

## **Autism at school: An invitation to reflect on accessibility and inclusion**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this article is to review the national literature on the relevance of the educational inclusion of autistic children in the regular educational environment. According to Law No. 13,146 - Brazilian Law for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities "Education is the right of people with disabilities, in order to achieve the maximum possible development of their physical, sensory, intellectual and social talents and abilities, according to their characteristics, interests and learning needs" (BRASIL, 2015). Based on this premise, the educational system is deliberately exposed to the challenges of developing a more equitable regular educational environment and the integral development of the person with autism.

**Keywords:** Educational inclusion, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Neurodevelopment.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this article is to review the national literature on the relevance of the educational inclusion of autistic children in the regular educational environment. According to Law No. 13,146 - Brazilian Law for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities "Education is the right of people with disabilities, in order to achieve the maximum possible development of their physical, sensory, intellectual and social talents and abilities, according to their characteristics, interests and learning needs" (BRASIL, 2015). Based on this premise, the educational system is deliberately exposed to the challenges of developing a more equitable regular educational environment and the integral development of the person with autism.

The WHO - World Health Organization estimates that 1 in 160 children have autism spectrum disorder – ASD. Autism is defined as a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects communication, social interaction, and behavior. It is characterized by repetitive patterns of behavior, restricted interests, and difficulties in understanding emotions and expressing one's own emotions. Autism is considered a spectrum, which means that the symptoms and severity of the disorder can vary widely from one person to another. This variation results in a range of abilities, challenges, and needs among individuals with autism (COLLYER, 2021). In conceptual terms, the word inclusion within the dictionary of the Portuguese language refers to the practice or "act of including, understanding, inserting" (INCLUSÃO, 2024). Therefore, educational inclusion refers to the practice of incorporating students with special needs into

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regular schools, providing them with an adapted education that is more egalitarian to their needs. The opinion of the National Council of Education - CNE No. 50, reinforces the importance of the joint action of the school, families, and autistic students for educational planning, and fosters the right to the Specialized Educational Service Plan (PAEE) as well as the Individualized Educational Plan (PEI) (A TRIBUNA, 2023). These regulations ensure the practice of educational inclusion of autistic children, contributing to the adaptation of the school environment to meet their specific needs.

The Individualized Educational Plan (PEI) is a formalized document that aims to meet the specific educational needs of a student with special needs. It is developed in collaboration with a multidisciplinary team, which may include teachers, therapists, parents, and other relevant professionals. PEI devises goals, strategies, and services necessary to promote student progress. In addition, the PEI is reviewed periodically to ensure that it continues to meet the student's ever-evolving needs. In addition, PEI can help promote understanding and acceptance of diversity within the school community, creating a more inclusive and welcoming environment for autistic people and people with other disabilities (BRASIL, 2021).

We know that the right to education is inalienable, and we also understand that the way learning develops in each child is paradoxically complex and unique. However, there is a differentiation in the context that involves children with autism. Law 9.394/1996 - LDB and Decree No. 7.611/2011, and the National Policy for Inclusive Education, regulates the Specialized Educational Service - AEE both in public and private schools, in this context the AEE is a teaching modality that aims to offer support and specific educational services for students with special needs, such as physical, intellectual, sensory or autism spectrum disorder. It is offered in a complementary way to regular education and seeks to promote the inclusion and full development of these students. The SEA is responsible for "the identification, elaboration and organization of pedagogical and accessibility resources that eliminate barriers to the full participation of students, considering their specific needs" (BRASIL, 2008). These teaching personalization guidelines are crucial to create an environment conducive to students with ASD, taking into account the individual characteristics and challenges associated with autism (SOUSA, 2022).

In addition to the guidelines, the effective implementation of school inclusion requires not only physical and curricular adaptations, but also a commitment to the training of teachers and the school community. Adequate training of these professionals plays a crucial role in promoting inclusive educational environments. Continuing education that addresses both theoretical aspects of autistic people and practical strategies to deal with the specific needs of these children becomes fundamental (MATOS; MENDES, 2015), since the learning process of students with ASD requires adaptations that go against traditional teaching methods (DUTRA, 2008). The diversity of learning style and the humanization of the look of the diversities present in the autistic spectrum is the central relevance within this process.



