



**PLAYFULNESS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION: THE INCLUSION PROCESS IN  
REGULAR SCHOOLS - FROM OBLIGATION TO CHALLENGES**

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**ABSTRACT**

This present study aims to analyze the role of playfulness and special education in educational policies and their incorporation process in teacher training, in order to achieve a democratic and inclusive educational environment. Methodologically, it adopts a qualitative, bibliographic, and documentary approach. The obtained results indicate that playfulness is one of the pathways to implementing special education through educational games that can be promoted by teachers. However, this pathway presents challenges as educators need to be prepared to incorporate this theme into their daily school routines. Therefore, there are challenges related to playfulness and special education, such as the need for continuous training that addresses this theme in the classroom, and the implementation of educational policies that provide guidance on this matter within the school routine, in order to create an inclusive and democratic space.

**Keywords:** Playfulness. Special Education. Inclusion. Regular schools.

**INTRODUCTION**

Since the Salamanca Declaration in 1994, the inclusion of students with disabilities has been widely debated (SOUZA; NOGUEIRA, 2017). However, it is necessary to expand these discussions to reflect on teaching practices that truly include these students in educational programs. Many institutions have made changes to their processes and physical structures to achieve this goal.

In light of this, it is crucial to rethink curricular education in order to include students with special needs. This is a discipline of great importance

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as it enables the appropriation of bodily movement culture, socialization, and other essential elements for students' development.

Among the various disabilities found in schools, autism is quite common. Characterized by behavioral changes that manifest in childhood, the alterations result from autism are unique to this type of disability (GAUDERER, 1993).

While there are advocates and opponents of tolerance in the education of students with special educational needs, it is legally established that inclusion should not be limited only to these students. This premise is among the main guidelines of national, federal, state, and municipal public education policies. There is a consensus that educational tolerance should take into account individual differences and diversity, accepting, respecting, and valuing them, as diversity is a natural and necessary part of the teaching process.

In this sense, implementing a public policy for inclusive education that caters to the needs of students with special education has been discussed and has fostered reflection on Brazilian education (regular and special) and teacher training (initial and ongoing). Professionals from various fields have highlighted the necessary differences, doubts, resistance, pertinent criticism, fear, contradiction, but above all, an openness for reflection, critical analysis, taking a stance, and promoting change and a change in perspective, concept, policy, identity, and practice of education, family, society, and education.

Despite divergent opinions on tolerance in the education of students with special educational needs, it is legally established and stated in the main guidelines of the national public education policy at the federal, state, and municipal levels. There is a consensus that tolerance cannot be limited only to students with special educational needs in formal education. The premise of educational tolerance is to consider individual differences, value, and respect diversity, as it is a natural and necessary part of the teaching process.



The teacher, as a facilitator of the education process, plays a central role in the development of students. It is necessary to reflect on and rethink the practice of these educators in the face of the diversity of students and their different needs, especially students with disabilities. According to Souza and Nogueira (2017), Physical Education is an important tool for inclusion as it enables the development and broadening of knowledge about bodily movement, as well as the experience of various group activities.

Diniz (2007) defines disability as a social problem rather than an individual one, as it has broad relationships with oppressive social systems. Community organization around people with a specific type of impairment provides them with information about disability. Therefore, it is understandable that a person with a disability experience more differences in the social sector than the disability itself limits them.

To respect the diversities found in all individuals present in the school environment, Inclusive Education emerges. Unlike Special Education, Inclusive Education has the primary role of encompassing all students, whether they have special needs or not. It aims to change the teaching landscape by providing opportunities to all while respecting their individual abilities and eliminating obstacles that limit learning and student participation in the educational process.

In this way, it is the duty of all schools to provide their students with the opportunity to live in a welcoming and safe environment, with pedagogical practices based on the inclusion of all students. The school should also involve other stakeholders to ensure inclusion, such as the internal and external community, offering them the opportunity to participate in the activities offered in the school environment.

In current days, there are several discussions about Inclusive Education, often associated with the inclusion/exclusion antagonism. However, if inclusive schooling is regarded as a fundamental possibility for the



transformation of society, assuming that inclusion, at its core, promotes respect for differences and fosters the necessary conditions for special education, how do we understand the qualification of professionals who assume the education of this public?

