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## **Between Policies and Practices: The Challenges of Inclusive Education in Brazil**

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to present the second edition of the Special Education Dossier: Differences, Curriculum and Teaching and Learning Processes. We discuss policies and practices regarding the inclusive education proposal in the Basic Education context. Our starting point is the idea that we are facing a global education policy and thus many local movements are raised in states and municipalities to implement it.

**Keywords:** education policy; basic education; inclusive education

### **Entre la Política y la Práctica: Los Desafíos de la Educación Inclusiva en Brasil**

**Resumen:** Este artículo tiene como objetivo presentar la segunda edición del Dossier de Educación Especial: diferencias, el currículo y los procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje. Se discuten las políticas y prácticas relativas a la propuesta de la educación inclusiva en el contexto de la Educación Básica. Partimos de la idea de que estamos frente a una política educativa global y, como tal, muchos movimientos locales se activan en los estados y municipios para implementarlo.

**Palabras clave:** política educativa; educación básica; educación inclusiva

### **Entre Políticas e Práticas: Os Desafios da Educação Inclusiva no Brasil**

**Resumo:** O presente artigo objetiva apresentar a segunda edição do Dossiê Educação Especial: diferenças, currículo e processos de ensino e aprendizagem. Discutimos as políticas e as práticas relativas à proposta de educação inclusiva no contexto da Educação Básica. Partimos da ideia de que estamos diante de uma política educacional global e, como tal, inúmeros movimentos locais são desencadeados em estados e municípios para implementá-la.

**Palavras-chave:** política educacional; educação básica; educação inclusiva

## **What Do We Still Need to Say About Inclusive Education Policies?**

The neo-liberalism I describe is often mundane and certainly not of a piece. Certainly I do not find it easy to condemn as a matter of course programmes and initiatives which offer access to education to children who otherwise have no opportunity to attend school. Also, as I say several times below, we as yet know little about ‘what is really going on’. Again this is a plea for more research so that we might be a little clearer about what we think. We are faced with deciding in ‘conditions of undecidability’ [...], as well as being positioned in all of this, being complicit, imbricated and compromised. (Ball, 2012, p. xiii)

All legal and political movements on Inclusive Education in Brazil in the last two decades are a good example of global policies that national states are being called to respond to due to supranational agendas and a whole set of external forces to countries and their territories.

As Hostins and Garay point out,

These new influences and interests are an indicative of changes in material and discursive terrain of education policies on a global scale or what Lingard, Creagh and Vass (2012, p. 315) call ‘global policy field’, which have significant implications for the design of education policies in the country (p. 3).

In addition, Education as big business, or on Ball’s (2014) terms as a Global Education Inc., has transformed the very formulation of policies in education, consolidating businesses that have specialized in selling and exporting education policies, especially for periphery countries that still need to solve their major educational problems.

Thus, the “game” has started and it is up to us researchers in the field to investigate this reality through our researches, responding to Ball’s call in this paper epigraph. As he explains, it is not about raising suspicion, specifically in our case, on policies that have made the public school more public and have, in some cases of Inclusive Education, assumed a repairing policy character, through a process of exclusion, explicitly assumed by the State in the form of laws and regulations and only recently have made school access as a civil right and a responsibility of the State possible. Indeed, it is about trying to understand how states and municipalities have responded to policy and curriculum determination that are often addressed to local actors through forces and supranational networks.

It is in this perspective that the purpose of this *Special Education: Differences, Curriculum and Teaching and Learning Process II* falls, bringing together texts that analyze policy context and intricacies of curricular practices. The proposal is to put focus on Inclusive Education and objectively involve us in this process.

In this sense, the papers analyze Inclusive Education policies and practices in Brazil, specifically developed within what we call Basic Education. In fact, Basic Education as a concept was made official by the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDB, Law no. 9394 of 12/29/1996). Since then it has been promulgated a set of guidelines and resolutions, in order to make this right accessible to all people.

The idea of basic, as Cury (2008) highlights, comes from the conception of basic, synonymous of structure, on which all education that leads to citizenship must be based. In his words:

School education, therefore, is held as public good, of own character, because it is itself a citizen. And as it implies citizenship in its conscious exercise, as it qualifies for the world of work, as it is free and compulsory in elementary education, as it is free and progressively mandatory in high school, as early childhood education is also a right, basic education is a role of the State. And as this is a legally protected right, especially as subjective public right in elementary education, it is necessary that it must be guaranteed and surrounded by all conditions. (Cury, 2008, p. 296)

Therefore, the concept of Basic Education as right is accompanied by two other dimensions, indispensable for its realization: the idea of a common education and respect for difference. The concept of common in this case is associated with the notion of universal, consistent with the prospect of valid knowledge learning to anyone and everyone following the cultural heritage notion that deserves to be shared. Linked to this, the notion of difference was also incorporated. According to the same author:

The link between basic dimension and the concept of common, in education, carries its own meaning. Common is opposed to a specific education (vocational education type), of class (that constitutes a privilege) or that carries any differential even lawful (confessional school). The notion of common associated to basic education is a right (opposed to privilege) and searches, in its universal openness, valid knowledge learning to anyone and everyone, responds to educational needs of human development as cultural heritage. 'Common' goes beyond 'for all', referring to scientific knowledge, equality, democracy, citizenship and human rights.

