

PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR THE INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER IN MAINSTREAM EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND TEACHING PRACTICES

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Abstract

The school inclusion of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) constitutes one of the main challenges of contemporary education, requiring pedagogical practices that ensure not only access to school but also participation, learning, and development within inclusive educational contexts. In this scenario, this chapter aims to analyze the principal pedagogical strategies aimed at the inclusion of students with ASD in mainstream education, discussing the challenges faced by teachers and the possibilities for strengthening inclusive educational practices. This is a bibliographic study based on the analysis of books, scientific articles, legal documents, and academic publications related to Special Education, Inclusive Education, and Autism Spectrum Disorder. Among other theoretical references, the study engages with the contributions of Maria Teresa Eglér Mantoan, Lev Vygotsky, Eugênio Cunha, Sílvia Ester Orrú, Paulo Freire, CAST, and Zerbato and Mendes, fostering reflection on the role of schools and teachers in building accessible educational environments. The analysis demonstrated that the effective implementation of school inclusion depends on the articulation of teacher education, pedagogical planning, curriculum flexibility, pedagogical mediation, the use of structured resources, and the principles of Universal Design for Learning. It also showed that strengthening public policies, collaborative work among schools, families, and support services, as well as the reorganization of pedagogical practices, constitute fundamental elements for promoting an education committed to equity and the recognition of diversity. It is concluded that school inclusion requires a transformation of

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educational conceptions and practices, understanding diversity as a structuring principle of the school and an indispensable condition for guaranteeing the right to learning for all students.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Inclusive Education, Pedagogical Practices, Teacher Education, Universal Design for Learning.

INTRODUCTION

The school inclusion of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) constitutes one of the principal challenges of contemporary education, particularly in light of the need to guarantee not only access to school but also permanence, participation, and learning in educational contexts committed to valuing diversity. Although legislative advances over recent decades have consolidated the right to inclusive education in Brazil, the effective implementation of this principle still encounters obstacles related to teacher education, the organization of pedagogical practices, curriculum flexibility, and the institutional conditions necessary to address the diverse ways of learning present in the school environment.

The 1988 Federal Constitution recognizes education as a right of all and a duty of the State and the family, establishing principles that guide the construction of an educational system based on equal opportunities. Subsequently, the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (Law No. 9,394/1996), the National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education (Brasil, 2008), Law No. 12,764/2012, known as the Berenice Piana Law, and the Brazilian Inclusion Law (Law No. 13,146/2015) strengthened the commitment to an education that recognizes human diversity as a fundamental principle of school organization. These legal provisions demonstrate that inclusion should not be understood as a concession or a welfare-oriented measure, but rather as a right guaranteed to all students, regardless of their characteristics or educational needs.

In this context, Autism Spectrum Disorder presents specific characteristics related to communication, social interaction, and behavioral patterns that require pedagogical practices sensitive to

students' individual needs, without losing sight of their participation in the classroom collective.

Contemporary understandings of ASD go beyond perspectives focused exclusively on clinical diagnosis and increasingly recognize that development and learning are influenced by educational opportunities, social interactions, and the mediations carried out within the school environment. Thus, the inclusion process requires schools to organize experiences capable of fostering the active participation of students while respecting their different rhythms, forms of communication, and ways of learning.

From this perspective, teachers occupy a central position in the construction of inclusive pedagogical practices. Their role extends beyond the transmission of content, involving the planning of diverse strategies, curriculum flexibility, the use of accessible resources, and the organization of learning environments that support the participation of all students. However, numerous studies indicate that many teachers still face difficulties resulting from insufficient initial and continuing education, a scarcity of pedagogical resources, and the need for greater coordination among teachers, management teams, Specialized Educational Services (SES), and families. These factors demonstrate that school inclusion is a collective responsibility whose implementation depends on institutional commitment to the development of more equitable educational practices.

Among the possibilities for strengthening this process are strategies such as curriculum adaptation, pedagogical mediation, the use of structured resources, the organization of predictable routines, and the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which propose the construction of educational environments capable of addressing diversity from the initial planning stage. By recognizing that differences are an inherent part of the human condition, these strategies shift the focus from individual limitations to the elimination of barriers that hinder student learning and participation within the school context.

In view of this scenario, this chapter aims to analyze the principal pedagogical strategies directed toward the inclusion of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in mainstream education, discussing the challenges faced by teachers and the teaching practices that foster more inclusive educational processes.

