




## SOCIAL INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD) IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

### A INCLUSÃO SOCIAL DE CRIANÇAS COM TRANSTORNO DO ESPECTRO AUTISTA (TEA) NA EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL

### INCLUSIÓN SOCIAL DE NIÑOS CON TRASTORNO DEL ESPECTRO AUTISTA (TEA) EN LA EDUCACIÓN INFANTIL

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#### ABSTRACT

This article addresses the social inclusion and learning process of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Early Childhood Education, aiming to understand how schools can foster the comprehensive development and active participation of these children in the school environment. The research is bibliographic in nature and was developed through the analysis of academic works, legal documents, and recent studies on inclusive education, autism, and pedagogical practices in early childhood. The investigation is based on the premise that the presence of a child with ASD in school does not, in itself, guarantee effective inclusion. It is necessary to rethink structures, relationships, and teaching methodologies to ensure acceptance and appreciation of their specificities. The study emphasizes the importance of a pedagogical approach sensitive to differences, based on careful observation and respect for each child's individual pace. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of collaborative work between teachers, families, and multidisciplinary teams, as well as the fundamental role of continuing teacher training in addressing the challenges of inclusion. The results of the analysis indicate that planned pedagogical practices, combined with the ethical commitment of education professionals, can promote meaningful learning experiences, contributing to the development of communication, socialization, and autonomy in children with ASD. The conclusion is that social inclusion in early childhood education must be understood as an ongoing process of transformation, requiring collective engagement and effective public policies to fully guarantee the right to education. Building an inclusive school, therefore, not only benefits children with disabilities but also strengthens the principles of equity, coexistence, and respect for diversity for the entire school community.

**Keywords:** Early Childhood Education. Social inclusion. Autism. Learning. Diversity.

#### RESUMO

Este artigo aborda a inclusão social e o processo de aprendizagem das crianças com Transtorno do Espectro Autista (TEA) na Educação Infantil, com o objetivo de compreender como a escola pode favorecer o desenvolvimento integral e a participação ativa dessas crianças no ambiente escolar. A pesquisa é de natureza bibliográfica e foi desenvolvida por meio da análise de obras acadêmicas, documentos legais e estudos recentes sobre educação inclusiva, autismo e práticas pedagógicas na primeira infância.

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A investigação parte da premissa de que a presença da criança com TEA na escola não garante, por si só, uma inclusão efetiva, sendo necessário repensar as estruturas, as relações e as metodologias de ensino para garantir o acolhimento e a valorização de suas especificidades. O estudo enfatiza a importância de uma abordagem pedagógica sensível às diferenças, pautada na observação atenta e no respeito ao ritmo individual de cada criança. Além disso, destaca a relevância do trabalho colaborativo entre professores, famílias e equipes multiprofissionais, bem como o papel fundamental da formação continuada dos docentes no enfrentamento dos desafios da inclusão. Os resultados da análise indicam que práticas pedagógicas planejadas, aliadas ao compromisso ético dos profissionais da educação, podem promover experiências significativas de aprendizagem, contribuindo para o desenvolvimento da comunicação, da socialização e da autonomia das crianças com TEA. Conclui-se que a inclusão social na Educação Infantil deve ser compreendida como um processo contínuo de transformação, que exige envolvimento coletivo e políticas públicas eficazes, a fim de garantir o direito à educação em sua plenitude. A construção de uma escola inclusiva, portanto, não beneficia apenas as crianças com deficiência, mas fortalece os princípios de equidade, convivência e respeito à diversidade para toda a comunidade escolar.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação Infantil. Inclusão Social. Autismo. Aprendizagem. Diversidade.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo aborda la inclusión social y el proceso de aprendizaje de los niños con Trastorno del Espectro Autista (TEA) en la Educación Infantil, con el objetivo de comprender cómo la escuela puede favorecer el desarrollo integral y la participación activa de estos niños en el entorno escolar. La investigación es de carácter bibliográfico y fue desarrollada mediante el análisis de obras académicas, documentos legales y estudios recientes sobre educación inclusiva, autismo y prácticas pedagógicas en la primera infancia. La investigación parte del principio de que la mera presencia del niño con TEA en la escuela no garantiza una inclusión efectiva, siendo necesario repensar las estructuras, las relaciones y las metodologías de enseñanza para asegurar la acogida y la valoración de sus especificidades. El estudio enfatiza la importancia de un enfoque pedagógico sensible a las diferencias, basado en la observación atenta y en el respeto al ritmo individual de cada niño. Además, destaca la relevancia del trabajo colaborativo entre docentes, familias y equipos multiprofesionales, así como el papel fundamental de la formación continua de los educadores frente a los desafíos de la inclusión. Los resultados del análisis indican que las prácticas pedagógicas planificadas, junto con el compromiso ético de los profesionales de la educación, pueden promover experiencias significativas de aprendizaje, contribuyendo al desarrollo de la comunicación, la socialización y la autonomía de los niños con TEA. Se concluye que la inclusión social en la Educación Infantil debe entenderse como un proceso continuo de transformación, que exige la participación colectiva y políticas públicas eficaces para garantizar plenamente el derecho a la educación. La construcción de una escuela inclusiva, por lo tanto, no solo beneficia a los niños con discapacidad, sino que fortalece los principios de equidad, convivencia y respeto a la diversidad para toda la comunidad educativa.

