

Functionality of The Living Environment and Schooling For Visually Impaired Children At The Louis Braille Inclusive Bilingual Primary School

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to analyse the features of the living environment that interfere with the schooling of visually impaired children at the Louis Braille Inclusive Bilingual Primary school in Yaounde (LBIBPSY). As part of an inclusive education, these learners, during their schooling, will have to cope with the demands and offers of their school microsystem. However, the rigour of the school environment, its fixity and indifference are sometimes a source of discomfort and intense suffering. Anything that makes possible the idea that the onset of disability constitutes a break-In, a shock, a tear in the school envelope, which must play its role as a container, a boundary and a forum for exchange, protection and continuity. The research is a case study carried out with four subjects, including two visually impaired pupils and two teachers. The results reveal that the schooling of visually impaired children is better when: the scopic framework is more flexible, the transitional space plays its full role and the topical space is more favourable.

Keywords: living environment, micro-system, topical space, scopic frame

Introduction

In Cameroon, according to the Demographic Health Survey and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (EDS-MICS), 5.4% of the population suffers from at least one disability. Sensory

impairments (3.6%) are the most common, in particular visual impairments (2.2%) and hearing impairments (1.6%), followed by motor impairments (1.2%), which are essentially deformities of the lower or upper limbs. In addition, 0.5% of the population suffer from behavioural disorders and 0.4% from the loss of certain extremities (EDS-MICS, 2011, p. 288). Indeed, a pupil with a disability is capable of learning like any other, provided that the impairments are physical, social, linguistic, behavioural and psychological. According to Pecqueux (2021.p.17), Louis Braille became blind at the age of 3 and entered the Institut des Jeunes Aveugles at the age of 10, becoming a brilliant pupil. This is proof enough that even people with visual difficulties have the potential and resources needed to boost their cognitive levels.

According to the third general census of the population and housing (RGPH) and the survey carried out by the National Association of Young Disabled People in Cameroon (NAYODPC) in 2010, 74.8% of people with disabilities do not attend school, 11% of whom have completed primary education. Faced with this number, the Cameroonian government has set up regulatory instruments, conventions and laws to protect and promote the education of people with disabilities. This is the case of Law N°83/013 of 21 July 1983 on the protection of disabled people, article 3 of which deals with the prevention and detection of disabled people, their care, training and education. In addition, Act No. 2010/002 of 13 April 2010 on the protection and promotion of people with disabilities focuses on disability prevention, rehabilitation and the psychological, social and economic integration of people with disabilities, with an emphasis on promoting the solidarity of nations.

In addition, various social players are working to reduce the cost of healthcare, with the support of development partners: combating disability, creating health infrastructures closer to the population, social transfers, promoting lower-cost generic medicines, lowering prices and sometimes providing certain medicines, examinations and treatments free of charge. Added to this is public spending on disability-related programmes, which are often only aimed at people with the greatest functional difficulties. These programmes cover a range of services, including health and rehabilitation services, the labour market, education and vocational training, (contributory) social insurance benefits for people with disabilities, and (non-contributory) social assistance in cash. The same applies to the purchase of technical aids, financial aid for access to transport, subsidies for public services and various support services, including personal assistants and sign language interpreters, to which administrative expenses must be added.

Despite these efforts, visually impaired pupils are still left to their own devices, performing relatively poorly at school, interrupting their education and still feeling rejected and isolated by their peers and teachers. All they feel is despair, guilt, shame and indignation. For Brejard and Pardinielli (2014, p.59), disability is like an ordeal, eminently present from birth and possibly corollary to an accident or illness that calls into question the subject's relationship with his body,

the world and himself, and depending on whether he is an infant, child, adolescent or adult, there will be consequent impacts on the psychological level that make the child dependent on others. To survive, man has a vital need to rely on others (Anzieu, 1975 p, 54). For Falguiere (2002), the group can be seen as a place where people can recognise themselves through the recognition of their peers, the place they occupy and the functions they perform. Thanks to the group, subjects are kept in a kind of tension that varies between balance and imbalance (Robert, 2014 p. 28). The group also plays the role of background, the matrix from which the latter will not only be nourished but also detached (Anzieu & Kaes, 2019). It is also in this way that the child will build himself and forge a place for himself in his individual psychic apparatus (Anzieu & Kaes, 2019).

