

Inclusive education in times of pandemic: a comparative case study

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Abstract

The article documents a comparative case study research in basic education classes in a municipality in Bahia and another in Minas Gerais. It addresses remote activities in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, a period that brought even greater difficulty to inclusive school work, according to the research data itself. Documentary and bibliographic research was used, as well as an electronic questionnaire to collect data, being the descriptive method used to report practices in the school environment. In the end, difficulties and some advances in including school work are pointed out.

Keywords: remote teaching; basic education; inclusive education; COVID-19.

Introdução

Education, recognized worldwide as a driving force that instructs humanity and valuably contributes to the formation of subjects, whether within the family and/or in an institutionalized way, establishes relationships and promotes bonds that are capable of significantly transform people's lives. In this sense, it is understood as an instance of a high and priority order for society since childhood.

Over time, research, on-site observations, regulations, resolutions, in short, a range of materials was institutionalized and launched, whose purpose is primarily aimed at the qualification of the teaching and learning process in the segments and modalities in which education is subdivided. According to Nóvoa (2009, p. 31),

The new types of teaching professionalism imply a reinforcement of the collective and collaborative dimensions, of teamwork, of joint intervention in school educational projects. Professional practice is increasingly organized around “communities of practice”, within each school, but also in the context of pedagogical movements that bind us to dynamics that go beyond organizational boundaries.

In reiterating the author’s words, it is relevant to highlight the constant search for education, in an instance of incessant valuation, to be constantly seeking improvement so that the prerogatives arising from the real demands of the present day are met.

In view of the scenario in which institutionalized education is organized, using the regular classroom environment, the format of various desks and chairs in a place for several people to gather, the social relationships established in schoolyards, cafeterias, among other spaces, translate the core of what the school really is, what it represents for society. According to Libâneo (2001, p. 1):

It is always useful to distinguish, in studying this matter, a scientific-rational approach and a critical, socio-political approach. [...] In the first approach, the school organization is taken as an objective, neutral, technical reality that works rationally; therefore, it can be planned, organized and controlled in order to achieve higher levels of effectiveness and efficiency. [...] The second approach looks at the school organization basically as a system that aggregates people, where the intentionality and social interactions that take place between them, the socio-political context, etc. assume key roles. School organization would not be a completely objective and functional thing, a neutral element to be observed, but a social construction made by teachers, students, parents and members of the surrounding community.

In 2020, more precisely in the first half of the year, the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus impacted not only the educational scenario, but also the social spheres worldwide due to the spread of a pandemic situation that led to health, economic, social and political crises. In this regard, Magalhães (2020, p. 205-206) notes:

The social transformations in the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic since the beginning of 2020 have caused changes in several areas of society, of proportions that are still impossible to measure. The need to impose social distancing practices to control and reduce the contagion of the disease drastically impacted basic sectors of the structure of capitalism, such as the economy, health and education.

Thus, this culminated in an educational scenario that, regrettably, forced educational institutions to organize themselves so as not to stop them from serving students. To this end, amid the uncertainties brought about by this pandemic scenario, most educational institutions chose to adopt remote education in view of the mandatory social distance imposed. Educators, schools, fathers, mothers, students, they all had to build a new teaching and learning model in the midst of this new scenario of possibilities and difficulties.

Inserted in this scenario, researchers sought to investigate how educational units selected for the study were organized to offer an inclusive education, even if remotely. In this process, the challenges faced by the management, teaching and pedagogical teams, their inventiveness, as well as the measures used to solve the identified problems were evidenced.

It is extremely important to emphasize the definition of inclusive education used in this article, having as a reference the one brought in the Salamanca Statement, instituted by Unesco:

The guiding principle that informs this Framework is that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups. These conditions create a range of different challenges to school systems. In the context of this Framework, the term 'special educational needs' refers to all those children and youth whose needs arise from disabilities or learning difficulties (UNITED NATIONS, 1994).

Inclusive education is not aimed only at students with motor, sensory or cognitive disabilities, but at all those who need intervention, within or not the school environment, for different reasons, as presented in the Salamanca Statement.

The selected educational institutions are part of the social context of the researchers and are remarkably relevant to the community to which they belong, and so this work's content brings the restlessness experienced in everyday life, thus motivating a research and the desire for plausible answers and conditions for a beneficial intervention. And, to that effect, easy access to institutions was used to conduct the research.

Brief history of educational legislation with a focus on the inclusive approach in the educational process

Going through the history of the human educational process, we came across several models, which varied according to time and society. In this sense, it is crucial to follow the challenges arising from contemporaneity, as well as to seek training that contributes to transforming and meeting the precepts necessary for a life in society in an equitable way. The school pattern has always followed the conceptions and stigmas of social organizations in line with their time. It should be noted that the conceptions regarding what is normal and what is anomalous have always existed and proved to be specific. Thus, we can define the representation of human subjectivity through societies as: exclusive, segregative, integrative and inclusive.

