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# What is Special in Special Education from the Inclusive Perspective?

## Abstract

*The article offers insights into the discussion of the terms 'special' and 'inclusive' applied as concepts to define educational inclusion. By analyzing three cases where a school's routine was followed, it was possible to interpose discourse and practice to highlight how contradictions in educational practices are constituted in the micro level of classroom reality. Data were collected through interviews, video-recordings and school documents in two Early Childhood Education Schools in Brazil. Through a qualitative epistemology analysis, the key findings pointed to contradictions regarding the role of teachers towards the implementation of pedagogical practices and the special education support actions. We discuss the need of reconsideration of what is understood by special education system and argue that human development is the key to develop inclusive practices.*

*Keywords: Human Development, Educational Inclusion, Special Education, Early Childhood Education*

## Introduction

UNESCO has been a forerunner in the global turn towards more inclusive approaches in education since the Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO, 1994), leading up to the organization's recently published guideline "Inclusion from the start" (UNESCO, 2014) and placing inclusive education largely attached to a social justice perspective in educational policy. Previous studies on inclusion have addressed either in-depth interpretation of inclusive education, presenting reviews of international trends (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006) proposing deep changes of how research on inclusion should be carried out (Messiou, 2016), or underlining the possibility of different and distinct conceptualizations of inclusion. Slee (2014) affirmed that, historically and internationally, "exclusion is an established tradition in the modern invention of schooling" (p.11) and that inclusion is not an evolution of previous models, but rather an entirely new proposal for organizing society (Slee, 2006). Therefore, inclusion is a paradigmatic milestone where societal rather than individual transformations are expected, and in which ideological principles and pragmatic orientation have struggled to find a balance and overcome its contradictions (Croll & Moses, 2000; Farrell, 2001).

However, school practices do not necessarily follow the speed with which changes in political declarations and paradigmatic concepts happen (Forlin, 2010; Sailor, 2010), resulting in contradictions between new conceptual understandings of school organization and the practices accomplished in reality (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006; Farrell, 2001). In other words, discussions at the macro political and conceptual research level are not immediately or fully reaching the micro classroom spheres, showing that daily classroom practices seem to be conjugated into the net in which the discourse has been signified (Hujala, 1996; Rutanen, Amorim, Colus & Piattoeva, 2012).

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to investigate, within the classroom context, the implementation of special education practices concerning inclusive education, and how the concepts of 'special' and 'inclusive' education are signified in early childhood education (hereafter referred to as ECE).

## Research context

This research takes place in Brazil within the tensions between the inclusive policy and the transversal modes of special education. Onboard with the project of putting inclusive international policies into practice locally, Brazil's Ministry of Education and Culture have emphasized that an inclusive

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model of special education is destined to attend to a public of people with disabilities, creating a transversal mode of education that functions inside the mainstream school (Brasil, 1996; 2009; 2011; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013b). The special education system in Brazil is responsible for providing services (e.g., individual assistance, continuing education for teachers), resources (e.g., adaptation of materials, development of alternative tools to allow access to activities), and strategies (e.g., curriculum reformulations) to overcome the barriers that prevent the full access of people with disabilities to equal education (Brasil, 2009). Within its scope of actions, the special education system (Brasil, 2011) identifies student needs, elaborates pedagogical plans and organizes practices and pedagogical resources to fulfill the aims of special education.

However, beyond the aim of promoting access and participation in mainstream schools, Brazilian inclusive education policy raises the discussion of the right to be different, a right to uniqueness (Mantoan, 2008) and that diversity belongs to the human condition, initiating a discussion about the development of children with disabilities in school settings (Mantoan, 2015). In this sense, the meaning of human development not only grounds the overview of the educational processes, but also delimits the objectives of pedagogical practices and the role of assessment, seeming to be a key element and a common aim in both in special education and inclusive education.

#### *Special education through the lens of human development*

The concept of 'special education,' according to Pessoti (1984), Januzzi (2004) and Mazzota (1987; 2005) clarifies the relation between 'special' and 'abnormal.' The term 'special' is placed bilaterally in the definition of something (in this case, education) developed to attend the needs of someone that is different from the majority, defining not only the structure created but also the person for who that social structure attends to (e.g., the special school, for special children). In this case, the abnormality defines the needs, and the needs defines the actions/structures and the epistemology grounding the reasoning belongs to a Cartesian and Positivist theoretical background, which considers abnormality everything that does not belong within the curve of normality (Mendes, 2006).