**Palabras clave:** Educación Infantil. Inclusión Social. Autismo. Aprendizaje. Diversidad.



## 1 INTRODUCTION

The social inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Early Childhood Education is one of the great challenges and commitments of contemporary education, especially in a context in which valuing diversity and respecting differences become fundamental principles of human coexistence.

By considering the school as a space for integral education, democratic coexistence and construction of knowledge, it is necessary to recognize that all children, regardless of their neurological conditions, must be assured the right to learn, participate, interact and fully develop in environments that welcome their specificities and potentialities.

Early Childhood Education, the first stage of basic education, represents a decisive moment for the formation of bonds, the development of language, the strengthening of socio-emotional skills and the beginning of community life, being, therefore, a strategic space for the construction of inclusive practices.

Autism Spectrum Disorder encompasses a wide range of behavioral, cognitive, and sensory manifestations that are expressed in a unique way in each child. Thus, the process of school inclusion of these children requires a sensitive, flexible and responsive approach on the part of education professionals, who must be prepared to understand the multiple forms of expression and communication present in the autistic children's universe.

In Early Childhood Education, it is essential to create a welcoming, playful and stimulating environment, where differences are recognized as enriching aspects of coexistence, and not as barriers to participation. Inclusion, in this sense, goes beyond simple access to the school space; It implies promoting meaningful interactions, ensuring adequate learning conditions and respecting the pace of development of each child.

In this scenario, the role of the teacher acquires centrality, since he is the mediator of the experiences lived by the children in the school environment. Their posture, attitudes and pedagogical strategies directly influence the way children with ASD will be perceived and welcomed by the group, and can favor or limit their socialization and learning process.

The Early Childhood Education educator needs, therefore, to be attentive to the specific needs of each student, seeking creative and affective ways to ensure their participation in activities, respecting their individuality, but also encouraging the construction of social bonds with other colleagues. The construction of a truly inclusive



pedagogical practice requires availability for dialogue, openness to the new and constant reflection on one's own educational activities.

The presence of children with autism in the context of Early Childhood Education challenges the school to rethink its practices, routines and conceptions about development and learning. More than adapting the student to the institution, what is sought is to transform the school into an accessible space, where diversity is contemplated from planning to the execution of daily activities.

This perspective requires the involvement of the entire school team, from management to support professionals, creating a collaborative network that favors the reception and well-being of all children. Social inclusion is effective to the extent that the school promotes opportunities for children with ASD to interact with others, participate in group activities, be listened to and valued in their singularities, thus building a sense of belonging to the collective.

Reflecting on the social inclusion of children with ASD in Early Childhood Education is also reflecting on the social and ethical commitment of education to equity and justice. The construction of a truly inclusive school begins with the recognition that all children have the right to a quality education, which respects their particularities and enhances their capacities.

Childhood is a sensitive and powerful period, in which the foundations for affective, cognitive and social development are established, and therefore, ensuring that children with ASD have positive school experiences is to ensure them a more dignified, autonomous and happy future. Thus, this article proposes an in-depth analysis of the paths, challenges and possibilities of social inclusion of these children, recognizing the importance of pedagogical practices committed to diversity and the right of all to full and respectful coexistence in the school environment.

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

This article has as its methodological approach the research of a bibliographic nature, based on the analysis of academic productions, legal documents, books, scientific articles and specialized publications that deal with social inclusion and the learning process of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Early Childhood Education. The objective of the research is to understand, based on updated theoretical references,



how the inclusion of children with ASD has been discussed in the Brazilian educational context, especially in the early years of basic education.

