



From child to child: The inclusion and protagonism of children with special needs in children's literature

De criança para criança: A inclusão e protagonismo de crianças com necessidades especiais na literatura infantil

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ABSTRACT

Although there are numerous picture books, children who have special needs in children's books and stories appear only as extras or supporting characters, and the protagonism is maintained with characters molded to generic social standards. This article reports the experience of creating a literary project of her own authorship, addressing the theme of the protagonism of individuals with special needs in children's literature. To assist in the organization and completion of the stages, a design method was used, with an open structure with the possibility of including or removing certain stages, molding itself according to the evolutionary guideline of the project through the exploration of the creative process. The books are characterized by the narration of stories of children who become superheroes and overcome their limitations using their superpowers related to their clinical condition. Through literature and its illustrations, we reach the children's imagination, in order to transmit ideas, fix social and cultural moments, and rethink concepts. It is hoped that the initiative to create this literary content will promote recognition of unique abilities of children who have disabilities and that they will feel more understood and appreciated when reading books that portray characters like them.

Keywords: Children's books, Inclusion, Protagonism, People with special needs, Literature.

1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to share the initiative of creating picture books that narrate inclusive stories as an approach to inclusion and protagonism of children with special needs in children's literature. According to Silva (2016), literature enchants the adult audience in a more



mature way, as the real and the illusory are mixed at any age, being able to transmit human values, disseminate culture and mischaracterize prejudices. Such characteristics are present, for example, in the works of Ruth Rocha, as the author has the ability to deal with heavy themes of the adult universe in a light way. As an example, we have the parable of Romeo and Juliet that addresses racism in a playful and simple way.

Children's literature is the books that have the ability to provoke emotion, pleasure, entertainment, fantasy, identification and interest in the child. It began with the adaptations of folk stories, where fairy tales are born, almost never aimed at children. Great collectors of these stories were the Brothers Grimm, who had their tales republished and adapted several times, where today they are excessively modified (CUNHA, 2003). It can be said that literature aimed directly at children began in the eighteenth century. XVIII, with the publication of Charles Perrault's Tales of Mother Goose in 1667. Before that, the child was treated as a miniature adult whose period of immaturity should be shortened (SILVA, 2016).

To be introduced in Brazil, children's literature had the help of great authors, including Monteiro Lobato, who nationalized works such as Peter Pan, where the reality and the imagination of the boy who did not want to grow up are reflected in the work *O pica pau amarelo*, where fantasy and reality are united in such a way, that the characters can't tell them apart. In the work *The Yellow Woodpecker*, the writer deals with two fertile themes of children's literature, which are the role of the book in the child's life and the desire to fly, that is, to know new lands and live new adventures. In the author's works, it is already possible to observe the role of the illustrator, since in the stories the characters always appear portrayed with drawings (PANTOJA, MIRANDA, GONÇALVES, 2012).

The contemporary narratives that make up the Children's Literature genre increasingly rely on language resources in which literariness goes beyond the verbal text. In this way, it expands in multiple dialogues with the image and the graphic project, languages that form so many diverse productions in multiple materialities, books of all formats and sizes, which, by accompanying all contemporary cultural production, multiply their possibilities of signification, becoming references for reflection on society, since, in addition to the materiality of the object, they also involve diverse social and cultural contexts, providing conditions for the formation of readers who interact, understand and question the reality that surrounds them (SPENGLER, DEBUS, 2018).

In the list of all these diverse languages, we find the images of the illustrations of children's literature books, which enable the reader to be immersed in reading contexts that are not only of



the written word. These images, also literary, acquire innumerable modes of signification and representation from those who read them. Thus, we believe that the reader, in contemporary times, should be sensitized to understand the importance of the aesthetic experience that these images enable (SPENGLER, DEBUS, 2018).

Picture books work in a variety of ways to meet children's basic learning needs and help children dive deep into the classic atmospheres of humanity to experience the emotions of the characters in the stories. Most importantly, a picture book always covers a specific theme around morality and philosophy, either explicitly or implicitly. Although the theme is embedded in the story, it is often unfolded with the telling of a story to teach children a lesson to help shape their thoughts, personality, and behaviors (PRATER 2006; LIAN *et al* , 2020). According to Cartledge and Kiarie (2001), the visual form of presentation through picture books on social behaviors could help children master social skills quickly and become more empathetic.