In the last century, the debate on inclusion gained greater projection, becoming a recurring agenda in academic studies and discussions, in view of the notoriety that

exclusion could not be conceived as a central axis of the school environment as in past centuries. As highlighted by Silva (2015, p. 83),

The sense of quality in basic education implies, therefore, the social transformation of reality in the full construction of citizenship and in the protection of human rights, through the development of political-pedagogical project plans that include all students in an efficient and effective learning process. [...] The universalization of access, permanence and school success implies expanding and qualifying education at all levels, stages and modalities.

The 20th century was a turning point regarding visibility. We can mention as documents that guide the construction of an education system for all: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which establishes, in its article 26, the universal right to education; the Jomtien Declaration (1990), in which Brazil assumes the responsibility of eradicating illiteracy in the country; the Salamanca Statement (1994), whose central agenda was access, quality and due attention to those of special education; and the Guatemala Convention (1999), which stipulates the eradication of stereotypes and prejudice against people with disabilities.

With regard to legislation at the national level, several changes were adopted throughout that century, such as Law No. 4.024/61, which provides that “the education of those exceptional should, as far as possible, fit into the general education system, in order to integrate them into the community” (BRAZIL, 1961), and Decree No. 72.425/1973, which created the Centro Nacional de Educação Especial (National Center for Special Education) (CENESP) (BRAZIL, 1973). However, greater importance must be given to the advances provided in the Brazilian Constitution. In its Article 205, the Federal Constitution makes it clear that education is a right for all (BRASIL, 1988). Santos and Barbosa (2016) list the national documents that were related to special and inclusive education in force until 2016, shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – National public policies for people with disabilities

National legislation for inclusive-approach, special education			
Legislation	What?	For whom?	Where?
Federal Constitution of 1988	Specialized educational service	People with disabilities	Preferably in the regular school system
Statute of the Child and Adolescent, chapter IV, Law No. 8.069/1990	Specialized educational service	People with disabilities	Preferably in the regular school system
National Education Guidelines and Framework Law No. 9.394/1996	Special education	Students with special needs	Regular school network (preferably), special classes or special schools

National Guidelines for Special Education in Basic Education – Res. CNE 2/2001	Special education	People with special needs	Ordinary classes, special classes or special schools
National Education Plan – PNE, Law No. 10.172/2001	Special education	People with special needs	Ordinary classes, special classes or special schools
National Policy for Special Education from the perspective of Inclusive Education – CNE Res. No. 04/2009	Specialized educational service	Target audience of special education (students with disabilities, pervasive developmental disorders, and highly skilled/gifted)	Public schools, specialized educational service centers, public or affiliated
Decree No. 7.611/2011	Specialized educational service	Students with disabilities, pervasive developmental disorders, and highly skilled or gifted	Multifunctional resource rooms, accessibility centers
Law No. 13.146/2015	Specialized educational service	People with disabilities	Inclusive systems at all levels

Source: Santos and Barbosa (2016, p. 53).

As shown, the National Legislation for Special and Inclusive Education is advocated through laws, guidelines, the Constitution, and statute. In this sense, these contributions are understood as support for actions concerning inclusion, since, through the organizational understanding of public policies, it is possible to understand the documents that guide current practices (SANTOS; BARBOSA, 2016). However, beyond regulations and guidelines, it is crucial to strive for these documents to be materialized in local areas and in such a way that they actually reach students who yearn to find, in the school space, a place of reception, understanding, for overcoming barriers and to develop their potential through inclusive educational practices.

For this to become real, many obstacles need to be overcome so that the actions may truly be implemented; the limits comprise situations of a physical nature that extends to administrative, curricular, political spheres, in short, a series of macro factors that need to be articulated in a unison perspective so that the legislation overcomes the cold place of the regulation and achieves what it proposes: the school environment.

Methodological procedures

The research used an electronic form in the Google Forms platform as an instrument for data collection with the subjects. For data analysis and interpretation of the reality of the institutions surveyed, the descriptive method was used, since “research of this type has, as its primary objective, the description of the characteristics of a certain population or phenomenon or the establishment of relationships between variables” (GIL, 2008, p. 28). The descriptive process that will be carried out in this study must be at the level of materialization of an investigation that will certainly be able to contribute effectively and successfully, both to the scientific sphere (universities and others), and to the educational units that were willing to collaborate with said study.