To this end, the chapter is grounded in bibliographic research developed through the analysis of scientific publications, legal documents, and references in Special Education and Inclusive Education, engaging with authors such as Maria Teresa Eglér Mantoan, Eugênio Cunha, Sílvia Ester Orrú, Lev Vygotsky, Enicéia Gonçalves Mendes, and other scholars who discuss the construction of pedagogical practices committed to the learning and development of all students.

By reflecting on the challenges and possibilities of the school inclusion of students with ASD, this chapter seeks to contribute to the strengthening of teaching practices and to broaden discussions on the construction of a truly inclusive school. More than presenting teaching strategies, it proposes understanding inclusion as an ethical, political, and pedagogical commitment grounded in the recognition of differences, the appreciation of each student's potential, and the defense of everyone's right to learn under equitable conditions.

UNDERSTANDING AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has undergone significant transformations over recent decades, accompanying advances in research across the fields of health, education, and the human sciences. Whereas earlier interpretations were predominantly centered exclusively on clinical diagnosis and individuals' limitations, a broader perspective now prevails, recognizing the diversity that exists within the spectrum and emphasizing the importance of social and educational contexts in the development of each student's potential.

Autism Spectrum Disorder is classified as a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by persistent differences in communication and social interaction, associated with restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), these characteristics manifest in the early years of life and vary in intensity, which is why the term "spectrum" highlights the broad variability among diagnosed individuals (American

Psychiatric Association, 2014). This understanding breaks with homogeneous views of autism and reinforces the need to recognize the singularities present in each student.

The levels of support described in the DSM-5 are not intended to establish hierarchical classifications among people with ASD but rather to guide the identification of the support necessary to foster participation in different dimensions of social life, including the school context. Thus, understanding support levels means recognizing that some students will require specific adaptations, while others will depend on more systematic strategies of monitoring, pedagogical mediation, and educational-environment organization. This perspective shifts the focus from disability to the identification of conditions necessary for learning and participation, strengthening educational practices committed to equity.

However, understanding ASD solely through diagnostic criteria is insufficient when the goal is to promote genuinely inclusive education. The school environment constitutes a privileged space for human development in which learning experiences, social interactions, and pedagogical mediation play a fundamental role in knowledge construction. From this perspective, the student with ASD should not be defined exclusively by limitations but recognized as a rights-bearing individual with potential that can be developed when educational opportunities compatible with their needs are available.

From this standpoint, school inclusion requires teachers and educational institutions to understand the characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder without reducing the educational process to diagnosis. Each student displays particular forms of communication, learning, interaction, and expression, making standardized strategies inappropriate for all cases. As Orrú (2012) and Cunha (2015) emphasize, effective pedagogical practices are those that begin with observation of the student's singularities and organize interventions capable of expanding participation in school activities while respecting interests, learning rhythms, and learning styles.

This understanding aligns directly with Vygotsky's (2007) sociocultural perspective, which recognizes that human development occurs through social interactions and mediation carried out by more

experienced individuals. Thus, teachers assume an essential role in creating conditions that facilitate access to knowledge by organizing experiences that stimulate participation, communication, and the development of higher psychological functions. Learning, from this perspective, ceases to be understood as the exclusive result of individual characteristics and comes to depend also on the opportunities offered by the educational context.

Furthermore, understanding ASD from the perspective of inclusive education implies recognizing that barriers to learning do not always arise from the student's characteristics but often from the conditions provided by the school itself. Inflexible environments, rigid curricula, a lack of accessible pedagogical resources, and insufficient professional preparation can significantly limit opportunities for participation among students with ASD. Therefore, inclusion requires institutional transformations that go beyond isolated adaptations and promote changes in teaching organization, pedagogical practices, and the conceptions that guide educational work.

Accordingly, understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder from the perspective of inclusive education means recognizing diversity as an inherent element of the school environment. More than understanding clinical characteristics, education professionals must construct pedagogical practices based on appreciation of students' potential, the elimination of barriers to learning, and the guarantee of everyone's right to effective participation in educational processes. This understanding constitutes the starting point for reflecting on the challenges faced by schools and teachers in building a truly inclusive education.