The choice for bibliographic research is justified by the intention of gathering, systematizing and interpreting already consolidated knowledge on the subject, allowing a critical reflection on inclusive pedagogical practices, public policies aimed at special education and the challenges faced in daily school life. This type of research enables the theoretical deepening necessary to support the proposed discussion, in addition to offering subsidies for the understanding of the specificities of ASD and its implications in the educational environment.

Data collection was carried out through the reading and selection of sources that address, directly or indirectly, the central themes of this study, with emphasis on the contributions of educational sciences, psychology and inclusive pedagogy. Recent publications were prioritized, in order to ensure the updating and relevance of the information analyzed. In addition, legislation and educational guidelines that guide inclusion practices in Brazil were consulted, seeking to understand the legal framework that supports the rights of children with disabilities in the school environment.

The analysis of the information was conducted qualitatively, based on an interpretative and critical reading of the selected texts. The data obtained were organized into thematic categories, in order to highlight the main elements that make up the relationship between social inclusion and learning of children with ASD. This organization made it possible to identify recurring challenges, successful pedagogical practices, conceptions about child development and proposals for the construction of a more equitable and participatory education.

With this methodology, it is intended to contribute to the expansion of the debate on the inclusion of children with ASD in early childhood education, highlighting the importance of educational practices that respect the singularities of child development and promote the effective participation of all students. Bibliographic research, therefore, fulfills the role of offering a solid basis for theoretical and practical reflections, aiming at the construction of a more inclusive, welcoming and democratic school.

### **3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In this perspective, the Ministry of Education/Secretariat of Special Education presents the National Policy of Special Education in the Perspective of Inclusive



Education, which accompanies the advances of knowledge and social struggles, aiming to constitute public policies that promote quality education for all children.

Social inclusion still holds a lack of consensus to identify what it actually means to be socially included and what are the factors contributing to inclusion, as a result of its contribution the improvement of mental health, especially of people with disabilities, among the factors that contribute to social inclusion are employment, education, housing and neighborhood (Filia, 2018).

There are many factors that encourage people to insert themselves in all factors of society, in the words of Filia (2018) inclusion is something that does not only involve school or employment, but the environments in which this person lives and can be inserted, when citing, for example, neighborhood as one of the contributing factors for inclusion, It is clear that the participation of any person in social spaces is essential for them to overcome their fears and challenges.

Labonté (2004, p. 115), recommends accuracy in the use of terminologies, when we take it to the field of social cohesion we are working on something more systemic linked to policies, while when we talk about inclusion and exclusion we need to take care that this does not further increase exclusion and cites "for example, how can someone 'include' people and groups in structured systems that systematically 'excluded' them in the first place?". This dialectic is important, because by reinforcing the discourse of communities, it can create a clash between us and them and take the burdens off the political and social system.

The term inclusion is quite broad, involving issues of race, gender, color, economic condition, any factor that promotes mental health problems in people who realize or not that they are being excluded. When discrimination is not perceived, it may come from the acceptance that the system allows equality and that being different would make us smaller, it is like saying the perfect body, the perfect hair, the perfect student, the perfect person, these stereotypes with

frequency comes from the media linked to a marketing strategy of brand positioning. First of all, we need to accept ourselves as we are and not as the consumer, labor and social market would like us to be.

In the poem *The Bluest Eye* of 1970, written by Morrison (1994), describes a young black woman who is tormented by not accepting herself, portrays the derogatory effects of poverty that hides the tones of discrimination.



Pecola Breedlove, in her first year of femininity, is black, ugly, and poor, living in front of a store, sharing a room with her brother, crippled mother, and drunken father. Pregnant with her father, she goes to Soaphead Church, a man who believes he possesses sacred powers. What she wants are blue eyes. In this scene, in which a young black man on the verge of madness seeks beauty and happiness in the desire of a white woman's eyes, the author makes her most forceful statement about the tragic effect of racial prejudice on children. But the scene takes place at the end of the novel – too late to achieve the impact it might have had on a different construction. Most of the way, Pecola cedes center stage to Frieda and Claudia

- who, in addition to knowing her and perhaps offering contrast, because they are black and poor (although from a happier home), serve little purpose other than distraction. (Morrison, 1994, undated)

Social exclusion leads people to deny their human condition, for Edwards and Miller (2001), social exclusion marginalizes people, denies human rights, offends human dignity, promoting social and economic inequality and underlines that talking about inclusion is a necessary good. The author brings a very strong reflection by pointing out that it is a necessary good, clarifying that inclusion should be treated as a heritage of any country, because including would be related as a condition for economic growth and development.

