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# The development and learning of a student with intellectual disability through social interaction with the other-self

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#### **Abstract:**

This text focuses on the educational process of a student with intellectual disabilities during Physical Education classes, considering the context of Inclusive Education. The objective of the study was to understand the conditions of participation of a student with intellectual disability in Physical Education classes and, from there, to propose pedagogical interventions in order to contribute to her effective insertion during these classes. The study is based on the cultural-historical perspective of human development. The thirteen-year-old student was enrolled in the 7th grade of a state school located in a city in the interior of the state of São Paulo. The data construction was carried out through observations recorded in a field diary, focusing on her relationship with the teacher and peers, and pedagogical interventions made by the researcher. As results obtained, at first it was observed that the student who was the focus of this study did not participate. Later, with more directed pedagogical actions it was possible to observe the motivation and participation of the student, who performed the activities, showing difficulty in some tasks, but, with the help of the researcher, was able to participate more effectively.

**Keywords:** Special Education. Inclusive Education. School Inclusion.

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#### I. Introduction

This paper is part of a research developed in the scope of a Postgraduate Program in Education, which focused on Physical Education classes, considering the context of Inclusive Education. The objective of the research is to understand the possibilities of participation of a student with intellectual disability in Physical Education classes.

Since the implementation of the Special Education Policy from the Inclusive Education Perspective (BRASIL, 2008), several Brazilian studies have tried to investigate, analyze and understand aspects of the educational context in view of this policy. However, in the area of Physical Education, there are few studies that focus on School Inclusion, especially those based on the cultural-historical perspective of human development (VIGOTSKI, 1995, 2000) and that address aspects of pedagogical practice for students with disabilities.

Thus, I intend in this text to discuss aspects of the school inclusion of a student with intellectual disability, focusing especially on the interactions between student and teacher and student and researcher, during pedagogical practices in Physical Education classes. The researcher carried out the study in a public elementary school in which he developed a proposal for pedagogical intervention, seeking to carry out teaching practices that would enhance the student's participation during the classes.

In the middle of the 20th century, after the Second World War, ideas about the inclusion of people with disabilities were discussed in meetings organized by several countries, which resulted in documents such as the Salamanca Declaration (1994). Brazil becomes a signatory of these documents and starts to incorporate the inclusive discourse, which gains legal contours with the enactment of the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education - LDB 9394/1996 (BRASIL, 1996).

In this law, Special Education is now considered a teaching modality which aims to promote the enrollment of students with disabilities in the regular education system. The inclusion of these students is always a reason for discussion and concern in the educational environment, on the part of these students' parents, teachers and guardians in general. In relation to the discipline of Physical Education, we can find studies with controversial results regarding the inclusion aspects.

The studies of Mazzarino; Falkenbach; Rissi (2011); Palma; Lehnhard (2012) and Andrade (2014) point us to problems related to issues of physical structures, institutional support and lack of adequate materials for the subject. However, studies show us reports of positive experiences, with significant benefits, such as

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increased self-esteem, self-confidence, student autonomy, affectivity, and an improvement in coexistence among peers (KARAGIANNIS; STAINBACK; STAINBACK, 1999; GORGATTI, 2003).

As observed in the cited studies, the theme about participation and inclusion of students with disabilities in Physical Education classes is still controversial. Although the school and the teachers are concerned about these students, there are still several obstacles for the expected inclusion to occur effectively. The subject of Physical Education, as part of the school curriculum, should not leave this process restricted; on the contrary, due to the comprehensiveness of its characteristics, it should expand the possibilities of experience of the student with disabilities, in order to contribute to their development.

# **II.** Theoretical Foundation

Vygotsky (1995, 2000), the main theorist of the cultural-historical perspective of human development, sought to understand the origin and development of higher psychic functions, such as: directed attention, volitional memory, and language. The author, based on the principles of historical and dialectical materialism (MARX; ENGELS, 2007), understood that "the origins of higher forms of conscious behavior should be found in the social relations that the individual establishes with the outside world" (VIGOTSKI, 1988, p. 25).