Children's books aim to develop fantasy and imagination, in addition to the pedagogical function, improving educational values, knowledge of the Portuguese language and agility in reading. In Brazil, most children have their first contact with books at school, which reduces the chances of this child being an adult who appreciates reading. The first contact with books should take place at home with the parents, presenting stories according to their age group so that it is a pleasant activity of interaction between them (VIANA, 2015).

Manuel Bergström Lourenço Filho (1897-1970) was one of the first scholars to seek to define this genre more systematically, considering the issue of age group as a prerequisite for the classification of children's literature books. The writer, without sticking to the usual criteria for classifying books written for children, from the point of view of psychology, points to the age group as a determining factor for the destination of children's literature. The division suggested by Lourenço Filho, which according to him will be able to satisfy practical needs:

- a) picture albums, coordinated for one reason or not, with reduced text or without text, for children aged 4 to 6 years;
- b) fairy tales and simple narratives (fables, apologues) for children aged 6 to 8;
- c) longer narratives, for children aged 8 to 10 years;
- d) travel and adventure stories, for children aged 10 to 12;
- e) Novelized biographies, *idem*. (LOURENÇO FILHO, 1943, p. 160)

Jean Piaget encouraged the use of age to determine the type of book for each child, as can be seen in the following table published by Da Silva; Freitas and Bertolletti (2006). In this

framework, it is possible to quickly verify the characteristics of the stages of development, proposed by Piaget, which serve as a parameter for a possible application in reading, also considered in the form of stage of development. For Piaget, the child goes through a phase of fundamental transition between action and operation, that is, between what separates the child from the adult. Applied to the development of reading in children, it is also assumed that the reader goes through previously determined phases (DA SILVA, FREITAS, BERTOLETTI, 2006).

Table 1 - Taken from Filipousky (1982)

Desenvolvimento cognitivo infanto-juvenil		Desenvolvimento da leitura	
Idade	Estágio de desenvolvimento personalidade	Estágio de desenvolvimento	Tipo de leitura
3 e 6 anos	<i>Pensamento pré-conceitual</i> – Construção dos símbolos. Mentalidade mágica. Indistinação eu/mundo.	<i>Pré-leitura</i> – desenvolvimento da linguagem oral. Percepção e relacionamento entre imagens e palavras: som, ritmo.	Livros de gravuras, rimas infantis, cenas individualizadas.
6 a 8 anos	<i>Pensamento intuitivo</i> – Aquisição de conceitos de espaço, tempo e causa. Ainda mentalidade mágica. Auto-estima. Fantasia como instrumento para compreensão e adaptação ao real.	<i>Leitura compreensiva</i> – textos curtos. Leitura silábica e de palavras. Ilustração necessária: facilita associação entre o que é lido e o pensamento a que o texto remete.	Aventuras no ambiente próximo: família, escola, comunidade, histórias de animais, fantasias, e problemas infantis.
8 a 11 anos	<i>Operações concretas</i> – Pensamentos descentrados da percepção e ação. Capacidade de classificar, enumerar e ordenar.	<i>Leitura interpretativa</i> – desenvolvimento da leitura. Capacidade de ler e compreender textos curtos e de leitura fácil, com menor dependência da ilustração. Orientação para o mundo. Fantasia.	Contos fantásticos, contos de fadas, folclore, histórias de humor, animismo.
11 a 13 anos	<i>Operações formais</i> -Domínio das estruturas lógicas do pensamento abstrato. Maior orientação para o real. Permanência eventual da fantasia.	<i>Leitura informativa, ou factual</i> – desenvolvimento da leitura. Capacidade de ler textos mais extensos e complexos quanto à idéia, estrutura e linguagem. Introdução à leitura crítica.	Aventuras sensacionalistas: detetives, fantasmas, ficção científica, temas da atualidade, história de amor.
13 a 15 anos	<i>Operações formais</i> -Descoberta do mundo interior. Formação de juízos de valor.	<i>Leitura crítica</i> – capacidade de assimilar idéias, confrontá-las com sua própria experiência e reelaborá – las em confronto com material de leitura.	Aventuras intelectualizadas, narrativas de viagens, conflitos psicológicos, conflitos sociais, crônicas, contos.