THE CHALLENGES OF INCLUDING STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER IN MAINSTREAM EDUCATION

The consolidation of inclusive education represents one of the greatest challenges faced by educational institutions in contemporary society. Although Brazilian legislation guarantees the right of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to schooling in mainstream education, the

implementation of this right still encounters obstacles related to school organization, pedagogical practices, teacher education, and the institutional conditions necessary to ensure the participation and learning of all students.

Among the most evident challenges is teacher education. The inclusion of students with ASD requires knowledge that extends beyond mastery of curricular content, demanding an understanding of developmental specificities, different forms of communication, mediation strategies, and possibilities for adapting pedagogical practices. However, numerous studies indicate that many teachers still feel insecure about working in inclusive contexts, a situation frequently related to limitations in initial teacher preparation and insufficient opportunities for continuing professional development. This reality directly affects the organization of pedagogical work and the construction of genuinely inclusive practices.

Another challenge concerns coordination among the different professionals involved in the educational process. School inclusion cannot be understood as the exclusive responsibility of the classroom teacher, support teacher, or Specialized Educational Services (SES). On the contrary, it is a collective undertaking that requires shared planning, ongoing dialogue among school professionals, and family participation in developing strategies that support student development. When such coordination does not occur, actions tend to become fragmented, compromising the continuity of pedagogical interventions.

Difficulties related to the organization of pedagogical practices also stand out. In many situations, curricula remain structured according to homogeneous teaching models that disregard the different rhythms, interests, and learning styles present in the classroom. This logic hinders the participation of students with ASD and highlights the need for more flexible practices capable of promoting diverse pathways to knowledge without lowering expectations regarding students' development.

Another recurring issue in the literature concerns the scarcity of pedagogical resources and institutional conditions for developing inclusive practices. The lack of adapted materials, the absence of adequate spaces for Specialized Educational Services, limited technological resources, and insufficient

time allocated to collaborative planning are factors that directly affect the quality of school inclusion.

These elements demonstrate that the implementation of inclusive education depends not only on teachers' commitment but also on investments in public policies capable of providing concrete conditions for pedagogical work.

In addition to structural issues, challenges related to attitudinal barriers in everyday school life persist. Conceptions still exist that associate inclusion exclusively with the student's presence in the classroom without considering the need to ensure effective participation in proposed activities. In other contexts, there is an expectation that students fully adapt to practices already established by the school, whereas the principle of inclusive education presupposes that the institution itself should reorganize its practices to accommodate the diversity present among its students.

These challenges become even more evident when considering aspects related to communication, social interaction, and the organization of school routines. Many students with ASD require more predictable environments, objective instructions, visual resources, and mediation that supports their understanding of proposed activities. When these needs are not considered in pedagogical planning, difficulties in participation and learning become more likely, reinforcing barriers that could be reduced through more accessible and intentionally planned practices.

Given this scenario, it becomes clear that building an inclusive school requires changes that extend beyond isolated adaptations. Overcoming the identified challenges depends on the articulation of teacher education, pedagogical planning, strengthening of public policies, collaborative work, and the reorganization of school practices. More than ensuring access to mainstream education, inclusion requires the creation of educational environments that recognize diversity as a constitutive element of the educational process and guarantee all students genuine opportunities for learning, participation, and development.

PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSIVE TEACHING PRACTICE

The implementation of inclusive education depends on the construction of pedagogical practices capable of recognizing diversity as an inherent characteristic of educational processes. In the case of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), this perspective requires pedagogical planning that takes into account different ways of learning, communicating, and participating in school activities. Thus, rather than merely adapting isolated content, teachers are called upon to organize accessible, flexible, and intentionally planned learning experiences that promote the participation of all students.

Among the most relevant strategies is curriculum adaptation, understood as a process of making teaching practices more flexible without compromising learning objectives. Unlike the simplification of content, curriculum adaptation seeks to reorganize methodologies, resources, timing, and assessment methods, enabling students to access the curriculum according to their needs and potential. From this perspective, pedagogical planning comes to recognize that students learn in different ways and that a diversity of strategies is an essential condition for promoting learning.

This understanding is closely aligned with the conception defended by Mantoan (2003), who argues that an inclusive school reorganizes its curriculum to respond to the diversity present in the classroom, replacing homogeneous teaching models with practices that value differences as an enriching element of the educational process. In this way, curriculum flexibility ceases to represent an exceptional adaptation and becomes integrated into daily planning, benefiting not only students with ASD but the entire class.