Therefore, in Vygotsky's (2000) thesis, the social and the cultural are two basic aspects of all human development, which is characterized as a process of transformation from a biological being to a sociocultural subject. For the author, functions of the nature of the species are not disregarded in human development, but rather resized to the extent that the individual establishes social relations, through the mediation of cultural signs created in the social environment, signifying and internalizing them.

Vygotsky (1997) was also a scholar on the development process of people with disabilities. He also made several discussions and criticisms about the education intended for these subjects, trying to rework the concept of compensation brought by psychologists of his time, such as Adler, and issues about special education, which we can find in the collection Fundamentals of Defectology (1997).

Starting from the principle of the social nature of human development, Vygotsky (1997) exposes his ideas about the constitution of people with disabilities. The author discusses the possibilities of development and education for these subjects and seeks to understand the relationship between learning and development. For the author, development and learning are not coincident, but interdependent aspects. Development is prompted and driven by learning, and learning depends on social conditions. Learning occurs in the relationship of the subject with the social environment in practices necessarily involved in semiotic mediation.

Thus, when we refer to the learning possibilities for students with disabilities, the process is no different, that is, it must be understood from the social situation of development. Based on Vygotsky's (1997) assumptions about the disabled, we understand that it is not only the organic (biological) conditions that define the learning possibilities of these subjects. In turn, depending on the opportunities offered by the social environment, people with disabilities may develop their higher psychological functions.

For Vygotsky (1997), therefore, the student with disability must be considered an individual with learning possibilities, as long as appropriate conditions are provided to him/her. Thus, the author reiterates the thesis of the social nature of development for all subjects. He explains that, in the case of children with disabilities, auxiliary means and stimuli must be sought so that they can develop. He states that "[...] elniñocuyodesarrolloestácomplicadoporeldefecto no es simplemente un niñomenosdesarrollado que sus coetâneosnormales, sinodesarrollado de otro modo." (VIGOTSKI, 1997, p.12).

Thus, we understand that the learning process for students with disabilities cannot be limited to simplified and decontextualized pedagogical practices. In the case of Physical Education, the focus of this study, this idea is no different and we believe that the teacher of this subject should seek different ways for the student to participate in classes and develop.

# III. Theoretical and methodological aspects

This study was conducted in a public elementary and high school in the state of São Paulo, in a medium-sized city in the interior of the state. We clarify that the research was carried out in this school, by recommendation of the teaching supervisor of the special education area, linked to the regional board of education. The school was indicated because, according to her, it has several students with disabilities.

After talking to the school principal and getting her permission, the researcher made observations during physical education classes in nine Elementary II classes in which the school principal said she had students with some kind of disability. After the observations, it was decided to follow a student enrolled regularly in the 7th grade of elementary school, here named Ana Laura, a thirteen-year-old teenager.

The choice for this student was made by indication of the principal, who said she was a student with intellectual disability. Although she did not have access to the report proving her disability, the student was seen

by the principal and the teachers as an "inclusion case". In addition, the researcher was informed that Ana Laura was a regular student at school, which would make data collection possible.

The student entered elementary school within the age/grade expectations, and thus continued her studies without any failures. She lived in a neighborhood a little far from the school, and traveled to school on a school bus, without needing the help of other people. Ana Laura, at first, seemed to be shy, a little introspective, who suffered from some difficulties because of her overweight. Shepresented a cardiorespiratory fatigue, even when talking. There were moments when the student showed irritation and nervousness, which seemed to stem from these difficulties. I believe that these physical limitations were hindrances to the interaction between the student and her peers.

Data construction was carried out through observations of the student in activities during physical education classes, focusing on her relationship with the physical education teacher, peers, and the researcher. Conversations were held with the principal and with some teachers, to obtain more information about the student Ana Laura. All data recorded in a field diary. For this text I prioritize the data that focused on the interaction between Ana Laura and teacher, here called Lurdes and, researcher and Ana Laura.

In the first semester eight observations of the student were made, during Physical Education classes, in the context of activities carried out in the court, classroom and courtyard. After these observations, it was found that the student did not participate in the classes, remaining most of the time sitting on the bleachers. In view of this, in the second semester, it was proposed to the teacher to make a pedagogical intervention, a proposal to plan some activities to be carried out, aiming at the student's participation.

