manipulate and we have to be calm” (boy, 16 years old)

It is in the groups of 10 and 16-year-olds that the strategies proposed are those of dialogue, to make the other aware of his behaviour and the effects on others, however no statistical differences were found among groups.

Table 6 – Relationship with a violent person

Type of relationship	Nº	%
Good/Normal	3	3,5
Support/Help	12	14,1
Conditional	9	10,6
Difficult	19	22,4
Impossible	38	44,7
Unknown/Unanswered	4	4,7
Total	85	100

One fourth of the subjects interviewed state they had already some type of contact with violent persons either in or out of school and think that also for colleagues, teachers and parents it would not be easy to establish relationships with such persons, unless they share the same behaviour.

Economic Status

As supported by some studies, children from a very early stage in their lives do understand differences in social and economic status related to more or less privileged groups (Weinger, 2000; Monteiro, 2002; Nesdale *et al.*, 2003).

Based on our experience and observation we notice that quite often children and youngsters are rejected and reject others who do not possess items of a certain value (e.g: shoes or clothes of a certain brand) and this is an important issue if you want to belong to a specific group. Therefore, this subject was approached in the interview by asking children and youngsters what they think about relating either to someone richer or poorer, having then a higher or lower economic level.

Table 7 shows the results and for a large majority (83,5%), it is stated that would be *Good/Normal*, expressing themselves in the following way:

“What is important is to have friends, to get along well with them ... what is important is the person, not to be rich or poor” (boy, 10 years old)

“I relate well with people of different social classes, either rich or poor” (girl, 13 years old)

“what is relevant is the person inside and not what he has ... what he is like psychologically, how he relates to us” (girl, 13 years old)

These arguments seem to reveal that social economic status is not a factor that creates a barrier to the relationship with the other and once more it is the value attributed to the person, not his conditions, which emerges.

Table 7 - Relationship with a person from another economic status

Type of relationship	Nº	%
Good/Normal	71	83,5
Difficult	11	13,0
Unknown/Unanswered	3	3,5
Total	85	100

The difficulty in relating is associated to the arrogance that some attribute to those who have much money, stating that:

“rich people are more proud. I had colleagues like that and the world has to go around them and they do not think about the others” (girl, 13 years old)

“some of my colleagues are rich and a bit stupid ... they do not accept the others' opinions” (boy, 16 years old)

These results show a very homogeneous group in the way of thinking about this specific question and no statistic differences were found when one crosses age, gender and parents' educational level.

Influences in the way of thinking

When questioned about who or what had influenced the way they think and feel about the matters we talked about, the majority (41,2%) consider it to be a result of their *Own Experience* (Table 8),

“Experience ... since I was a little boy and did not know anything about black or Gipsy people, I got along well with them” (boy, 13 years old)

“I think it was the experience ... and we live in a world where one talks about everything” (boy, 13 years old)

“I think it is for my experience, for what I feel it is correct, for the information I have and this is so that many of my opinions are opposite to those of my parents” (girl, 16 years old)

Table 8 – Influences in the way of thinking

	Nº	%
What or Who was influential		
Own Experience	35	41,2
Parents and Experience	24	28,2
Parents and Teachers	5	5,9
Everyone/Everything (parents, teachers, friends, experience)	20	23,5
Unknown/Unanswered	1	1,2
Total	85	100

When such results are analysed some statistic evidence came out regarding differences among age group and if for the youngest group it is their own experience that is emphasized, the oldest group recognizes that both their own experience and their parents influenced.

This recognition of parents' education in the oldest group can be explained by characteristics of development, the ability to consider the others' perspectives and to coordinate different points of view (Selman, 1980, in Coimbra, 1990), but also the attachment relationships established in family context and the way these can promote reciprocity and trust in others (Rubin *et al.*, 2004; Nickerson & Nagle, 2005).

Conclusion

The results show a group of children and youngsters very much aware of the importance of relating to others in a non conflicting way and trying to see the others as persons regardless of their skin colour, disability, ethnicity, behaviour or economic status and they seem to be in harmony/agreement with colleagues, parents and teachers and value the good environment in which they have been able to grow up.

Of course one is dealing here with a discourse that can be seen as too kind or addressed in a way that is socially acceptable and also to please the researcher as it may happen in any study. We cannot assure that in the presence of someone belonging to a discriminated/stigmatized group such as those the interview approached, the behaviour of these children and youngsters would not be different from their speech and these discrepancies do exist. However, as Festinger puts it, the cognitive dissonance is something the individual is confronted with and tends to develop a coherent move towards the reduction of such gap, either changing behaviour or belief/thought.

