Article

Headteachers and Inclusion: Setting the Tone for an Inclusive School

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Abstract: Inclusion is an unavoidable dimension of education and the school's mission. Educational organisations must therefore seek approaches and practices that materialise in the effective management of diversity, equity and inclusion, since these are conditions for the involvement of the whole community to achieve the goals of education for all. This study sought to answer (i) How do school leaders conceptualize equity and inclusion? (ii) What guidance and administrative procedures do headteachers use to facilitate inclusion? (iii) What characterises their practices concerning leadership for equity and inclusion? The empirical focus of the research was a set of school principals of Portuguese public schools, where a qualitative methodology was used, namely the interview survey technique. The sample gathered 11 interviewees. The results show that, although from an ideological point of view, headteachers have a broad conception of inclusive education, from an operational point of view, the evidence shows the implementation of normative practices. The data point to a reproduction of Portuguese policies and their priorities, showing a leadership engaged in targets, outcomes and performance indicators. The conclusions of the article point to the need to explore new possibilities for understanding inclusion and leadership, and these understandings may impact the school's transformation toward successful inclusion.

Keywords: school leadership; inclusion; qualitative methodology

1. Introduction

In recent decades there has been a global and gradual growth of interest in educational leadership, particularly around the attempt to identify and operationalise the knowledge, skills and practices related to educational leadership [1]. Current policy guidelines highlight the importance of leaders who know how to set and meet objectives oriented towards school and academic results, promote excellence and seek good results in external and internal assessment processes. As a result of this trend, there has been an attempt to standardise the leadership practices of school administrators, promoted by policies that define standards and reference frameworks of competencies that serve as a guide for professional training, learning and evaluation of educational leadership. These attempts to homogenise educational leadership practices have been increasingly criticised for decontextualizing and neglecting issues related to equity and social justice [2,3].

Although it seems evident that educational leaders should motivate their staff to achieve common goals of education for all, the truth is that "in the maelstrom educational leaders find themselves in, being caught up with administration and management rather than leadership, and often just trying to keep up with bureaucratic demands and desires" [4] (p. 1).

According to Biesta [4], the question of what educational leadership ought to be is erased more often when engaging in targets, outcomes and performance indicators.

If it is granted that educational leaders should lead, then the obvious question is what they should lead for—which can also be phrased as what they should lead towards [4].

However, there are possibilities for resistance to what [5] calls "the impulse society". Gert Biesta proposes an alternative to quasi-causal thinking about education and suggests a complexity-oriented approach that pushes schools and leaders to resist, "rather than just to satisfy the desires that societies project onto their schools" [4] (p. 2).

Along with these trends, research on leadership reveals only one type of organisation or leadership style [6]. In this sense, the theories that seem to receive more supporters argue that the best leader is the adaptable leader who adjusts to the situations and contingencies they encounter in his/her actions. In this context, mediating variables may influence the processes [7], and that makes sense for the approximation between the concepts of leadership and culture [8].

Additionally, in the Portuguese panorama, the most recent trends in the analysis of educational leadership point to an understanding of leadership with a channelling of energy of people in the social system in an organisation, where numerous interactions take place [9,10]. These relational leadership challenges are often difficult to quantify because they are more related to situations, culture and context.

Schools are crossed by a plurality of cultures, and social and ethical divisions that turn it into a "micro-political arena" [11], mined with contestation and conflicts, mismatches and differentiated expectations. This reality is an enormous challenge for those who intend to manage and lead in a complex and unpredictable scenario. It is, therefore, vital to prepare leaders to face difficult challenges and to have a positive agency to influence their followers, articulating an organisational culture and the organisation's performance.

Good leaders and good schools must be those who can act according to democratic and inclusive principles. In a universe where multiple meanings are multiplied in interactions, cultures, struggles of interest, values and beliefs, internal and external actors build and rebuild the school culture daily. It is therefore necessary for the leadership to redirect and rebuild its school's organisational culture, focusing on students' learning by forming critical, responsible citizens based on universally constructed values [12].

Thus, leadership should be an exercise of both management (understood as an immediate response to procedures and problems that require a quick mobilisation of means to achieve ends) and leadership (understood as a vision of action over a more extended period that requires deep reflection to envisage a strategic vision of the organisation that mobilises all those involved). The external and internal contextual variables are fundamental to any of these plans.