Within this theoretical framework, human development is treated in the same way as natural phenomena, where biological events are considered the markers of development. Observable dif-

ferences (in behavior and/or in the body) are interpreted as transformations, which are identified in different age groups, designated as phases of development, and used to characterize the standard path of human growth (Bee, 2011; Gesell & Amatruda, 2000; Garcia, 2003; Junn & Boyatzis, 2012). This procedure has created an understanding of human development following universal path, with clear and unchangeable signs to evaluate its course.

Despite paradigmatic changes pointing to a broader conceptualization of human development, these individualistic frameworks are still present and ground perceptions and practices (Collares & Moysés, 2010). The understanding of a universal path of development and the ontological connections to the standardized evaluation of 'normality' that 'special education' carries implicates that this 'abnormal' development demands another way of learning, or even another understanding of what learning will be for that individual (or group). Consequently, there is a necessity to create different institutions where that differentiated process can occur. The process of transformation relays in the individual and in its possibility to adjust into the natural flow of mainstream social life.

#### *Inclusive education through the lens of human development*

In turn, the term 'inclusive education,' officially appeared in documents in the late 1990s referring to access in school (Mendes, 2006; Sailor, 2002; Slee, 2012; UNESCO, 1994). It is grounded on a moral doctrine, which the main idea is that all people should have the same social rights regardless of individual differences (Berhanu, 2010; 2011; Mendes, 2006) and underlies the claim that, regarding disability, the absence of rigorous decision-making processes can lead to exclusion in special education environments (Berg & Schneider, 2012). 'Inclusive education' stems from the assumption of human development as a phenomenon resulted from a social construction, and therefore, is not intrinsically individual.

Contributions to this view are found in the Historical-Cultural Theory by Vygotsky (1928-1934), which postulates the social nature of human development (Vygotsky, 1991) and the inseparability between emotion and cognition, valuing individual experience, and revealing the uniqueness of the developmental process (cf. Gonzalez-Rey, 2016). According to Smolka and Nogueira (2002), human development happens at the same time and dimension in what it is constituted as the social surrounding. This collective experience defines the

social nature of human development by emphasizing how the individual's "organic dimension is impregnated by the culture and marked by history" (Prestes, 2012 p.80). It is therefore necessary to examine social constructions within schooling and learning practices instead of looking exclusively towards the individual student's achievements. Thus, "the social relation in which the subject is involved explains his way of acting, thinking and relating" (Smolka & Nogueira, 2002, 81).

However, to this day, the way inclusion is implemented varies depending on how policymakers and practitioners understand inclusion and connect it to their daily social environments (Turnball et. al, 2002), seeming to be experienced in distinct ways in multiple social frames and contexts (e.g., Mäkinen & Mäkinen, 2011; Gao & Mager, 2011). Evans and Lunt (2002) explore in their study the expressed difficulty of teachers to translate the national policies into practices, especially when there is a gap between what is foreseen for the praxis (a student-centered approach) and the evaluation (a standardized system). For the authors, the key to understand the process remains on the investigation of teacher's perceptions and actions towards developing inclusion.

Previous studies focused on teachers' perception identified that teachers that received Special Education Training have more positive attitudes toward including students with disabilities (Varcoe & Boyle, 2013). Accordingly, teachers with more positive attitudes towards inclusion were reported by their pupils to provide environments with higher levels of satisfaction and cohesiveness and lower levels of conflicts, competitiveness (Monsen, Ewing & Kwoka, 2014). However, beyond exploring teachers' perspectives, which according to the mentioned studies are the starting point of the inclusive practices, there is a need to deeper investigate the processes in which these perceptions are materialized, transformed into actions.

Considering all, and understanding that the classroom is where the inclusion happens, this study offers a qualitative microanalysis of learning processes by addressing the following research questions: What are the meanings teachers give to 'special' and 'inclusive' education through the classroom practices or, in other words, how are the 'special' and 'inclusive' manifested in the daily classroom practices? How does the 'human development' perspective promote inclusive pedagogy?

## Methodology

This study utilizes the Network of Meanings framework (Rosetti-Ferreira, Amorim & Silva, 2004) as a methodological approach; a perspective drawn from the studies of human development in early childhood settings introduced by Rosetti-Ferreira et al. (2004). This framework assembles personal, relational and contextual processes embedded in and constituted by a historical social-cultural framework, placing focus on the interactions and meaning-making processes.