According to De Paula (2018), literary production for children has expanded. Books of different sizes, colors, drawings, figures, materials, etc. are marketed and some are distributed in schools and institutions. The themes of the stories are diverse and seek to cater to various ages and audiences. The publishing market caters to multiple sectors and seeks to produce books that portray the condition of children undergoing health treatment. These books are mostly written by adults and have an optimistic character, encouraging them to cope with adverse situations. These



themes are beginning to be addressed in children's literature, but they are still insufficient to meet the demand of children and pathologies. There is still a long way to go.

The idea of creating the books arose from experiencing the extension project "Between Stimuli and Affections" linked to the Federal University of Delta do Parnaíba-UFDPar, which has contributed to the professional training of academics, through elaborate practices that interconnect the academic environment with the demand of the community, particularly of children assisted in various Physiotherapy services in the city and region. During the consultations, the physiotherapy students work with playful activities, including reading children's stories, to keep the children's attention and continue the treatment with them. With this, the question arose that there are no books that tell stories of children with special needs, when they appear they are as supporting characters, never as the main character.

Playfulness is not only present in the act of playing, but also in the act of reading, in appropriating reading as a natural way of discovering and understanding the world. Playful and creative expression activities attract children's attention and can be a mechanism for enhancing learning. Playful activities favor the motor and psychomotor development of children in their activities (SALOMÃO, MARTINI, JORDÃO, 2007).

Although there are numerous picture books, there is no protagonism of children who have special needs in children's books and stories, they appear only as extras or supporting characters. Importantly, creating children's stories featuring children with disabilities can be a powerful way to help reduce prejudice and promote inclusion.

This article reports the experience of creating a literary project of her own authorship, addressing the theme of the protagonism of individuals with special needs in children's literature. The literary project seeks to convey information through a childish and playful language, making up for the lack of knowledge on the subject, helping in the construction of an inclusive identity in the midst of the children's environment.

2 METHODOLOGY

To assist in the organization and completion of the stages, a design method was used, with an open structure with the possibility of including or removing certain stages, being necessary in some cases, molding itself according to the evolutionary guideline of the project through exploration of the creative process.

At the time of pre-conception, an in-depth study of the themes addressed in the project was carried out, namely: pathologies with greater demand in the area of pediatrics, children's books and their creation and illustration processes, in addition to the analysis of similar and

semantic panels on both themes. After having knowledge about the topic and having the requirements of the project, it is at this stage of conception that the alternatives will be elaborated, aiming at different proposals to solve the questions around our initially proposed objective.

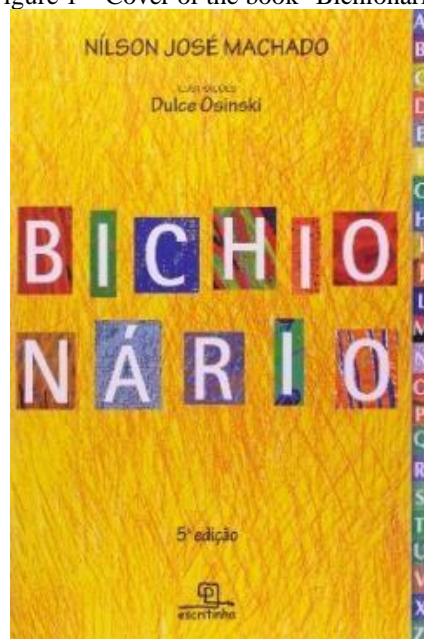
In order to meet the demand of the project, in the pre-conception period, a brief research was carried out addressing the content of inclusion, illustration, early childhood education and illustrated books, which unfolds in specific topics. Thus, the lack of understanding about the real meaning of the term inclusion nowadays is understood. In order to expose the absence of protagonism of children with special needs in the sciences, letters and arts, and in several other fields where these children should be inserted, however, these absences punctuate the inequalities and oppressions that live around the "special being".