From this perspective, to lead in context is to consider the specific dynamics of the organisation and its culture. The complex organisational reality of schools and the contextual variables are crucial for successful leadership. In this sense, [13] defending the concept of "Culturally Responsive Leadership" to advocate leadership in context is a success factor for leadership impacting school performance effectively.

The idea of an inclusive school underpins the work of any educational leadership. The concept of inclusion, particularly in education, has also been the subject of research and theoretical discussions. One of the contributions we would like to introduce in this article is the concept of "transclusion" [14]. According to this author, "as long as we think of inclusion as a process of bringing those who are on the 'outside' into the 'inside,' we run the risk of reproducing the very social and political structures that label some as insiders and others as outsiders in the first place". To overcome this trend, Biesta [14] puts forward the idea of "transclusion" articulating a double movement of "moving position" and "shifting terrain" attempting to transform the field where positions are held and taken and changing identities and relationships of both outsiders and insiders. This disruptive idea brings us to an alternative scenario where we can no longer develop actions to bring outsiders inside. We must also acknowledge the need for movement from those on the inside.

The literature reveals a correlation between leadership and inclusion in schools [15,16] and highlights the need for a better understanding of the importance of leadership in promoting inclusive processes and practices. These trends in school leadership and inclusion point to leadership based on democratic values and principles that promote democratic

and participatory synergies. Promoting these synergies requires leadership to adapt to the contexts and situations of each school, which brings us to the concept of organisational culture. Some authors argue that corporate culture is the most adequate and promising approach [17,18] to clarify educational management and leadership theory and to separate it from general management theory [19]. However, the connection between successful inclusive educational leadership and the context, specifically the schools' organisational culture in which it functions, needs to be more prominent in the literature. This paper offers alternative perspectives that frame leadership for inclusive education in terms of broader concepts, such as the "culturally responsible leader", that seek to develop more integrative views that bring the ideas of culture and context closer to the ideas of leadership and inclusion. These alternative perspectives try to overcome the more polarising debates of educational leadership that focus on management and performance aspects and compete with the leadership role in inclusion. The main argument of this article centres on the idea that leaders have the power to resist the performative management pressures imposed on them, promoting inclusive (or transclusion) practices built from, for and towards the specific contexts of each school. Through interviews with eleven school principals, we sought to identify these transgressive tendencies, recognising the concept of inclusion of these school principals and how they promote it in the organisational culture they lead.

How do school principals implement inclusive education practices, and how do they include the community in these practices? What are these inclusive practices, and what is the underlying concept of inclusion? How can a single school principal exert an inclusive effect on the daily life of schools? Are their inclusion practices themselves inclusive?

To address these questions, this study seeks to identify inclusive education practices in school principals' leadership, aiming to (a) describe the challenges faced by these school leaders in addressing the needs of inclusion of populations, (b) understand how these leaders conceptualise an inclusive education for all, and (c) identify the inclusive practices that they implement to ensure an education for all.

The Political and Legal Context of Inclusive Education in Portugal

Following the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, Portugal set out on a path that included the publication of new legislation in 2018, which defined a new regime of Inclusive Education. The Decree-Law no. 54/2018, 6 July [20] established the new regulatory framework for inclusive education in Portugal, which applies to all public educational establishments. This new normative framework sought to introduce a new paradigm of Inclusive Education in Portugal. Specifically, this new legal framework proposes: (a) abandoning a system of categorisation of students, including the "category" special educational needs; (b) abandoning a model of special legislation for special educational needs students; (c) establishing a continuum of educational responses for all students; (d) focusing on educational responses rather than categories of learners, and (e) it envisages the mobilisation, whenever necessary and appropriate, of resources from health, employment, vocational training and social security [21]. As underlined in the documents complementing the normative framework.

It abandons a restricted conception of "support measures for pupils with special educational special educational needs". It takes a broader view, implying that the school is a whole, and contemplates the multiplicity of its dimensions and their interactions. Another distinctive feature of the current diploma lies in the assumption that any student may need measures to support learning throughout his or her school career [21] (pp. 12–13).