The research is identified as a case study, with a preliminary documentary and bibliographic phase. According to Merriam (1988 apud BOGDAN; BIKLEN, 1994, p. 89), the case study “consists in the detailed observation of a context, or individual, of a single source of documents or of a specific event”. Therefore, this type of procedure is relevant as we will focus on the analysis of the context to understand the particularities and impacts of remote teaching on the teaching-learning process of students with disabilities, especially during the atypical school period brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

For data collection, the electronic form met all prerogatives described in Circular Letter No. 1/2021-CONEP/SECNS/MS, of March 3, 2021, in particular its items 2.1 and 2.1.1.¹ In the invitation sent to the research subjects, the researchers clarified the need for a careful reading of the Free and Informed Consent Form (ICF) before deciding to participate in the research. The research project was submitted to Plataforma Brasil and approved by the Ethics Committee for Research with Human Beings of the Municipal Health Department of the city of Betim-MG.²

The research environments

This research had two public schools as the locus of investigation: the Escola Estadual Guilhermino de Oliveira, located in the municipality of Contagem, in Minas Gerais, and the Colégio Municipal Tamburi, in the municipality of Marcionílio Souza, in Bahia.

Escola Estadual Guilhermino de Oliveira is located in the urban area of Contagem, a municipality that, according to the last Census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics - IBGE (2010), has a population of 603,442 inhabitants. The school is considered easy to locate and provides the necessary structure for the development of the research, as it offers the Integral School Program for Elementary School: 6th and 7th grades, final grades of elementary school (6th to 9th grade) and high school (1st, 2nd and 3rd grades), serving students residing in the vicinity of the school and in surrounding neighborhoods. During this research, the institution was developing its pedagogical activities remotely.

The school today has students with an average age between 11 and 18 years old, with 663 enrolled and attending. The socioeconomic profile of the families served is quite diverse, with a large part situated on minimum income, with 50% of the students depending on social projects (such as Bolsa Escola),³ that aid them in purchasing school supplies.

Currently, the institution has two students with special needs who are followed up by support teachers. The school has a physical structure and furniture suitable for all students. It is important to emphasize that it is located in an area of social vulnerability.

The socioeconomic profile of the families served is quite diverse, with a large part situated on minimum income

About Colégio Municipal Tamburi, its name has a very strong meaning, as it refers to the name of a tree present in the region, since the emergence of the village, and which was also the name of the settlement of that time, which belonged to the city of Maracás-BA. According to historical data, the construction of the railway began in 1850, so a railway station was built next to the great Tamburi tree, acting as a reference for the drovers who passed through the place to rest. In 1962, the old town was emancipated and named after a colonel with political influence in the region: Marcionílio Souza.

Given the significance of the tree in the foundation of the municipality, its name was chosen for the school founded in 2000. A few years later, the management team at the time took the initiative to plant a seedling in front of the school, and it is still alive to this day.

This is a medium-sized educational institution, with 494 students regularly enrolled, located in the downtown of the city, being the largest school in the municipal network, both in physical structure and in terms of the number of students and teachers. It serves the final years of elementary school (6th to 9th grade) in the municipality and the education of youth and adults – initial and final years of elementary school (1st to 9th grade).

Still about Tamburi, the service to students who live in rural areas close to the city stands out significantly, as well as to students who are close to a situation of social vulnerability. Due to such specificities, it also explains the high percentage of students who do not have access to the internet (quality or none) and electronic equipment (cell phones, tablets, computers, among others), which further points out challenges for the implementation of remote education during the pandemic period.

Colégio Municipal Tamburi has seven students who submitted a medical report specifying special educational needs. A few years ago, the institution received equipment from the federal government to work with inclusive education, such as computer equipment, and a specific room was organized already at the beginning.

The materials were not properly used and, therefore, remain in the school, but they are still not used with the desired frequency

However, due to the lack of adequate continuing training for handling, the materials were not properly used and, therefore, remain in the school, but they are still not used with the desired frequency.

About three years ago, a professional (teacher from the municipal education network with a degree in Psychopedagogy – lato sensu specialization) was provided for specialized educational service in a network, which included Colégio Tamburi. During this period, the partnership with the Social Assistance Reference Center (CRAS) was also strengthened, with the objective of providing better service to students. Aiming at complying with the law and offering a better service, the works on the municipality's Specialized Educational Service Center began in the first half of 2020. In 2021, the Municipal Department of Education had exclusive psychological support for the Education Network.

As explained above, the schools defined to conduct the research – and reiterating the particularities of each city and state (Contagem-MG and Marcionílio Souza-BA) – cover specificities that meet the objectives intended herein, being considered significant sources of data for analysis and conceptualizations about the topic defined to be studied, and where the collaboration of its managers and teachers was decisive for the conclusion of the research.