The Network of Meanings is based on a number of theoretical works, i.e., Bioecological Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1996); the notion of complexity (Morin, 1996); the Historical-Cultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1991; 1996; Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991; Valsiner, 2000; Wallon, 2007), and the dialogical conceptions of Bakhtin (1979; 1992), and it has been used in qualitative work within the field of developmental psychology (Almeida, 2014; Amorim 2013; Colus, 2012; Ferreira, 2013; Moura; 2012; Moura & Amorim, 2013). The contribution of Network of Meanings to this study relies on the structure that assembles a "multiplicity of possible meanings, points of view, affectionate and power relationships as well as discursive practices contain and promote deviation, dispersion and contradiction" (Ferreira-Rosetti, Amorim & Silva, 2006, p.283). The key points of this framework are the access to multiple factors (i.e., individuals, micro and macro social contexts) and the relational way by which analysis is conducted (i.e., even contradictory dialogs are explored), exploring the interrelationship between these diverse features of human development. To get at this interrelationship requires the process of immersion in the field and the assumption of an active role for the researcher that grounds the design of the study. It then results in a construction of methodological steps that remains open to different tools and resources to collect the data and consider multiple perspectives on the process of analysis (Ferreira-Rosetti et al., 2006).

Taking into account all the above and aiming to develop a work which indeed addresses the complexity of the phenomenon of human development, we structured the research as a case study carried out in two schools. According to Yin (2010), this kind of case study research aims to identify the existence of a phenomenon and explore how it happens and how it relates to its social context.

### *The schools*

The two schools upon we studied belong to the Federal Public Educational System (School A) and to the Municipal Public Educational System (School

B), both located in Minas Gerais State, Brazil. School A offers educational services for over 900 students from ECE (3 years old) to the 9th grade (15 years old). School B offers daycare for 990 children from six months to six years old.

The ECE curriculum in these schools follows the national curriculum (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2010) and regulatory documents (Brasil, 1996; 2000; 2005; 2011), and the practices are developed under a broad view of the social-interactionist theoretical perspective (La'Taille, Oliveira & Dantas, 1992).

In School A, besides the classroom teachers and the gymnastic teacher, the early childhood department includes a special education teacher, a part-time social worker, a psychologist, and a class aide as members of the staff that work directly with children and families. Children attend the school only part-time (in the afternoon) in classes of 15 to 19 students (two of them were children with disability). The teacher's work is organized in a weekly schedule established by the collective of teachers in 16 lessons of 60 minutes each. The curriculum of School A implements pedagogical practices in five spheres of child development: oral and written language, mathematical reasoning, the body and its movement, artistic language and emotional development. Teachers have the freedom to design their own strategic planning and class activities. The school curriculum carries a section devoted to explaining the special education services, specifying two modalities: (1) pedagogical planning with the teacher, and (2) extra individual tutoring outside the school day.

In School B, children attend daycare from 7am to 6pm. Classes are composed of 25 to 30 children (one child with disability in the group), and the teacher's schedule is defined by the headmaster of the school according to a work agreement of 30 hours per week. Teachers and children count with a full-time aide, and an extra aide in case there is a child with disability in the class. This school's curriculum consists of a guidebook where teachers can find instructions to elaborate their daily plans. Special education is mentioned "as a right to all children with disabilities" in accordance with the Law 9.394\96 of Bases for National Education (Brasil, 1996), in which the service of special education, as a constitutional duty of the State, begins at age zero to six years old as part of ECE. Therefore, School B provides a special education teacher to develop individual activities for students with disabilities. Planning is based on observations and an evaluation made by the special education teacher during her time with the child.

### *Participants*

Participants were selected using a purposive sample to provide information that is relevant to our research questions. Therefore, the participants included three class teachers (two from School A and one from School B), three children with intellectual disabilities that are here addressed as *target children*, and the students of these classrooms (62 children in total).

The target children (with assigned pseudonyms) were all diagnosed with Down Syndrome. Ivan (School A) is a three-and-a-half-year-old boy. Ignacio (also from School A) was a four-year-old boy and Amanda (School B) was a three-year-old girl. Both teachers from School A had a master's degree and thirteen years of experience. In School B, Amanda's teacher had one-year-training in special education and had been teaching children with disabilities for five years.

### *Data Collection Procedures*

Data comprised teacher interviews and student observations registered through video-recordings and field diary conducted by the first author. The interview is perceived as a moment of social interaction, bringing up representative criteria, and thereby, showing both objective (e.g., concrete facts and objectives), and subjective nature (e.g., attitude, values, and beliefs) of the discursive data (Minayo, 1996). Children's observations were carried out through video recordings, which have been used as a pertinent and adequate tool on many studies with children (Carvalho, Branco, Pedrosa & Gil, 2002; Pálmadóttir & Einarsdóttir 2016; Pedrosa & Carvalho, 2005; Rossmannith et al. 2014;). The videos allow us to analyze nonverbal communication and subjective experiences of the children, which are both considered to be important to human development (cf. Trevarthen & Aitken, 2001).