The study conducted by Falkenbach et al. (2007, p. 38) pointed out that inclusion "can be an extremely complex action for teachers and the school community since pedagogical action has been seeking the universalization and standardization of knowledge." Such pedagogical action causes a gap between the pedagogical project and the reality experienced by members of the school community, leading to a lack of political and community coordination in the collective action of this community.

The justification for conducting this work is to track the trajectory of different experiences built during the continuing education of teachers to work in inclusive education. Researching the main obstacles and advancements in teaching practices in the classroom, discussing possibilities for investing in the continuous training of teachers and the new challenges in the field of inclusive education.

The general objective of this study is to analyze the role of playfulness and special education in educational policies and their incorporation into teacher training, in order to promote a democratic and inclusive educational process. The specific objectives were: to promote teacher training and public policies in the field of Special Education from an inclusion perspective, to stimulate more democratic pedagogical practices, and to foster exchange between researchers, professionals, and students in the field of education and related areas.

The present study is structured in the following stages: firstly, we discuss inclusion in education; then, we present the results and discussions derived from the literature review. Finally, we provide the concluding remarks.

### **Debate on Inclusion in Education: History and Contexts**



If we analyze the history of inclusive education, we can see that it was characterized by the exclusion of individuals with special needs. People with disabilities were marginalized, discriminated against, and excluded from society. In the 20th century, with the emergence of significant medical and technical knowledge about individuals with disabilities, the first signs of social responsibility began to appear. In 1994, the Salamanca Declaration affirmed the rights to education, and society began to increasingly recognize the importance of inclusive spaces. Therefore, we understand that special education in Brazil has undergone many changes over the years and has been provided differently from education offered to those without disabilities.

In the 1988 Constitution, Special Education gained new prominence, where in Article 208, the State is obligated to ensure effective inclusive education, with special educational assistance for individuals with special needs, preferably in general education. This law was repealed to be effectively included and start taking the first steps.

In 1996, the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education 9.394/96 was approved, bringing about a comprehensive process of changes in the Brazilian educational system. Among these changes was the implementation of the policy of inclusion of individuals with special needs in the general education network, altering the previously adopted system that excluded and segregated these individuals in special institutions. The approval of the Law included a proposal for inclusive education, which established that individuals with special needs should participate on an equal basis in the regular school education system. In this way, the school becomes a place for everyone.

Later, in 1994, in the Salamanca Declaration, the right to education for individuals with special needs was established, affirming that every person with special needs has the right to express, as they wish, their desires regarding their education, if it can be accomplished.



In this sense, both the Brazilian Education Law (LDB) and the Salamanca Statement point to the need for educational spaces and professionals in education to be prepared to receive and educate people with special educational needs in the best possible way. Therefore, public policies that encompass all the necessary inclusion requirements to be effective are essential and important.

In this way, for a school to truly be inclusive, it needs to make room for all children, whether they have special needs or not. When a child with disabilities starts interacting with other children, they cease to be excluded and become an integral part of that social environment. Ensuring that the inclusion process can flow in the best possible way is the responsibility of the management team, composed of the principal, pedagogical coordinator, counselor, and vice principal, if applicable. To accomplish this, it is essential that they have knowledge and the necessary conditions to implement it in the school's daily activities.

Inclusive education does not mean education with representations and low expectations for students, but rather understanding the important role of stimulating situations with degrees of difficulty and complexity that challenge teachers and students with meaningful learning, authentic challenges to creativity, and the breaking of preconceived ideas, as was the case with the great pioneers of education who believed in the significant role that education played in providing access to citizenship for the most disadvantaged, being labeled as "crazy" (then as now). (SANCHES, 2006, p. 73).

The regular education system must provide special education for any student with disabilities. This process requires transformations in the way classes are conducted and how relationships are formed with the classes and families. In order for the school to be prepared to accommodate students with disabilities, it is necessary for the school to provide minimum accessibility conditions, such as: access ramps, handrails, multi-functional rooms, doors with appropriate widths for wheelchair access, adapted bathrooms, suitable teaching materials, among others.

Inclusion breaks the paradigms that sustain the conservatism of the school. The main challenge for parents, teachers, and professionals



working with children who have difficulties is to help them gain self-confidence and believe in their abilities. (GÓMEZ; et al; 2010, p. 7).