However, curriculum adaptation alone does not guarantee inclusive processes. Its effectiveness depends on the teacher's role as a mediator of learning, organizing educational situations that encourage active student participation. From a sociocultural perspective, Vygotsky (2007) emphasizes that human development occurs through social relationships and that teacher mediation is a fundamental element in expanding learning opportunities. Thus, teachers must create conditions enabling each student to participate in school activities while respecting their rhythms, forms of communication, and particular

ways of constructing knowledge.

In this context, pedagogical mediation requires constant observation, attentive listening, and flexible planning. Teachers cease to occupy exclusively the role of content transmitters and instead assume the function of organizers of educational experiences, promoting situations that foster dialogue, cooperation, and collective knowledge construction. For students with ASD, such mediation may involve the use of objective instructions, visual supports, advance notice of activities, predictable routines, and diverse forms of communication—strategies that facilitate a better understanding of classroom proposals.

Another strategy widely discussed in the literature concerns the use of structured pedagogical resources. Concrete materials, visual resources, educational games, digital technologies, visual schedules, social stories, and various support tools constitute important mediators of learning, helping to broaden understanding of activities and promote student participation. When integrated into pedagogical planning, these resources enhance the predictability of school routines, reduce situations of anxiety, and strengthen student autonomy during activities.

Among the approaches that have most significantly contributed to the organization of inclusive practices is Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Grounded in the understanding that students have different ways of learning, UDL proposes that pedagogical planning be conceived from the outset to address the diversity present in the classroom. Rather than creating adaptations only after identifying specific difficulties, this perspective guides the development of flexible proposals that offer multiple means of presenting content, different possibilities for participation, and varied ways of demonstrating learning.

The principles of Universal Design for Learning, systematized by CAST (2018) and further developed by Zerbato and Mendes (2018), demonstrate that inclusive pedagogical practices benefit the entire school community. By diversifying resources, methodologies, and assessment strategies, teachers broaden learning opportunities for students with different profiles, reducing barriers that have historically limited many students' participation in educational processes. From this perspective, inclusion ceases to

be understood as a service directed exclusively at the target population of Special Education and becomes a guiding principle of the school's pedagogical organization.

Another essential aspect concerns strengthening social interactions in everyday school life. Learning does not occur in isolation but through relationships established among teachers, students, and the school community. Therefore, collaborative practices, small-group activities, cooperative games, interdisciplinary projects, and experiences that encourage dialogue foster relationship-building, expand opportunities for participation, and contribute to the development of social skills among students with ASD. More than promoting coexistence, these strategies strengthen a school culture grounded in respect for differences and appreciation of diversity.

Within this process, it is equally important to involve the entire school community in the construction of inclusive practices. Coordination among teachers, management teams, Specialized Educational Services, families, and other education professionals expands opportunities for student support and strengthens pedagogical planning. Inclusion therefore ceases to be the individual responsibility of the teacher and comes to be understood as a shared institutional commitment based on co-responsibility and the collective construction of solutions to the challenges present in daily school life.

Thus, the pedagogical strategies discussed in this chapter demonstrate that building inclusive practices does not depend on applying standardized methods but on the school's ability to organize educational experiences that recognize students' potential and eliminate barriers to learning. Curriculum adaptation, pedagogical mediation, structured resources, Universal Design for Learning, and the strengthening of social interactions constitute complementary pathways toward consolidating an education committed to everyone's right to learning, participation, and development under equitable conditions.

PERSPECTIVES FOR STRENGTHENING SCHOOL INCLUSION

Building a truly inclusive school requires understanding that inclusion is not achieved merely through granting students with Autism Spectrum Disorder access to mainstream education, but rather through creating conditions that ensure their participation, learning, and development on an equal basis. In this sense, the literature reviewed demonstrates that the implementation of inclusive education depends on the articulation of public policies, teacher education, pedagogical planning, and institutional commitment to valuing diversity.

Throughout this study, it was observed that different pedagogical strategies contribute to reducing barriers to learning and expanding opportunities for participation among students with ASD. Curriculum adaptation, pedagogical mediation, the use of structured resources, Universal Design for Learning, and the organization of accessible environments are practices capable of promoting not only the development of students who are the target population of Special Education but also the learning of the entire class. This finding reinforces the understanding that inclusive practices benefit the whole school community by promoting educational environments that are more democratic, collaborative, and committed to the right to learn.