*Interviews.* with the classroom teachers were conducted with a semi structured format and consisted of 35 to 40 minutes of dialog. The content of the interviews concerned the teacher's educational background, theoretical perspectives, prior experiences, opinions, and perspectives about the inclusive educational environment, special education, and the schooling processes of children with disabilities. The dialogs were audio-recorded and allowed for a reflexive interview (Szymanski, 1998; 2004) where the structure during the two interview times (before and after observations) provided a dialectical dynamic between the participant and the researcher.

*Observations.* were conducted once a week with a duration of 30 to 50 minutes per day during the entire school year of 2014 and recorded on video. The focus was on target children with minimal interference in the activities that were taking place. After collecting the material, part of the videos had to be discarded either because there were images of children from another classroom, which parents were not aware of the research, or because it had scenes that exposes children's intimacy, for example using the toilet. The total amount of video recordings from all target children was 2422 minutes<sup>1</sup>, and they mainly revealed different aspects of the target children's participation in the school context. For supplementary data, we utilized the plan book documentation produced by the teachers and first researcher's field diary. The pedagogical plan books were private and unofficial journals that belonged to the teachers, lent to the first researcher during the last month of the school year and returned to the teachers on the last day of school. In these books, teachers documented their pedagogical methods and materials to develop practices with children and evaluation procedures, allowing a closer look into their ideas concerning schooling process and pedagogical aims of specific activities.

#### *Ethical issues*

This research respects and fulfills all ethical criteria for research with human beings. Procedures described in this paper are part of doctoral-level research that was approved by the National Committee of Ethics in Research with Human Beings, through the University of São Paulo, Brazil. Participants were aware of and in agreement with the use of the information presented herein, teachers and the parents of the children participation on the study signed the terms of free and enlightened permission.

#### *Analysis*

All interviews were transcribed, yielding 24 single-spaced pages of text. Interviewees were numbered as participants 1–3 and any use of direct quotation of the transcribed material will identify the participants by 'atp' code, meaning 'according to participant' (e.g., quotes by participant 1 will say "atp1"). The data were content analyzed, by a four-step coding procedure (Corbin & Strauss, 2008a; 2008b), which resulted in a systematized categori-

zation of teachers' discourse. In parallel, we analyzed the video recordings by the following two-phase process: (1) contextualization and categorization of the scenes, meaning that we divided the videos into episodes according to the type of activity or the focus of the dynamic. This process allowed the identification different elements of the pedagogical praxis. And, (2) the selection of specific extracts to subject to microgenetic analysis (cf. Goés, 2000) of dynamics.

Accordingly, we also considered elements from the school curriculum and teachers' personal pedagogical plan books as the supplementary data, respecting the theoretical assumptions of the Network of Meanings's approach that presents a view of discourses as inseparable from their settings. This data was analyzed by content analysis, used as a way to contextualize the teacher's interviews and our analysis of the video.

#### **Results**

We found our findings from the interview analysis fit into four main categories: (1) Role of regular school for children with disabilities; (2) Learning process of children with disabilities; (3) Teacher's training in special education; and (4) Teacher's understanding about disability. We focused on data from the first two categories to allow for a deeper exploration of the research questions of this article. From the video-recordings, during the process (1), contextualization of school's practices, six categories of daily routines emerged. The scenes revealed the context, the type of pedagogical approach and the amount of situations in each school, as illustrated in the table 1 below.

Through the categorization of video-recordings, we identified that individual classroom activities (i.e., children had to perform a specific guided task and there was an individual result) were the most common type of daily routine implemented in all schools. Therefore, we explored this category more deeply and continued to the microanalysis of relevant episodes. The results from the step (2) of the video-recording microgenetic analysis pointed that 53 episodes were classified as individual activity in the classroom, and were described by five aspects: Number of children involved; number of adults involved; type and availability of materials; type of activity; and, adults' actions during the activity.

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<sup>1</sup> In school A, 23 sessions of data collection were conducted for case 1 and 25 for case 2. In school B, 18 sessions were conducted entirely.

Regarding the number of children and adults involved, in School A Case 1, the individual activities were conducted by one teacher, two aides and all 19 children, while in Case 2 of the same school there was one teacher, one aide and 18 children.