As Terrisse, Kalubi and Larivee (2007) have already suggested, support for people with disabilities must take into account all the sub-systems of the ecosystem, i.e. the onto system (personal, intrapsychic skills), the microsystem (family environment, school environment), the mesosystem (comprehensive care, psychological and therapeutic help) and the exosystem (through society's beliefs and view of the individual's disability). It is well known that the quality of the school environment is a factor that promotes harmonious social and academic integration and the well-being of subjects with special needs (Ionescu, 1997). As a result, the school is recognised as a microsystem capable of determining mental health and, in turn, ensuring harmonious development in all its aspects in adolescents. In the context of inclusive education, the visually impaired adolescent attending school will have to cope not only with the demands and offers of his or her school environment (microsystem), but also benefit from the adaptation of the setting to his or her context (disability).

The rigour of the school environment, its fixity and indifference, is sometimes a source of unease and intense suffering. All of which gives rise to the idea that the onset of visual impairment constitutes a break-in, a shock, a tear in the school envelope, which must play its role of containment, limit and exchange, protection and continuity. As a result, the framework is lost, the adolescent loses himself and loses his bearings, and the narcissistic contract is undermined. The child's physical transformations no longer correspond to the ideal, i.e. to society's standards or norms. Similarly, the group, through its fixity and indifference, no longer constitutes an ideal for the adolescent. As a result, the (secondary) group's view of the child, and the adolescent's view of the group, is different, arbitrary, indifferent, abnormal and non-compliant. This can lead teachers to the problem of doing or remaining silent.

In this situation, instead of being a receptacle for the 'undifferentiated', 'psychotic' or 'symbiotic' parts of the child's personality (Kaes, Missenard, Anzieu and Guillaumin, 2022), the setting poses the problem of a lack, a defect leading to spectacular symptoms in the child (abandonment, incomprehension, punishment, indifference). We might therefore ask ourselves: should we burn down the institution of schooling, as Chambrier (2014) advocates?

1. Methodology

The study is part of a comprehensive paradigm. It aims to understand how the functionalities of the living environment interfere with the schooling of visually impaired children at the Louis Braille Inclusive Bilingual Primary school in Yaounde (LBIBPSY) created in 2003, which is a school located at the Rehabilitated Blind Youth Club of Cameroon (RBYCC). It is a non-political, non-governmental organization with social, humanitarian and cultural aims. We chose this organization because of its versatility in the socio-educational approach to disability. Its technical platform and human resources are capable of providing the information needed for our research.

1.1. Population and study sample

The study population consisted of visually impaired pupils attending the RBYCC LBIBPSY in the Ekounou district of Yaounde and the teachers at this school. The children were aged 08-12 and came from various nuclear, polygamous or even blended families. This research project is based on case studies. It involves four (4) children with acquired visual impairment and four (4) teachers selected using a non-random sampling technique: purposive sampling or sampling by reasoned choice (Deslauriers, 1991), because the aim is to highlight typical cases in relation to the research (Dubé et al., 2005; Rousseau et al., 1995).

However, only two cases met the inclusion criteria for pupils: being visually impaired; having attended LBIBPSY for at least two years; presenting a disability card; and being aged 08-10. Two cases also met the inclusion criteria for teachers, namely: being sighted or blind with at least three years' experience in an inclusive class; presenting a certificate of training in the field; being a permanent teacher at RBYCC for at least two years. The data presented here were collected using the semi-structured individual interview method and analyzed using the content method (Bardin, 1977). According to Mgbwa et al (2013), this method allows our respondents to express themselves freely, in the terms they wish and in the order that suits them. The interviews took place with the participants at two sites, namely a classroom and an office at the French-language RBYCC. The interviews focused on three main themes: **the scopic frame, the transitional space and the topical frame.**

