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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Mantoan, M. T. E. (2000). Special education in Brazil – from exclusion to inclusion. *ETD - Educação Temática Digital*, 1(3). <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-106349>

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Special Education in Brazil – from exclusion to inclusion

Maria Teresa Eglér Mantoan

Abstract

This article is about the phases through which the Brazilian education has been developing, starting from the exclusion of students with disabilities in specialized institutions which are typically therapeutically oriented to our present days, when this educational modality has been clashing with the proposals of a school for all, one and only, open to the differences, and, as a result, inclusive. The path that has been followed is focused on from the point of view of legal documents, of educational plans and policies. Finally we focus on teacher education and present

some indicators by which we have been evaluating the benefits of inclusion in the Brazilian schools, through the investigations from the researchers at LEPED (Laboratory of Studies and Research in Teaching and Diversity) / Unicamp- São Paulo/Brazil.

Key words

Special Education; inclusion; educational legislation and policies

SITUATION FRAMEWORK AND HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS

The historical development of special education in Brazil started in the 19th century, when the services dedicated to this segment of our population, inspired by North-American and European experiences, were brought by some Brazilians who were willing to organize and implement isolated and private actions to help people with physical, mental and sensory disabilities.

Those initiatives were not integrated to the education public policies and approximately one century had to go by before the special education could become one of the components of our educational system. In fact, it was in the early 50s, when this teaching modality was officially recognized, under the name of “education of the disabled”.

We can, therefore, say that the history of the education of persons with disabilities in Brazil is divided into three long periods:

- from 1854 to 1956 – marked by private initiatives;
- from 1957 to 1993 – defined by national official actions;
- from 1993.... – characterized by the movements in favor of school inclusion.

In the first period the specialized medical service was emphasized. The most traditional institutions to help persons with physical, mental and sensory disabilities were founded in that period. Those institutions followed the example and pioneer spirit of “Instituto dos Meninos Cegos” - Institute of Blind Children-, founded in Rio, at the end of 1854.

From the foundation of that Institute to our present days, the history of special education in Brazil was structured, following almost always models which are assistance oriented, and are characterized by a segregation view, by a segmentation of the disabilities, what has contributed even more for the education and the social life of children and young persons with disabilities to happen in a separate world.

Special education was assumed by the government in 1957 with “Campaigns”, which were specifically geared towards caring for each one of the disabilities. In that same year, the Campaign for the Education of the Brazilian Deaf – CESB was created, followed by the foundation of the National Institute of Education for the Deaf – INES, which still exists in Rio de Janeiro /RJ. Other similar “Campaigns” were launched later in order to care for the other disabilities.

In 1972, the Task Group of Special Education was established by the Ministry of Education and Culture - MEC and together with the specialist James Gallagher, who was invited by that group, to come to Brazil, the first proposal to restructure special education in Brazil was presented. In order to manage such a proposal, a central agency called National Center of Special Education – CENESP - was created inside the Ministry. Today this center is what is called the Secretary of Special Education – SEESP, which has kept basically the same competences and organizational structure of its predecessor, at the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The control of the Brazilian policies of special education were for a long time in the hands of the same people, that is, the policies were kept by a group of people who got deeply involved in that task. Those people, among others, were linked to private and beneficent movements to care for the disabled and until today they have a great influence and power over the

guidelines of special education. At the time of the military regime, the generals and colonels were the ones who led the big specialized institutions, and today some of them have been elected deputies, after assuming the general coordination of associations; they continue to put pressure on the public opinion and on the government itself in order to have things in a way that suits them better.

Many were the politicians, educators, parents and Brazilian prominent people who identified with the education of persons with disabilities and made the history of special education. All of them played relevant roles throughout all stages of this march and cannot be ignored since they acted in the political situation which somehow affected the education of persons with disabilities either by daring, advancing, transforming the proposals or by delaying them, hampering their evolution towards new educational targets. The parents of people with disabilities are among those who make up that leadership and most of them have shown a great strength in order to keep, rather than change the concepts and conditions of medical and school service offered to their children with disabilities.

We cannot, then, disregard the private and beneficent-oriented initiatives conducted by the parents in relation to the school and medical service for people with disabilities as well as in relation to the professional preparation (protected) despite the fact that their intentions were most of the times supported by discrimination and strong protectionism .