Data analysis

The electronic form was made available during September 2021. After collecting the answers, the data were tabulated electronically in Excel-generated tables. Graphs were created and analysis categories were organized. The descriptive method was adopted, a data analysis technique that aims to understand the facts occurring in current times. According to Marconi and Lakatos (2003, p. 167),

[...] the researcher goes into greater detail about the data resulting from the statistical work, in order to obtain answers to his questions, and seeks to establish the necessary relationships between the data obtained and the hypotheses formulated. These are proven or disproved through analysis.

This section will present the data obtained through the collection of information from the selected institutions. It is necessary to emphasize that the two schools, as well as most Brazilian educational institutions, reorganized themselves during this atypical period resulting from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in order to continue school activities, respecting the guidelines of their respective municipal education departments, as well as guiding themselves by the resolutions that supported the Special Regime for Non-Face-to-Face Activities (REANP).⁴

The presentation of the obtained data will follow the order of the questions in the electronic questionnaire used in the research. To contextualize the presentation

hereinafter, the data will be organized as follows: characterization of respondents; experiences related to academic background and school practices; actions for bringing together school staff, families and students; special and inclusive education; remote education and students with special needs – planned actions; remote education and students with special needs – impossibilities; and open floor.

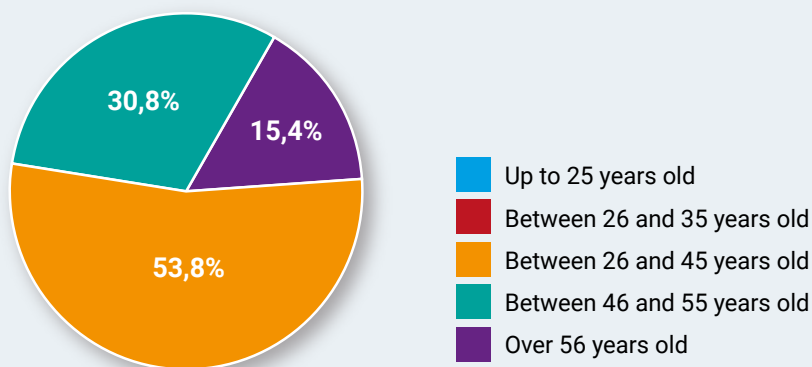
Characterization of research participants

To better understand the basic profile of the participants, the first section of the questionnaire was aimed at collecting information from professionals who worked in the institutions surveyed. Among all the professionals who worked in the two educational institutions, teachers, directors, deputy directors and pedagogues were invited to answer the questionnaire. There were 52 invited professionals, 88.45% of whom were teachers, 3.85% directors, 3.85% deputy directors and 3.85% pedagogues.

The profile of research participants is of great importance to understand the results obtained, as well as to contribute to the refutation and/or confirmation of hypotheses and to corroborate the analysis of the answers. Therefore, we brought herein the aspects raised about the professionals who participated in this work.

Regarding the age group of the participants of the two institutions, it was found that all were 36 years of age or older. Most of them was in the age group between 36 and 45 years old (53.8%). On the other hand, the participation that represented the lowest percentage corresponds to teachers over 56 years old (15.4%). Between these two thresholds are professionals between 46 and 55 years old (30.8%). Figure 1 visually presents these ranges.

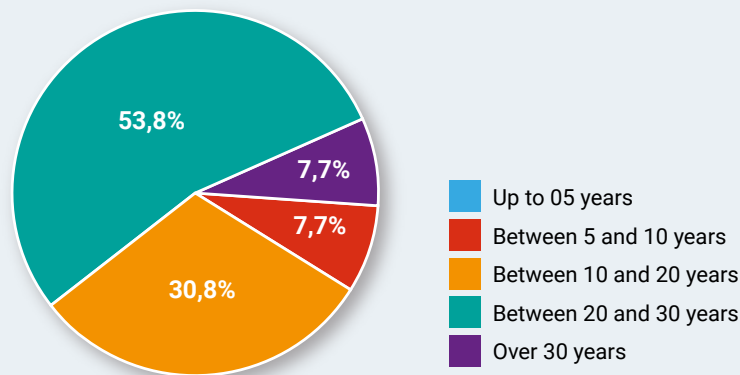
Figure 1 – Age group of research participants



Source: Research data.

This information makes two interesting points evident: there are professionals in the researched educational units who graduated at different times, given the over-ten years age gap between many of them; and the gap between the age of the participants and their respective length of service. These factors become more evident when comparing Figure 1, presented above, with Figure 2, which shows the time of teaching experience.