2. Results: presentation of cases observed

2.1. The case T

Case T is a 9-year-old child enrolled in CE2 at LBIBPSY. He became blind at the age of 6 due to neglect. According to him, *“my mother always told me that the doctor said I should buy a product to put in my eyes regularly, because when I was 2 years old my eyes started to leak tears*

and by the age of 3 the pain had set in". His disability gradually set in and eventually left him blind. Faced with this situation, Case T thought his life had come to an end. *"When I lost my sight, I didn't want to go to school because I knew that if you can't see, you can't go. But my parents made me understand that I could go to school and come top of my class"*. Before starting classes, he had to undergo tests and learn certain things, such as mobility in the context of life and school. He found the environment hostile and difficult because he was not in the presence of the people he had known in the past; neither his brothers nor his parents were present. *"I couldn't see anyone and I could hear voices, some of them saying: 'He doesn't understand anything"*.

In his classroom, he says that he is treated unfairly; in the case of teaching, for example, they say that he doesn't understand anything and that to understand properly I need a bit more time than children who can see. Case T says: *"They say I'm not like the others, that it takes me a long time to understand. I'm not treated on the basis of my disability, but rather as an inhibitor for others, and yet I didn't ask to be blind"*. At school he doesn't feel fulfilled, the teacher doesn't understand him, everything he wants the teacher doesn't take into account. No one understands what he wants, yet at home he feels loved and pampered. At school, they don't take into account everything I want. Sometimes I find myself doing my business on myself because no one wants to go with me - maybe it's because I'm blind?

2.2. The case O

Case O is 8 years old and comes from a monogamous couple, the fourth of 4 children (3 girls and a boy). His father was a farmer and his mother a housewife. A pupil in CE2, he lost his sight at the age of 4 and started school at the age of 8 at LBIBPSY, where he attended a special introductory class in Braille reading and writing.

When he lost his sight at the age of 4, his parents wanted him to continue at school, but where he was attending was not inclusive. So he came to live with his uncle in Yaoundé, where he was enrolled in an inclusive class. From his very first day there, he was astonished by the teacher's exclamations. *"New visually impaired children in the classroom means I have to rethink the way I teach, and that's not easy either for me or for the child"*. That day he cried all day long and that evening he told his parents about it, but they didn't believe him.

At school, he never feels at ease, he's not free to move around the classroom as he pleases and talk to whoever he wants. One day, his bench-mate told him that his parents had warned him not to play with him or take his snack, even if he gave it to him. When his classmates were reading to him, he was obliged to listen to them, sometimes to sleep, because he didn't have a book, just his papers, his tablet and his punch. *"I'd like to read and write like the others, but the teacher didn't look after me, telling me that I wasn't trained to teach you to read and write. As for*

homework, I copy it at the end of lessons and I try to do it myself as I don't have anyone to guide me through it. I don't copy all my lessons because the teacher dictates some and not others". His teacher never understood him. When he arrived at school angry, even when he was crying, she never asked him why he was crying. When he had a tummy ache, the teacher punished him by putting him on his knees, saying that he preferred to sleep instead of copying lessons. In the midst of his classmates, he was deprived of speech and could not say what was on his mind during a game. People don't feel sorry for me, he says, "so I'd better stay at home. I wasn't born blind, I didn't ask to be the way I am, so why do you treat me like this? No one likes me, not even my teacher". He says that at school there are too many rules, too much instruction, but at home he's free to do what he wants.

2.3. The case M, the trainer on the verge of burnout

Case M has been a trainer since 1988, is married and has 4 children. He currently teaches visually impaired people aged 16 and over. He has a CAPIEM and teaches special classes. Inclusive classes are taught on an individual or personalized basis, because each disabled learner is a case and each case represents a class. The teachers focus on the child's mental representation, because the child creates an imaginary framework that is not far from the reality of a visually impaired person who has assimilated his or her lessons well. He claims that they are not trained to teach children with disabilities, and in the field he finds himself in an inclusive class with children of all types of disability, given that each child represents a class, he has to follow them in a particular way, but he encounters many difficulties and these are ultimately very frustrating, which is why he declares: *"It's unacceptable to recruit a visually impaired child into a CE2 class who hasn't been trained in Braille reading and writing. I can assure you that it's very frustrating to teach a class knowing that you have to go over the same thing several times, and in the end the child hasn't retained anything and hasn't enabled the other pupils to make any progress"*.