We must emphasize the group of parents of children with mental disability, which is the largest and founded over 1000 Association of Parents and Friends of Persons with Mental Disabilities - APAE all over Brazil.

The tendency of the parents movement still is to get organized in specialized associations that they can manage

themselves, trying to set up partnerships with the civil society and the government so as to achieve their aims. Such parents movements are sponsored by the government – municipal, state and federal.

Contrary to other countries, most Brazilian parents have not yet favored the school inclusion of their children. Although this preference is shown in the Federal Constitution, there is a tendency for parents to organize themselves in specialized associations in order to guarantee their children with disabilities' the right to education.

Only very recently, from the late 80s and early 90s, have the persons with disabilities started to organize themselves and to participate in coordination councils, Forums and movements aiming at making sure the rights they have conquered are recognized and respected in their basic needs for socializing with other people. Such movements are penetrating all areas: work, transportation, architecture, city planning, social security and accessibility in general. People are looking for affirmation and want to be heard, just like many other minorities voices, which need to be taken into consideration in a democratic society, as the one we presently live in, in this country. Unfortunately, however, despite being present and having shown their participation in various aspects of social life, those movements are still not strong enough in what refers to educational prerogatives, and school processes, specially the inclusive ones.

LEGISLATION AND CONCEPTS OF THE SCHOOL SERVICE

Special education has been present in the Brazilian educational policies since the late 50s and its present situation results from a trajectory followed by several national general education plans, which have deeply marked the directions traced for the

school service for students with disabilities.

The evolution of special education services has moved from an initial phase, markedly assistance-oriented, aiming only at the well-being of the person with disability to a second phase in which the medical and psychological aspects were given priority. After that, it got to the educational institutions and then to the integration of special education into the mainstream school system. Today, finally, the special education clashes with the proposal of total and unconditional inclusion of students with disabilities in the classrooms of mainstream schools.

Such transformations have altered the meaning of special education and have distorted the meaning of that teaching modality. There are many interested educators, parents and professionals who mix it up with a kind of assistance offered by unselfish people to children, young people and adults with disabilities. Even when properly understood, special education in Brazil is also understood as a set of methods, techniques and special teaching resources and as different kinds of school support service for students who cannot meet the expectations and requirements of the mainstream school.

The Basic National Educational Guidelines – Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional- LDB, Act Nr. 4.024/61, has granted the “exceptional students” the right to education, stating in the article 88 that in order to integrate those students in the community, they should be placed, as much as possible, in the mainstream educational system. It is understood that in this mainstream system both would be included, the regular educational services and the special ones, but it can also be understood that when the education of students with disabilities does not fit the mainstream educational system, a special

system should be created, becoming a separate sub-system.

Those as well as other inaccuracies have stressed the ambiguous character of special education within the mainstream system of education. The question being raised at that time was: After all, according to the law, is it a regular or a special system of education? The same thing is happening nowadays in relation to the insertion of students with disabilities in the mainstream school. We will deal with this case later, in the context of the discussion of inclusive education.

In 1972, the Federal Education Council in a report dated 10/08/72 understood the education of “disabled children” as a teaching trend, that is, school education. Right after that, ministerial orders regarding assistance matters and social security, while defining the clientele of special education, had a different concept from that of the report; they focused on a therapeutically based view of the service to persons with disabilities and elected the corrective and preventive aspects of those actions: there was no intention of promoting school education.

Still today, the difficulty in distinguishing the medical pedagogical model from the educational/school model of special education is evident. This impasse holds back the course of the special education in Brazil, preventing it from choosing innovative positions, as it is the case of insertion of students with disabilities in inclusive schools.

What seems to be clear is that the legislators have established a direct relationship between the students with disabilities and special education. This binary relationship is not always what interests us the most, specially when our objective is total and unconditional insertion of all students, in the mainstream

schools, that is, a school open to differences.

Despite the definitions, studies and other ways to distinguish the special education clientele, there aren't legal instruments nor conclusive answers about the true profile of the student in special education, that is, about its specific clientele.

