

The inclusion of students with ASD in school physical education in the early years: Challenges and benefits

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the inclusion of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in School Physical Education, highlighting the challenges in the areas of social interaction, communication, and transition between activities. ASD, characterized by communication difficulties and repetitive patterns of behavior, has variations in severity, from mild to severe. In Brazil, legislation such as the 1988 Constitution and the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education guarantee the inclusion and quality of education for people with disabilities. The qualitative study aims to analyze how Physical Education classes can benefit students with ASD, promoting social integration and motor development.

Keywords: ASD, School Physical Education, Elementary School, Inclusion.

INTRODUCTION

This study addresses the presence of students with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) in School Physical Education, highlighting challenges in social interaction, communication and transition between activities, as well as the benefit of classes. ASD is defined as a disorder that affects neurological development characterized by impairments in communication, social interaction, and the manifestation of restrictive and repetitive patterns of behavior and interests (APA, 2014). Savall and Dias (2018) classify ASD into three degrees: mild, moderate and severe, determined by the multidisciplinary team. Mild autism can be difficult to diagnose due to the subtlety of the signs, while moderate autism represents a middle ground between mild and severe, with less independence. In severe autism, dependence on family members is greater, and there is a greater propensity for aggressive behavior, including self-harm.

In Brazil, we have laws that guarantee people with disabilities access to inclusive and quality education. These rights are supported by several documents, such as: The Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil (1988), Salamanca Declaration (1994), Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (1996), National Policy on Special Education in the Perspective of Inclusive Education (2008), National Policy for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2012) and Statute of Persons with Disabilities (2015). The 1988 Constitution establishes education as a right for all, ensuring inclusive and qualified access to people with disabilities. Several countries officially adopted the possibility of institutionalizing inclusive schools with the Salamanca Declaration of 1994, which guided the

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inclusion of these people in schools, followed by the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education in 1996, which ensured criteria for quality education. In 2008, the National Policy on Special Education in the Perspective of Inclusive Education was enacted, aiming to "ensure the school inclusion of students with disabilities, pervasive developmental disorders and high abilities/giftedness." (BRASIL, 2008, p.14).

From 2012 onwards, the discussion about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) gained prominence, resulting in the implementation of the National Policy for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with ASD (BRASIL, 2012), through Law No. 12,764, of December 27, 2012. In § 2, the person with ASD is considered to be a person with a disability for all purposes of law. Finally, it is important to mention the Statute of Persons with Disabilities, enacted in 2015, which ensures the right to inclusion of this portion of the population in all social aspects, repudiating any form of discrimination or exclusion, and recognizing the person with disabilities as an active and capable member of society.

According to Brandl and Brandl Neto (2015), the importance of Physical Education for children in the early years of elementary school has been recognized for decades, however, there are still many municipalities without systematic classes of this discipline, lack of qualified teachers and adequate structure. The authors argue that "the discipline of physical education is the one that accomplishes what children like most: play, play." (BRANDL and BRANDL NETO, 2015 p.115). The National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC) includes a specific area for Physical Education, seeking to solve these gaps, bringing the contents to be worked on and their importance.

According to Maranhão and Souza (2017), it is common for children with ASD to have a very pronounced inflexibility when starting school. This period also represents a time of new experiences for them, as well as for teachers, as they are very attached to the routine and have exacerbated difficulty in getting out of it. As for motor coordination, we can say that in some studies, such as the one by Brás et al (2009), researchers noted that children with ASD found it difficult to maintain postural balance during tasks that required coordination between the two hands.

According to Dias and Borrachine (2020) it can be observed that children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often face significant motor challenges, given the considerable impairment in their motor development. Poorly coordinated and slow movements are noticeable, as well as difficulties in motor initiative, balance and repetition of gestures. But, according to the same authors, there are many benefits of inclusive work in Physical Education classes, among them providing the student with ASD with a better development in terms of social integration and motor development, skills to anticipate circumstances common to all children, a beneficial skill for their social, affective and intellectual development.

This study aims to describe the benefits of Physical Education classes at school, especially in the early years, for students with ASD and thus discuss ways to make these practices more inclusive.



MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a qualitative study of narrative review, ideal for exploring the current landscape of a specific topic. It involves a comprehensive analysis of the literature, without following a narrowly defined methodology that allows for accurate reproduction of data or quantitative answers to specific questions, as pointed out by Vosgerau and Romanowsk (2014).

We conducted a search for scientific articles from School Physical Education journals in the last five years. The search is being done on Google Scholar or Google Scholar, as it is a search that allows you to find academic materials in a more comprehensive way. Using the keywords "TEA", "school physical education" and "early years". The selection is based on relevance in relation to the proposed theme, we look for articles that have the point of view of both teachers and students, that combine ASD and one of the key words at the same time, one of which is always ASD.