However, implementing these strategies still faces limitations related to the concrete operating conditions of schools. Insufficient pedagogical resources, the need for greater coordination among education professionals, limited offerings of continuing professional development, and difficulties in collaborative planning remain recurring challenges identified in the literature. These factors demonstrate that responsibility for inclusion cannot be attributed exclusively to teachers but must be shared among administrators, pedagogical teams, education systems, families, and other professionals involved in the educational process.

Among the most recurrent themes in the publications analyzed is the need to strengthen teacher education. School inclusion requires teachers capable of understanding the specificities of Autism Spectrum Disorder, planning flexible pedagogical practices, and employing strategies that respect the

different ways of learning present in the classroom. More than providing technical knowledge, initial and continuing teacher education should foster the development of investigative, reflective, and collaborative attitudes, preparing teachers to face the everyday challenges of inclusive education.

Another fundamental element concerns strengthening an inclusive culture within schools. Inclusion ceases to be understood as a set of adaptations intended for particular students and instead guides the organization of curriculum, methodologies, assessments, and the relationships established within the school environment. From this perspective, recognition of differences becomes a structuring principle of pedagogical work, enabling each student to participate in educational experiences according to their potential, interests, and needs.

The results of this research also demonstrate the importance of integrated action among schools, families, and support services. Ongoing dialogue among these different actors supports the construction of more consistent pedagogical strategies, broadens understanding of students' needs, and strengthens monitoring processes throughout the educational trajectory. When such collaborative work is established, opportunities for the academic, social, and emotional development of students with ASD are considerably enhanced.

From this perspective, it is also necessary to expand investments in public policies aimed at consolidating inclusive education. Ensuring pedagogical resources, strengthening Specialized Educational Services, promoting continuing professional development, and guaranteeing adequate working conditions for teachers are indispensable actions for effectively translating the principles established by Brazilian legislation into everyday school life. School inclusion requires political commitment, institutional planning, and continuous investment in building accessible and welcoming educational environments.

Thus, the reflections presented in this chapter make it possible to understand that the implementation of inclusion for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder depends on overcoming barriers that still limit their participation in mainstream education. More than implementing specific strategies, it is necessary to promote a change in educational conceptions, recognizing diversity as a constitutive

element of the school and as a guiding principle of pedagogical practices. Only from this perspective will it be possible to build educational processes committed to equity, participation, and the full development of all students.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The school inclusion of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder represents an ethical, social, and pedagogical commitment that extends beyond guaranteeing access to mainstream education. Throughout this chapter, it has been demonstrated that the implementation of inclusive education depends on the construction of planned pedagogical practices grounded in the appreciation of diversity and the recognition of each student's potential. In this regard, schools are challenged to reorganize their educational processes, promoting environments that support participation, learning, and development under equitable conditions.

The discussions developed herein made it possible to understand that inclusive pedagogical strategies constitute essential elements for consolidating this process. Curriculum flexibility, pedagogical mediation, the use of structured resources, the principles of Universal Design for Learning, and the strengthening of social interactions represent concrete possibilities for reducing barriers to learning and expanding opportunities for participation among students with ASD in daily school life. More than methodological resources, these strategies express a conception of education committed to respect for differences and to guaranteeing the right to learn.

However, the literature reviewed also demonstrates that the consolidation of inclusive education still depends on addressing challenges related to teacher education, working conditions, strengthening public policies, and constructing collaborative practices among schools, families, and support services. Overcoming these barriers requires continuous investment in the qualification of education professionals and in the creation of institutional conditions that enable the development of genuinely inclusive pedagogical practices.

It is therefore concluded that the inclusion of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder cannot be understood as the individual responsibility of the teacher or as a set of isolated adaptations. Rather, it is a collective process requiring institutional commitment, intentional pedagogical planning, and the appreciation of diversity as a structuring principle of education. When these elements are articulated, the possibility expands for building a school capable of recognizing differences as a constitutive part of learning and ensuring all students genuine opportunities for development.

It is hoped that the reflections presented in this chapter will contribute to strengthening the debate on inclusive education and support teachers, administrators, and other education professionals in constructing pedagogical practices that are more accessible, collaborative, and committed to democratic, high-quality education. By recognizing that each student learns in a unique way, it is reaffirmed that inclusion is not a challenge restricted to Special Education, but rather a guiding principle of the contemporary school and of guaranteeing the right to education for all.

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