He says that he can't teach the handicapped very well because of the teaching materials the administration doesn't do anything about it, even after several complaints, even the introductory book on reading and writing in Braille, which he didn't have in his class. All his complaints to the administration have fallen on deaf ears. During lessons, he says that the child's brain has been so formatted at home that he doesn't do what he thinks. The child doesn't have confidence in himself and doesn't trust his teachers any more. Case M explains that the inclusive framework creates a lot of problems for the child, especially the visually impaired, because he says that other disabilities are digestible, but the visually impaired cannot cope easily in an inclusive class. He suggests including other types of disability, but in the case of the visually impaired, creating a class just for them and providing the teaching materials to teach them.

2.4. The Case C, the overwhelmed teacher

Case C is a 30-year-old teacher who has been at LBIBPSY for 3 years, holds a CAPIEM qualification and is the mother of two children. Inclusive classes are taught according to the category of disability the teacher is dealing with. The presence of several types of disability in one class is a double task. She says that she received the same training as the teachers in the exclusive classes. It's very difficult for her to teach in an inclusive class, but the school doesn't understand that. In view of the training she has received, it's difficult to offer a child a setting that he or she wants, because all in all he or she will be behind and have a lot of gaps compared with the other pupils. During lessons, they will feel left to their own devices because they are not up to the level of the class. With his friends and classmates, she says that the blind child will do everything to fit in, but will be rejected by them. Case C points out that the inclusive framework is a place that creates a lot of problems for a child who becomes blind in the course of his or her life. She also suggested including other types of disability, but in the case of visual impairment, creating a class just for them and providing the teaching materials to teach them. She adds that parents must love their children, because all the difficulties her pupils encounter with their teachers are due to the teaching or education they receive at home. For her, it is not a question of creating inclusive establishments in name only, or putting visually impaired and able-bodied people in the same classroom and talking about inclusion. The State must ensure that so-called inclusive establishments are not a framework that is indifferent to the needs of people with disabilities, especially the visually impaired. It must take the trouble to transcribe their school textbooks into Braille. It must also train teachers in inclusion.

3. Analysis of the results

Theme 1: the scopic framework

The various problems faced by children at a disadvantage plunge them into a situation of permanent fear and anxiety. They are lost and lose their bearings. According to Kessler (1981), the manager's role should be to contain the child and prevent him from recognising the death drive at work, arbitrariness and indifference. According to T: *"It's a different environment to the others I used to go to, I'm often scared when the voices are unfamiliar"*. Case T thought that inclusive schools did not facilitate learning, especially for the visually impaired, as this type of disability has learning problems, especially for those who have not been in a special class. The latter become sources of frustration for teachers in their teaching. In view of the above, children are left to their own devices. They are mocked and ridiculed by their classmates, who constantly remind them that they are different from them. On the other hand, the teaching staff who, despite their desire to do well and to assist the child, find themselves trapped and without resources.

Data from the field shows that visually impaired children are confronted with an excess of prohibitions in their school environment. We are dealing with individuals who are incapable of following the program of the pleasure principle. As a result, they often become hating and persecuting beings. Nor are teachers immune to this proliferation of prohibitions. They see it as the best way of controlling the actions of visually impaired children. Otherwise they will be held to account, especially as these children are very stubborn. For Case C: *"I'm not joking with the visually impaired, they're very disobedient, whether they like it or not, they have to fall in line. If anything happens to one of them, I'll be the one to blame. I often have to put them on their knees, whip them and watch everything they do. You have to be tough and strong-headed with them"*.

Theme 2: Transitional space

In the continuity of human existence, three areas can be distinguished: the inside, the outside and the potential or transitional space. This area is an area of mediation between the inside and the outside. It is an area of cultural experience and creative play. This potential space lies between the realm where there is nothing but me. And the realm where there are objects and phenomena beyond omnipotent control. This subjective space differs from one person to another in its flexibility and surface area, because it depends on each person's life experiences.