In an inclusive school context, it is essential to understand that inclusion is not solely about enrolling a student in a school environment and assuming that inclusion has been achieved. If that were the case, meaning if the investment in the quality of education does not become a constant action, the demand for enrolling these students in the regular class can lead to increasingly prominent rejection and trigger greater difficulty in studying alongside other students. As a result, the school must provide opportunities for these students to develop their skills and learning abilities in accordance with their limitations or giftedness.

Total and unrestricted inclusion is an opportunity we have to reverse the situation in the majority of our schools, which attribute the deficiencies to the students that are actually a result of the teaching provided by them. The focus is always on evaluating what the student has learned, what they don't know, but rarely do we analyze "what" and "how" the school teaches, so that students are not penalized by repetition, dropout, discrimination, exclusion, and so on. (MANTOAN, 2006, p. 18).

We can perceive that building an inclusive school is not an easy task; it requires believing in the possibilities of learning and overcoming daily obstacles. Often, these obstacles prevent us from appreciating and implementing education with an emphasis on diversity. However, it is necessary for us to be sensitive to the history of struggle of this target audience in their pursuit of equal rights.

Specialized educational assistance is a right granted to students with special educational needs. This right is guaranteed by laws and ensured through inclusive practices and resources. This assistance is described in the Federal Constitution of 1988, in Article 208, Section III, which states that it should preferably take place in the regular education system. The term "preferably" has opened precedents, leading to subjective and disparate judgments across the country.

Although the school presents alternatives to meet the needs and particularities of students with disabilities, we understand that this is



not enough to ensure access to the AEE (Specialized Educational Assistance) for the student. It is necessary to seek better conditions for the implementation of public policies in order to guarantee transportation for rural students to attend the reverse shift of the AEE, with suitable schedules and a pedagogical proposal that meets the aspirations of students who seek educational opportunities consistent with their reality. (ANDRÉ, 2019, p. 106).

Although the discourse on specialized educational assistance is not new, the practices or news about how inclusion has been carried out are not expanded and still raise many doubts. When we stop to analyze two contexts: special schools and regular schools. Special schools, which can also offer AEE, have always worked with students with special educational needs in environments very different from regular school spaces. And regular schools were accustomed to thinking about linearity in relation to their students' learning, viewing them as homogeneous beings.

The National Policy on Special Education from the perspective of Inclusive Education aims to guarantee the school inclusion of students with disabilities, global developmental disorders, and high abilities/giftedness, guiding educational programs to ensure: access to general education, participation, learning, and continuity in school; high levels of education; the development of the special education system from early childhood to higher education; the provision of special educational assistance; training teachers from special education services and other education professionals to be inclusive. [...] (BRASIL, 2008).

As a result, dealing with students with special educational needs within the regular school setting requires alternative approaches to the educational process, employing strategies and methodologies that need to be shared across all environments that offer specialized educational support, inadvertently. Thus, we understand that there is a need for the organization of a network of knowledge, in which professionals involved with these students, whether in the classroom or in other school settings, including Specialized Educational Assistance (SEA) or outside their school, should have the ability to share and distribute the pathways necessary for these students to learn and develop in the best possible way.

The present work will be developed using a bibliographic research methodology, which involves consulting scientific material already published





by different authors in various publicly available sources. The materials that can be consulted in this methodology include books, scientific articles, newspapers, magazines, theses, articles found in online databases, among others. The objective of the bibliographic research methodology is to allow the author to approach the chosen topic by gathering information from various sources and creating their discussion and theoretical framework based on them. The role of the author is to select articles related to the topic, verify the presented information, and highlight similarities and differences, constructing material for their elaboration (PRODANOV; FREITAS, 2013).

Bibliographic research serves as a foundation for various other types of research because every research project needs to start with a theoretical framework. Therefore, for the completion of this work, relevant articles related to the chosen topic were selected, searched using keywords, and analyzed to identify the most suitable ones. Articles that were identified as not relevant to the topic were discarded; it is important for the articles to serve as a basis for supporting the presented ideas. After selecting the articles, a theoretical foundation and discussion were developed based on the information presented by the cited authors. Bibliographic research needs to be conducted in a language that allows the work to be accessible both to the scientific community and the general public, in order to assist in the dissemination of important information that contributes to society (PRODANOV; FREITAS, 2013).