In School B, one teacher and two aides conducted all the individual activities with 25 children. Teachers and aides presented and conducted individual activities with the entire classroom, meaning that there weren't divisions of different activities for groups of children, rather they all did the same task at the same time.

**Table 1.**  
*Categorization of the school's daily routines*

Name of the categories	School A, case1	School A, case2	School B
1. Individual activities in the classroom	19	22	12
2. Group activities in the classroom	16	10	7
3. Free play	17	9	8
4. Eating	2	2	4
5. Individual activities outside the classroom	9	8	19
6. Group activities outside the classroom	6	8	5

It is important to mention that in School A; the class aides are undergraduate students in teacher education. In school B, the aides are professionals with a higher educational (academic or vocational) degree in teaching. Regarding the availability of the materials and its use during the individual activities, we present the results in Table 2.

In School A, case 1, we identified drawing, coloring, collage, and writing tasks as the types of activities. In general, children would initiate the activity by choosing places to sit. The teacher or class aide

would then deliver materials. In case 2, drawings, bricolage, painting, playing with clay, and writing tasks were more common. Children in case 2 had pre-established places to sit, organized by the teacher. The teacher delivered the materials. In School B, the activities were coloring, cut and collage, and playing with clay. The class aides were responsible for delivering the materials, and since there were not enough tables for all children, they were guided to take a place on the floor.

**Table 2.**  
*Type and availability of materials*

	School A, case 1	School A, case 2	School B
Materials	Paper A3, crayons, pencil ballpoint pen, paint and glue	Paper A3, crayons pencil paint, glue, teared paper and plaster.	Paper A4, magazines, pencil glue and teared paper.
Type of storage	Cabins	Shelves	Locked cabins
Display	Free access to children	Available with teacher's pervision	Available with teacher's pervision

*The mainstream school and children with disabilities*

The data revealed how the teachers saw the purpose of mainstream school for the children with disabilities. Their views were in accordance with the Special Education and Early Childhood Education National Guidelines (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2006; 2013b) and the school's curriculum when emphasizing the school's role to "promote the learning process" (atp2) and to "allow him to socialize and promote an active participation" (atp1). Teacher also associated the purpose of mainstream school to the promotion of "cognitive

development of the child with disability" (atp1) and to "improve his (student's) capacities, mediate his knowledge (atp2).

By affirming that development (in a general understanding of the term) is an important element of the school's role, teachers revealed that from the macro level of policies and curriculum planning, the structuring idea of inclusion is already part of their discourse. Furthermore, teachers also acknowledged that promoting the participation of the child in his own way, planning classes starting from the child's own knowledge, and providing opportunities for children to manifest

themselves were the aims of schools in the context of inclusive education.

However, regarding the attention to the special educational needs (SEN) that a child with a disability might require, the interviews raised different perspectives that carried a less student-centered approach. Teachers claimed that activities

should not be different from the rest of the group: "what I do with children, I also do with Amanda (...) she doesn't have any specific orientation" (atp3); and that overall pedagogical planning happens collectively with other teachers, which can include the child with disability.

**Table 3.**

*Teachers' actions during the activities in episodes of the category "Individual activities inside the classroom"*

Teacher's actions	School A, case:	School A, case:	School B
Explaining the activity to all	x	x	X
Organizing the classroom	x	-	-
Going around the class assisting individually when he runs outside the classroom	x	x	-
Going after the child with disability	x	-	-
Giving orientation to the class aide	-	x	-
Observing children while the activity	-	-	x
Playing with children	-	x	x
Holding the child with disability on her lap	x	-	x
Calling the attention of the children	x	x	x

*In the table 3, the (x) represents presence and (-) represents absence of specific action.*

**Table 4.**

*Aides' actions during the activities*

Aide's actions	School A, case1	School A, case2	School B
Conducting individual intervention with the child with disability	x	x	x
Organizing the classroom	-	x	x
Going around the class assisting individually	x	x	-
Going after the child with disability when he runs outside the classroom	x	-	x
Reading books to the child with disability	x	x	-
Mediating interaction with peers	x	x	x
Playing with children	x	x	x
Holding the child with disability on her lap	x	-	x
Calling the attention of the child with disability	x	x	x

*In the table 4, the (x) represents presence and (-) represents absence of specific action*

Special education activities were evidenced by the specific support of special education teachers during the collective planning (i.e., discussion with all the teachers about the school's routine and pedagogical activities developed), and in the activities that special education teachers developed part-time (extra-class hours) with the child. It is important to highlight that, while the teachers from School A emphasized the help that special education teachers and psychologists provided for the collective pedagogical planning, the teacher from School B affirmed that they did not have any contacts with the school's special education department.

