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From the Inside Out: Autism and the Challenges of Inclusive Education in Teacher Training

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Fernanda Cristina Garcia Salgado de Almeida

Graduated from the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais – PUC-Minas – Brazil

Email: fcgsalmeida@hotmail.com

Summary

This article proposes a critical reflection on the structural weaknesses of Brazilian education in the recognition, acceptance, and support of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), especially those classified at support level 1. Using an autobiographical approach, it analyzes the impact of late diagnosis on the educational, social, and emotional trajectory of a woman from the periphery and a context of extreme poverty, diagnosed at age 40.

This paper discusses diagnosis beyond a pathologizing perspective, understanding it as an instrument of emancipation, access to rights, and identity redefinition. It highlights the role of initial and ongoing teacher training in the early identification of signs of ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder), in addressing school exclusion, and in building inclusive pedagogical practices with individualized, student-centered plans. It concludes that the absence of an attentive and humanized pedagogical approach contributes to marginalization, illness, and a sense of not belonging, while the implementation of inclusive education transforms trajectories and produces social justice.

Keywords: Inclusive education; Autism; Late diagnosis; Teacher training; Autobiographical narrative.

Introduction

This article engages in dialogue with the book *The Story of an Autistic Favela Dweller: From the Hill to the Mountain*.

An autobiographical work that sheds light on a life marked by extreme poverty and exclusion.

school-related issues and a late diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), received at age 40.

To share the experience, the goal is not limited to personal narrative, but proposes reflection on...

The role of school in human development and the limitations of an education that still fails in...

Recognizing the diversity of neurodevelopment.

Growing up as a level 1 autistic person, without diagnosis and without educational support,

It meant going through childhood and adolescence under constant strain. The school, which should have been welcoming,

It was also a space of misunderstanding. Difficulties in social interaction, sensory hypersensitivity.

and unique ways of learning were interpreted as inadequacy or lack of effort. For

For many children with autism level 1 — especially those from marginalized communities — invisibility becomes a form of...
silent exclusion.

Because they exhibit functional language and preserved intellectual performance, these students

They tend to go unnoticed by the education system. The absence of support does not mean

Autonomy, but also an accumulation of emotional and cognitive demands that impact development.

fostering anxiety, recurring crises, and often, mental illness. This reality

This highlights structural flaws in the school's failure to observe, understand, and intervene early in the face of...



From the perspective of someone who has also worked as an educational manager, revisiting this trajectory. This shows that many stories could be different if there were a more attentive school environment. Literacy-focused, inclusive, and humanized. Teachers and administrators occupy a strategic position in identifying signs of ASD, engaging in dialogue with families, and developing pedagogical practices that... welcome and promote holistic development.

This article aims to contribute to the training of educators, drawing attention to... For students with ASD requiring level 1 support. Early diagnosis is advocated, not to pathologize. Differences, but to guarantee rights, reduce burdens, and transform educational and social trajectories.

Theoretical basis

Human development, environment, and interactions in inclusive education.

Human development does not occur in isolation, but is constituted by the interactions between Subject and social environment. Piaget (1978) highlights that cognitive development results from the interaction The constant interaction between the individual and the environment, mediated by assimilation and accommodation, is significant. The environment is not neutral. but a component of the formation of the individual.

In childhood and adolescence—central phases of psychic, social, and intellectual development—the The quality of school interactions directly impacts development. Impoverished environments or marked by exclusionary relationships restrict learning and identity construction, especially for students whose ways of being and learning do not conform to the norm. hegemonic.

Freire (1996) expands on this perspective, stating that the subject is formed in the relationships that establishes a relationship with the world. For him, education is a political, ethical, and relational act, in which the reading of The world precedes the reading of the word. Thus, human development depends on the environment, relationships, and... the bonds that the individual establishes.

School, normalization, and exclusion

The traditional school model tends to normalize behaviors and ways of learning, classifying maladapted students as problematic. In the case of autism In women, exclusion is subtle and persistent, as signs of the spectrum often go unnoticed. Unnoticed. Institutional invisibility generates emotional overload, isolation, and silencing.



Diagnosis and autobiography

The diagnosis of ASD, often seen as a limiting label, should be given new meaning. as an instrument for organizing experience, accessing rights, and building strategies. pedagogical (ALMEIDA, 2025; PIAGET, 1978). According to Piaget, development occurs in interaction between subject and environment; the diagnosis allows adjusting the educational environment, transforming Challenges become opportunities.

For Freire (1996), education is an act of freedom constructed through dialogue. The diagnosis, When ethically appropriate, it allows the individual to understand the world from their own perspective. Uniqueness, promoting self-understanding and authorship. For students with ASD at level 1 support, This mediation is essential, because institutional invisibility and moralizing judgment generate Emotional overload, isolation, and silencing.