In the post-conception period, the production process and the three components were analyzed, this being the final result to consider the possibility of elaboration of the product on a full-size scale, along with its technical drawing and presentation to peers.

To begin the production of literary material, it is necessary to understand the complexity of the elements that make up children's literature. Children's books are made up of different structures: number of pages, forms of illustration, formatting of the text or highlighting element. These characteristics will vary according to the age of the audience to which it is intended, following the classification according to the reader's age group.

The first classification is pre-reader or image book, it is composed mostly of images, does not necessarily have a text, it presents a small format, as it is intended to be handled by a child.

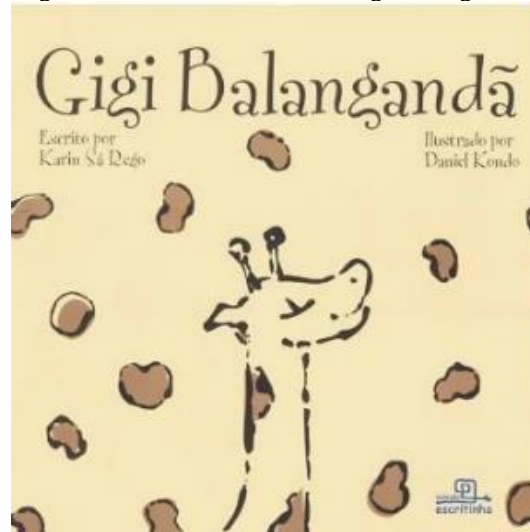
Figure 1 – Cover of the book "Bichionário"



Source: <https://universodoslivros.com.br/pre-leitor-2-5-anos/>

The second category is the beginning of the reader, composed of children who are at the beginning of reading without the help of another person, readers from six to eight years of age. Humor and imagery are key, as well as simple action and dialogue to aid understanding.

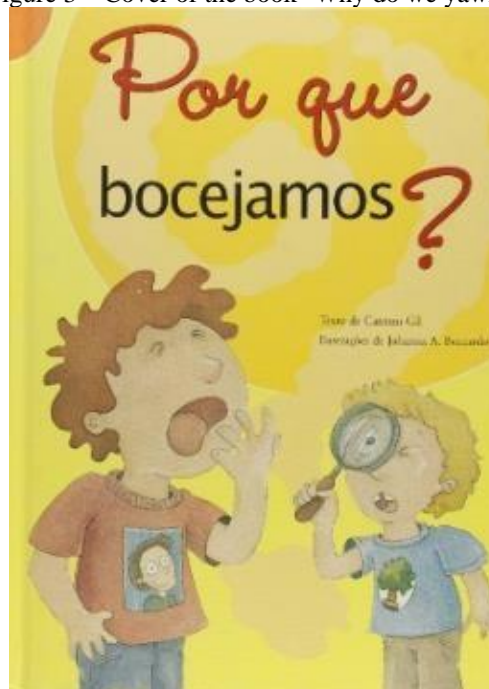
Figure 2 – Cover of the book "Gigi Balangandã"



Source: <https://universodoslivros.com.br/leitor-iniciante-6-7-anos/>

The third category is the reader in process, with greater complexity of information and discussions on the topics addressed.

Figure 3 – Cover of the book "Why do we yawn?"



Source: <https://universodoslivros.com.br/leitor-em-processo-8-9-anos/>



The structure of the books follows a specific architecture, formed by two groups of elements, the material and the textual, both have in their composition the following items: cover, cover page, false title page, title page, dedication, preface, introduction, core, index, colophon, erratum, on cover, flap, belt, spine, fold and bottom and top cut.

To determine the importance of each element in a book, you need to have knowledge of its components and structures, such as:

- a) **Format:** Proportion assigned to the book, determines the visual aspects, its configuration changes according to the purpose of the book;
- b) **Thickness:** Number of pages, should be relative to the height of the book, and have adequacy to the general dimensions for good handling;
- c) **Paper:** It can be present in different textures and weights, it is proposed to be resistant and opaque, avoiding showing the image on the back;
- d) **Typography:** It can be present in different formats and styles in coherence with the theme of the book. Its size, spacing, and lines should be aesthetically legible;
- e) **Pagination:** Present in different designs and symmetries. It is necessary to have margins that allow the positioning of the reader's fingers without interference with the texts, and binding;
- f) **Binding:** Manages the elements, making the content durable.