However, unlike what he observes in Filia (2018), the author positions inclusion as a policy factor and that schools would prepare people for the strengthening of an inclusive society. Thus, while one unveils more the social aspect, the other deals with the political aspect. In a way, it is highlighted that inclusion could not in itself be a good if politics does not promote it. To imagine that only society will be able to handle inclusion or that only the state would have this role, is to reduce the role of transforming society and promote exclusion. In essence, the union of efforts is what will promote inclusion.

Social inclusion is aggravated for people with challenging behavior, having a potential risk of being excluded, so it cannot be measured in a different way.

same form all disabilities (Bigby, 2012). This questions us to imagine that in order to seek equity it is necessary to identify the effects of social exclusion in order to have the dose of medicine according to your diagnosis, and not to seek to medicate everyone in the same way.

Added to this is the case, for example, of the elderly who suffer abuse and neglect (Podnieks, 2006). Exclusion does not come with a single element, for example, a black, disabled, defiant disorder, fat, elderly and poor person would accumulate several exclusions on his or her person. Therefore, inclusion is not something punctual, but



perennial in society and in the person, as their physical shape or longevity changes, the need for inclusion changes.

A systematic literature review (RSL) conducted by Cordier, et. al. (2017), identified that the connectors in descending order are connectivity, participation and citizenship. As it is an RSL, these could be the keywords that stood out the most in the searches. Converging with what has been discussed up to this point, connectivity is related to access to technology, especially those promoted by software and developed through the internet, while in participation the person participates in the various segments of life such as employment, education, politics and others and citizenship related to the exercise of their rights and duties.

Cordier et al (2017), by highlighting connectivity as a result of research consulted in databases, brings a new vision for social inclusion, presenting its social plasticity, that is, society changes and so does inclusion. This increase is important for policies to be conducted and allows the opportunity for people to be socially included.

Inclusion would also be related to democracy, Sullivan's (2002) studies presented the policies developed in the United Kingdom for cities and neighborhoods, therefore in the most micro space, to deal with the aspects of democracy and inclusion, highlights four axes worked on that reinforce what is exposed in the RSL developed by Cordier (2017), being civic, economic, social and interpersonal, His statements are forceful when he underlines that the lack of accreditation of the population in local governments, due to their non-inclusive performance, practically proposes a process to organize their neighborhoods and their demands, using a very broad concept of inclusion.

This concept of social inclusion is consolidated among the authors in order to guarantee means for people to have opportunities for employment,

education, citizenship, democracy and human rights. For Nussbaum (2000, p. 5) "Capacities do not represent the real physical or mental capacity of individuals to achieve various results, defined as what people are really capable of doing and being". Nussbaum (2000, p. 3) reinforces this in the discussion of gender, in which:

When poverty combines with gender inequality, the result is an acute failure of core human capacities. In developing countries as a whole, there are 60% more women than men among illiterate adults; the female schooling rate even at the primary level is 13% lower than that of men; and women's wages are only three-quarters of men's wages. We still don't have reliable statistics on rape, domestic violence, and sexual harassment, because in many countries little attention is paid to



domestic violence and sexual harassment, rape within marriage is not considered a crime, and even rape by strangers is considered a crime. rarely punished that many women are dissuaded from reporting the crime.

In this sense, capacities and their discussion hide hatred and violence against people, it is a stratagem used by groups and strata of society, as it is based on the imaginary and not on the real capacity of people. What leads us to believe that a woman has fewer abilities than men, or an autistic person has fewer abilities than a typical person? Both have real capabilities, some common, some unique.

These discussions reveal that inclusion will be full when we do not need to reinforce it in the social context, that is, this will occur when these capacities become naturalized and people are able to observe them, giving opportunities for work, citizenship, education, economic and social, their terminological distinction loses its meaning. It is quite utopian to imagine that this will be achieved in a short period of time, the emergence and appearance of these themes are infinite, when one type of exclusion is dealt with, others will appear.

Society is dynamic and exclusions always arise. Let's go on the Achilles' heel, in the case of refugees, the very term refugee is already a form of exclusion to differentiate who are the natural or nationalized persons of the country and who are not, or when dealing with the case of Venezuelans in Brazil, even more complex, some nationalities are more accepted than others to remain in the country of destination (Santos, Reis and Andrade, 2019).