It is common knowledge that the family plays a fundamental role in the educational inclusion of autistic people, being a vital link between the school and the home environment. The support and collaboration of parents and family members are essential to ensure the academic, social, and emotional success of autistic children and young people within the educational context. In addition, parents play an important role in supporting the development of the autistic student's social and communication skills. They can provide additional support at home by reinforcing the skills and concepts learned in school and helping the student generalize them to different situations. In addition, parents can play an active role in planning and advocating for the educational rights of their autistic children, working in partnership with the school to ensure that they receive the support and resources they need to reach their full potential. (SOUSA, 2022).

Another relevant point is the promotion of social interaction between autistic children and their peers, fostering the construction of positive and inclusive relationships. Participating in social interactions in regular classrooms also provides opportunities for autistic people to learn about acceptable social and behavioral norms in different contexts. By observing and interacting with their peers, they can learn to interpret social cues and adapt to social expectations in different situations (BEYER, 2007). By actively participating in these interactions, autistic people can not only improve their social skills, but also experience a deeper sense of belonging and connection with others.

Vygotsky already advocated in his studies the importance of inserting atypical children in homogeneous groups, where these exchanges that occur between atypical and typical children refer to the concept of mediation, which, according to Vygotsky (1962), plays a fundamental role in the maturation of the individual. The presence of autistic children in regular schools contributes to the construction of a more inclusive and diverse environment. This experience promotes respect for differences and the appreciation of individuality, in addition to stimulating the development of empathy and tolerance in all students. It is important to recognize that the inclusion of autistic children in regular school also presents challenges. The need for curricular adaptation, specialized training for teachers and accessibility resources requires a commitment on the part of the school community.

## **OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this article is to analyze the narratives about the inclusion of people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in regular schools, considering the challenges and impacts on students' learning and social development.



## **METHODOLOGY**

It is a narrative review about studies on educational environments accessible to people with Autistic Appearance. Narrative review articles describe and debate the "state of the art" of a given subject, from a theoretical and/or contextual point of view (ROTHER, 2007), without determining a rigorous and replicable methodology at the level of data reproduction and quantitative answers to specific questions. Narrative reviews contribute to the acquisition and advancement of knowledge on a specific theme, by awakening new ideas, techniques and sub-themes that have greater or lesser prominence in the selected literature and in a short period of time (ROTHER, 2007).

Finally, narrative reviews seek to discuss or describe the current moment of the subject, differentiating themselves from other modalities, aiming only at structuring the existing knowledge (Cordeiro et al., 2007; Soares et al., 2013). Thus, the narrative review is not limited to listing existing studies, but seeks to contextualize them, identify patterns, contradictions, and gaps in the literature, offering a more comprehensive and interpretative view of the topic in question. It is not necessary to detail the sources investigated or the methods used to find reference sources. In this sense, the researcher selects the studies for analysis based on the theoretical perspective and the context of the topic discussed (MATTOS, 2015).

The research was carried out by reading full scientific articles, carried out between the years 2023 and 2024, available on the online platforms Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) Brazil and Electronic Journals in Psychology (PePSIC), under the descriptors "TEA", "inclusion" and "schools". As inclusion criteria, the following stand out: articles published between the years 2018 and 2024, published in Portuguese and that were related to the theme studied. It was decided to exclude articles published in foreign languages, which do not present the data sought on challenges in the inclusion of students with ASD, which were not available access to the full article and which were duplicated in the searched databases.

## **DEVELOPMENT**

The inclusion of people who are within the autistic spectrum is a topic of extreme relevance for the community in general, especially for contemporary education. Within the study carried out, the effective inclusion of these students brings significant benefits not only to the students with ASD themselves, but also to their colleagues, teachers, educational institutions and families. Research in the area has highlighted the benefits of educational inclusion for autistic children, such as the development of social skills, improved self-esteem, and stimulation of academic learning (SOUSA, 2022). By participating in regular educational environments, autistic students have the opportunity to interact with other children, developing social skills such as communication, collaboration, and empathy (GOMES, 2021).