From field research to search and analysis of similar ones in databases, searches in *online* libraries and study of current cartoons broadcast on open and closed channels, it is possible to find materials of a social nature, aimed at children and adolescents, addressing different themes, such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, but without constant references regarding the inclusion of people with special needs as protagonists of stories Children.

The process of conception and registration of ideas was developed in meetings and comments of the members of the extension project Stimuli and Affections, being progressively outlined the main characters, auxiliaries, conflict and outcome of the story. From this moment on, the stage of development of the physical and psychological characteristics of the characters was developed.

Chart 2 - Produced by the main author.



3 RESULTS

The books are characterized by the narration of stories of children who become superheroes and overcome their limitations using their superpowers related to their clinical condition. They are aimed at children in the age group of 6 to 8 years and were developed according to the particularities to meet the needs of this target audience.

The choice of the main characters was made according to the disabilities and disorders of greater incidence. Initially, in a randomized way, it was defined that two characters would be male and one female, as well as their physical characteristics. Each character's story was written individually and will be available in three picture books, with eight pages each, in digital and print formats. The characters are children with Chronic Childhood Encephalopathy and the ability to create super strategies, Down Syndrome and his superpower to make everyone who meets him feel loved and welcomed, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) with the ability to understand and solve complex problems in a fraction of a second.

After researching the support materials and readings of children's books, the stories were written according to the references used and the creativity of the authors. Some main aspects for the creation were: including characters of the same age group as the target audience and of both genders; reproduce the same physical characteristics of the selected children; Written in a way suitable for children and stories that allow for an adventure full of imagination.



3.1 CHARACTER CREATION

- **Arthur**

Feature: Chronic Childhood Encephalopathy Hobby:

drawing;

Qualities: is a calm and curious child;

Appearance: has curly hair and black skin.

- **Luna**

Characteristic: Down syndrome; Hobby:

playing in the park;

Qualities: is a gentle and communicative child; Appearance:

has straight hair and white skin.

- **Peter**

Feature: Autism Spectrum Disorder; Hobby: assembling

puzzles;

Qualities: is an intelligent and observant child; Appearance: has

wavy hair and white skin.

3.2 CREATION OF THE STORIES

- **BOOK 1:**

"Arthur the Strategist": Arthur, a 6-year-old boy with Chronic Childhood Encephalopathy is a very happy and energetic child. He is smart and curious, likes to plan and organize everything he does. One day, while drawing, he began to think and plan how he could carry out his daily tasks more accessible, put it into practice and became more independent. He discovered that this ability of his was a superpower and that it could help others overcome their physical limitations, just as he did. Arthur started to provide accessibility and inclusion in his city and everywhere he went.

- **BOOK 2:**

"Luna's love": Luna, a 7-year-old little girl, was born with Down Syndrome, her parents realized that she had a special glow and a unique way of being because she was always very affectionate. One day, while playing in the park, he saw a lady who was sad and alone. She approached her and started talking, told her about her favorite games and toys. The lady gradually became happier and even began to smile and joke with her. After that day, Luna discovered that she had a superpower, she was able to make the people she met feel loved and welcomed, and



she began to spread her sweetness and joy wherever she went.

- **BOOK 3:**

"Peter, the little genius": Peter, an 8-year-old boy, has Autism Spectrum Disorder, he is very intelligent and observant. Enjoys puzzles and logic games. One day, while he was playing in the square, he met a boy who was trying to solve a math activity at school and was not succeeding. He asked to look at the issues and found the solution in a few seconds. The boy was amazed at the little boy's ability to solve such difficult questions even though he was so small. Peter discovered that he had a superpower to understand and solve such complex problems in seconds. People began to look to him for help and he became known as "the little genius" of his town.

