

SCHOOL INCLUSION OF AUTISTIC CHILDREN: CASE STUDY IN A BRAZILIAN KINDERGARTEN SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to discuss school inclusion of ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) children, based in a Psychoanalytical framework. Stemming from observations of a student in a private school in a country town in SP Estate, it was possible to identify characteristics similar to other studies on the inclusion of ASD children. Studies show that the success of the inclusion process is only possible via a collective action, with the support of professionals such as teachers, psychologists, speech therapists, doctors and, especially the family. Freud's studies emphasize challenges in the educational process and the importance of the word in a subject-listener. Psychoanalysis can cooperate for the success of inclusion, as it understands the challenges and their impacts in each stage of development, as well as taking account of the child's unconscious desire as vital for his/her development.

KEYWORDS: School Inclusion, ASD, Autism, Freud & Psychoanalysis

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Inclusion

School inclusion is part of the Brazilian Constitution (Brasil, 2009), and should guarantee that special needs' children and teenagers be included in mainstream school process. School inclusion means receiving all students in mainstream education, regardless of skin color, social class, and physical or psychological conditions. According to Serra (2004), school inclusion is understood as a movement of rupture with old paradigms and reformulation of the school system, that is, a changing process of looking at the special needs student inside the school.

It is important to pay attention to every aim and end of the inclusion process, especially its benefits and advantages, even before the student is included, as we are considering the future of a person that needs special support in Education. Education is considered a relationship with exchanges of knowledge and experiences, students and teachers participating in all processes, mainly dialogues and exchanges. In other words, Education is understood as a process where the relationship between teacher and student is fundamental for the student's success and development, but considering the student as a person who also has the knowledge to be shared. As such, school inclusion signs a more special attention, as those students have a very singular way of relating to the world.

School inclusion is an educational, as well as a political action and it is relevant to remind the present Brazilian school scenario, full of inequalities and injustices, needed to be reassessed. Because of that, school inclusion demands special attention aiming to overcome the challenges those inequalities reveal: inclusion cannot be a simple act of enrolling a student in a school, but requires the process to be strictly followed, as a guarantee that the staff involved will receive support in dealing with the included student. School inclusion helps to eliminate prejudice and break up with historical cultural limitations (Bezerra, 2009).

The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), offers significant guidelines for public policies in inclusion, such as the guarantee of education for every child, despite their differences, and should be included in the mainstream school system, adapted to their needs.

1.2 Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) causes a delay in child development, compromising the interaction and socialization, as well as communication. Although ASD can be diagnosed early, in general children are born without any apparent sign and symptoms appear in the course of development. Being present throughout the world and in different families' groups results in ASD not to be related to a specific psychological or environmental source (Alves, Lisboa, Lisboa, 2010). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5 – APA, 2013) shortlists a long list of symptoms:

- Social interaction and communication problems
 - Difficulties in normal conversation
 - Sharing of interests or emotions
 - Challenges in understanding or responding to social cues (eye contact and facial expressions)
- Restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviors, interests or activities:
 - Hand-flapping and toe-walking
 - Playing with toys in an uncommon way
 - Speaking in a unique way
 - Need for a predictable routine or structure
 - Intense interests in activities that are uncommon for a similarly aged child
 - Experiencing the sensory aspects of the world in an unusual or extreme way

Calazans and Martins (2007) state that the disorder can be understood as a disruption of order to be followed and, if there is an order, it is necessary for every individual to adapt to it, meaning that ASD people suffer a deficit in relation to those people who have already adapted to that order. Alves, Lisboa and Lisboa (2010) notice that a successful outcome with ASD children involves support of different professionals, such as psychologists, speech therapists, physiotherapists, and physicians, as well as the teacher.

Freud (1937/1979) mentions three impossible activities: to educate, to govern and to heal, meaning that the word spoken has a huge impact in other people's lives, that is, the speech is submitted to unconscious desires of the receiver. Therefore, in Education, the teacher is the one who possesses a knowledge and transmits it through speech, but he has no control over the effects that speech will have over the student. Freud (1925/1996) declared to be practically impossible a same educational method to fit all sorts of children. That assumption reinforces, even more, the need to establish an Education that requires special attention to ASD children, as they have difficulties in communication and social interactions.

However, ASD children are also bearers of unconscious desires, that manifest through actions and those are the keys to enhance their learning experiences (Avila, 1997). Bastos and Kupfer (2010) emphasize that school inclusion can be considered a therapeutic education, that is, a structured practice through interdisciplinary activities, aiming the recovery of the children's development, or their psychological structure, that was interrupted due to the disability. Psychoanalysis look towards inclusion is turned to each student's subjective conditions, opposite to a juridical look that places limits in objective conditions to inclusion (Voltolini, 2004).

The aim of this study was to discuss the school inclusion of ASD children in a psychoanalytical framework.