The interviews also indicated that teachers understood their role in learning processes as mediators who articulate actions for the child and guide them the appropriate uses of materials. However, they also pointed the need for an aide to help with the implementation of lesson plans. The interviews also portrayed teachers' understanding of the learning process of children with disabilities. Teachers expressed that each child has his/her own learning process. Teachers identified that children with disabilities learn at a slower pace, or within a rhythm that is different from the rest of the class, needing help during the schooling process such as to "learn the school routine" (apt1), to "amplify the child's vocabulary" (apt1), and "to improve communication" (apt3).

Teachers also revealed that the children with disabilities learned from and with their peers, attributing a great emphasis on activities where peers can interact and be actively involved in the learning process, such as when they "learn by listening to other children" (atp2), or "when they are interacting with other children and transforming that experience in something valuable for them" (atp1). Overall, teachers seemed to have a comprehensive understanding of the social justice ideology of inclusion (Berhanu, 2010; Berg & Schneider, 2012; Smith, 2012; Young, 1990), presenting a clear perspective about its premises and acknowledging the responsibility of mainstream school to promote human development. Nevertheless, regarding the implementation of special education within an inclusive perspective, they presented distinct ideas about pedagogical actions and the role of each professional in the schooling process. While teachers recognized their active role in the learning processes and the importance of a multi-professional team, classroom practices reflected the tradition of exclusive special education, where differentiated activities are conducted outside the classroom by a special education teacher.

#### *Class activities*

The video analysis revealed how the schools implemented inclusive practices, and in relation to the themes raised with the teachers' interviews, three core issues emerged: (1) The function of class aides; (2) The relation between the type of activity and the time to execute it; and, (3) A lack of promoting peer collaboration.

The class aides conducted, mediated, and intervened pedagogically for the majority of the individual activities, often playing a more active role in the learning process for the children with disabilities than the classroom teacher did. The addition of extra adults to support the schooling processes in classrooms where children with disabilities were located was a particular consideration addressed by law in Brazil (Brasil, 2009). However, the teacher was still the one who has been seen as responsible for mediating and assisting these children during the activities in the classroom. What we saw through the analysis was that the teachers' focus was mainly on conducting the class instructions, assisting children in general, but designating one-on-one mediation to the class aide. This was especially visible in School A, where the class aides were appointed to assist the children with disabilities. While in School B, even though there was no specific designation for the class aide, they ended up largely fulfilling the same function, as a private assistance for the child with a disability.

Concerning the relation between time and activity, we observed that the activities were given at the same time for all students, and it was the main group of children's rhythms that regulated the daily routine. Accordingly, the teachers enabled children with disabilities to perform the tasks in their own rhythm by allowing for specific goals and performing a special pedagogical intervention for them. Nevertheless, all the flexible possibilities were restricted within the school's structure by limiting the activities' pace into a pre-established week schedule. Therefore, even acknowledging the slower rhythm and supports which the child with disability needed, it was still a homogenous perspective that defined the daily routine.

In terms of peer collaboration, peers contributed to the learning processes of the children with disabilities, according to the teachers' interviews. The teachers raised that the children with disabilities learned from and with the peers in different ways. According to the video analysis, however, peer interaction was limited by the class aide in the majority of the scenes. Class aides placed themselves in between the children with disabilities and their peers, creating a physical barrier to



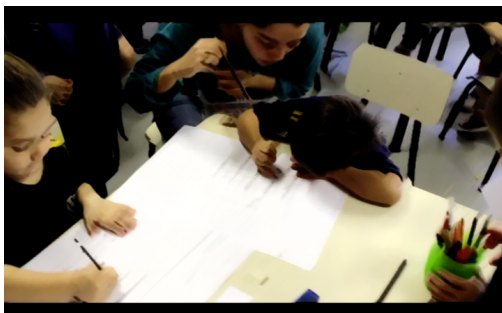
peer collaboration. Children's attention was called to their own differentiated activity rather than peer interactions.