Thus, eight classes were planned and developed with the class, using as a basis the pedagogical activities proposed in the Teacher's Notebook, a material that is part of the unified curriculum of the Secretariat of Education of the State of São Paulo. After reading all the material recorded in the field diary and guided by the methodological principles of the cultural-historical perspective, some of the most recurrent modes of student participation were identified. For this text, the data were organized in two thematic axes: 1. Modes of interaction between student and teacher: moment of observation. 2. Modes of interaction between student and researcher: moment of intervention.

## Modes of interaction between student and teacher: observation moment

#### Episode I

The episode is about the first day of observation. I waited for the PE teacher to arrive in the teachers' room. After she arrived, we went to the classroom. The teacher Lurdes introduced me to the class, as a physical education teacher who would make observations during class, and the students welcomed me with great enthusiasm. After the brief introduction, the teacher starts the roll call. After the roll call in the classroom, Lurdes goes to the court with two balls in hand, a soccer ball and a volleyball. The teacher throws the soccer ball to some students who were already there, and hands the volleyball to one of the students. The other students organize themselves and start playing soccer; some of the students stand behind the court, on the left side, and exchange volleyball passes, while four students chat, sitting on the bleachers. Ana Laura is now lying on the second step of the bleachers. After distributing the materials, the teacher leaves the class for about twenty minutes. When she returns, she talks to some students and then addresses Ana Laura.

Teacher Lurdes: Our Lady, Ana Laura, get up, girl, do something.

Ana Laura doesn't answer, and remains lying on the bleachers, until the end of the class. (Excerpt from the field diary).

I brought this episode to raise some questions about the participation of student Ana Laura, her classmates, and the teacher. At first, we notice that Ana Laura remains lying on the bleachers all the time without participating in class, without interacting with her classmates and the teacher. Her classmates also don't talk to her or call her to do the activity.

The way the teacher Lurdes approaches the student who is lying down without participating in class is also noteworthy. The teacher calls her attention verbally, telling her to participate in the activity. Ana Laura does not react to the teacher's call, and the teacher leaves her lying on the bleachers until the class is over.

The teacher's action leads us to assume that she does not present many pedagogical initiatives to insert the student in the activity. It is inferred that the teacher does not consider it important to demand from her what she would demand from other students in their learning and development. Jurdi (2004) emphasizes that students with disabilities are often seen as incapable of achieving good school performance, pointing out that this may be linked to the teacher, who does not always believe in the capacity of these subjects.

I noticed that the pedagogical activities proposed by the teacher are not included in the Teacher's Notebook, a teaching material from the Secretary of Education of the State of São Paulo. Some examples of activities proposed in this booklet are: rhythmic activities; athletics; basketball; general gymnastics and fights.

Moreover, during this class, I didn't observe the teacher giving the students directions to do the proposed activities (volleyball and soccer); she just gives the soccer balls to the boys and the volleyball to one of the girls. After that, she is absent for a good part of the class.

From the literature that discusses Physical Education classes within the Special Education policy from the perspective of school inclusion, one can see that there are controversies about participation, inclusion, and principles of learning and development for students with disabilities. The factor that draws more attention to me is the role of the teacher in this process.

The study by Andrade (2014) on the inclusion of students with disabilities in Physical Education classes discusses that if there is an intervention proposal, there may be participation and inclusion of these students during these classes. The author highlights situations of teacher intervention with disabled students; interventions that provide means and conditions for them to participate in classes, learn, and interact with their classmates. Also, according to the author, if teachers act in an intentional way, looking at the students with disabilities, proposing pedagogical activities and appropriate interventions, it is possible that school inclusion will be more effective, as well as the participation of these students in Physical Education classes.

In another study, Andrade and Freitas (2016) point out that the teacher's role is preponderant in organizing the possibilities and means of participation, learning, and development of students with disabilities, provided that activities and strategies that consider the singularities of these students are made available. On the other hand, we can see in the results obtained in the study by Silva and Souza (2005), the teachers questioned stated that they have problems and difficulties in dealing with students with disabilities. They also emphasize that the inclusion of these students is far from achieving what is advocated by the school inclusion policy.