Figura 2 – Time of teaching experience

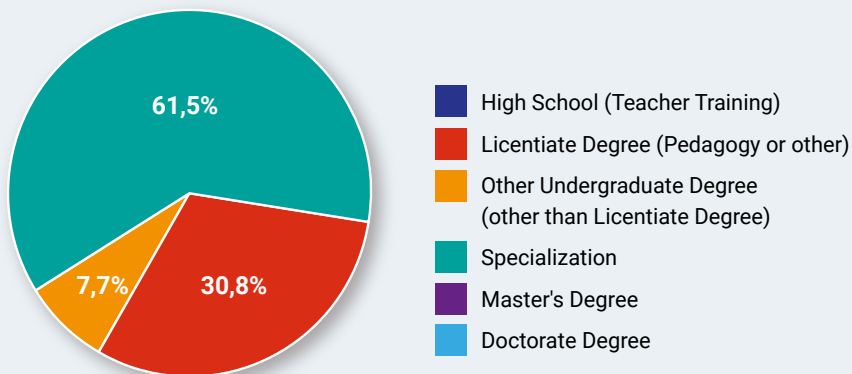


Source: Research data.

According to the data, 7.7% of the participants answered that they had between 5 and 10 years of experience as a teacher, while the majority (53.8%) answered that they had 20 to 30 years of work. Another 30.8% had between 10 and 20 years of teaching experience, and 7.7% had more than 30 years of teaching experience. Therefore, it is possible to infer that these professionals have proper academic knowledge in different periods, a factor that interferes with the profile of the teaching staffs, in view of the various changes in the laws that govern training in licentiate and teaching training courses, the modification of the school curriculum in the sphere of higher education, and the different spectrums that education sporadically incorporates. However, the importance of continuing education and the promotion of dialogue is taken into consideration herein and, thereafter, the adoption of school practices that are in line with the demands presented by the current period. This includes education that values the multiplicity and specificities of students, in every way.

As shown in Figure 3, most of the research participants had, as the highest academic title, specialization (61.5%); following those, participants who had a licentiate degree – pedagogy or other (30.8%). Finally, there were professionals trained in other undergraduate courses other than licentiate degrees (7.7%). The *stricto sensu* education alternatives were not marked.

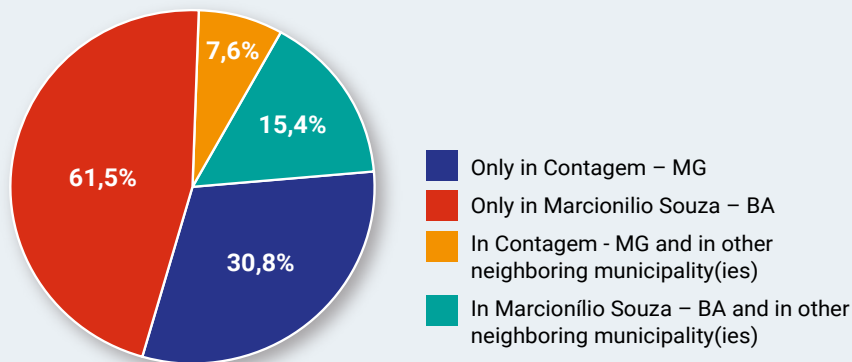
Figure 3 – Educational level of research participants



Source: Research data.

In order to better understand the work dynamics in the period of online activities, we sought to know the municipalities where the professionals participating in the research work, since among education professionals it is common for many to have a split workload in different cities. Of the total number of participants, 77% teach in only one municipality (Contagem-MG or Marcionílio Souza-BA), while 23.1% teach in two municipalities, concomitantly (according to their state). Figure 4 presents these data in greater detail.

Figure 4 – Allocation of research participants (number of professional institutions)



Source: Research data.

Although the researchers are aware of teachers who, although they worked only in that municipality, still worked in other educational institutions (different from the locus of the research), we are interested, for the time being, in identifying only the municipality where these professionals are located, in view of the specific educational policies of the municipal education departments.

Experiences reported by participants related to their academic education and everyday school practices

Teaching practice is permeated by challenges that require constant reflection and, as such, actions must be analyzed according to the results obtained, sometimes requiring a redirection so that satisfactory and qualitative results are achieved; as the COVID-19 pandemic brought specific and unprecedented obstacles, the teaching profession needed to be reinvented through tools and strategies that were not used frequently in school daily life, but that have assumed a prominent place, without disregarding the importance of the mediation by teachers.

With regard to the main challenges listed by the participants, two answers had a significant percentage and explicitly show issues that need to be observed with a somewhat necessary and urgent attention: the difficulty to keep in touch with students through virtual means (92.3%); and the absence or little support from the family (of students) during remote work (76.9%). It is interesting to note that the percentage of answers that indicated the absence of student responses to the teacher's contact attempts was of 38.5%. This last index, compared to the first, points us to the following conclusion: the percentage of participants who reported difficulties in keeping in touch with students through virtual means includes students who did not respond to messages sent by research participants (managers and teachers) and exposes difficulties faced by the professionals themselves in using virtual communication tools.