*Children with disabilities as a part of an inclusive setting*

Next, we illustrate the findings depicted above by presenting an extract of the class routine School A, case 1. The scene starts with the teacher explaining the next activity to the group of 19 children. They are all sitting on the floor in a circle. Aldo (target child) is sitting on the class assistant's lap. The activity consists of identifying, in a board of letters, the specific ones that are used to write the name of characters of the story that the teacher read. Once the children have identified the same letters in the board, they color them, highlighting the word. For this task, each child received an A3 sheet of paper, previously prepared with all the elements for the activity. Children are told to find themselves a place to sit and to wait for the teacher to deliver the pencil and the crayon that they will use to color the letters. The task had the same pedagogical goal for Aldo, but with lower level requirements. Instead of recognizing the written words independently, he had to identify individual, unrelated letters shown to him by the aide. After the teacher's explanation, all children sat in their places at the tables (each child choose their place). The class aide sits next to Aldo (marked with the arrow in figure 1). Children wait for the teacher to give them the activity. While waiting, all children engage in their own processes of interaction (e.g., playing with the pencils or pretend play), including Aldo.

**Figure 1.**

*Children engaging in pretend play*



When everyone gets their materials, they start doing the activity independently. Aldo has full-time assistance that controls how he is going to do the activity by holding the pencil away from his hands and conducting the process with auxiliary materials (e.g., plastic letters).



**Figure 2.**

*Aide taking the pencil from Aldo's hands*

Aldo looks towards other children (special attention to the one right in front of him); looks back at the class aide and tries to take back the pencil. He grabs the pencil from the aide's hands, looks to the peers in the table and colors the letters (randomly). The aide calls for his attention and gets hold of the pencil again (illustration with figure 2). This dynamic is observed 13 times throughout four minutes and after approximately four and a half minutes, Aldo stands up and turns towards the blackboard, leaving the table. He walks towards the blackboard, grabs a chalk and draws a letter (letter C) as illustrated with figure 3. The entire process last for 12 minutes.

The teacher's plan book had remarks about the child's behavior on this specific day, reporting "lack of interest in the activities that the class is doing" (atp1) and "continuous behaviors of disengagement with the group" (atp1).



**Figure 3.**

*Aldo writing on the black board*

Concerns with Aldo's "difficulties concentrating and socializing like other children" (atp1), also appeared in the child's semester evaluation, justifying the full-time presence of a class aide in the next school year. However, when we micro-analyze the episode, it is possible to see that the teacher could not always notice what was happening in reality once is the aide that conduct the activity. This short extract, which is one of the 23 scenes in which the activity is conducted exclusively by the class's aide, raises questions about

what items and criteria are involved in the evaluation process, and how the teacher could have noted the specificities of Aldo's learning process if it was the aide who was the most involved with him.

### **Discussion**

The observations raise a number of different questions, but none of these is meant to discredit the work of teachers or institutions, or to affirm that their practices are not inclusive of the children with disabilities. Nevertheless, we would like to point out contradictions that are evident if

discourse and practice are compared, shedding light on the challenges that the conceptual understandings of inclusive education, special education, and human development involve. In this sense, teachers' discourse and practices are distinct from each other in four very crucial ways: the role of teacher towards the implementation of pedagogical practices, the special education support actions, the focus on human development, and the peer's participation on the learning process of the child with disability. These distinctions lead us to affirm that ideals and perceptions that teachers expressed (interviews) are not always put into practice in reality (the video of daily, routine observations).

In the videos, teachers did not lead efforts to provide differentiated instructions for children with disabilities, even though they expressed being in charge of their inclusion in their interviews as government documents on inclusion suggest they should be (Brasil, 2009; 2011; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013b). The class aide, who was only supposed to be part of a support action from the special education, became an essential element to providing schooling for the children with disabilities, fulfilling the central role of the teaching process. Special education, which under the perspective of the inclusive education is characterized as a support assistance modality within the mainstream schooling process (Brasil, 2011; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013b), is, in reality, transformed into a parallel schooling process. Inclusive education becomes, in practice, the system that places children with disabilities in mainstream classroom along with others, but still considers them as demanders of a specific (parallel) process.

Another issue regarding special education supports relates to the collective planning between the classroom teacher and special education teacher. In the observed reality, the special education teacher is planning with the classroom

teacher, but it is the aide (sometimes non-qualified) that is implementing the actions. This system compromises the evaluation of the child's developmental process, which is the central element for the schooling process, according to the teachers' interviews. Teachers' evaluation, which composes the process of assessment of the children's development, despite using qualitative resources, was still comparative and homogeneity-oriented, which leaves out space for individual ways of learning and the uniqueness of human development, as emphasized in the interviews.

Development "happens by complex processes of interaction within a mash of semiotic elements dialectically inter-related" (Rossetti-Ferreira et al., 2004, 23). Therefore, what defines the course of development within the schooling process is not a set of comparisons between children based on a curve of normality, but the complex and unpredictable ways in which individuals will construct their net of interactions. Observing this process requires close observations and interactions with the child by the evaluator. Therefore, to maintain a coherent approach, the evaluation of child's development should involve the person that is actively participating in the entire process, in this case the aide, and cannot consider any other parameters besides the individual's own milestones, respecting the student-centered perspective that teacher's discourse pointed.