Souza and Boato (2009), in a study that addresses the conceptions and attitudes of Physical Education teachers regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in the classes of this discipline, in regular education, as well as the training of these teachers to deal with the inclusion process in their classes, concluded that the conceptions and attitudes of the teachers surveyed are contradictory, divided between positive towards inclusion and biased towards segregation. Some teachers said they had no problems working with students with disabilities, but most of them pointed out that they had problems in dealing with them. There were teachers who attributed this difficulty to a lack of professional preparation, saying that they were not prepared.

It is inferred that the teacher Lurdes may not be proposing effective pedagogical activities for the student Ana Laura, for the same reasons of the teachers of the studies mentioned. As Vygotsky (1997) states, the development of the disabled person, as well as of all people, is guided by the principle of the social nature of development. What makes it different is that the person with disabilities needs different paths and auxiliary resources for them to have access and possibilities of learning and development, so we deduce that the student Ana Laura would need a look aimed at these different paths.

## **Episode II**

The desks are all lined up. Ana Laura is sitting at the fourth desk in the first row, from left to right. After the teacher calls out, she addresses the students:

Teacher Lurdes: Hey, here in the box there are magazines, checkers and chess boards.

The teacher keeps making notes in the class diary. Then some students get up to get the materials, some get a checkerboard, others get magazines, and some students keep talking among themselves. Ana Laura, at this moment, remains seated at her desk, lying with her head down and her arms on the table. After about twenty minutes, the teacher addresses Ana Laura.

Teacher Lurdes: Hey, Ana Laura. Take a magazine here.

Ana Laura gets up and goes to the teacher's table, where the box with the materials is, picks up a magazine and goes back to her desk. After this, Ana Laura spent a short time leafing through the magazine, not showing much interest. After ten minutes, she lies down on her desk again (excerpted from the field diary).

At first, we observe Ana Laura's posture and her relationship with her peers. She remains practically during the whole class, lying down on the desk, a posture opposite to the other students, who interact with each other. Ana Laura doesn't talk to her classmates or to the teacher, and they don't look for her either. Then it is noticed that the teacher addresses the other students, asking them to get the materials proposed for the class, and

twenty minutes after the beginning of the proposed activity, the teacher addresses Ana Laura so she can get the materials. Finally, we can see Ana Laura's lack of interest and motivation to do the activity, since she observed the magazine in a mechanical way, not showing much interest.

In view of the propositions of the cultural-historical perspective on the developmental conditions of people with disabilities, I understand that for Ana Laura to participate in the activity might have required another look from her peers and from the teacher. The fact that the teacher only proposes an activity, without developing it together with the students, is not enough for this student to participate and appropriate the culturally developed knowledge.

Vygotsky (1997) argues that man develops through culture, social interaction, relationships with others and with the environment in which he is inserted. Thus, it can be seen that, in this episode, the student Ana Laura needs more frequent and intentional interactions with the social group, so that she can develop.

Saviani (2008) discusses the exclusionary inclusion, which manifests itself and covers the educational area. The author reports a government strategy, which consists in including students in the school educational system, which increases the statistics and numbers of students inserted into the school. However, these students, although they are included in school, are not able to appropriate the minimum necessary school contents and, thus, obtain success in the labor market and active participation in society, what he calls "exclusionary inclusion".

#### Modes of interaction between student and researcher: moment of intervention

## Episode I

Today I proposed an activity to the class. After explaining the activity, the students started the modality of resistance running activity that was based on running around the court. I set a time of five minutes of light running, without interruption, and demonstrated to the students what a light run would be (around 8km/h), always observing and respecting the characteristics and limits of each one. Ana Laura started the race very fast, motivated by the competition. She ran at a very fast pace during the first two minutes and then stopped, "closed her face", looking nervous and went towards the bleachers to sit down. At this moment I was timing the students in the group. Seeing that Ana Laura was going to sit down, I asked the teacher to continue timing the students so that I could talk to her. The teacher readily and kindly accepted and continued marking the times, and so I addressed Ana Laura

Pesq.: Hey, Ana Laura, why did you sit down? No sitting down, the class is not over yet, let's do the lesson.

Ana Laura: I can't do it anymore, I'm dead. Pesq.: Yes, you can, come on! Go on, get up!

Ana Laura: I can't.

