



The school inclusion of children with autism spectrum disorder in early childhood education

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Summary

Although studied for almost a century, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) still holds many enigmas for researchers and specialists working in the field. The increasing inclusion of children with ASD in Early Childhood Education, guaranteed by law, highlighted the importance of this research, which aimed to analyze the conceptions of teachers, pedagogues, and school administrators regarding the process of school inclusion for children with ASD in Early Childhood Education at Municipal Early Childhood Education Centers in the cities of Divino, Orizânia, and São João do Manhuaçu, Minas Gerais, Minas Gerais. Specifically, the objectives were: to identify the conceptions of school stakeholders regarding the process of school inclusion for children with ASD; and to analyze, through the accounts of school stakeholders, the challenges faced by Municipal Early Childhood Education Centers in ensuring access, learning, and socialization conditions for children with ASD, alongside other students, in their school inclusion process. To this end, a qualitative, exploratory-descriptive study was conducted, using questionnaires as the research instrument. Based on the results obtained, it was concluded that the professionals involved still have little knowledge about this population, feel insecure in promoting school inclusion and face several challenges, such as technological inequality, lack of family support, scarcity of teaching materials and the need for the involvement of the entire school community in the process of including children with ASD.

Keywords: Inclusion, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Early Childhood Education.

Abstract

Although studied for nearly a century, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) still presents many enigmas for researchers and specialists in the field. The increasing enrollment of children with ASD in Early Childhood Education, guaranteed by law, highlighted the importance of this research, which aimed to analyze the perceptions of teachers, pedagogues, and school administrators regarding the process of school inclusion of children with ASD in Early Childhood Education, in the Municipal Centers for Early Childhood Education (CMEIs) of the cities of Divino, Orizânia, and São João do Manhuaçu, in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. Specifically, the study sought to: identify the perceptions of school stakeholders about the school inclusion process of children with ASD; and analyze, through their accounts, the challenges faced by CMEIs in ensuring access, learning, and socialization for children with ASD alongside their peers during the school inclusion process. A qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive research approach was adopted, using questionnaires as the data collection

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instrument. Based on the results, it was concluded that the professionals involved still have limited knowledge about this population, feel insecure in promoting school inclusion, and face several challenges, such as technological inequality, lack of family support, scarcity of teaching materials, and the need for the entire school community to be involved in the inclusion process of children with ASD.

Keywords: Inclusion, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Early Childhood Education.

INTRODUCTION

This research sought to discuss a relevant topic, currently, for education: inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at the Early Childhood Education level, considering that the Brazilian Federal Constitution guarantees the target audience of the student Special Education school enrollment as a mandatory part of Basic Education, aiming at ensure their integration and coexistence in society.

The Statistical Diagnosis of Mental Disorders – DSM-V (APA, 2014) comprises ASD as a behavioral disorder compromising neurodevelopment, manifesting around the first three years of life. The main areas affected by this disorders are associated with communication, social and behavioral interaction, with restrictions in its cycle of activities, also including, in its characteristics, stereotyped movements, patterns of variable intelligence and extremely labile temperament. Such specificities are manifest in a unique way in each person and with varying severity, using the term “spectrum” for the various levels of conduct.

Cunha (2015) argues that the TEA terminology enables a more comprehensive understanding comprehensive, classifying it into three distinct levels – mild, moderate and severe. Consequently, This classification is of great value for better care and coexistence with the child, providing conditions for its development.

Because it does not have an exact etiology, ASD has a multicausal origin, encompassing factors neurological, genetic and social factors, thus causing atypical development in their communication, language and social interaction (Evêncio; Fernandes, 2019).

Being considered by science as a health condition, ASD may be associated with other comorbidities and clinical conditions, such as Attention Deficit Disorder with Hyperactivity (ADHD), schizophrenia, intellectual disability, speech disorders

sensory processing, high abilities/giftedness, among others. Thus, their condition deviates from the typical development pattern, and the child needs support and assistance to cope with situations from your daily life.

The intention to research the topic is related to the fact that, even though it has been studied for almost a century, ASD has held many enigmas for researchers and specialists working in the area, being a subject not yet “deciphered”, in terms of scientific studies. In this sense, Borges and Castro (2019) highlight that, although ASD has been investigated for several decades and with significant advances in diagnostics and interventions, it is still an etiology which encompasses a multitude of behaviors and secondary characteristics, relating research into genetic factors and epigenetics.

2. Autism Spectrum Disorder

“Autism” comes from the Greek word *autos*, which means “myself,” expressing the notion of oneself, of oneself (Orrú, 2016). For centuries, people with ASD were treated as mentally ill people were often forgotten by their families and lived in hospices. With the Over the years, countless theorists, based on their lived experiences, have added understandings about this disorder.