Following this reasoning, we still have to point out the incoherence between the belief that peer interaction promotes learning process and reality, where peer interactions are limited or restricted during individual activities in the classroom. In the scene that we shared previously, Aldo had the peers in front of him as a reference and he was expected to be allowed to perform the task as his peers were. Instead, the class aide interpreted his interactional behavior with his peers as purely indicative of a lack of concentration. Peer interaction has a significant impact on the regulation of behaviors (Carvalho, Branco, Pedrosa & Gil, 2002; Carvalho & Pedrosa, 1998; Guralnick, 2002; Império-Hamburger, Pedrosa & Carvalho, 2009), leading to numerous kinds of learning processes, as studies already have shown (Corsaro & Molinari, 1990; Corsaro 2003; 2005; Schilling & Clifton, 1998; Verba, 1994).

This scene shows that there is an expectation of a specific behavior for the engagement in the activity to be recognized (e.g., paying attention to what the adult says, following the given instructions). If not, the moment will be judged as unsuccessful (e.g., did not achieve pedagogical goals, did

not complete the task) and the child labeled negatively (e.g., having problems to concentrate or to follow the activity). Participation cannot be restricted to attending specific expectations academically recognizable, otherwise engagement processes will not fully respect the individuality of learning experiences. In this specific case, we interpreted that the child maintained his interest in the activity for twelve minutes; he tried thirteen times to take control of the pencil and looked seventeen times to the peer's work. He walked out from the worktable when he saw a possibility to perform the activity (draw the letter) on the blackboard and by applying a different strategy; he found a way to gain control.

Measuring a student's participation and inclusion involves balance between respecting a child's individual developmental process (including a personal way of experiencing being in the world with a disability), the offer for specific support for the child's learning process, and the academic duties that a school has towards all its pupils. The support for pedagogical practice should not cross the line of becoming the teaching practice itself to avoid creating exclusion despite the discourse or curriculum proposal. On the other hand, the absence of specific learning supports for the purpose of full inclusion can also compromise the effective participation of a student by not providing what it necessary for the child to take part in the process and activities.

Within a developmental perspective, there is no space for 'special' as a 'different' or 'parallel system' (as the concept was originally constituted). The recognition of subjectivity and multiplicity in learning paths as inherent to the process of human constitution (Rossetti-Ferreira et al., 2004; Branco, 2004), places pedagogical practices in an individualized, student-centered context, where the disability is considered a human condition which has to be accepted and acknowledged as one more way of learning, developing, and being.

Special education trajectories are defended by those that believe in a parallel system and whose concept of human development is tied in the idea of a clear, well-defined, universal process, which when applied to the educational field becomes an argument for standardization. This creates the inevitable exclusionary system described in Slee's work (2011, 2014). What we propose here is a reflection over the adoption of a wider perspective towards human development within schooling processes. This perspective should incorporate the complexity, the diversity,

and the contradictions of humanity (Rossetti-Ferreira et al., 2004). Therefore, we understand that the more you consider a practice 'special,' the less it becomes inclusive, because these categories belong to opposite epistemological beliefs even if they are placed together in the current educational context.

Beyond highlighting the importance of a more reflective practice, the implications of this study relay on the possibility to discuss about the role of school and the necessity to transform its structures and the curriculum in order to effectively carry out in practice the actions foreseen in discourse. In this sense, this study evidences that as well as the investments in teachers training in special education, it is necessary to rethink the school, the organization of its space and time towards the promotion of more qualified interactions and the respect of different learning rhythms.

Evidently, the limitations of this study are diverse. We recognize the singularity contained in the case study and its limitations towards generalizations. The research design prioritized a subjective view of the investigated phenomenon within a specific social context inside Brazilian reality, restricting the applications for our findings. The focus of the study remained in the inclusion process of children with intellectual disability, which implies specificities that are different from other conditions of disabilities and the elements analyzed do not represent the wholeness of the school environment, but rather a situated fragment of it. However, we believe that core elements of social phenomena reside within the singularity of each participant, and presenting these considerations, we intend to explore how the misunderstanding of concepts like inclusion can be implicitly present in daily day life in educational scenarios. We believe that, until human development is not the center of all educational curriculum, proposals, and practices, conceptual misunderstandings will always be present. Therefore, future investigations focusing on applying such concept in educational practice are yet necessary.

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