In spite of the unanimity found, there are some data that has to make one think about. If it is understandable the rejection of someone considered violent, as such relationship does not bring pleasure for any of those involved, a different matter is relating to members of the Gipsy ethnic group, who appears to generate more ambiguous feelings with a third of the sample, raising some kind of conditions to relate to members of this particular group.

It is certainly an indication that something has to be done and public school, as stated before, is the best context to work on prejudices and to develop a climate open to differences, breaking down the barriers that are often built around disadvantaged individuals and groups.

The value attributed by the subjects to their own experience with difference, and to their parents' education, do indicate their awareness of context features for such way of thinking and feeling and it is precisely on these ways of thinking and feeling that educational communities have to work on and to commit themselves to the never lasting battle against discrimination.

REFERENCES

- Ainscow, M. (1997). Educação para todos: Torná-la uma realidade. In M. Ainscow, G. Porter & M.Wang, *Caminhos para as Escolas Inclusivas*. Lisboa: Instituto de Inovação Educacional, pp.11-31.
- Bardin, L. (1991). *Análise de Conteúdo*. Lisboa: Edições 70.
- Barroso, J. (2003). Factores organizacionais da exclusão escolar: A inclusão exclusiva. In D. Rodrigues (Org.), *Perspectivas sobre inclusão: Da educação à sociedade*. Porto: Porto Editora, pp.25-36.
- Bigler, R. S. (1999). The use of multicultural curricula and materials to counter racism in children. *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 55, 4, 687-705.
- Bigler, R.S., & Liben, L.S. (1993). A cognitive-developmental approach to racial stereotyping and reconstructive memory in Euro-American children. *Child Development*, 64, 1507-1518.
- Bigler, R.S., Jones, L.C., & Lobliner, D.B. (1997). Social categorization and the formation of intergroup attitudes in children. *Child Development*, Vol. 68, 3, 530-543.
- Bodenhausen, G.V., & Macrae, C.N. (1998). Stereotype Activation and Inhibition. In R.S.Wyer Jr. (Ed.), *Advances in Social Cognition*, Vol. XI (pp. 1-52). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Bodenhausen, G.V., & Moreno, K.N. (2000). How do I feel about them? The role of affective reactions in intergroup perception. In H. Bless, & J.P. Forgas (Eds.), *The message within: The role of subjective experience in social cognition and behaviour* (pp.283-303). Philadelphia: Psychology Press.
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (1994). *Investigação qualitativa em educação: Uma introdução à teoria e aos métodos*. Porto: Porto Editora.
- Bunch, G., & Valeo, A. (2004). Student attitudes toward peers with disabilities in inclusive and special education schools. *Disability & Society*, Vol. 19, 1, 61-76.
- Canário, R. (2006). A escola: Da igualdade à hospitalidade. In D. Rodrigues (Ed.), *Educação inclusiva: Estamos a fazer progressos?* Cruz Quebrada: Faculdade de Motricidade Humana, pp. 31-45.
- Carvalhosa, S.F., Lima, L., & Matos, M.G. (2002). Bullying: A provocação/vitimação entre pares no contexto escolar português. *Análise Psicológica*, 4 (XX): 571-585.
- Chulvi, B., & Pérez, J. A. (2003). Preconceitos e representação social dos ciganos. In M.L. Lima, P. Castro, & M. Garrido (Orgs.), *Temas e Debates em Psicologia Social*. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, pp. 149-175.
- Coimbra, J.L. (1990). Desenvolvimento interpessoal e moral. In B.P. Campos (Org.), *do desenvolvimento e educação de jovens*. Lisboa: Universidade Aberta, Vol.II, pp.9-49.
- Cortesão, L., Stöer, S., Casa-Nova, M.J., & Trindade, R. (2005). *Pontes para outras viagens – Escola e comunidade cigana: representações recíprocas*. Lisboa: Alto Comissariado para a Imigração e Minorias Étnicas.
- Costa, A.M.B. (2006). A educação inclusiva dez anos após Salamanca: Reflexões sobre o caminho percorrido. In D. Rodrigues (Ed.), *Educação inclusiva: Estamos a fazer progressos?* Cruz Quebrada: Faculdade de Motricidade Humana, pp.13-29.
- Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.). (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc.
- Deschamps, J.C. (2003). Identidade e relações de poder em contexto intergrupar. In M.L. Lima, P. Castro, & M. Garrido (Orgs.), *Temas e Debates em Psicologia Social* (pp. 57-124). Lisboa: Livros Horizonte.
- Devine, P.G. (1998). Beyond the isolated social perceiver: Why inhibit stereotypes? In R.S. Wyer, Jr. (Ed.), *Advances in Social Cognition*, Vol. XI (pp. 69-81). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Devine, P.G., & Vasquez, K.A. (1998). The rocky road to positive intergroup relations. In J.L. Eberhardt, & S.T. Fiske (Eds.), *Confronting racism: The problem and the response* (pp.234-262). Thousand Oaks: Sage publications.
- Dias, E.C., Alves, I., Valente, N., & Aires, S. (2006). *Comunidades ciganas: Representações e dinâmicas de exclusão/integração*. Lisboa: Alto Comissariado para a Imigração e Minorias Étnicas.
- Fonseca, E.P., Marques, J.M., Quintas, J., & Poeschl, G. (2005). *Representações sociais das comunidades cigana e não-cigana: Implicações para a integração social*. Lisboa: Alto Comissariado para a Imigração e Minorias Étnicas.
- França, D.X., & Monteiro, M.B. (2004). A expressão das formas indirectas de racismo na infância. *Análise Psicológica*, 4 (XXII), 705-720.