2. METHODS

This qualitative research was developed in two different moments. The first moment consisted of three observations lasting two hours each, conducted in a school setting, in different situations (inside the class and during intervals), focusing a boy diagnosed with ASD. At the time of the research, the boy was 6 years old (who will be named G., for privacy), and attended a private school in a country town in São Paulo, Brazil. The second moment consisted of a one-hour semi-structured interview with the mother of the boy.

This research was part of a larger project about school inclusion and was approved by the Ethics Committee (CEP/UPM n. 1279/09/2010 and CAAE n. 0087.0.272.000-10).

3. RESULTS

The three observations showed the same patterns of interactions. Inside the classroom, G. presented difficulties in communication, socialization, and interaction. Most of his classmates would not approach the boy, did not talk to him, seemingly because they did not know how to interact with him. The teacher never encouraged the other children to communicate with G.

He normally repeated movements, vocal sounds, and words. In some occasions, he stood up and run in circles around the classroom, sat down, and some minutes later repeated the run. Frequently, the teacher called G.'s attention because he was running around the classroom and throwing himself on the floor.

During recreation in the playground, G. played alone, running in circles, throwing himself on the floor, or circling in the roundabout. No classmate invited him to play and the teacher did not stimulate them to include G. in games.

There was no support, or carer for G., during school activities. According to the school administration, the school does not offer any kind of special attention to children diagnosed with ASD, although some Psychology and Education trainee students helped G. in class.

G. never obeyed the teacher's orders in class. He only drew animals, and as he finished one drawing, run to get another sheet of paper, while the teacher was explaining other activities to the classroom. Compared to the other classmates, who are not able to write yet, G. wrote the names of all the animals he drew and circled the initials.

In one specific situation, the teacher was very annoyed because G. would no obey her orders and threatened to send him away from class. He then threw himself on the floor, started screaming and crying. The teacher tried to contain him and he cried more, starting to get very agitated, and pulling the teacher's clothes, arms, and hair. The parents were called to take him home.

The interview with the mother showed that the family is aware of G.'s needs, as well as of his abilities and the challenges they will face during his development. The family has the support of a psychologist and a speech therapist working with G. The mother reported many difficulties in the previous school, due to lack of information and training of the staff. She feels that this school is better, and she thinks G. is improving.

4. DISCUSSIONS

Based on the observations, it is possible to confirm the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (APA, 2013), as the boy shows deficits in communication, interaction, socialization, repetitive behaviors (APA, 2014). Once the student needs special attention, it is important that he receives family and school support to enhance his development (UNESCO, 1994).

The interview with the mother indicated adequate family support, in accordance with Alves, Lisboa, and Lisboa (2010), testifying the importance of therapies conducted by psychologists, speech therapists, physicians, and teachers. Authors still state that ASD child must be treated normally by family, teachers, and peers, trying to understand his/her subjectivity and singularity. In fact, the quality of the relationship between teacher and special needs' students is an important factor for the success of the inclusion process. However, that was not the situation observed, as the boy did not receive any support in school and, as a result, the boy may have his school process hindered, for he is excluded by his peers and the teacher never encourages interactions. Stimulate the peers to interact with an ASD student is a movement of rupture and breaking up of old paradigms and historical prejudices (Bezerra, 2009), as well as a changing in the way a special needs student is seen (Serra, 2004).

School should be a free space for all students, but it has to offer physical and professional support to the students (Brasil, 1999). The support offered by trainee graduate students, mentioned by the administration of the school observed, does not guarantee the efficacy of the activities, for trainees are limited to their qualifications, supervision, time and kind of actions allowed in school.

According to Psychoanalysis, the observed ASD boy is a child full of desires, most of them unconscious. Those are manifested through actions, words, games, and they must be understood and allowed. In other words, Psychoanalysis focus on the subjective conditions of the child (Voltolini, 2004), allowing even the comprehension of extreme behaviors, such as his despair when taken out of the classroom.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Freud (1937/1979) considers education as one of the three impossible professions, for when the teacher speaks, it is submitted to the students' unconscious desire. Besides, Freud insists that one only educational method may not be good enough for all students. This is the reality observed in this case, as the student needs special attention when compared to his classmates, and, at the same time, is more advanced in other abilities (writing, for example).

In the school context, teacher's words cause a significant impact, especially considering a child diagnosed with ASD. Psychoanalysis helps us to understand the meanings that are not directly communicated but can be assessed using other tools. Consequently, if the school environment is clearly structured, and offers adequate support, school inclusion will have a therapeutic effect in the student, who may occupy his proper place: the place of a student (Bastos, Kupfer, 2010).

The critical look offered by Psychoanalysis may contribute to the triumph of school inclusion for it pays attention to the child's desires and understands the challenges faced by each stage and their developmental impacts for the construction of a complete human being.

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