In the early 20th century, researchers began studying people who, for some reason, because, they did not maintain contact with reality, as if they “lived in another world”.

According to Rodrigues (2010), in 1911, Eugene Bleuler gave this condition the name “autism”, referring to a symptom of schizophrenia to describe the loss of contact with reality, describing it as a state of disconnection from reality with the outside world, consequently, the impossibility of communicating with the outside world, not necessarily through speech, demonstrating reserved and unusual behaviors.

In 1943, American psychiatrist Leo Kanner wrote the article entitled *Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact*³, where, after observing the behavior of eleven children intelligent, with a physical appearance within normal standards and with characteristics individualized from other childhood psychoses, such as childhood schizophrenia, named it as

3 Autistic Disorders of Affective Contact.



autistic disorder of affective contact, identifying in these children the symptoms of inability in interpersonal relationships, stereotypes and resistance to change (Dias, 2015).

In his publication, Kanner (1993) denoted as carriers of autistic psychopathy those who, despite high intellectual abilities and peculiar behavior, presented difficulties in verbal communication. Its main characteristic was social isolation, classifying it as a personality disorder. He also highlighted the existence of a distortion in the family model, causing changes in the child's development psychoaffective, resulting from the intellectual character of the parents of these children. However, the author also described, as a peculiarity, exceptional abilities such as a great memory and did not leave to associate autistic behavior with some biological factor, since the changes behavioral changes were noticed even in early childhood, making it difficult to accept such only relational.

A year after Kanner's publication, Austrian pediatrician Hans Asperger published a article on "autistic psychopathy", where the traits described by the author are very similar to those focused on by Kanner. During his research, he found that autistic characteristics manifested themselves from the age of two and would be persistent, being limitations in social contact, lack of facial expressions, difficulty understanding emotions, resistance to changes and alterations in language such as pronoun inversion.

According to Cunha (2012), based on these publications, it was decided to separate autism from childhood schizophrenia. While Kanner was investigating autism, pediatrician Hans Asperger studied children with similar conditions, however, the children observed had as characteristic greater communication capacity and high intelligence.

Thus, these references to possible causes were, in a way, precursors to two different theoretical approaches to autism research: affective theory and purely relational approach.

Over the years, theoretical concepts about the etiology and dynamics of ASD were gradually modified, with the aim of seeking more evidence to explain the precocity of clinical manifestations.

Over the years, many studies have been carried out and the parameters of diagnoses have undergone changes; in 2013, the DSM-V named Spectrum Disorder Autistic, encompassing all subgroups of autism in a single diagnosis, with different

levels of commitment, determined based on the following criteria: behaviors repetitive and stereotyped, communication deficits and social disabilities.

The manual lists the following characteristics as criteria for diagnosis:

[...] persistent impairment in reciprocal social communication and social interaction (Criterion A) and restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities (Criterion B). These symptoms are present from early childhood and limit or impair daily functioning (Criteria C and D).
[...] (APA, 2014, p. 53).

These signs usually appear in the first three years of life, with varying degrees of severity. in individuals, who may also exhibit incredible intellectual, musical, and of memory and others in which, most of the time, they are much more advanced than should be, beyond their chronological age.

2.1 The inclusion of autistic children in early childhood education

When addressing education in the early years of life, the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education (LDB, Law No. 9,394/1996), presents early childhood education as part of education basic, thus being a right of the child and a duty of the state. According to the BNCC, early childhood education is the first stage of basic education, which serves children aged 0 to 5 years. Therefore, it is clear that at this stage it is essential to take into account experiences, knowledge and experiences of children, obtained both within the family and community, in order to provide the construction of new learning.

Therefore, in this fundamental stage of the educational process, children go through a metamorphosis in their cycle of experiences, which expands beyond the family, linking them if, now, the school, with its colleagues and professionals. The BNCC presents as rights of learning and development that must be ensured in the first stage of teaching: coexist, play, participate, explore, express and get to know each other. When discussing education inclusive in early childhood education, Carneiro (2011) says that:

The construction of an inclusive school from early childhood education onwards implies thinking about its spaces, times, professionals, pedagogical resources, etc., aimed at the possibility of access, permanence and full development also for students with disabilities, students who, due to their

particularities, have special educational needs (Carneiro, 2011, p. 86).

Early Childhood Education, over the years, has gone beyond the bias of just being a caregiver, also assuming the role of educating. The recognition of the rights to childhood guaranteed by law went through different conceptions in relation to time.

In this sense, the BNCC states:

As the first stage of Basic Education, Early Childhood Education is the beginning and foundation of the educational process. Entering daycare or preschool often represents the first separation of children from their family ties and their incorporation into a structured socialization environment. In recent decades, the concept of linking education and care has been consolidated in Early Childhood Education, understanding care as inseparable from the educational process (Brasil, 2017, p. 32).