- Garcia-Marques, L., & Garcia-Marques, T. (2003). Mal pensa quem não repensa: Introdução ao estudo dos estereótipos sociais numa perspectiva cognitiva. In L. Garcia-Marques, & T. Garcia-Marques (Eds.), *Estereótipos e cognição social* (pp. 11-25). Lisboa: Ed. Instituto Superior de Psicologia Aplicada.
- Ghiglione, R., & Matalon, B. (1992). *O Inquérito: Teoria e prática*. Oeiras: Celta Editora.
- Gumpel, T. P., & Meadan, H. (2000). Children's perceptions of school-based violence. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 70, 391-404.
- Houlette, M.A., Gaertner, S.L., Johnson, K.M., Banker, B.S., Riek, B.M., & Dovidio, J.F. (2004). Developing a more inclusive social identity: An elementary school intervention. *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 60, 1, 35-55.
- Khmelkov, V. T., & Hallinan, M.T. (1999). Organizational effects on race relations in schools. *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 55, 4, 627-645.
- Laws, G., & Kelly, E. (2005). The attitudes and friendship intentions of children in United Kingdom mainstream schools towards peers with physical or intellectual disabilities. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, Vol. 52, 2, 79-99.
- Levy, S.R. (1999). Reducing prejudice: Lessons from social-cognitive factors underlying perceiver differences in prejudice. *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 55, 4, 745-765.
- Lewis, A. (1995). *Children's understanding of disability*. London: Routledge.
- Lewis, A. (2002). The development of children's ideas about others' difficulties in learning. *British Journal of Special Education*, Vol. 29, 2, 59-65.
- Liégeois, J. P. (2001). *Minoria e escolarização: O rumo cigano*. Lisboa: Centre de Recherches Tsiganes/Secretariado Entreculturas, Ministério da Educação.
- Macrae, C.N., Milne, A.B., & Bodenhausen, G.V. (2003). Estereótipos enquanto instrumentos de poupança de energia: Um vislumbre do interior da caixa de ferramentas cognitiva. In L. Garcia-Marques, & T. Garcia-Marques (Eds.), *Estereótipos e cognição social* (pp.77-103). Lisboa: Ed. Instituto Superior de Psicologia Aplicada.
- Madge, N. (2001). *Understanding Difference: The meaning of ethnicity for young lives*. London: National Children's Bureau.
- Maras, P., & Brown, R. (2000). Effects of different forms of school contact on children's attitudes toward disabled and non-disabled peers. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 70, 337-351.
- Maroco, J. (2003). *Análise estatística com utilização do SPSS*. Lisboa: Edições Sílabo, Lda.
- Mendes, M.M.F. (2005). *Nós, os ciganos e os outros: Etnicidade e exclusão social*. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte.
- Monchy, M., Pijl, S.J., & Zandberg, T. (2004). Discrepancies in judging social inclusion and bullying of pupils with behaviour problems. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, Vol. 19, 3, 317-330.
- Monteiro, M.B. (2002). A construção da exclusão social nas relações interétnicas: Orientações teóricas e de investigação na perspectiva do desenvolvimento. *Psicologia*, Vol.XVI, 2, 271-292.
- Morgado, J. (2003a). *Qualidade, inclusão e diferenciação*. Lisboa: Ed. Instituto Superior de Psicologia Aplicada.

Morgado, J. (2003b). Os Desafios da educação inclusiva: Fazer as coisas certas ou fazer certas as coisas. In L. M. Correia (Org.), *Educação especial e inclusão*. Porto: Porto Editora, pp.73-88.

Morgado, J. (2004). *Qualidade na educação: Um desafio para os professores*. Barcarena: Editorial Presença.

Moscovici, S., & Pérez, J. A. (1999). A extraordinária resistência das minorias à pressão das maiorias: O caso dos ciganos em Espanha. In J. Vala (Org.), *Novos Racismos: Perspectivas comparativas* (pp.103-119). Oeiras: Celta Editora, Lda.