In the official discourse, in the educational plans, in the national curriculum guidelines for teaching persons with disabilities the clientele is well defined. In general, the students who fill up the special classes are not, even today, the ones to whom this teaching modality aims at, and due to the absence of effective reports and well – supported school complaints, all those students risk being accepted and considered as students with disabilities. In fact, they are students who haven't been able to keep up with the pace of their colleagues, or undisciplined students, children of underprivileged black families and other unfortunate ones in our society. They are, indeed, the majority among a minority of really disabled students.

Such vagueness accounts for all the disorder and trespasses practiced by some schools regarding the right to education and non-discrimination. That is happening in some schools due to lack of effective control from parents, the educational authorities and the justice in general.

What is being stressed at the moment, are the actions which aim at guaranteeing these students the right to study with their peers in mainstream schools. In order to guarantee those rights, attorneys and state attorneys responsible for the infancy and youth, for the elderly and for the disabled, have been mobilized. The recommendations of those authorities have clarified doubts and successfully solved cases of inadequacy and school exclusion in public and private schools.

All these situations, which involve conceptual problems, ignorance of the Federal Constitution and biased interpretations of the educational legislation have made the meaning of school inclusion unclear and confusing and have harmed those who fight for implementing the legislation in the Brazilian schools. Such issues are at the core of the understanding of the policies for mainstream and special education. These issues have been, in our view, responsible for uncertain paths taken by those who think, decide and carry out the Brazilian educational plans.

The change in the nomenclature – from “exceptional students” to “students with special educational needs”, appeared in 1986. This change of nomenclature, however, has meant nothing in the interpretation of disability or even in the placement of the students in the schools.

The Ministry of Education and Culture still adopts the term “ carriers of special educational needs”- PNEE - “portadores de necessidades educacionais especiais”- when they refer to students who need special education. Even by including among those students the ones with learning difficulties, the ones with disorderly behavior and the gifted ones, the clientele of the special education is still not well defined because most people establish a direct and linear relationship between a person being disabled and attending a special school.

The Brazilian Constitution of 1988, in Chapter III, Of Education, Culture and Sports, Section 205 prescribes: “ Education is the right of all and it is the responsibility of the State and of the family”. In section 208, it says: “The responsibility of the State towards Education will be put into effect through the guarantee of: [...] specialized educational service to the carriers of disability, preferably in the mainstream school system”.

These and other legal devices regarding social assistance, the child's, the youth's and the elderly's health raise very important issues for the debate on Special Education in Brazil, not only in what refers to the adaptation of public buildings by breaking all kinds of architectural barriers, but also in what refers to public transport, obligatory minimum wage to the people with disability who cannot provide for themselves, among others. Among all those issues, school inclusion presently comes to view and again raises the question of the destiny of special education.

The clarification of this issue involves three possible directions for the placement of the children in the schools: a) the one that implies an opposing meaning between special and mainstream education, where the students with disabilities would have only one option, that is, the special education; b) that one that implies partial insertion, that is, the integration of students in the mainstream classrooms when they are ready to study with their colleagues in the mainstream teaching, but always with direct or indirect support from the special teaching people and finally c) the one that indicates inclusion of students with disabilities in the mainstream classrooms, indistinctively and unconditionally, thus implying a transformation of the schools to meet the educational needs of all the students and not only of some of them, the ones with disability or the gifted ones as they are referred to in special education.

The present debate is centered on directions b) and c) mentioned above, that is, between school integration and school inclusion. The issue raises innumerable and uncountable controversies, it challenges teachers and health care professionals who deliver services to persons with disabilities — the paramedics and others who clinically treat children and young persons who have school and social adaptation problems. It also challenges the parents

associations which adopt traditional paradigms of service delivery to their clientele. The issue also affects special education teachers greatly; they fear losing the space they have conquered in schools and in the school system in general. The teachers from the mainstream schools feel incompetent to cater for the differences in their classrooms, specially with regard to the students with disabilities, once their specialized colleagues have always been distinguished as being the only ones to deliver that service and have done so exaggeratedly under everyone's eyes. There is also a contrary movement of parents of students without disabilities, who do not admit inclusion, because they think the schools will become worse and/or will lower even more the quality of their teaching if they have to take in these new students.