The use of virtual media as tool for and pedagogical mediation and proximity still represents an important obstacle for education in the 21st century, given all the social, structural and family issues that encompass public education, which, in a way, reverberates in the second challenge exposed by the research participants. Tangently, the absence or little support from the family has had repercussions on the indexes of basic education at the national level, as taught by Moran (2013, p. 27):

The students' family background is also an important factor to consider when it comes to changes in education. Students who come from open families, who support change, who emotionally stimulate their children, who develop culturally rich environments, learn faster, grow more confident [...].

Thus, it is noted that the contingent linked to the exercise of school functions increased in the period of the remote regime, in which the educational agent started to deal with emerging requests from the new reality. This is clear when 46.2% of the participants answered that they had difficulties in reconciling the various new tasks in remote work.

Other answers complained about the absence of continuing training to work with special and inclusive education in the pandemic period and the absence or little support from the pedagogical team during remote work. Although these aspects have been indicated in a lower percentage than the questions discussed above,

these answers also represent a demand that needs attention and care, as they are aspects that, together, work as a support for inclusive school practices and results that will reverberate in social changes towards human dignity.

Actions for bringing together school staff, families and students

The pandemic scenario caused by SARS-CoV 2, whose spread triggered an emergency organization in the social, political, administrative and health spheres, among others, resulted in the need to articulate urgent measures in the educational field. This triggered the unusual decision to close all schools for the preservation of life and guidelines for social distancing to be maintained among members of the school community. As a result, actions that sought to bring together, in the virtual world, school staff, families and students had to be articulated.

To this end, technological resources and social media have become viable strategies for being near students, families and colleagues from the same educational institution. Thus, the use of digital platforms (Google Classroom, Zoom, Google Meet), as well as applications (WhatsApp and Telegram), were alternatives found to continue classes and team meetings, both synchronously and asynchronously. According to reports by the research participants, phone calls also made a lot of sense and were widely used during the pandemic period, demonstrating as an effective way to contact families. In this sense, Moran (2013, p. 30) states:

Mobile digital technologies cause profound changes in face-to-face and distance education. In face-to-face, they uproot the concept of localized and temporal teaching-learning. We can learn from multiple places at the same time, online and offline, together and separately.

However, three research participants left this question unanswered, which characterizes a question to be observed, generating some hypotheses: (i) these professionals had no contact with families during the entire period in which schools were closed; (ii) they preferred not to comment on said issue; or (iii) contacts were minimal, so they chose not to answer. As mentioned above, the gap between the school staff's proximity to the families is still an issue to be further investigated, considering that the process is not entirely consolidated, in addition to social factors permeating the process, such as the lack of access to equipment and technology by low-income families, the absence or restriction of access to internet packages that allow these contacts, among others.

Specific actions for Special Education, focusing on inclusive practices

One of the main questions when it comes to special and inclusive education relates to the training of professionals to work in the field, since in the multiplicity of the classroom, it is a common factor in all years and stages of elementary and high

school. It should be highlighted the view of professionals from the institutions surveyed on the offer of continuing education by the State Department of Education and also by the Municipal Department of Education. Geglio (2010, p. 109) helps us in this understanding by pointing out:

The school, by its ontological nature, is a place of learning and that favors the elevation of the critical and democratic spirit, it cannot avoid discussing one of the most important matters for contemporary education: inclusion.

Firstly analyzing the answers related to the State Department of Education, 30.8% of the participants did not know or said they had never participated in any course on this topic, a worrying fact in view of the importance of continuing education for the teaching practice. In the view of the participants, lack of a broad offer should also be taken seriously. Among the respondents, only 23.1% said they had participated in courses on the topic of special and inclusive education, which were offered by the department. Another 23.1% answered that there was an offer, but that they did not participate in the course(s). Finally, 23.1% said they were not aware of the offer, but they have already taken (or are taking) courses on special and inclusive education with their own resources.

In relation to the Municipal Department of Education, the data were quite different. Only 7.7% of the participants were aware of the offer of continuing education courses and had already participated in these courses. A portion of 30.8% said that the department has offered course(s) on this topic, but they did not participate. Those who did not know but took courses with their own resources corresponded to 15.4%, and those who did not know and who had never participated in a course on this topic corresponded to 46.2%.

Away from the macro perspective and focusing on the reality of the institutions surveyed, we sought to understand continuing education on the institution's own initiative, with actions organized by the school staff itself. As in the data related to the State and Municipal Departments, most of the participants answered that they did not know or had never participated in any course on this topic (53.8%). The other alternatives ("It has already been offered but I did not participate"; "I do not know, but I take a course on the topic with my own resources"; and "It has already been offered and I participated") came next, with 15.4% of the answers captured, each.