The autobiography *The Story of an Autistic Favela Dweller: From the Hill to the Mountain* goes beyond... personal narrative, functioning as a support tool for other women and people with ASD. Level 1 support for those who experienced childhood and adolescence without diagnosis or educational support. The book acts as a symbolic guide, showing that, even in the face of neurodivergence, it is possible... To transform trajectories and claim space in educational and social environments.

Initial and ongoing teacher training should include the study of Neurodevelopment, early signs of ASD, and specificities of autism. Beyond knowledge. Technically, it is essential to cultivate an ethical, empathetic, and dialogical approach, capable of mediating relationships between the school, Family and healthcare network without stigmatization. Well-prepared teachers interrupt cycles of They eliminate exclusion, minimize overload, and build inclusive environments that promote learning. belonging and human development.

Methodology

This study falls within the field of qualitative research, of an autobiographical, narrative and... Reflective, articulated with theoretical-critical analysis in inclusive education. The author's autobiography. (ALMEIDA, 2025) constitutes the main corpus, complemented by formative memories, records Reflective thinking and experience as an educational manager.

Methodological procedures: analytical reading of the narratives, thematic categorization. (childhood and periphery, school normalization, invisibility of autism, especially in girls, late diagnosis and mirroring, educational environment, teacher training, inclusion/exclusion) and Interpretive analysis. Ethical perspective: dignity, authorship, and non-stigmatization. Autobiography is used as an instrument of rescue, education and empowerment.



Final considerations

By articulating autobiography, theoretical reflection, and educational practice, it becomes evident that education, Diagnosis and resilience are closely connected. When the school learns to observe, listen and Acting from the perspective of each student's uniqueness transforms lives and shapes individuals. The experience The reported work, "*The Story of an Autistic Favela Dweller: From the Hill to the Mountain*," demonstrates that... Neurodivergence is not an obstacle to social participation, but rather an invitation to rethink practices. pedagogical and educational policies.

Piaget contributes to the understanding that development occurs through continuous interaction between Subject and environment; Freire reinforces that education is an act of freedom, built through dialogue. These These perspectives underpin the need for school environments that recognize and value... diversity, promoting effective inclusion, humanization, social justice and the construction of career paths. possible.

Diagnosis, education, and autobiography act as integrated instruments of transformation. Every marginalized individual can find paths to belonging and fulfillment, and The school, guided by ethical and conscientious teachers, plays a decisive role. Transforming lives. It requires attentive observation, dialogue, empathy, and pedagogical practices that liberate and give new meaning. experiences demonstrating that education reconstructs trajectories and produces social justice.

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Fernanda Cristina Garcia Salgado de Almeida

Graduated from Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais – PUC-Minas – Brazil

Email: fcsalmeida@hotmail.com



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Abstract

This article proposes a critical reflection on the structural weaknesses of Brazilian education in recognizing, supporting, and monitoring students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), especially those classified as level 1 support. Using an autobiographical approach, it analyzes the impact of late diagnosis on the school, social, and emotional trajectory of a woman from the periphery and extreme poverty, diagnosed at the age of 40. The diagnosis is discussed beyond a pathologizing perspective, understood as an instrument for empowerment, access to rights, and identity re-signification. The role of initial and continuing teacher education in the early identification of ASD signs, addressing school exclusion, and developing inclusive pedagogical practices with individualized student-centered plans is highlighted. It is concluded that the absence of attentive and humanized pedagogical practices contributes to marginalization, illness, and lack of belonging, whereas effective inclusive education can transform trajectories and produce social justice.

Keywords: Inclusive education; Autism; Late diagnosis; Teacher training; Autobiographical narrative.

Introduction

This article engages with the book *The Story of an Autistic Favela Dweller: From the Hill to the Mountain*, an autobiographical work that gives visibility to a trajectory marked by extreme poverty, school exclusion, and late diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), received at the age of 40. By sharing this experience, the goal is not limited to personal narrative but proposes reflection on the role of schools in human formation and the limits of an education that still fails to recognize neurodevelopmental diversity.

Growing up as a level 1 support autistic person, without diagnosis or educational support, meant navigating childhood and adolescence under constant overload. School, which should have been a place of care, was also a space of misunderstanding. Difficulties in social interaction, sensory hypersensitivity, and unique ways of learning were interpreted as inadequacy or lack of effort. For many level 1 autistic children — especially those from the periphery — invisibility becomes a silent form of exclusion.

Because they exhibit functional language and preserved intellectual performance, these students often go unnoticed in the educational system. Absence of support does not mean autonomy but an accumulation of emotional and cognitive demands that directly impact development, fostering anxiety, recurrent crises, and, often, psychological distress. This reality highlights structural failures of the school in observing, understanding, and acting early regarding ASD specificities.