In education, there is a lot of talk about inclusion as if it were only for disabled people, this is a blunder. Many typical and atypical people need to be included. For De Almeida Silva, Andrade and Estigarribia (2022, p. 433), this is a field of social pedagogy.

The definition of Social Pedagogy is totally pertinent to the current moment, as it originated from the need to provide educational methods for vulnerable groups, it is a practical science in overcoming social conflicts.

This is the focal point of social inclusion, vulnerability and still continue (ibid, p. 436):

It is possible and necessary to seek ways out to not only insert, but democratize the educational process, with professionals who have training focused on popular and community education, vulnerable people, or not, such as indigenous people,



quilombolas, PwD (people with disabilities)

It is interesting how the authors translate that the lack of training harms democratization, the treatment of social pedagogy given to social inclusion is more comprehensive than just dealing with people with PCD (people with disabilities), when we weave about inclusion, it is necessary to think that all people have their capacities and must be mapped, a very accurate picture is that unemployment among the poorest is 36%<sup>2</sup>. And this influences school performance and people's life purpose. Another very striking statistic is that 85% of people with autism are out of the labor market<sup>3</sup>.

In the case of autism, the subject of this dissertation, one of the main reasons for unemployment among autistic people is the lack of knowledge of the managers of organizations, as they have a distorted view of their real capacity, believing that autistic people would hinder the work, this type of discrimination is called audism (Reis, Oliveira, Fernandes and Andrade, 2023).

In this way, there are several challenges of social inclusion that go beyond the walls of schools and involve the whole of society.

The document National Policy on Special Education in the Perspective of Education (Brasil, 2008, p. 6), points out that:

"Inclusive education constitutes an educational paradigm based on the conception of human rights, which combines equality and difference as inseparable values, and which advances in relation to the idea of formal equity by contextualizing the historical circumstances of the production of exclusion inside and outside the school"

It is a policy that addresses the classification of students and the value of diversity and highlights that:

The definitions of the target audience must be contextualized and are not limited to the mere categorization and specifications attributed to a picture of disability, disorders, disorders and aptitudes. It is considered that people continuously change themselves, transforming the context in which they are inserted. This dynamism requires pedagogical action aimed at changing the situation of exclusion, emphasizing the importance of heterogeneous environments 10 that

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<sup>2</sup> Available at: < <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mercado/2021/09/taxa-de-desemprego-entre-os-mais-pobres-e-de-36-aponta-estudo.shtml>>. Accessed on 08.15.23

<sup>3</sup> Available at: < [https://epocanegocios.globo.com/colunas/Diversifique-se/noticia/2019/11/85-das-pessoas-no-espectro-autista-estao-fora-do-mercado-de-trabalho.html](https://epocanegocios.globo.com/colunas/Diversifique-se/noticia/2019/11/85-das- pessoas-no-espectro-autista-estao-fora-do-mercado-de-trabalho.html)>. Accessed on 08.15.23



promote the learning of all students (Brasil, 2008).

In this sense, it is worth noting that school inclusion provides the opportunity to review exclusionary school practices, which have historically surrounded society.

When choosing to be a teacher, one does not keep in mind the diversity of students that are found in the classroom, the teacher is faced with a class that at least 90% need constant attention, both in emotional, motor or educational aspects (Jóia, 2018, p. 44). With the conclusion of the impeachment process of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016, there were changes in the Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion (SECADI/MEC) and in the Directorate of Special Education Policies. The following year, SECADI/MEC opens several public notices for the selection of specialist consultants to support studies of Brazilian special education documents (UNESCO, 2017a; 2017b).

Public Notice No. 1/2017 aimed to hire "specialized consultancy to support the Basic Education Chamber of the National Education Council (CEB/CNE), in the process of reviewing and updating the National Curriculum Guidelines for Special Education, based on the state and national standards in force on Special Education" (UNESCO, 2017a, p. 1). Public Notice No. 13/2017 aimed to hire:

[...] specialized consultancy for the development of studies subsidiary to the process of updating the National Policy on Special Education, considering the pedagogical policy frameworks and pedagogical practices developed by the education systems (UNESCO, 2017b, p. 1).

The opening of such notices and the subsequent hiring of consultants indicated the clear intention to review the policy of formation of the inclusive educational system, along the lines in which it had been built until the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff.