4 DISCUSSION

Based on the author's line of thought, it is possible to highlight the importance of questioning the social patterns currently experienced, and to make claims with the representation of minorities, in order to empower and represent oppressed or forgotten groups. Limiting the human body to being only a biological structure, which allows it to transit or to be an aesthetic goal, is the key to mistaken arguments and the lack of understanding of the real factors that build a body. The moment we are educated or imposed on a new social context, the knowledge about the "special being" undergoes changes, and we change our behavior to fit into a certain environment or cycle of people individuals with differences, whether in the way they express themselves in speech, or body posture and their motor behavior.

Monteiro (1998) is based on Vygotsky when he states that: from the first years of life, the child with a disability occupies a certain special social position, and his relations with the world begin to take place in a different way from those involving typical children. Along with the biological characteristics (primary nucleus of the disability), a secondary nucleus begins to be built, formed by social relations. The interactions that constitute the secondary nucleus are responsible for the development of specifically human functions and arise from the transformations of elementary (biological) functions. This is possible because the child interacts with a world mediated by signs and transforms interpsychological relationships into intrapsychological ones. Therefore, consciousness and higher functions originate in relation to objects and to persons in objective conditions with life.

In this way, it is possible to perceive the psychological pressure suffered by a child or adolescent in the period of construction of their identity, when paired with rules in collective living environments, being forced to follow a pattern of behavior, if they do not fit in, they become an invisible body to others. It is also necessary to affirm that personal, social and



pedagogical values are shaped as stipulated for a way of being, where children, on certain occasions during childhood, will be treated as non-existent beings.

The existing society creates and recreates concepts that define the ideal subject both in terms of his physical appearance and his behavior, according to the standards of each era. Even today, it is common to say that differences are valued, it is perceived that, although disguised, there are still preconceptions when talking about children with special needs. There is little known knowledge that adequate educational interactions, from the first months of life, favor the development of children, whether they have a disability, high risk or have a development considered normal (PIECZKOWSKI, DE LIMA, RUHOFT, 2006).

From the moment the child does not meet the expected requirements, and presents a different thought or expression from the other members, it ceases to be accepted, and becomes an invisible body. That said, it is necessary to rethink a way to raise awareness among children and young society who present a behavior considered different from this social context, and to seek a method to make them realize that their difference is not synonymous with abnormality or weakness. Children's literature is indispensable in the inclusion process because it helps children to understand, in a specific language, that they have their own, unique characteristics and that this should not be seen as a problem.

Through literature and its illustrations, we reach the children's imagination, in order to transmit ideas, fix social and cultural moments, and rethink concepts. The illustrations instigate the imagination, making the child connect with their moments and their individualities. Picture books during childhood have numerous functions, whether to refer to a moment or to explain contents, becoming an educational material often denied in other environments, addressing the subject of inclusion and making it known through visual interpretation. Illustration and the art of illustrating differs from the language of painting, since images are more easily inclined to the mental verbalizations constituted by the human tendency to give meaning to what we see through a sequence of images.

According to Abramovich (2005), storytelling is a privileged activity to transmit human knowledge and values. It is a simple action, but it has a great power in the formation of the child. The act of storytelling awakens emotions such as joy, sadness, insecurity, fear, tranquility and several other feelings that narratives can provoke. When the child hears a story, he sees and feels it with the eyes of the imagination, in this experience he can discover a world full of conflicts and impasses, which we all live. Like the characters in children's stories, young readers will also find their own way to solve their problems, conflicts, and difficulties.



5 CONCLUSION

It is hoped that the initiative to create this literary content will promote recognition of unique abilities of children who have disabilities and that they will feel more understood and appreciated when reading books that portray characters like them. Throughout the writing, it was necessary to make observations, such as the care with the creation of the characters and their characteristics. Respecting the physical and psychological needs of children, it is necessary to work on social and intellectual aspects. The books aim to contribute to the child's imagination, help them face reality and develop their skills.

It can be stated that the creation of children's books for children with special needs is an important step towards creating a more inclusive and equal society. Children's literature that addresses these needs not only expands children's learning and development opportunities but also promotes understanding and acceptance. By acknowledging individual needs and the different ways we know the world, children's book creators can encourage empathy and support diversity.



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