However, challenges persist, requiring continuous efforts to improve inclusive practices, ensuring full access and participation of autistic people in the educational system, but the lack of knowledge about ASD by a large part of the school community is a challenge to be overcome (ANGELO, 2021). One of the solutions pointed out would be the training of teachers and school staff as a way to mitigate the difficulties of inclusion, learning about characteristics, needs and teaching strategies would make the school environment more conducive and effective to the process of immersion of these individuals within educational institutions (BARBOSA, 2018).

Another point observed within the narratives studied are the difficulties of communication and social interaction of students with ASD, these adversities become another barrier within the context of school inclusion, since verbal communication is the most common means of social interaction within schools. At this juncture, Extended Alternative Communication - AAC emerges as an essential device for individuals who have speech and language difficulties due to circumstances such as autism, cerebral palsy, stroke or neuromuscular diseases (FORTUNATO, 2023). Other tools used, such as eye tracking technologies and speech synthesis, which allows transforming symbols or characters into texts, are examples of how technologies can help in the effective insertion of people with any degree of impairment in their communication.

Another factor, which concerns the inclusion of people with ASD within the regular educational system, is the need to adapt the curriculum and pedagogical activities to the individual needs of each student with ASD. Legal provisions such as the Specialized Educational Service (SEA), the Individualized Teaching Plan (PEI), the right to Therapeutic Companions (TA) in classrooms, have the function of complementing or supplementing the student's education through the provision of services, accessibility resources and strategies that eliminate barriers to their full participation in society and the development of their learning (BRASIL, 2021).

The Individualized Teaching Plan (IEP) is a legal document that guides the teaching and learning process of students with special educational needs, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The PEI is prepared collaboratively between the school team, the family and the student, with the aim of ensuring a personalized and quality education.

In this context, ensuring the active participation of families and students in the educational process will bring greater collaboration and will certainly increase their satisfaction, contributing to the achievement of more positive results. The family and the school play essential roles in people's global growth, and can both stimulate and hinder their physical, intellectual, social, emotional and spiritual development. Thus, it is essential to make joint efforts to promote continuous advances and avoid setbacks, through collective construction within the educational community (CASARIN, 2008).



## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The school inclusion of people with autism spectrum disorder is an incessant movement that requires the engagement of the entire school community. By overcoming obstacles and implementing more effective methodologies, it is feasible to ensure the right to quality education for all students, with or without autism. The inclusion of people with ASD in the regular classroom is not only a fundamental right, but a unique opportunity to build a more just, equitable, and plural society. In addition, it is essential that school inclusion is accompanied by a child-centered approach, which takes into account their individual needs, interests, and abilities. This involves collaboration between parents, educators, and health professionals to develop individualized educational plans that meet the specific needs of each autistic child

Through a collective commitment and building bridges between different knowledge and experiences, we can ensure that all students, with or without ASD, have access to quality education and reach their full potential. Within this context, it is essential that schools are prepared to receive these students, with adequate infrastructure, well-trained professionals and a well-designed individualized teaching plan. In addition, it is important to recognize that school inclusion benefits not only autistic children, but also their typical peers. By interacting with autistic children, peers have the opportunity to learn about human diversity, develop empathy, and understand the importance of inclusion and respect for differences.

In addition to considerations that include the need to adapt the school environment, meeting the individual needs of students, training teachers in the use of inclusive practical tools is essential for the successful implementation of any inclusion project. Involving parents, caregivers and the community itself in demystifications and inclusion practices is to enable support environments that serve school-age children, adolescents and adults with quality and efficiency. School inclusion is more than mere physical insertion, full inclusion requires a paradigmatic transformation in school culture, teacher training and the construction of a truly welcoming and accessible environment.



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