In fact, at a meeting on April 16, 2018, the proposal to update the 2008 policy was presented. The Director of Special Education Policies explained that the version of the policy would be analyzed in public consultation: "The intention is that this proposal be analyzed and implemented in the same way as the BNCC, that is, with the participation of society, education systems and organizations, in a transparent and democratic way". The meeting was attended by: representatives of the Ministry of Education, the National Council of Education, the National Council of Secretaries of Education (Consed), the National Council of Persons with Disabilities (Conade), the Brazilian Council for



Giftedness (Combrasd) and the Council of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (Corde), the National Union of Municipal Education Directors (Undime), the Benjamin Constant Institute (IBC), the National Institute for the Education of the Deaf (INES), the Brazilian Federation of Down Syndrome Associations (Fbasd), the National Federation of Apaes, the National Federation of Pestalozzi Associations and the National Organization of the Blind of Brazil (ONCB), among others. The slides of the material discussed at the meeting quickly began to be shared on social networks and among the data and arguments presented, issues pertinent to research carried out in universities could be identified (BRASIL, 2018b).

Thus, the criticism elaborated by researchers, that Special Education had been restricted to Specialized Educational Service in multifunctional resource rooms (Mendes; Tannús-Valadão; Milanesi, 2016) is now used as an argument for changes in the document National Policy on Special Education in the Perspective of Inclusive Education (BRASIL, 2008). These first meetings mobilize responses from different groups across the country. One of them was the Inclusion Now! of 2018. The discourse does not disguise the intention: It is curious to note, both in the texts of the slides and in the speeches of the people who today coordinate and participate in the work of updating the PNEEPEI (National Policy on Special Education in the Perspective of Inclusive Education), the adoption of the terms that the defenders of school inclusion use and have always used in the struggle for a school for all.

It is even ironic to see people who have historically stood up against the inevitable advance of school inclusion policies use phrases such as "we defend an inclusive educational system", "we must guarantee not only access to school, but permanence, learning and quality" or "the school must fight discrimination". The use of terminology in the field of inclusion is an attempt to make the setbacks experienced more palatable, without taking into account and without dialoguing with the actors who actually work on school inclusion in all schools in Brazil. (LEPED. UNICAMP, 2018, p.11).

The excerpt above confirms that there is a term in the field of inclusion that expresses the perspective that the regular school is a place of education for all students. These terms will be adopted and used with meanings different from those originally intended. Among these expressions are precisely those that have circulated in federal government documents since 2003: the means and the ultimate end of inclusion: the formation of an inclusive education system. 4,444 Directors of Federal Institutions of



Higher Education were also mobilized by Circular No. 1/18 of the Rectory of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN), Christmas Letter (2018), in which: I defended this. "Fight" for "public democracy and quality higher education for all, while fighting for a fairer and more cooperative society, based on an inclusive culture and the recognition of difference." (CHRISTMAS LETTER, 2018, p. 5).

The Network for School Inclusion of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) also took a stand in June 2018, warning that public consultation "aimed at improving special education policies" in that post-impeachment political context constituted "a politically ambiguous action and hostage to different agencies".

In the same period, the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office issued a list of recommendations to the Ministry of Education to: refrain from making changes to the National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education; any allocation of public resources to expand and improve inclusive education in the regular school system, at all levels; and that before submitting proposals to amend the PNEEPEI, "students with disabilities, in their various cuts: gender, race, sexual orientation, class, geographic region and level of education" should be heard (BRASIL; MPF, 2018, p. 5).

The document made available for public consultation (BRASIL, 2018a) reaffirms the maintenance of spaces considered segregated by the 2003 to 2016 administrations of SECADI (special schools and classes), and justifies itself by stating "to comply with the provisions of goal 4, strategy 4.4 of the PNE and Article 58, paragraph 2 of the LDB" (BRASIL, 2018a, n.p.) in which there is a provision for the offer of services by the special school and in the special class. On November 16, 2018, researchers, teachers and students gathered in São Carlos-SP, at the VIII Brazilian Congress of Special Education and the XI National Meeting of Special Education Researchers (XI ENPEE), in an Assembly of the Brazilian Association of Researchers in Special Education (ABPEE), with the support of the National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Education (ANPEd) and the National Forum of Coordinators of the Accessibility Centers of Public Education Institutions Superior, Professional and Technological Institute (IPESPTec), decided to position themselves against changes in the Policy, at the time and in the way adopted, and released a critical document regarding the Public Consultation proposed for the "updating" of the current National Policy on Special Education in the Perspective of Inclusive Education (CARTA ABERTA., 2018, p. 1).