The more recent Basic National Education Guidelines Act – Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional-LDB, Law N° 9.394 dated December 20 1996 dedicates chapter V entirely to special education, and defines it in section 58° as [...]“school education modality, offered preferably by the mainstream school system, to students with special needs”. Would such a distinction be really an advancement? Undoubtedly, we have advanced a lot in relation to what is written in the Law N°4.024/61 once there seems to be no doubts left that “the education of exceptional children” can be fitted into the mainstream education system, but we are still subject to the subjectivity of interpretations, when we come across the term “preferably” in the definition mentioned in the law.

In the article 59 the new LDB talks about the differentiated pedagogical guarantees, such as curricula, methods, techniques and educational resources; specific course conclusion conditions for students who can't reach the minimum level required for concluding high school, due to a disability;

teachers' specialization at secondary and university level and education for work, besides equal access to social benefits.

Our LDB has finally defined the place for special education in the school, but it has not mentioned the evaluative aspects in any of the items and this has caused a certain worry because one does not know exactly what to do about it — one can either protect those students with specific parameters for that purpose, or compare them to what the law proposes for everyone.

Regarding the “specific conditions for course conclusion” of the various levels in the school the law is also rather ambiguous specially in what refers to the criteria by which they identify who has complied or not with the requirements for the conclusion of those levels and the danger lies in age being adopted as the indicator for that.

The teacher's qualification in order to guarantee the teaching of students with disabilities also raises many questions, also due to the ambiguity of the legal text.

We believe that more important than the specialization of the teacher is the initial and continued teacher education so that he/she can meet the educational needs of all students in the mainstream school system, as proposed by the school inclusion.

Recent master's and doctorate's researches carried out by members of the Laboratory of Studies and Researches in Teaching and Diversity – LEPED / State University of Campinas – São Paulo/Brazil, of which I am the coordinator, have clearly shown that teachers lack good preparation to teach all and not only the students with disabilities.

As Brito Castro (1997) has concluded in his master's thesis on the implementation of inclusion in the municipal schools in

Natal - Rio Grande do Norte / Brazil, the teachers have run into difficulties in working with the students in general, not only with those with disabilities, given the poor working conditions and insufficient teacher education. The researcher has concluded that the teachers need to have more knowledge than they do in order to develop teaching practice which takes into account the differences in the classroom; they don't need qualification specialized in the disabilities as proposed by the law and the Brazilian educational policies.

We came to the same conclusion in a research carried out in the southeast region of Brazil in 1999, together with other Brazilian researchers, when we analyzed the answers given by 493 teachers about their needs to order to help the students with disabilities in the mainstream classrooms.

Recently, in February 2002, at the Chamber of Elementary Teaching of the National Education Council, the discussion of a document that deals with the Curricular Guidelines of Special Education in Basic Mainstream Education was started.

What has surprised us the most in this document is that, despite the broad discussion among educators, legislators, parents and persons with disabilities, the concept of school inclusion has not advanced much from the point of view of its applications, at least not to the same extent as it has been clarified from the theoretical point of view.

In the document mentioned above as in many others, this lack of pace between the two becomes evident when it states, for example, that:

“Carrying out school inclusion [...] of all students, regardless of social class, race, genre or individual characteristics is the great challenge to be faced, in a clear demonstration of respect towards the difference” (p.21)

It supports inclusion, but suggests throughout the text actions that do not respect the principles of a school for all, a school without discrimination and prejudice, without separate teaching.

In fact, the document gives a confusing orientation for carrying out inclusion, when it refers to the education of students with disabilities and to teacher education, as we will comment next.

THE “SPECIAL” IN EDUCATION X THE “SPECIAL” OF EDUCATION

Based on those misunderstandings and restrictions, there is, from our point of view, no differentiation between the “special” of education and the “special” in education.

The “special” in education has to do with what is stated in the Document, from the practical point of view. In this case, what is understood is that the conditions for inclusion imply adding special teaching to the mainstream teaching, that is, the swelling of the system, once this entails more professionals, resources, methods and techniques from the special education to the mainstream schools. In other words, this proposal has to do with what we have had for years and that supports the organizational model of school integration, seen in the document as partial integration, in which the student has to adjust to the mainstream teaching in order to attend it and the special education staff will help him do that.