However, there is unanimity in the answers when it comes to the importance of courses that focus on discussions about special education and/or inclusive education. Surprisingly, 100% of the participants considered this type of training necessary and reported that they would gladly participate in courses on this topic.

Pedagogical didactic planning is a crucial action for the development of school practices. In this sense, the actions planned due to the need for remote education took on several strategies, so that the teaching-learning process was not stagnant, also considering the greater difficulty related to special education.

Regarding the actions planned by the research participants, online meetings associated with family meetings, printed material and adapted activities stand out, considering the fact that they conceive this as the “bridge” between school, multifunctional resources and regular education. In the questionnaire, there are forceful answers that lack an accurate “look” and mechanisms that collaborate to provide paths and possible solutions, based on the difficulties presented by the group.

“We were taken by surprise, we had to learn or make attempts to work remotely, facing great challenges”

Thus, it is essential to highlight the following excerpt: “The activities are designed exclusively by the support teacher. The other teachers barely know the specific characteristics of the student” (PARTICIPANT IV). This participant’s report is very strong and evidences a discontent, in addition to the distancing of regular teachers from practices aimed at serving students who need inclusive interventions, which thus become exclusive to the Multifunctional Resource Room (SRM) staff.

Another saying collected that very well highlights the challenge faced by professionals at this atypical moment reports the attempts to adapt to the new reality and the uncertainty experienced by these professionals, who, in many cases, learned through attempts and errors made in the process. “We were taken by surprise, we had to learn or make attempts to work remotely, we faced great challenges, especially in working with special students, it must be an above-average challenge” (PARTICIPANT XII, emphasis added).

Among the answers collected, something that draws a lot of attention is the participation with answers such as “I do not know” when referring to the matter of actions planned for serving students with disabilities. We understand the legitimacy of the “no answer” and “I do not know” options, although it is also necessary to understand them as a problem that needs to be investigated, discussed and considered in the educational field, subject to a change in posture and the adoption of awareness-raising actions. In this sense, Geglio (2020, p. 125) teaches us that,

[...] we aim to show that achieving a public school with quality is not only the task of professionals who work in the school. Public policies are needed, that take into account not only those who are able to be included in schools, but also those who need special services, even though many of them still need those services in specialized centers. This is a fight for democracy and for a more just and equitable society.

In addition to what has already been presented, answers consistent with the organization of differentiated activities and adapted to the level of learning, activity blocks and recorded readings were also pointed out as strategies adopted by school staffs. It should be emphasized the answer that addresses the relevance of a “more humanitarian service”, with lectures that prioritize the topic of inclusion.

Difficulties in organizing remote teaching for students with disabilities

In 2020 and 2021, the educational process faced major challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has made the already known difficulties in school life even greater, as the problems in the educational field became broader, and thus the challenges posed by remote education for students with disabilities were even more aggravated.

As for the impossibilities reported by the participating group, there were answers that can be characterized as an extreme point, with the report addressing all possible difficulties, including effective contact with students, obtaining family support, lack of internet access, among others. What stands out the most is the lack of family interaction with the educational core. This position can be contemplated through the following participation:

The fear of being contaminated by COVID-19 made clients to have a resistance to the activities, making it difficult for the teacher to access the students, the lack of information from the parents and the disregard for the education of their children (PARTICIPANT IV).

Active methodologies bring other work possibilities: learning through projects, case studies and gamification

As stated above, unfortunately, the lack of participation and family commitment in the educational life of the children has been a factor that has had a negative effect on the school environment. Teachers felt little supported by a portion of fathers and mothers who should be more present and collaborate in such a delicate period of history.

Another factor that had a significant impact was the lack of access to devices (cell phones, tablets and computers) and to the internet network, as indicated by Participant XIII: "Lack of internet access and absence of active methodologies". For students in public schools, a portion that belongs to the social class most impacted by the social and economic effects aggravated by the pandemic, the educational implications were even more felt. Many families that sought their livelihood through informal jobs, without the guarantee of a minimum income, ended up putting the follow up of their children's school life in second, which explains the testimony of some participants (lack of family participation during remote education).

With regard to active methodologies, it can be said, given the broad nature of the teaching process and the tendency to develop new strategies to improve learning, that they play an important role in enhancing educational results. Through problem situations that involve current topics, as well as the strengthening of discussions and critical thinking in the school environment, possibilities are created for the student to become a central character of their educational process, problematizing what they encounter in their everyday life. Active methodologies bring other work possibilities: learning through projects, case studies and gamification. However, it is up to the teacher to choose the active methodology that best suits the class and the content studied, enhancing the positive reach of this methodological strategy.