It is worth noting that this conflict highlights another movement: the clear and



reiterated position since 2016 of excluding scientific bodies from cases of participation in decision-making, which, as in the episode, Reorganization of the National Educational Forum (Brazil, 2017) , which is an attempt to take into account and/or ignore the parties involved. Looking at the movement of articulation of national proposals for special education, we can identify several moments of difference, but not necessarily of interruption. One is more clearly outlined until the end of Fernando Enrique Cardoso's second term, where acceptance occurs. Even after Brazil's formal commitment to multilateral agreements, coexistence in different locations is necessary for the education of people with disabilities.

The term autism was first used by psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler in 1908. He used it to describe a schizophrenic patient who retreated into his own world.

The pioneers in autism research were Hans Asperger and Leo Kanner who were working separately in the 1940s. Asperger described very capable children when Kanner described children who were severely affected. His views remained useful to physicians for the next three decades.

Making a historical chronology of autism based on Lara (2012), Ferreira (2018), Goldberg (2005) and Póvoa (2022). Chart 2 presents the chronology of the historical aspects.

**Table 1**

*Chronology of Major Historical Aspects of Autism*

Chronology	Historical Event
1908	The pioneer was Eugen Bleuler who invented the word "autism" in 1908 among severely withdrawn schizophrenic patients.
1943	The American Lion Kanner, the child psychiatrist studied 11 children. They had characteristics of difficulties in social interactions, difficulty in adapting to changes in routines, good memory, sensitivity to stimuli (especially sound), resistance and allergies to food, good intellectual potential, echolalia or the propensity to repeat words of the speaker and difficulties in spontaneous activity.
1944	Hans Asperger, studied a group of children. His children also resembled Kanner's descriptions. The children he studied, however, did not have echolalia as a language problem, but lightning as an adult. He also mentioned that many of them were clumsy and different from the so-called normal ones in terms of fine motor skills
1964	Bernard Rimland was a psychologist and a father of a child with autism. He disagreed with Bettelheim, when he indicated that the cause of his son's autism was due to his or his wife's relatives' abilities. In 1964, Bernard Rimland published " <i>Infantile Autism: The Syndrome and its implications for a neural theory of behavior</i> ";



1966	The first epidemiological study on autism was conducted in 1966 in England, by Lotter, who found a rate of 4.1 per 10,000 children between 8 and 10 years old. (Póvoas, 2022, p.1)
70s	The Erica Foundation began education and therapy for demented children in the early 1980s. Many parents still confused autism with mental retardation and psychosis; in 1980 Asperger's work was translated into English and published, it was believed that parenting had no role in causing autism and there were some neurological disorders and other genetic diseases such as tuberous sclerosis, metabolic disorders as PKU
1979	Since Rutter (1979), autism has been defined as a syndrome arising from an organic framework
The 80s	Lorna's wing, along with Christopher Gillberg at BNK (the children's neuropsychiatric clinic) in Sweden in the 1980s met the wing triad of disturbed mutual contact, of mutual communication disturbed and limited imagination.
1981	Ivar Velho Lovaas studied and promoted the behavioral analysis and treatment of children with autism. He developed it to target younger children (less than 5 years of age) at home and performed treatment and increased the intensity (a measure of the amount of "therapy time") to about 40 hours weekly. Lovaas wrote the <i>"Teaching Developmental Disabled Children: A Book"</i> in 1981. In 2002, Lovaas wrote, <i>"Teaching Individuals with Delays developmental: Basic intervention techniques"</i> ;
1988	Wing (1988) introduced the concept of "autism spectrum", conceiving autism as a symptomatological complex, occurring on a continuum, depending on cognitive impairment. The author proposed the existence of a "triad of social interaction disorders" (Goldberg, 2005, p.3)

Source: Based on the historical evolution of autism by Lara (2012), Ferreira (2018), Goldberg (2005) and Póvoas (2022)

According to the Table, in 1908 autism was seen as schizophrenia, from 1943 autism is observed as the difficulty in social interactions, in 1964 Rimland, who was the father of an autistic child, identified more biological than emotional issues, deconstructing the culpability of families for having autistic children.

Even in the 70s, there is still a difficulty for the family and society to understand autism, returning to the thoughts of 1908 relating it to dementia mainly, only in 1988 the concept of autism spectrum was incorporated by society as a symptomatological complex, that is, a set of symptoms to be observed. From the point of view of science, autism is something recent and is under construction in various areas, such as education itself.