Nesdale, D., Maass, A., Griffiths, J., & Durkin, K. (2003). Effects of in-group and out-group ethnicity on children's attitudes towards members of in-group and out-group. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 21, 177-192.

Nesdale, D., Durkin, K., Maass, A., & Griffiths, J. (2005). Threat, group identification, and children's ethnic prejudice. *Social Development*, 14, 2, 189-205.

Nickerson, A.B., & Nagle, R. J. (2005). Parent and peer attachment in late childhood and early adolescence. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, Vol. 25, 2, 223-249.

Niza, S. (1996). Necessidades especiais de educação: Da exclusão à inclusão na escola comum. *Inovação*, Vol.9, 1/2, 139-149.

Ornelas, J. H. (2001). Diversidade e desenvolvimento comunitário: Uma proposta de análise contextualista. In J. Ornelas, e S. Maria (Eds.), *Actas da 2ª Conferência, Desenvolvimento comunitário e saúde mental: Diversidade e multiculturalidade* (pp. 5-17). Lisboa: Ed. Instituto Superior de Psicologia Aplicada.

Phtiaka, H. (2005). Children with special needs in the ordinary classroom: teachers' and peers' views. [CD-ROM]. *ISEC 2005, Inclusive and Supportive Education Congress*, file:///D:/isec/abstracts/papers_p/phtiaka_h.html.

Porter, G. (1997). Organização das escolas: Conseguir o acesso e a qualidade através da inclusão. In M. Ainscow, G. Porter, & M. Wang, *Caminhos para as Escolas Inclusivas*. Lisboa: Instituto de Inovação Educacional, pp.33-48.

Rodrigues, D. (2001). A Educação e a diferença. In D. Rodrigues (Org.), *Educação e diferença: Valores e práticas para uma educação inclusiva*. Porto: Porto Editora, pp.13-34.

Rodrigues, D. (2006). Dez ideias (mal) feitas sobre a educação inclusiva. In D. Rodrigues (Ed.), *Educação inclusiva: Estamos a fazer progressos?*. Cruz Quebrada: Faculdade de Motricidade Humana, pp.75-88.

Rubin, K.H., Dwyer, K. M, Booth-LaForce, C., Kim, A.H., Burgess, K.B. & Rose-Krasnor, L. (2004). Attachment, friendship, and psychosocial functioning in early adolescence. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, Vol. 24, 4, 326-356.

Simon, J. (1991). *A integração escolar das crianças deficientes*. Rio Tinto: Edições ASA.

Slavin, R.E., & Cooper, R. (1999). Improving intergroup relations: Lessons learned from cooperative learning programs. *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 55, 4, 647-663.

Smith, P. K., Bowers, L., Binney, V., & Cowie, H. (1999). Relationships of children involved in bully/victim problems at school. In M. Woodhead, D. Faulkner, & K. Littleton (Eds.) *Making sense of social development* (pp.120-136). London: Routledge.

Smith, P. K., Cowie, H., & Blades, M. (1998). *Understanding children's development* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Stöer, S.R., & Magalhães, A. M. (2001). A incomensurabilidade da diferença e o anti-antietnocentrismo. In D. Rodrigues (Org.), *Educação e diferença: Valores e práticas para uma educação inclusiva*. Porto: Porto Editora, pp.35-48.

Vala, J. (Org.) (1999). *Novos racismos: Perspectivas comparativas*. Oeiras: Celta Editora, Lda.

Vala, J., Brito, R., & Lopes, D. (1999). *Expressões dos racismos em Portugal*. Lisboa: Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa.

Vala, J., & Lima, M. (2003). Diferenciação social, racialização e etnicização de minorias: Ambivalências e contradições. In M.L. Lima, P. Castro, & M. Garrido (Orgs.), *Temas e debates em psicologia social*. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, pp.177-206.

Vala, J., Lima, M., & Lopes, D. (2003). Valores sociais, preconceito e solidariedade relativamente a grupos racializados e imigrantes. In J. Vala, M.V. Cabral, & A. Ramos (Orgs.), *Atitudes sociais dos portugueses – Valores sociais: mudanças e contrastes em Portugal e na Europa* (pp. 391-427). Lisboa: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa.

Vayer, P., & Roncin, C. (1992). *Integração da criança deficiente na classe*. Lisboa: Instituto Piaget.

Vermeulen, H. (2001). *Imigração, integração e a dimensão política da cultura*. Lisboa: Edições Colibri.

Weinger, S. (2000). Economic status: Middle class and poor children's views. *Children & Society*, Vol. 14, 135-146.

Wieviorka, M. (2002). *A Diferença*. Lisboa: Fenda Edições.

Yoon, J.S., Barton, E., & Taiariol, J. (2004). Relational aggression in middle school: Educational implications of developmental research. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, Vol. 24, 3, 303-318.