Pesq.: Yes, you can, come on. I'll run with you. Ana Laura: Are you going? Then, I'll go. (Smiling)

Pesq.: Come on. Let's go, go, come on!

This dialogue lasted about a minute. After which Ana Laura and I went on the run, picking up where she had left off. I explained to the student that she got tired quickly because she had started running at a very fast pace. I also explained that this was the difference between endurance running and speed running. We ran for another two minutes, when she started to get tired again, wanting to stop, until at a certain moment she stopped and put her hands on her knees.

Ana Laura: I can't take it anymore, Teacher.

Pesq.: Yes, you can, come on. I am marking the clock, there is less than a minute left, let's go. Ana Laura: I can't, I'm dead.

Pesq.: Yes, you can, just a little more, come on.

Then, I took Ana Laura's right hand, and we started to run lightly. After a couple of meters, I accelerated the pace a little, and she followed me, running again, thus managing to cover the estimated time for the activity. (excerpt from the field diary).

It is observed in this episode some questions about the participation of the student Ana Laura, her classmates, and the ways used by the researcher to perform an intervention with the student. I emphasize Ana Laura's participation in the practical lesson of Physical Education held in the court and her motivation in relation to the activity proposed by the researcher.

As Vygotsky (1993) points out, motivation is a higher psychic function, which is constituted in social relations, that is, it is not something inherent in the subject (the subject may or may not be born with a tendency to stay motivated), it is something that depends on the social situation, on the relations established with others. In this way, the constitution of the subject as a historical and cultural being happens through the integration of the affective and cognitive dimensions.

Thus, we can point out that if the teacher doesn't interact with Ana Laura, doesn't point paths, concrete goals, and doesn't make intentional pedagogical interventions, the student will not be motivated to do the activity, and if there is no meaning in doing the activity, the motivation will not occur. In this way, the student will always be unmotivated to participate in class.

During the beginning of the activity, the student was very motivated, showing enthusiasm for the proposed activity, but at no time interacted with her classmates. In a second moment, during the activity, Ana Laura had difficulties, showing physical fatigue and, for this reason, she stopped and went to sit on the bleachers, irritated for not being able to complete the race. In a third moment of the episode, the researcher, upon noticing the discouragement, frustration and the difficulty found by the student, went to meet her, intervening with her, talking and motivating her to return to the court and continue the activity, with his help.

Based on the idea discussed by Vygotsky (1991), in which the author points out that learning and development do not happen from the direct action of the subject on the object of knowledge, but based on an action mediated by another, we understand that the researcher played a significant role, intervening in the student's action, so that she could continue the activity.

In this episode, the teacher's importance for students to participate in class is clear. Ana Laura needed the intervention and encouragement of the researcher and pedagogical activities that motivated her to participate; activities that are part of and indicated in the Teacher's Guidebook, Volume I, for 7th grade.

#### **Episode II**

On this day I proposed the activity of working on the basketball finishing principle, whose purpose would be to shoot the ball into the hoop. Since the school's court has no hoop, the goal would be just to throw the ball into the hoop. Some students managed to shoot the ball perfectly, others not. Ana Laura found it difficult, because she couldn't propel the ball to reach the table. She made three attempts, but none of them were successful. So, I intervened with the student, so she could throw the ball.

Pesq.: Ana Laura, let's try to do it this way. Put your hands one on top of the other (I demonstrated the movement of the hands). Now, when it is time to throw, try to propel the ball with both hands, not with just one, as you are doing. Come on, go.

Ana Laura: Okay. Let's try.

Ana Laura throws the ball towards the table, still not achieving the proposed goal.

Pesq.: Come on. One more time.

Ana Laura again throws the ball and, this time, the ball touches the table, although it was not the way I wanted it to be thrown. Ana Laura throws the ball for three more tries and, in the fourth, she manages to throw the ball as I had proposed.

Pesq.: You see how you can do it, just push the ball a little harder.

Ana Laura: (Just smiles).

Pesq.: (Touches Ana Laura's right hand as a greeting sign).

Ana Laura: (Touches the researcher's hand, smiling). (Excerpt from the field diary).