In Brazil, on July 18, 2019, law 13.861/19 was sanctioned (Brasil, 2019). Includes in the IBGE census a statistical survey on autism, with this law it will be possible to identify the number of people with autism;

The WHO estimates that there are 70 million people in the world with autism, 2



million of whom are in Brazil

The IBGE included a question about autism in the 2022 Census questionnaire, which will begin in June and end in August 2022, a period in which enumerators will visit all households in Brazil. According to the IBGE, "The results will be released between the years 2022 and 2025 in different media, multiple formats and in different spatial cuts, seeking to meet the demands of the various segments of the public" (Canal Autismo, 2022).

In the 2022 Census, the question about autism appears in the questionnaire. This demonstrates that the autistic spectrum, as it is a symptomatological complex, lays bare its characteristics and improves its process of understanding by society and the family. According to Baron-Cohen (2013, p. 45) "Genes that contribute to autism can override genes for the uniquely human ability to understand how the world works in detail", yet the aforementioned author identifies that genes that contribute to the disease are linked to technical aptitudes.

Also for Baron-Cohen (2013, p.44), in a correlation test between autism and mathematics, through 50 items, he identified that winners of the Mathematical Olympiad in Great Britain score much higher than "normal" people, this indicates the mathematical breath associated with autism.

#### **4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The social inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Early Childhood Education represents one of the greatest advances and, at the same time, one of the greatest challenges of contemporary education. It is a process that requires structural, attitudinal and pedagogical changes. The school that proposes to be inclusive needs to break with traditional paradigms and adopt postures that recognize and respect human diversity in all its expressions. Children with ASD, like any other, have the right to learn, express themselves, live together and develop in educational environments that welcome their specificities and promote their autonomy.

Throughout this work, it was possible to understand that the social inclusion of these children is not limited to enrollment or physical presence in the classroom. It is necessary to ensure that they actively participate in school activities, build affective bonds with their classmates and teachers, develop cognitive and socio-emotional skills, and have access to the same rights as all other children. This implies the construction of



meaningful, contextualized pedagogical practices that are sensitive to the particularities of each child, respecting their rhythm, their forms of communication and their support needs.

It is evident that the inclusion of children with ASD in Early Childhood Education requires preparation, continuous training and commitment from education professionals. Educators who work in inclusive contexts need to be open to listening, attentive observation and flexibility in their pedagogical interventions. More than applying standardized methods, it is essential that he understands each child in his or her uniqueness, recognizing their potential and their unique ways of learning. In addition, the presence of a multiprofessional team and the involvement of families are fundamental elements for the success of a truly inclusive educational proposal.

Another important point is the appreciation of the school environment as a space for coexistence and the formation of bonds. The social inclusion of children with ASD also occurs in daily interactions, play, spontaneous exchanges and moments of sharing. Therefore, the school must offer real opportunities for coexistence among all children, promoting relationships based on respect, solidarity and empathy. It is in this interaction that significant learning is built, which goes beyond the curricular content and contributes to the formation of more humane and conscious citizens.

Early Childhood Education, as the first stage of basic education, has a strategic role in promoting inclusion. It is during this period that the foundations for the child's integral development are laid, covering physical, emotional, social and cognitive aspects. Thus, ensuring that children with ASD are included from the early school years is a way to ensure that they have access to the same development opportunities as others, breaking cycles of historical exclusion and building a more just and egalitarian society.

It is necessary to consider that the construction of an inclusive school also depends on consistent public policies and investments in teacher training, adequate physical structure and accessible teaching resources. The social inclusion of children with ASD cannot be seen as an individual responsibility of the teacher, but as a collective commitment of the school, the community, families and the government. Everyone must be involved in this process, as inclusion is a right that must be guaranteed with dignity and respect.

In summary, this article sought to reflect on the importance of social inclusion and the learning process of children with ASD in Early Childhood Education, highlighting the



relevance of a sensitive, ethical and committed look at diversity. It is necessary to recognize that each child has their own universe, with unique ways of communicating, learning and interacting. By understanding and respecting these singularities, the school fulfills its true social role: that of forming full subjects, aware of themselves and of the other, prepared to live in a plural society.

Building a truly inclusive education is a long, continuous and challenging path. However, each step taken towards equity represents an achievement not only for children with ASD, but for the entire school community. When the school becomes a space where everyone is welcome and respected, it becomes a richer, more humane environment that is more capable of forming citizens who understand and value differences as an essential part of life in society.

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