What defines the “special” of education is not the dichotomy and the fragmentation of the school system into several different

modalities, but the capacity the school has to cater for the differences in the classroom, without discriminating, without working separately with some, without setting specific rules for planning, for learning or for evaluating (curricula, activities, special learning evaluation).

The “special” of education has to do with total inclusion, unconditional inclusion of all the students in the schools of their neighborhood, as mentioned in Salamanca, which goes beyond students with disabilities, but which certainly includes them. This “special” of education is required not only to include students with disabilities, but to revert a shameful situation of the Brazilian school, which is, today, marked by failure and dropout of many of its students. In other words, this “special” qualifies the schools which are capable of including excluded students, indistinctly, by not focusing on the problems related to total inclusion of the students with disabilities and focusing on what really causes this deplorable situation of our schools. A much larger group of learners are unmotivated, unhappy and kept apart from society as a result of failure and constant deprivations and low self-esteem which results from exclusion from school and society - students who are victims of their own parents, their teachers and above all, students who live in very poor conditions, in every sense of the word. These students are quite well-known in the schools, because they repeat the same grade several times, they are expelled, drop out and are labeled as ill-born and have behaviors which deviate from the standards of formal education.

It is true that the students with disability are a great concern for the inclusive educators, but we all know that most students who fail in school are children who do not come from special education but who will eventually end up in special education!

Another point to be mentioned is the feasibility of school inclusion. It is important to emphasize that the transformations required by school inclusion are not utopian and we have the means to carry them out. Those changes are already being implemented in some public school systems and in private schools in Brazil and abroad

Which have accepted the challenge to be truly inclusive. They base themselves on post-modern educational theories, multiculturalism, and paradigms which emerged in the education scenario at the beginning of this century.¹

The pedagogical implications that can be drawn from these new contributions are innumerable and the Basic National Education Guidelines Law has already indicated some of them in its text, when it refers, for example, to the new criteria for the creation of school classes (cycles of development), when it suggests individualized development plans for the school, by respecting the social and cultural identity of the students; by encouraging active participation of parents in the school decisions and by other means through which the principles of a truly inclusive education are compatible with pedagogical and organizational alternatives necessary for carrying it out.

In a word, the schools change, no longer the students!

To think, to decide and to work in favor of inclusion is to stimulate this obvious concept, a revolution in teaching!

¹Consider the contributions of Paulo Freire, Peter Mac Laren, Jorge Larrossa, Boaventura de Souza Santos, Edgar Morin and others authors.

ABOUT TEACHER EDUCATION

With reference to teacher education *in* the view of the “special” *in* education, we already have several means to qualify these professionals: in the undergraduate courses of education, in the several specialization courses which are offered in the graduate courses, in the continuing education offered by the school system as “preparatory courses for inclusion”, in the clinics and institutions which deliver services to students and persons with disabilities. It is the old and well-known teacher education which is necessary to maintain the idea that the school-clinic is the one that solves the problems of the disabilities and, consequently, of school inclusion.

The traditional teacher education in special education is not aimed at professionals who will be committed to include the excluded from the school, because it does not convey the idea of what is special *in* education, which redirects teaching objectives and practices, and recognizes and values the differences. It continues to divide, to separate, to fragment what the school should unite in order to become stronger, fairer and more democratic, aware of its duties and of the constitutional principles which guarantees to all Brazilian citizens a school without prejudice, which does not discriminate, under any circumstances — Section 3 paragraph IV of the Federal Constitution of Brazil.

Under the perspective of education opened to differences and inclusive teaching, teacher education does not happen in the same way as mentioned above; it is continuously built inside the schools, as the problems of the students with or without disabilities arise and it also takes into consideration the teaching which is being offered, its deficiencies, inadequacies and conservatism.

There is a new way to see teacher education, a way that tries to improve what the teacher has already learned in his initial education, by sometimes making him aware of his limitations, talents, and competences, and at other times by supplementing this pedagogical knowledge with other more specific kinds of knowledge, such as the Braille system, the techniques of communication and alternative/augmentative mobility, by improving his ability to teach the curriculum content, or by making him reflect upon the areas of knowledge, the trends of contemporary society, by making him/her experience all this while learning to work with the technologies of education, with the bilingualism in the classroom for those who can hear as well as the deaf ones.