Being in a fusional, symbiotic relationship, the child experiences unpleasant sensations. He is traumatized, shocked, does not understand his body, his identity and others, and needs these teachers to feel that he exists and can then hope to respond individually to what is happening to him. Case T says: *"They say I'm not like the others, that it takes me a long time to understand. I'm not treated on the basis of my disability, but rather as an inhibitor to others, and yet I didn't ask to be blind"*. However, in the teachers' comments, no mention was made of a relationship of trust between the teacher and the children; some children are so lazy that they do not listen to the teacher. Case M mentions: *"Another difficulty facing teachers is the mentality that parents have instilled in disabled people, namely that you can't do anything, even the school you go to, you just go and waste your time there. Such talk makes children lazy and very difficult to mould, to the point where teachers are unable to establish an atmosphere of listening and a relationship of trust"*. From the foregoing, the school setting seems doomed to failure because it is incapable of playing the role of a sinecure or a good mother in its function of holding, handling and even presenting object (Winnicott, 1967) for the safety of the visually impaired. In this study, it is the transformation of the teacher who becomes capable of listening and paying attention to his pupil in order to understand him. A teacher who is unable to transform bad projections changes the relationship between container and content into a negative one.

Theme 3: Topical space

A topical setting is a place where children can be happy, autonomous and fulfilled. To know that they are surrounded, listened to and supported. It's this framework that contributes to the realization of impulsive goals. It's what makes the child autonomous, a link in a long chain to which he's subject. Able to love, play and work. All this through tempered tunings. But sometimes, it can be neutral, indifferent, leaving the deficient in a world where he finds himself completely alone in an abyssal hole.

At school, children sometimes express the feeling of being alone or of not existing when they are in a group. They may feel suicidally withdrawn, their corner very different from the others. This generates tensions that can have a considerable impact on their performance. On this subject, Case O states: *"I don't know why everyone runs away from me. Maybe because I'm blind. But I wasn't like that before and I had lots of friends. Even at school they question everyone but me. It's as if I've become a ghost. Even when I attract attention, nobody sees me. As soon as I approach some of my classmates, everyone runs away. I feel really alone, even though people are right next to me"*. Case T thinks he's already dead before he dies. Even sitting next to him, people refuse. What he's experiencing is more than death, although he'd like to be around it, but every time he's at school, he's hurt. In any case, according to the analysis of the various corpora of interviews with visually impaired children and their teachers, the study shows that the schooling of these children takes into account the functionalities of the living environment, and this environment is far from being the container for undifferentiated, psychotic parts of the psyche. The anguish of over-excitement becomes a killer frame, incapable of sending a good reflection to the visually impaired child and creating a transitional space enabling him or her to become autonomous and integrate easily into society.

4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to analyze how the functionalities of the living environment interfere with the schooling of visually impaired children at the Louis Braille Inclusive Bilingual Primary school in Yaounde. The results obtained from the interviews show that factors such as the scopic frame, the transitional space and the topical frame interfere during the schooling of visually impaired children. These findings are in line with those of Lewi-Dumont (2015), who believes that the teacher has a key role in the journey of visually impaired children to promote their inclusion in the mainstream classroom and in their success, both academically and socially. For Kaes (2009), the suffering of visually impaired children in the institution can be understood as resulting in part from the massive expectations of its members, which are necessarily confronted with frustrating daily reality. When an excess or an occurrence of the forbidden occurs, we witness such a development of the feeling of guilt, deriving from anguish in the face of the withdrawal of love, anguish in the face of the superego (indispensable to the creation and permanence of civilization) that it leads, through the almost complete renunciation of the

satisfaction of drives, to levels of “intolerable tension” (Enriquez, 1975). We're dealing with individuals incapable of following the program of the pleasure principle. As a result, they often become hating and persecuting beings. In other words, for Kaes (2010, p. 111), the failures, disorganizations and recompositions of the "metasocial" formations of social life correlatively affect the "metapsychic" formations of psychic life, and consequently psychic life itself, and more specifically its metapsychic guarantors. In this context, the contract is broken. Teachers don't have, and don't articulate, structuring contract statements to their students, enabling them to become links in a long chain to which they are subject.