In view of this, daycare centers and preschools have the responsibility for the care and learning, containing in its pedagogical proposals the function of enhancing the skills in childhood and expand the universe of experiences, in order to guarantee the rights of learning amidst cultural plurality, to consolidate new learning and ensure their social, intellectual, emotional, physical and moral development.

With the intention of a more just and democratic society, Brazil restructured its laws and policies applied to the education system, with the aim of guaranteeing insertion and permanence of all individuals in educational institutions, without any distinctions.

According to Law No. 12,764 of December 27, 2012, in its article 1, the person with ASD is considered a person with a disability, for all legal purposes; also in its Article 7 mentions the mandatory access and stability of students with ASD in schools regular (Brazil, 2012).

According to the National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education (Brazil, 2008), when including children with ASD in regular schools, there was an increase significant increase in the number of enrollments (Nunes; Azevedo; Schmidt, 2013).

In this context, this number is a challenge for Early Childhood Education, because, when receiving a child with ASD, it is assumed that the school must reorganize the curriculum and the entire school environment, as well as adapting methodologies to enable learning and provide students with more effective participation in school tasks (Brande; Zanfelicce, 2012).



Contemporary society has been undergoing enormous changes in relationships political, economic, social and cultural, which makes Education a process increasingly hermetic.

From this perspective, the conception of the child as a historical subject makes the school a privileged space, so that everyone, regardless of their needs, can build knowledge, share knowledge, socialize and respect differences.

Experiences lived in early childhood contribute to the development of brain, in the cognitive, social and emotional development of the individual. Thus, stimuli appropriate at this stage of life contribute to future development, boosting their lifelong learning (Cardoso; Santos, 2020).

In order to ensure quality, in this age group, the schooling process is essential for its development, since, in this process of building the knowledge, children have a unique nature, because they feel and think about the world in their own way, in their daily interactions, so that Early Childhood Education provides the opportunity access to experience different cultural practices.

Vygotsky (1993) understands that, in addition to being a space for learning concepts scientific, school is also a primordial field that opens paths for development of culturally organized and especially human psychological functions.

In recent decades, school inclusion has provided schooling for all students, supported by international documents and Brazilian legislation. This has contributed to standardizing inclusive pedagogical practices.

In this context, Early Childhood Education is an important stage of teaching. to work on diversity and respect, with a preponderant role in the construction of a plural society.

Cardozo and Santos (2020) emphasize that thinking about the school enrollment of a child with TEA is to implement good pedagogical practices, enable the provision of adequate care and promote an active attitude. Therefore, the scope of inclusive education is not limited to just insertion of this student, but extends to the conception of a school environment for all. Thus, it is duty of the State and the family to guarantee access, permanence and promotion of learning, regardless of the student's conditions.

For students with ASD, difficulties in communication and social interaction are integrated to barriers already existing in their school admission process. With this, the process of schooling of this child refers to the perspective of guaranteeing the provision of schooling of quality, which ensures successful learning.

Therefore, schools begin to serve these students with many doubts and uncertainties, on which methodologies, strategies and resources to adopt to determine effective actions that ensure meaningful inclusion.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research emphasized reflections on the process of school inclusion of children with TEA, in the current context of Early Childhood Education, highlighting this level of education as the beginning of coexistence with diversity, considering that it is the first stage of Basic Education.

The education process transforms the human being, making it possible to develop their potential, according to the environment in which it is inserted and, for this to happen, it needs family, social and cultural references.

It is known that inclusive practices have been gaining more and more space in the scenario Brazilian educational system. However, the school inclusion of children with ASD, despite existing advances and investment in public policies, still brings challenges to the community school. Now, inclusive policies exist in the laws, but they do not guarantee the quality of school inclusion by themselves. Joint work is needed between public policies, schools, and families, ensuring effective contributions to the process of school inclusion of students with ASD, in Early Childhood Education, so that the rights described in documents are experienced in practice school daily. Teachers and administrators still feel insecure about promoting school inclusion of students with ASD.

An inclusive school needs the active participation of the entire school community, in what refers to the appreciation of diversity, with the aim of developing maximum potential of all students, thus preparing them to face everyday challenges as protagonists in the construction of knowledge. Therefore, it is necessary to break with the vision ableist that judges students based on standards of normality, which classifies them as based on the learning expected by the school's standard curriculum, generating a form of

exclusion within the school environment. On the contrary, the school must ensure that this child will have the same opportunities to do school activities.

Inclusive Education must enable the full participation of students who are the target audience. Special Education, in the educational process, promoting equality in learning, being that the school needs to be a welcoming environment, which recognizes potential and abilities and that not everyone learns in the same way, favoring an education focused on diversity. Therefore, it is possible to affirm that the reflection and action of all subjects involved with the education are fundamental to a society and school with an equitable perspective and inclusive.

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