RESULTS

In the initial search, 9833 studies appeared, but literature review articles were excluded, falling to 89, then those that were not articles were excluded, leaving only 4 articles in the last 5 years.

Author, Year	Theme	Objective	Conclusion
BARRETO, SILVA E SOUZA, 2023	TEACHER TRAINING AND INCLUSION: physical education teachers and looks at students with special needs	To verify whether the initial and continuing training of Physical Education teachers working in the Elementary School Early Years of a municipal public network in the northwest of Paraná contributes to the process of inclusion of students with special needs (ASD/ADHD) in the school environment.	His initial and continuing training (specialization course) enabled a knowledge base to optimize his performance in dealing with students who demand specialized educational assistance. It showed the immediate importance of specialized training and continuous professional monitoring to ensure a more effective response to the educational demands of these students during Physical Education classes.
GOMES and CAETANO, 2021	INCLUSIVE PLAYFUL INTERVENTIONS: possibilities and difficulties of interaction and communication of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Early Childhood Physical Education classes	To analyze the possibilities and difficulties of interaction and communication through inclusive playful interventions in preschool, in physical education classes with autistic children	They realized that children with ASD actively participated in groups in PE classes as subjects of rights, like all children, with inclusive environments, with the help of support materials (visual elements),

			favoring interaction and communication.
MAYAN BATAGLION, MAZO, 2020	STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER IN REGULAR SCHOOLS: REPORTS FROM PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS	To present the perception of Physical Education teachers from Porto Alegre and the Metropolitan Region, in Rio Grande do Sul, about the inclusion of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in regular schools.	The characteristics presented by students with ASD in Physical Education classes lead teachers to seek strategies that allow them to favor their teaching and learning, and social skills are widely evidenced in this process.
MELLO FIORINI, COQUEIRO, 2019	BENEFITS OF SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER IN THE PERCEPTION OF TEACHERS	To identify the perception of PEF about the benefits of school Physical Education for the development of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder	They noticed that the 10 PEF participants in the research indicated, through the answers, that they knew the definition of ASD, however, there is a lack of broader knowledge in this area.

The four articles found are not very different from each other, and complement each other, which made the research more interesting.

In 2019, Mello, Fiorini, and Coqueiro conducted a study that involved 10 Physical Education teachers, using an open questionnaire to explore the relevance of Physical Education classes in the development of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The results revealed that, although teachers were familiar with the definition of autism, and recognized the importance of Physical Education classes for this audience, many did not feel prepared to include these students in the practices or to identify the specific benefits generated for them.

The 2020 study, by Maia, Bataglioni and Mazo, investigated how Physical Education teachers in Porto Alegre and the Metropolitan Region perceive the inclusion of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in regular school. Eight teachers were interviewed, and the thematic analysis revealed that students with ASD tend to follow routines in class, show greater engagement in exploratory activities in Early Childhood Education and in activities with defined stages in Elementary School. Teachers adapted their strategies to meet the individual needs of students with ASD, using specific activities and varied strategies to promote inclusion. Peer mediation and interdisciplinary work were highlighted as important for an effective inclusive education in Physical Education.

In 2021, the research conducted by Gomes and Caetano, examined interaction and communication through inclusive play interventions in preschool, specifically in physical education classes with autistic children. Three children were studied, each in a preschool room in Santos/SP, using document analysis,



participant observation, audiovisual records and Field Diary as instruments. The results were categorized into three main areas: relationship between children, teachers' practices, and physical environment. The research highlighted that inclusive interventions facilitated interaction between children, promoting the breaking of barriers that segregate autistic children into special classes.

The 2023 study, carried out by Barreto, Silva e Souza, investigated the impact of the initial and continuing training of Physical Education teachers in the Early Years of Elementary School in a municipal public network in northwestern Paraná on the inclusion of students with special needs (ASD/ADHD). Six teachers were interviewed using a semi-structured approach, focusing on training, physical structure, teaching material and personal support, in addition to the specific challenges of working with students with ASD and ADHD. The data were analyzed using content analysis, highlighting that teachers have adequate initial training, but lack specific continuing education provided by school management. Although there are sufficient physical and material resources, the lack of a supportive teacher during classes has been identified as a significant gap.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The analysis of the articles emphasizes the urgent need for specific training and continuous professional support to better meet the educational needs of these students during Physical Education classes. Teachers were not sufficiently trained when they receive an autistic student in their teaching practices.

On the other hand, the study that surveyed the children was able to note the importance of inclusive interventions, since the specific activities and varied strategies favored a breakdown of barriers between the student with ASD and the one who does not.

Further studies on the subject are necessary, since the results found for the search for keywords were limited when it came to scientific articles.



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