But all this must be understood as a work process which is necessary so that the school can welcome all students, without any kind of prejudice and aware of its responsibilities towards educating and not only instructing new generations; the school transmits knowledge which is continuously being outdated, and can, therefore, be systematized as something learned / taught, as it used to be.

How can we teach teachers in their initial education or in-service, heterogeneous and inclusive practices, when we have a policy for teacher education which emphasizes the disability, which categorizes the learners and their teachers and which, by doing so, opts for homogeneous practices and excludes those who fit in it and place them in specific modalities of education?

In fact, the dichotomized teaching into mainstream and special, defines distinct worlds inside the schools and in teacher education courses. Such division perpetuates the idea that teaching students with disabilities and with learning difficulties requires knowledge and

experience which are beyond the capacity of the ordinary teachers. There is, in fact, an exaggeration in everything related to special education, which disqualifies mainstream teaching and the teachers who may not have the ability to teach this clientele.

We have urgently, then, to regain the confidence that the teachers in mainstream schools have lost, the confidence to know how to teach all students, without any exception, to understand that there are not students who learn different things, but students who learn in different ways.

Summing up what we have just described and commented, we can affirm that there was and there is still a certain ambiguity in the direction of the services in special education. The main trends in our national special education policies until 1990 were the therapeutically and assistance oriented service, instead of the educational service itself. The government keeps supporting private institutions specialized in disabilities, what shows the segregation view of special education in Brazil. Unfortunately, there isn't a clear definition from our educational authorities about adopting a truly inclusive policy in our mainstream schools. If the special education protects itself, by fearing a radical change of the school, the mainstream school omits itself, by overlooking the issue, but at the same time protecting itself from every transformation of its work in the schools, claiming teachers insufficient preparation and lack of functional conditions to assist to all children, including those with disabilities.

In this political-institutional game, the children and the nation are the ones which lose; the Brazilian nation has its new generations once more deprived from the benefits of a school which would teach justice, democracy and openness to differences, through the most efficient method — the relationship among peers.

The special education and all uses of this adjective in programs., projects and action plans to develop the schooling of students with disabilities still have a very heavy weight and promote the division of students, teachers, systems, schools, ideas, legislation, and do not broaden the specialization in teaching all students.

WHAT'S NEW?

No matter how much the inclusion movement in schools has been contested, for the threatening characteristics that any change brings, specially in the educational setting, it is irreversible and convinces everyone because of its logic and the ethic of its social attitude.

Inclusion is denouncing the abyss that exists between the old and the new in the Brazilian educational institution. Inclusion reveals that gap which needs to be filled with the actions mentioned previously.

Thus, the future of inclusive education, in our opinion, depends on a quick expansion of the projects truly committed to transforming the school, to adjust it to the new times.

A school can't be changed as in a magic trick; however, implementing inclusive school is a possible dream and we are working towards the realization of that dream and we have had several encouraging results in public and private Brazilian schools.

The Laboratory of Studies and Researches in Teaching and Diversity – LEPED/Unicamp has counseled several projects all over Brazil, in the states of São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Bahia, Rio Grande do Sul, Rio Grande do Norte, Rio de Janeiro, and at the same time it has been carrying out research on what is going on inside the classrooms, thus, building up knowledge about school inclusion.

The main indicator of the success of our projects have to do with the change of attitude from the teachers, directors and the school community, as well as from the parents and students, regarding inclusion. We are not talking about students with disabilities, but all students in the school, but who are kept apart from society, and those who are not in the school because they were excluded or could not enter them due to all kinds of prejudice: social, cultural, racial and religious. We are a multicultural country due to our strong mixture of races; nevertheless, we discriminate and isolate the more stigmatized minority groups and others which are considered inferior such as the black, the native Indians, the immigrants the migrants from the North and the Northeast of the country, among others.

In the schools where we are working, the indicators of success are also related to the fulfillment of action plans of the school systems and of the schools, individually.