For the construction of this research, a bibliographic study will be conducted, employing a qualitative approach developed through a case study. According to Ribeiro (2008, p. 05), the qualitative approach unfolds in a natural setting, providing rich descriptive data obtained through direct contact between the researcher and the studied situation. It places more emphasis on the process rather than the outcome, aims to portray the participants' perspectives, has an open and flexible plan, and focuses on reality in a complex and contextualized manner.



## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The history of toys, theoretical studies on toys, sociology of toys, folklore studies on toys, among other things, are highly important for the understanding of the topic as a whole. Despite all these areas, the current work focuses on a better understanding of playfulness in the context of early childhood education, specifically for children with special needs included in regular schools (SILVA, 2011).

Play has always been part of human life, it is part of our traditional makeup, and it is a highly important topic that can be used to teach and learn school relationships, especially in elementary and secondary education. Playful activities can be incorporated into the curriculum as a tool that facilitates learning, as long as they are used correctly, meaning that the activities should be purposeful and have an educational objective.

As mentioned before, games have roots in every aspect of human life, so there are games of all kinds, categories, and age groups, which is different when we include it in education. Play is also a form of learning that has significantly grown in today's world as it brings fun and, therefore, knowledge. Vygotsky states that through play, children develop their cognitive abilities, which aids in the formation of their thoughts. Incorporating a game in the classroom has been innovative, allowing us to emphasize the role of the student. Besides providing fun, play can foster bonds, teamwork, maturity in competition, and consequently, learning.

In this sense, it is important to understand that there are three types of games: physical, analog, and digital. These can have a profound effect on the learning process, with a particular emphasis on digital games, as the current generation is fully connected, facilitating a connection with the student in their "world." According to the article "Gamification in Pedagogical Practices: Theory, Models, and Experiences," gamification is the process of learning a playful culture that effectively engages and entertains, as well as being related to motivation and problem-solving through digital games.



Gamification can be considered as the learning of game culture within the corrective techniques of cyberculture, a natural movement integrated into human development through interaction with players. The word is a translation of "gamification" and was first used in 2002 by Nick Pelling. The authors claim that through gamification, it is possible to engage, collaborate, motivate, and effectively teach. It was also one of the pioneers in the idea of creating games that encourage people to engage in daily activities using a sports mentality in reality, which could lead to the development of a better world.

### **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

From this presentation, it is understood that play is an important tool in academic performance. It is a tool that simplifies the learning process, especially in early childhood education. Schools can utilize games and play as a variety of teaching methods, allowing students to learn through didactic activities guided by teachers. In the case of literacy, this approach also works so that through games and play, the teacher can provide the learner with space to learn while having fun, enabling them to become familiar with the ideas of the characters through playful activities.

The educational system requires changes in teaching methods in order to better understand children's development and foster holistic education, taking into consideration all aspects and opportunities for children.

Playful teaching methods allow children to demonstrate higher academic performance, as well as develop a variety of skills, thereby promoting holistic education. Considering that play is a natural act for children and has been present in everyone's lives since ancient times, integrating it into the teaching process is important, as play provides numerous opportunities for knowledge construction.

In order for this to happen, however, it is necessary for teachers and schools to change their view on spaces dedicated to games and toys, no longer



seeing them as mere objects meant to distract and increase their usage, but rather as tools not only for leisure but also for classroom practice.

It has been shown that teachers have an important role to play as mediators, with the responsibility of changing the way they work and helping to build knowledge, which is important for them to stay updated on the discoveries of the learning environment and seek new ways in their actions.

Teachers need to develop their skills in using games and play that align with what they want to teach their students so that they can learn about the games, rules, and opportunities. More than just creating a game or playing a game in the classroom, the teacher needs to actively engage in the activity with their students and plan the activities in a way that benefits the teaching of the content they want their students to learn.

In this way, a greater in-depth exploration and research on the subject are proposed in order to develop a heightened awareness among education professionals, with the aim of changing their understanding of toy libraries and play. By utilizing these opportunities, it is intended to benefit educational practice and the students.

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