In a holistic perspective of the educational process, this new regulatory framework also emphasises that inclusive education is not the sole responsibility of specialists and special education teachers but should be promoted and developed by a multidisciplinary team with the involvement of the whole school community [22].

This new legal framework for Inclusive Education brought, as already underlined, a paradigm shift, which also gave rise to some controversy among some theorists and practitioners in the field of Inclusive Education. Specifically, these theorists and practition-

ers consider that the new legal framework presents weaknesses, particularly regarding abandoning the "special educational needs (SEN) category". As some authors argue that, by leaving the SEN category, we are "excluding" students with significant educational needs and "will weaken the significant change of decision-making considered less inclusive at various levels" [23] (p. 5).

The implementation of this new legal framework has "generated several readings and different forms of implementation, causing heterogeneity of processes and calling into question the application of the diploma, as well as the principles of equity and inclusion described therein" [24] (p. 139). It is at this stage that school leaders must act.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Objectives and Type of Study

The present study investigated what actions headteachers have developed to promote inclusion in their schools. More specifically, the following objectives were formulated: (1) to know how the school leaders conceptualise equity and inclusion; (2) to know the guidance and administrative procedures of the headteachers used to facilitate inclusion, and (3) to identify which effective practices the school headteachers adopt to promote inclusion.

Given our study's research objectives and exploratory nature, a qualitative methodology was adopted. From an epistemological point of view, this study adopted a constructivist perspective since the teachers' experiences that our research aimed to uncover are, by nature, assumed from the participants' points of view and, therefore, do not have a "neutral value" [25]. Thus, the study acquired a phenomenological position as it explored the participants' lived experiences to gain a more profound understanding of the phenomenon under investigation through their eyes and experiences [26].

2.2. Participants

For the present study, a purposeful sample was selected [27] that fits the following two selection criteria: to be a school director and to have five or more years in charge. To meet the selection criteria, the recruitment of the participants followed a kind of snowball sampling [28], whereby each participant who volunteered to participate in the study indicated that other colleagues they knew might be willing to participate. We ended up with 11 interviewees, five female and six male school directors with extensive professional experience ranging from 5 to 19 years and ages between 43 to 64 years old. These participants are responsible for around 16,000 students and coordinate around 1800 teachers.

All participants are directors of school clusters located in the districts of Beja (1), Lisbon (7), Porto (1), Santarém (1) and Setúbal (1). Four of these school clusters are located in socially vulnerable contexts and are part of the Educational Priority Intervention Territories (TEIP) (The TEIP Programme is a government initiative currently implemented in 146 school clusters/non-grouped schools that are located in economically and socially disadvantaged areas, marked by poverty and social exclusion, where violence, indiscipline, dropout and school failure are more prevalent (Source: http://www.dge.mec.pt/teip, accessed on 13 November 2022). network (3 in the Lisbon district and 1 in the Beja district).

For anonymity and confidentiality, the participants were assigned codes (D1 to D11), which will be used in this article for data evidence presentation.

2.3. Procedures—Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection for the present study was carried out with in-depth interviews, which are appropriate for gathering detailed information about people's thoughts and behaviours [29]. The questions in the interview protocol focused on the topics under study: conceptions; practices; legislation and policies for inclusion, and future challenges.

All 11 interviews were carried out by one of the present study's authors, all of whom are experienced researchers, from October to November 2022. The interviews were conducted via the Zoom platform, and the participants chose times at their best convenience.

Each interview lasted between 60–90 min. The interviews were recorded with the prior consent of the interviewees.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis, and the interviewees were asked to read their respective transcripts to confirm their testimonials. This procedure also served data validation purposes [30].

Thematic analysis (TA) [31] was adopted as the method of data analysis. This method guaranteed richness and detail of analysis and was thus particularly appropriate for understanding the participants' perceptions and uncovering their experiences [32]. Braun and Clarke [33] describe TA as being two-directional, performed inductively and deductively. This approach can aid in demonstrating rigour in the analysis [34]. This was the case with our analytical approach. While predominantly utilising TA inductively in an iterative and multi-directional manner, moving backwards and forwards across each transcript to identify emerging themes, our analysis was also guided by the research objectives and questions in a deductive manner. Both approaches were used during the coding phase of the analysis, which involved the identification of the initial themes and sub-themes. Once the themes were developed, a chart for the themes, subthemes and meaning units was created and underwent several revisions.