It is important to emphasize that the systems with which we work have banned special education from their organograms and we can deal with the new proposals for the organization of teaching in schools without trying to avoid inclusion. Having only one modality of teaching can reduce the chances of having to deal with the problems and difficulties related to teaching some children, with or without disability in separate settings and we can send the teaching problems to the schools, to the teachers, to the structure and to the general functioning of the systems. Such a challenging situation makes us go beyond the pedagogical and administrative limits of schools, towards inclusion.

In a word, the challenge of inclusion is destabilizing the minds of those who have always supported the selection, the fragmentation of the teaching into modalities, the specializations and the specialists, the power of evaluations, the

clinical view of teaching and learning. As there is no ill that lasts forever, it has become hard for those who label students as incapable of learning to be kept unaffected by change.

THINKING AND MAKING A SCHOOL FOR ALL – SCHOOL INCLUSION

The moment is appropriate to get rid of the theoretical excuses, the purposeful distortions of the concept of inclusion, linked to the intellectual, social and cultural capacity of the students to meet the school requirements and expectations. We know we can reformulate education according to new paradigms, precepts, new tools and educational technologies.

In fact, the conditions we have today to transform the Brazilian schools empowers us to propose one and only school where the cooperation replaces the competition, because what is intended is that the differences complement themselves and that the talents of every one are brought out. Among the innumerable reforms that we have been carrying out at the schools and school system where we are implementing a school for all, the preparation and making of curricula, at all levels, implies interaction and no longer distribution and transmission of knowledge done unilaterally and hierarchically oriented, from the teacher to the student. Both can and should be co-authors of the school plans, by sharing all of their acts, from the planning to the evaluation, and by having mutual respect.

The classes organized by cycles of development eliminate the school levels and the time for learning becomes an allied and no longer an enemy of the students. The evaluation of learning becomes a two-way process in which not only one of its sides is evaluated, the student's, without knowing the other, the teaching and the teacher's performance.

We are, with great difficulty, fighting the disbelief and pessimism of the "accommodated" and showing that inclusion is a great opportunity for the students, parents and educators to demonstrate their competences, powers and educational responsibilities.

The tools are there, so that the changes can happen, urgently, and the school can be reinvented, by destroying the obsolete machine that drives it, the concepts upon which it is based, the theoretical-methodological pillars on which it stands. The parents are the great allied of those who are already committed to the construction of a new Brazilian school – the inclusive school, open to the differences.

They are a driving and claiming force for the so desired school reconstruction because they want the best for their children, with or without disabilities; they are not satisfied with the projects and programs that keep harping on the same string, and /or make up what has always existed.

The researchers from LEPED/ Unicamp have been working on the results of such projects and also on more favorable conditions for school inclusion. Many of those studies have been concluded and some are in course ². They are doctorate theses on Education and master's theses that we advise at the Faculty of Education and which make up a patrimony of inclusion related issues.

² Among other works produced by LEPED, we highlight the ones that follow, because they discuss issues that touch on:

- transformations in the public school system to welcome all students: Brito de Castro 1997; Barros de Almeida, doctorate in course; Mantoan et al, 1999;
- inclusive nursery schools and pre schools;(action research): Vincentin, doctorate in course; Oliveira, master's in course;

- teachers discourse and professional identity of the teachers towards inclusion: Trindade de Lima, doctorate in course; Marques, doctorate thesis 2000;
- the meaning of “regular” in the “regular” school: Teixeira dos Santos, doctorate in course;
- inclusion at the workplace: Aloisi, doctorate thesis 1999; Giugni da Silva, doctorate thesis, 2000;
- special institutions and inclusion: Trindade de Lima, master’s thesis 1999;

- the use of new technologies and development of the inclusive processes in schools: Campos, master’s thesis, 1998; Amorim, master’s in course;
- social inclusion of the blind: Paula Arruda, master’s thesis, 2001;
- bilingualism and inclusive education of deaf students: Faria, doctorate in course;
- physical education, sports and inclusion of the blind in competitions: Ribeiro Luz, master’s thesis, in course.

What is essential, in our opinion, is that all the present and future investments of the Brazilian schools should not repeat the past, but truly take into consideration the role of the school and its educators in teaching the importance of the diversity in all of its manifestations, including in our

own species. It is essential that we keep in mind that before worrying about the students who are in the schools, we should worry about the students who are out of the school and everything that makes schools unfair, discriminating and excluding.

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