As already mentioned, studies have pointed out the problems that Brazilian schools have faced in this regard, in general, lack of physical structure and lack of materials (CANESTRARO; ZULAI; KOGUT, 2008; FALKENBACH; RISSI, 2011; PALMA; LEHNHARD, 2012). This problem is even more striking in Physical Education classes, in which teachers "need" these materials so that they can propose pedagogical practices appropriate to the objectives of the subject.

Canestraro, Zulai and Kogut (2008), when investigating the main difficulties encountered by Physical Education teachers in elementary school, highlight as the biggest one, among them, the lack of structure of the school, both problems of physical structure and of almost always precarious materials. They also emphasize that

teachers feel hindered by the lack of support from the school, so that they can develop their pedagogical activities effectively.

Cruz and Neto (2013) point out that, given this situation, it is extremely important that teachers, parents, students and other members of society seek to be informed and participate in school life, claiming, presenting suggestions, questions and solutions, so that a society without injustice can be built, and ways can be found for this reality, mentioned here, to be changed. The authors also point out that for students with disabilities to have access to Physical Education classes, it is necessary to overcome this reality by creating a school environment which provides an adequate physical structure, with adapted materials and teachers trained to work with these students.

Physical Education presupposes working with multiple knowledge about the body and movement (BRASIL, 1998). It is considered fundamental to Physical Education cultural activities for the purposes of leisure, expression of feelings, recovery, maintenance, and promotion of health. In Physical Education, it is necessary that the student is guaranteed practical and conceptual knowledge in his learning.

To this end, it is important to change the emphasis on physical fitness and physical performance. A more comprehensive conception is required, involving all dimensions of body practice. It is also important to make it clear that the goals of school Physical Education are not the same as those of sports and dance. Physical Education aims to give equal rights and opportunities to all students, so that they can develop their potentialities, training them to become autonomous, organized, and critical citizens who know how to respect each other.

Dainez (2009) points out that the concept of compensation, discussed by Vygotsky, should not be seen only on the sensory and organic level. That is, we should direct our attention to a compensation focused on historical, cultural, and social aspects. The author discusses that the compensation occurs by means of language, of a social and signaling mediation, which seeks to constitute the subjectivity of the person with disability, and this needs to be developed according to their concrete life conditions.

In this same perspective, Góes (2002) points out the attribution of a central role to the other and to language in the compensatory possibilities of people with disabilities. For the author, in the educational field, the teacher must promote the use of language as an alternative path for students with disabilities. Language has meaning when it corresponds to something experienced by the student and that makes sense to him.

It is important to point out that in the episode above, the researcher seeks ways for the student to participate he guides the student to do it in another way, the movement, insists that the student does it, and encourages her to participate. Thus, through gestures and words - semiotic instruments - Ana Laura can perform the activity.

### **IV. Conclusion**

In this text, I sought to understand the conditions of participation of a student with intellectual disability during Physical Education classes in the context of regular school. It was discussed and these relations facing the inclusion process, based on the propositions of Vygotsky's cultural-historical perspective and contemporary authors.

Through the analysis, it was identified that the teacher organized her classes, offering the students repetitive contents and activities that were not part of the pedagogical activities proposed and indicated for the 7th grade of elementary school by the Teacher's Notebook of the state of São Paulo.

I also emphasize the lack of effective participation of the teacher during the classes, since, in several moments, she just distributed the materials and left the room, leaving the students alone. There was no movement on the teacher's part to integrate Ana Laura into the activities. It was not the purpose of this study to investigate the teacher and her history of training and performance, since we do not have elements to discuss her motivations for doing her job.

It is also analyzed that all the students in the class, including Ana Laura, participated in the activities proposed and conducted by the researcher. The student, in some moments, found it difficult to carry out the activities, but ended up doing them, as well as getting in touch with her classmates, based on the researcher's deliberate interventions. This study made it possible to reflect on the inclusion of students with disabilities in the school environment.

I understand that for school inclusion to occur and the possibility of effective participation of students with disabilities during Physical Education classes, concrete teaching opportunities are necessary, through differentiated methods, objectives, and pedagogical actions that respect the individuality of the student, taking into account his social and cultural reality. Thus, with pedagogical planning and intentional action by the teacher, it becomes possible to carry out a school inclusion project that aims at the cultural development provided by the discipline of Physical Education.

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