The analysis was conducted by the three authors of the study. At first, it was conducted individually following the procedures described above. In the second stage, the comparison of the results of the individual analyses with a review of the entire process by the three authors was carried out to eliminate overlaps and ambiguities. This two-stage procedure allowed adjustments, some amendments and the elaboration of a final chart, as shown in Table 1. This analysis, which involved more than one investigator/researcher observing the same data, is described by [35] as "investigator triangulation" to validate the analysis and findings.

Table 1. Thematic analysis—Themes and sub-themes.

Themes	Sub-Themes
Concepts	Inclusive Education Inclusive School Culture
Practices	Human resources training and development Family-community-school relationship Inclusion in sustainable projects
Legislation and Policies for Inclusion	The framework of Inclusive Education in Portugal Autonomy policies and Inclusive Education
Scenario thinking: "approaches to the future"	Encouraging beginnings and challenges Impact of transformational leadership

3. Results and Discussion

The analysis identified four main themes encompassing the headteachers' concepts, actions, legislation and policies and the future of education regarding inclusion. Kamens (2013) [36] emphasises that it is essential to recognise that every school is unique, with its context and culture, with every school having its distinctive mission and community. How the data were analysed is related to the contextual diversity of each school cluster. In this way, when reading the narratives of each headteacher, we must consider the characteristics of each educational community and its sociocultural diversity. Each school is a unique and singular academic world, and the data presented and discussed below cannot be dissociated from this evidence.

Theme 1—Concepts

Inclusive school leadership takes place within a regulatory framework that universally defines inclusive education, determines which resources are available, which decisions can be made and what leaders are held responsible for. Portuguese headteachers in this research echoed the wording in the new Decree-law 54/2018 [20]. Regarding the definition

of inclusive education, D6 stated, "each student has the right to his or her life project. This requires stimulating and flexible educational responses", D8 added, "all education must be inclusive. Every student should have the same educational options. The student is at the centre of the action, and around him are the resources that will facilitate his development and growth". There was some consensus around respect for difference and a commitment to offering all pupils access to learning opportunities [37] (p. 27).

D11 referred to the idea that "inclusive education means giving to all students the opportunity to grow and learn with their differences and particularities in the same classroom, developing their potential to the fullest". Most teachers either explicitly or implicitly stated that inclusion refers to the placement of all students in regular schools and classrooms, regardless of their ability level [38].

D5 stated, "inclusive education is to give all students the same learning opportunities. But this is impossible in our school with the lack of resources". Schuelka et al. [39] confirm these thoughts, expressing that some of the most significant obstacles and challenges to successful inclusive education are inadequate school resources/facilities and specialised school staff.

The current policy framework proposes abandoning the "special educational needs" category and the broader need to categorise a student's needs before intervening. This changes the paradigm when saying inclusive school culture. To this end, D6 said, "a school with an inclusive culture has diversity as a value, not only for students but also for teachers and staff. It's a culture that always looks for the best in each one . . . trying to bring out the best in each player and knowing how to include all community partners". In practice, headteachers find themselves increasingly challenged by the inclusion of diverse learning populations. All students entering classrooms bring various circumstances beyond ethnic, racial, linguistic or cognitive profiles [40]. Oswald and Engelbrecht [41] explored school leadership as one determining factor which either affords or constrains inclusive practices. Hoppey and McLeskey [42] have indicated that, while policies call for inclusive education, achieving this goal remains complicated and challenging for headteachers. The authors argue that headteachers also need to take on several roles to ensure that their schools can offer the professional support required to teachers and other professional educators. This goes well beyond the knowledge of the concepts in the legislation. D1 stated, "schools which, in combination with families and community, manage to constitute themselves as true learning networks"; D8 referred to " . . . our educational project values an inclusive school culture, valuing values and including solidarity, citizenship and friendship". This aligns with the set of indicators provided by UNESCO-IBE [43] for school leaders. This document highlights several items that school leaders must evaluate their schools, including, among other things, that everyone is made to feel welcome; students are equally valued; there are high expectations for all students; staff and students treat one another with respect, and there is a partnership between staff and families.