From the perspective of someone who also served as a public school manager, revisiting this trajectory shows that many stories could have been different if the school environment had been more attentive, literacy-focused, inclusive, and humanized. Teachers and managers occupy strategic positions in identifying ASD signs, dialoguing with families, and building pedagogical practices that embrace students and promote their integral development.

This article aims to contribute to teacher training, drawing attention to students with level 1



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support ASD. Early diagnosis is advocated not to pathologize differences but to guarantee rights, reduce overload, and transform school and social trajectories.

Theoretical Framework

Human Development, Environment, and Interactions in Inclusive Education

Human development does not occur in isolation but is constituted through interactions between the individual and the social environment. Piaget (1978) emphasizes that cognitive development results from constant interaction between the individual and the environment, mediated by assimilation and accommodation. The environment is not neutral but a key component of subject formation.

In childhood and adolescence — central phases of psychological, social, and intellectual formation — the quality of school interactions directly impacts development. Environments impoverished in stimuli or marked by exclusionary relationships restrict learning and identity construction, especially for students whose ways of being and learning do not align with hegemonic standards.

Freire (1996) expands this perspective, affirming that the subject is formed through relationships established with the world. Education is a political, ethical, and relational act, in which reading the world precedes reading the word. Human formation is therefore intrinsically linked to the environment, relationships, and bonds the subject establishes.

School, Normalization, and Exclusion

The traditional school model tends to normalize behaviors and learning methods, classifying students who do not adapt as problematic. In the case of female autism, exclusion is subtle and persistent, as signs of the spectrum are often overlooked. Institutional invisibility generates emotional overload, isolation, and silencing.

Diagnosis and Autobiography

The diagnosis of ASD, often seen as a limiting label, must be re-signified as a tool for organizing experience, accessing rights, and developing pedagogical strategies (ALMEIDA, 2025; PIAGET, 1978). According to Piaget, development occurs in the interaction between the individual and the environment; diagnosis allows the educational environment to be adjusted, transforming challenges into learning and participation opportunities.

For Freire (1996), education is an act of freedom built through dialogue. Diagnosis, when



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ethically applied, allows the individual to understand the world from their singularity, promoting self-understanding and authority. For students with level 1 support ASD, this mediation is essential, as institutional invisibility and moralizing judgment produce emotional overload, isolation, and silencing.

The autobiography, "The Story of an Autistic Favela Dweller: From the Hill to the Mountain," goes beyond personal narrative, serving as a support tool for other women and level 1 support autistic individuals who experienced childhood and adolescence without diagnosis or educational support. The book acts as a symbolic guide, showing that even in the face of neurodivergence, it is possible to transform trajectories and claim space in educational and social environments.

Initial and continuing teacher education must include the study of neurodevelopment, early signs of ASD, and autism specificities. Beyond technical knowledge, it is essential to cultivate an ethical, empathetic, and dialogical posture capable of mediating relationships between school, family, and health networks without stigmatization. Well-prepared teachers break cycles of exclusion, minimize overloads, and build inclusive environments that foster learning, belonging, and human development.

Methodology

The study falls within qualitative research, autobiographical, narrative, and reflective in nature, articulated with theoretical-critical analysis in inclusive education. The author's autobiography (ALMEIDA, 2025) constitutes the main corpus, complemented by formative memories, reflective records, and experience as an educational manager.

Methodological procedures: analytical reading of narratives, thematic categorization (childhood and periphery, school normalization, invisibility of female autism, late diagnosis and mirroring, educational environment, teacher training, inclusion/exclusion), and interpretative analysis. Ethical perspective: dignity, authority, and non-stigmatization. The autobiography is used as a tool for rescue, training, and emancipation.

Final Considerations

By articulating autobiography, theoretical reflection, and educational practice, it is evident that education, diagnosis, and resilience are closely interconnected. When the school learns to observe, listen, and act according to each student's singularity, it transforms lives and shapes subjects. The experience was reported and the book, "The Story of an Autistic Favela Dweller: From the Hill to the Mountain," was published. demonstrates that neurodivergence is not an obstacle to social participation but an invitation to rethink



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pedagogical practices and educational policies.

Piaget helps understand that development occurs in continuous interaction between the subject and the environment; Freire reinforces that education is an act of freedom, built through dialogue.

These perspectives underpin the need for school environments that recognize and value diversity, promoting effective inclusion, humanization, social justice, and possible trajectories.

Diagnosis, education, and autobiography act as integrated instruments of transformation. Each invisible subject can find paths to belonging and fulfillment, and the school, mediated by ethical and conscious teachers, plays a decisive role. Transforming lives requires attentive observation, dialogue, empathy, and pedagogical practices that liberate and re-signify experiences, demonstrating that education reconstructs trajectories and produces social justice.