It should be highlighted that the absence of training that contemplates the study and use of active methodologies in a more forceful and fruitful way in the classroom has impacted on pedagogical didactics, since, according to research, their use during the pandemic period was low. Although the scenario of necessary social distancing between school agents and students has contributed to this issue, the difficulty of “getting out of the box” of traditional pedagogical practices demonstrates the need for training actions that encourage teachers to seek to make their practices more dynamic.

That said, we emphasize the importance of investing in public policies that recognize the importance of teacher training, primarily carried out in the school environment, ensuring the participation and voice of all. Additionally, it is also important to invest in the acquisition of materials for didactic and pedagogical use listed based on the manifestation of the collective of school professionals, since this ensures that the specificities of that place are met, avoiding the standardization of broad biddings that make it difficult or make it impossible to use goods purchased with public cash. It is necessary to recognize the changes arising from digital culture and its effects on education and the school environment, understanding, problematizing and seeking local solutions for the contemporary educational demands.

Open floor to research participants

Finally, a space was made available where participants could share practices used in these last two school years (2020 and 2021), their wishes and comments that possibly contributed to the research according to each one's perspective. Some answers highlighted the scenario experienced by these professionals in the face of new possibilities and uncertainties, which can be extended to students and the school community in general.

I feel vulnerable amid so many problems generated by the pandemic, and hopeful in knowing that, despite everything, science has advanced. The practice that we must share is solidarity, love for others, since it was and continues to be the differential at this critical moment (PARTICIPANT VI).

This report evidences the fear, vulnerability, and how important is the school environment in the process of socialization of individuals, the interaction established in the daily lives of students and workers. Contact with peers is still essential in the schooling process and, in a way, demonstrates that interactivity⁵ is not yet able to fully replace face-to-face human interaction in the basic education system. Complementing: “This moment made me reinforce the idea of how important socialization, empathy, the diversity of strategies are in the teaching-learning proposition” (PARTICIPANT XIII). However, despite the difficulties presented, everyone began to adapt to the new models: “At first it was quite worrying, but now things are trying to get back to normal” (PARTICIPANT IV).

Final considerations

It is worth mentioning the contributions of this research to the educational scope and other instances that encompass the discussions presented in this work. The following understandings should be noted:

1. Education cannot occur without human participation: machines and internet connection will not replace pedagogical mediation. Therefore, the teacher is an important link in the educational process.
2. Public schools should never be oblivious to the situations of social vulnerability in which its members (school community) find themselves, not to assume the role of other institutions, but to understand, adapt and find how to best keep the educational process of their students effective;
3. Continuing education focused on inclusion must constitute an urgent educational policy, especially in both schools participating in the research, which reflects a broader issue – the need to strengthen continuing education at the national level;
4. With the pandemic, didactic-pedagogical resources and training for work with the use of media resources need to receive greater attention from school management and education departments, since the staff of teachers and pedagogues, in particular, must be trained to work in these interactive virtual environments.

Investing in continuing education actions is investing in the success of the educational process and in the construction of effectively inclusive practices

Therefore, it is necessary to horizontalize access to information and daily practices. This effort denotes the maintenance and permanence of those served, regardless of the type of education. For this to become a reality, we believe it is necessary to invest, in particular, in on-the-job training. Training actions that take place from and with the staffs are more effective in school practices and promote staff commitment to the success of pedagogical practices for all students. Thus, investing in continuing education actions is investing in the success of the educational process and in the construction of effectively inclusive practices in the daily school life.

Finally, the prominence in conducting this research lies in the importance of seeking the understanding and plausible mediations about the problems affecting education in these days, and those that persist from other times. In this sense, the aspirations of this work are in line with the intention of inspiring other searches with the purpose of strengthening and giving visibility to special and inclusive education practices, culminating in new studies and possibly supporting future pedagogical interventions to improve teaching practice and teaching environments.

Notas

¹ According to the document, the invitation to participate in the research must not be made using lists that allow the identification of the guests or the visualization of their contact data (email, telephone, etc.) by third parties. Likewise, any individual invitation sent via email can only have one sender and one recipient, or be sent as a hidden list. The document can be read in full at the link: http://conselho.saude.gov.br/images/comissoes/conep/documentos/CARTAS/Carta_Circular_01.2021.pdf

² According to the Certificate of Presentation for Ethical Appreciation (CAEE) No. 49195321.2.0000.5651.

³ The Bolsa Escola program consists of a social policy aimed at supplementing family income and ensuring access to the right to education for children of school age.

⁴ These are specific procedures, means and forms of organization of mandatory school activities aimed at complying with legally established teaching hours, guaranteeing student learning and fulfilling pedagogical proposals at the levels and teaching modalities offered by state schools. Available at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ne_ot7kFhMc3x8ivLPz5yhiihbArh7m/view.

⁵ The concept of interactivity supposes the existence of correspondence in the processes or actions of individuals through communication systems and/or electronic devices between two or more people.

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