Theme 2—Practices

Headteachers can support their teachers and other staff to move towards inclusion by fostering new meanings about diversity, promoting inclusive training practices within schools/communities and developing inclusive, sustainable projects. D1 said, "the educational project is built with the involvement of partners, both inside and outside the school, and points to inclusion as a strategic guideline for school policy"; D4 stated, "the decisions that are made involve everyone . . . and we involve all community in important decisions for the school. Families, mayors, teachers, students, etc. . . . "; D8 concluded, "we have actions and initiatives that lead people to this inclusive school culture. We had specific training on Decree-law 54/2018 [20]. We were also included in a large international Erasmus project, "TWINS" on diversity and inclusion, which facilitated our teachers' acquisition of new practices". The headteacher's attitude is influenced by the knowledge and training they have obtained about inclusion and the best ways to implement it [44]. This study also revealed that, as perceived by teachers, headteachers' actions and behaviour affect the success of inclusion in the school.

On the other hand, while recognising the progress made in the domain of inclusive education, Florian et al. [45] identify some challenges posed by the need for the adoption of diverse practices, resource allocation mechanisms, training of teaching and auxiliary staff, provision of pedagogical and therapeutic support for schools and the transition to adulthood and entrance to the job market. Many of these issues were mentioned by the participants in our study. Geleta [46] found that headteachers are proactively required to ensure inclusive school settings, and their active involvement and support are critical to beat the challenges above. Teachers should be urged to collaborate within national/international projects as a path to professional growth and development. Accordingly, D3 stated, "we promote teacher training on multiculturalism and inclusion in a systematic way, as we have students of more than 30 nationalities"; D6 added, "we have virtual cafes where teachers share a problem/challenge and try to solve the questions together. We have a 360-degree pedagogical observation system. Everyone observes lessons and is observed".

This kind of involvement can be regarded as initiators of research into their practice (e.g., collaborative action research) [47]. Regarding the family–community–school relationship, D7 stated, "we work with families by providing Portuguese language classes for parents who do not speak Portuguese. We also have free psychology for the educational community twice a week . . . We have parents of foreign students who are very participative and interested in developing the school's activities"; D8 added, "for example, we created two pedagogical teams during the pandemic, one to support families on social issues and another to provide technological support. We also have meetings that we call 'Saturdays with families'. With the parish council and the city council, we have constant and almost daily relations". D9 explained, "we have a project called 'Balloon of dreams', which is what each student and parent would like to have at school. Exciting things come up and bring parents and schools closer together. We have some problems of indiscipline, and we develop some actions with external guests to talk to parents, so we promote meetings with parents".

Inclusive education is only as successful if there are clear opportunities to benefit from learning and apply what has been learnt outside of school, valuing families and educational communities' representatives [48]. Finally, action should be taken to transform schools into natural learning communities [49], with all stakeholders committed to developing and implementing policies and practices that promote inclusion and equity throughout civil society. This assumption was clearly stated by D11: "we have a wide range of partners, also because of the vocational courses. The living forces of the region participate in our general council. Many companies have signed protocols with us and frequently invite us to be present at their events".

Theme 3—Legislation and Policies for Inclusion

The new Portuguese legislation on inclusion and school autonomy brought a new perspective on education and a new discourse for all educational agents in Portugal. The headteachers from our study highlighted some relevant changes within their schools. D3 stated, "it was a complete change of philosophy. For some time, there was great resistance from the teachers. The multilevel approach and the universal learning design concepts raised many challenges to the schools . . . The autonomy decrees changed the school a lot. Autonomy is out there. This Decree already allows curricular innovation and development plans, but it is a bureaucratic process"; D4 added, "curricular autonomy that we currently have is very beneficial. Everything is adaptable and allows us to leverage everything to improve student's learning"; D5 referred to fact that "the Decree-law emphasises the potential of the student and the relevance of the multidisciplinary team. There are more people involved in the process for each student . . . It makes it a lot easier! We can have an emancipatory exercise in terms of curriculum reformulation. This led to a new thinking matrix of pedagogical practices". D8 added, "It brought many new challenges! To apply it effectively, we needed more resources . . . We have a huge range of potential responses to diversity if applied correctly. But it takes time to think about this potential, and our resources are limited." Legislation relating to inclusion, equity and diversity has a relevant