(...) But the basic education concept also incorporated to itself, by law, the difference as a right. The legislation, thanks to extensive process of mobilization, dissemination of a new consciousness, reviewed the situations of discriminated minorities and sought to establish a higher ethical principle: legal order incorporated the right to difference. Basic education, as it is a privileged moment in which equality intersects with equity, took upon itself the legal formalization of assisting certain social groups, such as people with special educational needs, Afro-descendants, who must be individuals of a stereotype, prejudice and discrimination deconstruction, both through the socializing role of school and its role to provide scientific, truthful and meaningful knowledge. Young people and adults who did not have the opportunity to scholarization at the right age can and should be subject to their own pedagogical model and supported with features that make them restart their schooling without the shadow of another failure. Indigenous communities have also to be subject of a special model of school, equipped with resources and respect for their specific cultural identity. The recognition of differences at this moment of

schooling is consistent with the acknowledgment of equality. (Cury, 2008, pp. 300-301)

In this sense, over the past two decades, in Brazil, public policies in education have been established with the aim of reducing inequalities in the educational path among all segments of society. Even if such issues have appeared to some extent in the curricular movements raised nationwide, it was after LDB that Basic Education is emerging as a right, anchored in the principle of welfare and respect for diversity.

The national movement of building the Curriculum Standards culminated in 2010 with the attempt to build a National Educational System. As the guidelines explain:

It is urgent to bring to the debate the principles and practices of a social inclusion process that ensures access and considers human, social, cultural, economic diversity of groups historically excluded. These are the issues of class, gender, race, ethnicity, generation, consisting of categories that are intertwined in social life - the poor, women, Afro-descendants, indigenous, disabled, rural populations, those of different sexual orientations, sheltered people, those living on the streets, deprived of their freedom – everyone that comprises the diversity that is the Brazilian society and is starting to be addressed by public policies. (Brasil, 2010, p. 17)

With that the Guidelines raised an elaboration movement of specific documents in order to guarantee the right to diversity. Among the set of Curriculum Standards published for that purpose, we highlight the following:

- Operational Standards for specialized education services in Basic Education, Special Education mode.
- National Standards for young and adults' education in situation of detention in prisons.
- National Curriculum Standards for Indigenous School Education.
- Standards for the school education care of children, adolescents and young people in roaming situation.
- National Curriculum Standards for *Quilombola* School Education.
- National Curriculum Standards for Racial and Ethnic Relation Education and History and Afro-Brazilian and African Culture teaching.
- National Standards for Education in Human Rights.
- National Curriculum Standards for Rural Education.

Therefore, consolidating Basic Education in the last decades was the great political effort of several social and political agents in the country with the intention of ensuring the right of all citizens to free, quality, public education.

The municipalities, the smallest political entities of the Federation, before the regulations and national orientations, were forced to choose the possible paths before their local realities, seeking to adequate the education systems to this new reality. In this sense, we must also say that it is in the municipalities that many of the agents who have claimed for the expansion and dissemination of education policies these days operate more intensely. These education policies aim to improve the quality of basic education, such as social movements, trade unions, NGOs and other agents resulting from the civil society organization sensitive to the challenges of thinking and doing public education. Thus, the comprehension of the contradictions, limits and possibilities of Inclusive Education and more specifically Special Education depends on the analysis of the entanglement in which such initiatives are immersed.

In addition to these local challenges, we cannot lose sight of Ball's warning (2012, p. 114/115):

In education, policy transfer, policy colonisation and policy convergence are all being effected here, through the writing of policy, policy consultancy and recommendations, policy influence, the selling of management and improvement products, and the growth and spread of multinational service providers with standardised methods and contents at various levels of policy. New policy relationships and spaces and media are constituted and used to re-embed mobile policies and their attendant discourses in national territories. Concomitantly, public services are being redesigned or modernised [...] to meet the needs of the neo-liberal state, although, at the same time, national governments, especially those of small and fragile states, may be experiencing a reduction in their capacity to steer their education systems [...]. Through all of this, and despite the interpretation and modification of policy products at national and local levels (which I have not attended to here) there is clearly now something we can call 'global education policy' – a generic set of concepts, language and practices that is recognisable in various forms and is for sale!

We can see we still have much to say about these policies. The challenge of understanding them is just beginning!

### **Regarding Policies and Practices: What Do the Texts of This Dossier Tell Us?**

Our second dossier on the same theme reflects on how fertile and urgent the matter is in the research field. The choice to unfold the texts in two dossiers is due to the fact of the significant number of qualified papers received. We had sixteen papers accepted for publication in the Journal, eight of which were published in the first edition and eight are being published in this second.