Surveys have shown that the difficulties presented by the visually impaired when attending school could be a caricature of the possibility of becoming human, a dependency that goes wrong, a loss of freedom that comes later in life. The subject pays a symbolic debt that is part of his personal history and that of his living environment, a second chance offered to him to become independent and autonomous. Kaes (2009), drawing on Bion's work on the Alpha function, Bleger's on the psychoanalytic framework and Winnicott's on the transitional area, discusses the notion of transitional space, referring to the coexistence, without crisis or conflict, of the already there and the not yet there. He shows us the constitution of this space through the mediation that the mother establishes between the child's bodily and psychic needs and the physical and social environment that surrounds him. Cultural experience is an extension of the idea of transitional phenomena and play. According to Kaes (2009), the crisis is the result of the undeveloped transitional space. The narcissistic contract in this case is in name only, as our participants are plunged into lack, emptiness and denial, the arbitrariness of the school setting.

A topical setting is one that builds the child, one that enables him or her to realize his or her impulsive goals; it's a welcoming place, a place where there's interaction. The child in a topical setting feels happy, autonomous and fulfilled. Freud's (1920) work shows that a topical framework is one that studies the child's mental structure. In psychoanalytic theory, a topical framework is one that reveals the relationships between the id, the ego and the superego. During this period, the frame remains very indifferent. It becomes cathodic and disconnected from the visually impaired child, activating his wound.

Finally, it can be said that when a framework becomes too rigid or too flexible, it exposes the ego to intrapsychic (the visually impaired child) and interpsychic (the group) anxieties. In the continuity of the human being's existence, it is essential that the framework offers a space where the I can emerge, where the individual can realize his desires and fantasies. So it makes no sense to say that you love a child when you have no plans for his or her life, no commitment to teaching him or her about the world and its laws, no support for his or her studies, no concern for his or her social life or feelings (Halmos, 2006).

The education that the visually impaired receive will enable them to discover what they can do, allowing the child to incorporate the rules of life, and this can only be done in the community “with others”. A visually impaired child can only develop best when boosted by a nurturing environment.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to analyze how the functionalities of the living environment potentiate and interfere with the schooling of visually impaired children at the Louis Braille Bilingual Inclusive Primary School. In the course of their schooling, visually impaired children will have to cope not only with the demands and offers of their school environment (microsystem), but also benefit from the adaptation of the setting to their context (impairment).

The research involved a sample of four people, including two visually impaired students and two teachers at LBIBPSY in Yaoundé. This was a case study. The fundamental reason for choosing the case method is that it will shed light on how the functionalities of the school setting contribute to the emergence of schooling for children with visual impairments. After conducting three interview sessions with our participants. The results were analyzed according to the model of thematic or horizontal content analysis envisaged by Castillo (2021, p. 236) in two opposing movements: “content analysis combines two opposing movements: description as a splitting movement (categorization and classification), analysis as a gathering movement (synthesis and generalization)”. At the end of the survey, we understand that, through the functioning of the inclusive environment, the visually impaired person is confronted with a double psychic suffering that undermines the bond and, in turn, the narcissistic contract: psychic suffering at the very level of the phenomenon of the visually impaired person, and psychic suffering at the level of the school setting. How, we ask, is the visually impaired going to symbolize knowledge that is increasingly devoid of the law of symbols? Are we still in the link or in the network? All these difficulties, frustrations and anxieties lead the blind or partially sighted person to find an answer to their suffering, whatever the cost. And that answer, in the context of our work, is solitude. The visually impaired people in our study suffer from abandonment anxiety (Boukerrou, 2023), indifference, berezina, arbitrariness, and constantly shout out the names of their comrades and teachers with no way out. They need their availability, their tenderness, their attention, their interest in what they're doing.

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