impact on schools, providing guidance and direction for the future of schools, society and the workplace. Policy content is one of the critical pillars on which policy implementation is based. It is regarded as a crucial factor, although it does not determine the exact course of implementation [50]. Inclusive education studies also claim that solid support from headteachers is one of the key factors in implementing inclusive education in schools [22,42]. Schools are expected to cope with large class sizes, students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, developmental variations of students' skills and social problems. D9 explained, "it is only with time that teachers will see all the challenges of new legislation. This will end the modus operandi of some situations"; D11 added, "the real appropriation was the acquisition of new concepts because we already had the practices. It brought an integrated vision for everyone. A vision of equality, and this changed the paradigm". To accomplish this, it is suggested that teachers need to be well-organised, have expert skills, have well-established routines and be adaptable to ever-changing conditions in the regular classroom [51].

Leadership must be concerned with getting the most out of individuals and developing a collaborative culture supported by the legislation [52,53]. Headteachers have a direct impact on the success of the development of an inclusive school by preparing and adjusting resources and facilities [52,54]. Some participants had some reluctance towards parts of the legislation. D7 stated, "the management of specialised human resources does not depend only on the school, which is an obstacle to true autonomy . . . If I had autonomy, I would manage resources differently"; D11 added, "we have more and more hermetic legislation, full of buzzwords. We needed a different framework, objective and clear for all, including parents. We need to objectify and distinguish the pedagogical work component of the administrative work component". Deal and Peterson [55] state that each school have a culture that is its own. There are, in the school, complex rituals of personal relationships, values, beliefs and habits built on the school communities with a set of distinct ways of conduct.

Successful leadership requires a combination of cognitive and emotional understandings allied to clear standards and values. The differential application of the legislation and inclusion policies, with a cluster of crucial strategies, depends on the educational context of each grouping school.

Theme 4—Scenario thinking: "approaches to the future".

The future of education is always so attractive and appealing. What type of schools and teachers will we have and need in the future? What knowledge, skills, attitudes and values will students need to thrive and shape their world? The participants in our study raised some interesting ideas. D1 stated "it is to create conditions for the school to mobilise towards the paradigm of inclusion, sustainability and social equity"; Ainscow [56] referred to the fact that there are pieces of evidence that schools faced with new challenges have an increased interest in the idea of making education more inclusive and equitable. However, the field remains confused about the actions needed to move policy and practice forward.

D4 stated, "is to be permanently open to dialogue, to reflection on multiculturalism, inclusion and the current world"; D6 said "it is to instil in students an enlightened, innovative, and enterprising citizenship in a circular and sustainable economy. The great challenge is to transform students with active and preponderant action in their future"; D8 stated, "we have to be the vectors of change for equity and the development of students' global skills". Teachers need to create synergy across the relevant variables to obtain large and significant effects on students' learning. Among all the parents, teachers and policymakers who work hard to improve education, teachers in leadership positions are uniquely well-positioned to ensure synergy [57].

D11 highlighted, "the important thing is the organisation to which we belong. To develop a top-quality identity culture and focus on the professional growth of teachers and students . . . the aim must be to facilitate cohesion between the educational community and the University". School leadership focused on improving teachers' motivation, capacities and working environment are most likely to improve student achievement [58]. The tone for

an inclusive culture also requires school leaders that emphasise nurturing teacher morale, partnerships with families and professional collegiality [59]. D4 said, "the decisions you make involve everyone . . . we involve the community in the important decisions for the school. Families, mayors, teachers, students and so on. The main thing is people. I have learned many things from other schools, and some learn from us".

Leading a school involves both leadership and management. Using human and financial resources strategically and aligning them with pedagogical purposes can influence how school activities improve teaching and learning, under the headteacher's central role [54]. D6 stated, "everything strategic is decided in a plural and global way. People are committed to the decision because decisions are taken in various forums". Where appropriate, empowering and involving teachers, students, parents and the broader community will help generate a collective sense of responsibility for school development and inclusion [60].

The focus should be on establishing structures and cultures that enhance quality, setting direction, developing people and (re)designing the organisation through a mindset of transformational leadership [61]. D11 concluded with a picture-perfect sentence "the school and its educational community must position itself in a way to be open to the region and the world. Students need to have the world within!"