The first article, 'School inclusion policy and curricular practices: pedagogical strategies for conceptual elaboration of the Special Education target audience', by Hostins and Jordão, discusses the curricular practices and schooling processes directed to students of Special Education, through the implementation of school inclusion policies. Based on the historical-cultural perspective, the paper shows how these practices are materialized and transformed at the school environment through conceptions historically built on the learning (im)possibility of these individuals, particularly the ones with intellectual disabilities. Also, the paper highlights the contradictions, divisions and fragility of school inclusion policy to effectively ensure the construction of scientific knowledge. In this regard, the data of their applied research show also possible ways of transforming the curricular practices and the development prospects of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

In the paper 'Continuing professional development of Special Education public managers: local policies for school inclusion', Jesus, Pantaleão and Almeida discuss local possibilities of transformation of school practices through the implementation of public policies. To this end, through a collaborative, critical action research, the authors offer continuing professional development strategies to public managers based on the principles of school inclusion. The results indicate, among other things, the importance of local actions to promote knowledge and procedures to organize ways and practices of collective management. They also emphasize the importance of joint actions between university and local school systems. Finally, the authors show the contributions of this research methodology for necessary conceptual changes in public policies and managers' ways of acting in the field of Special Education in the perspective of Inclusive Education.

Yet, regarding curricular practices, Freitas and Rech present the article 'School enrichment activities as strategy to contribute to school inclusion of high ability and gifted students'. The authors advocate not only the registration of high ability students in regular schools, but also enriched curricular practices, thus ensuring the educational rights of these individuals. In this sense, through a qualitative research, the authors showed local problems that are still faced in different

regions of Brazil in relation to education of students with high abilities that remain largely invisible in the classroom. The text covers also the possibilities of curriculum enrichment to ensure the full development of gifted students, aspect not much discussed in researches and national debates.

Another little investigated issue in Brazil concerns the learning evaluation of students with intellectual disabilities. This is the focus of the paper 'Literacy and intellectual disabilities: perspectives on inclusive context', in which Oliveira presents data from an investigation into the performance of students with intellectual disabilities in literacy phase. The results point to the learning possibilities of these individuals and the difficulties faced every day at school to ensure effective practices that promote reading and writing.

In the paper 'Comparative study of school inclusion policy for students with physical disabilities in three Brazilian municipalities', Andrade and Mendes focus on the barriers faced by students with physical disabilities enrolled in regular schools. The results, among other aspects, show the range of barriers faced by students in their daily lives. Nevertheless, the qualitative analysis of the reports of the study participants, the school inclusion policy is evaluated as positive. Yet, according to the authors, researches of this nature become increasingly necessary to evaluate in large scale the impact of education policies on schools and on the lives of the individuals for whom they are designed.

The implementation of policies for Inclusive Education was also focus of Castro and Vaz's paper: 'Teachers in specialized education services: responsibilities and impossibilities'. Through document analysis, interviews and field observations, the paper discusses the possibilities and impossibilities of implementation of inclusion policies from the performance of teachers in the so-called Multimedia rooms of specialized education services of Florianópolis, State of Santa Catarina. The authors argue that the lack of investment in teachers impacts negatively the development and implementation of strategies that promote inclusion.

Entitled 'Use of graphic systems in the regular classroom routine with students with disabilities', Deliberato and Nunes show the importance of adapting the school environment within the diversity of students present in this context, as well as they describe the use of graphic systems in the routine of an Early Childhood Education class through the collaborative work between researcher, teacher and students. The results of this intervention research indicate that children made use of the graphic system, which helped positively on the routine planning and pedagogical actions developed in class. The research also highlighted the need for intervention programs in schools to ensure inclusion through the promotion of social and school development of students with disabilities.

Finally, the paper 'Special Education in inclusive perspective: implications for teacher's work articulated with High School and technology education', Costas and Honnef discuss the limitations and possibilities of collaborative work between the teacher of regular class and Special Education with regard to planning, development and evaluation of the class. The research was conducted in a high school and a federal technology institution in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Preliminary results indicate the importance of joint working between teachers with general and specialized education, as well as point to obstacles to be overcome in order to mobilize practices that enable student learning. Also, they show the widespread idea of inclusion in the school context without proper financial investment to secure it effectively.

From different theoretical and methodological perspectives, the set of papers that make up this dossier raises numerous challenges to be faced by the education policies at the federal, state and municipal levels to ensure teaching and learning processes with promotion of students' growth. Also, the set illustrates the problems and strategies found in different contexts to increase educational rights of students in Special Education.

We hope the papers presented in this dossier raise questions and reflections on the ways and challenges of Inclusive Education policies and their implementation in school practices of a country as large, populous and diverse as Brazil.

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