4. Conclusions

The European Union guidelines for Inclusive Education [62] aim to develop efficient and socially sensitive inclusive education, but there are significant differences in implementation among the European countries. The most recent policy changes in Portugal see inclusive education as integrating all children in the same classroom for a large part of their day. These changes move away from considering children with special educational needs separately, and inclusive education now depends on the integration of all children regardless of their attributes. In other words, successful inclusive education must produce practical outcomes for all children and young people, with or without learning difficulties.

However, what effects are these policy guidelines having on practices and contexts? Considering leaders as critical actors for change and success in education, what conceptions and practices of inclusion are they implementing? What are the meanings that the inclusion practices of these leaders assume? Seeking to answer these questions has led us to some concluding ideas that we would like to highlight. The success of inclusive education depends on school transformation and system change [63]. On the other hand, it is argued that inclusion should not be considered as a linear movement of integration of those who are outside to inside, but rather a transformation of identity and roles from those who are included and excluded in the sense of transclusion [14].

The speeches of the headteachers in this research show a certain level of mimicry and direct implementation of Portuguese policy measures. There is also a certain conformity in identifying barriers and obstacles to the success of inclusive education at schools. The need to point out obstacles related to the lack of adaptation of policies to the contexts, the lack of resources and infrastructures, the lack of specialised staff, the lack of training of teachers and pedagogical technicians, etc. were transversal to all interviewed headteachers. The recurrent focus on the difficulties and barriers denotes a low transgressive and resistant [5] attitude of the headteachers concerning the policy guidelines and their culturally responsible leadership. This finding reinforces what [4] was referring to when he stated that the question of what educational leadership ought to be for is often erased when they engage in targets, outcomes and performance indicators. In this sense, the speeches show difficulties in implementing what is imposed on them and do not denote an approach that pushes schools and leaders to resist, as [4] proposed.

The tendency to highlight the difficulties of success in implementing inclusive education is evidence of a conception of Inclusive Education as something to be achieved rather than a transformative process towards the previously mentioned transclusion. Considering that only four directors belonged to socially disadvantaged schools or clusters, it does not seem that this variable impacted the reading of the collected data. Directors of schools and

groups have very similar discourses, regardless of the cultural and socioeconomic contexts in which they are inserted.

Inclusive education is a complex and multifaceted process that requires efforts and a collective journey of transformation and changing roles.

These findings lead us to some final considerations:

- Concepts: there are new possibilities for understanding inclusion and leadership, and these understandings may impact the school's transformation towards successful inclusion.
- Actions/procedures: the discussion around the success of inclusion practices in education is still ongoing. It must include theoretical arguments that broaden the concept of inclusion in the transformative process of included and excluded.
- Legislation and policies for inclusion: politicians must support effective school leadership to enact an inclusive vision for their schools. The bureaucratic constraints to which Portuguese school leaders are obliged may be a solid barrier to reflection on the idea of inclusion and the possibilities of implementing it in specific contexts. Nevertheless, the headteachers interviewed show a tendency towards implementing inclusion practices involving collective action contexts inside and outside the school.
- Scenario thinking, "approaches to the future": although consensus is challenging to achieve in education, it is essential to continue the debate around key elements that characterise education for inclusion which have implications for the practices of actors such as leaders.

Based on these conclusions, we pose the question again: are there signs of transgressive tendencies in the inclusive practices of these school principals? From the discursive point of view, it is clear that the school principals conceive inclusion as a form of respect for difference and offering equal opportunities for all. We identified practices that aim to include actors from the educational community and an apparent effort to adapt to the political framework.

However, there was no evidence of transgressive tendencies towards developing unique practices to the needs of the particular contexts of the schools they lead. There needs to be clear evidence of a change in roles towards changing mindsets rather than just implementing inclusive projects and practices, as significant as they may be. We did not see signs that go beyond the knowledge of concepts and the implementation of circumscribed practices.

Finally, we conclude that the theme of educational inclusion in leadership practices and how leaders frame their actions in the organisational culture is a topic that needs further investigation. More research on this topic will contribute significantly to multiple perspectives of culture, leadership and inclusion and its direct influence on the behaviour of individuals who form organisations.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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