

The person with intellectual disability and the conceptions of special education teachersⁱ

A pessoa com deficiência intelectual e as concepções de professores de educação especial

La persona con discapacidad intelectual y las concepciones de profesores de educación especial

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Abstract: The objective of this study is to discuss the conceptions of special education teachers of an Espírito Santo (Brazil) municipality about a person with an intellectual disability. It is a qualitative and exploratory research study, with the application of one hundred and fifty-one open questionnaires as a data collection technique. As discussions and considerations, it was found that teachers of special education still perceive the person with intellectual disability from a perspective of biological limitation regarding the possibilities of development and learning. These stigmatizing conceptions contribute to the construction of a pedagogical posture that includes the person with intellectual disability as an individual defined by the inability to learn, over which there is little or no expectation. On the other hand, it is observed the emergence of a tendency that tries to overcome this perspective towards a conception that bets on the potentialities of the person with intellectual deficiency.

Keywords: Special education. Intellectual disability. Specialist teachers.

Resumo: Objetiva-se discutir as concepções de professores de educação especial de um município do Espírito Santo (Brasil) sobre a pessoa com deficiência intelectual. Trata-se de uma pesquisa de natureza qualitativa e de caráter exploratório, empregando-se a aplicação de cento e cinquenta e um questionários abertos como técnica de coleta de dados. Como discussões e considerações, constatou-se, por um lado, que os professores de educação especial ainda concebem a pessoa com deficiência intelectual numa perspectiva de limitação de ordem biológica em relação às possibilidades de desenvolvimento e aprendizagem. Essas concepções estigmatizantes contribuem para a construção de uma postura pedagógica que compreende a pessoa com deficiência intelectual como um indivíduo delimitado pela não aprendizagem, sobre o qual há pouca ou não há expectativa. Por outro lado, observa-se o surgimento de uma tendência que busca superar essa perspectiva em direção a uma concepção que aposta nas potencialidades da pessoa com deficiência intelectual.

Palavras-chave: Educação especial. Deficiência intelectual. Professores especialistas.

Resumen: El objetivo es discutir las concepciones de los profesores de educación especial en una ciudad de Espírito Santo (Brasil) sobre las personas con discapacidad intelectual. Se trata de una investigación de naturaleza cualitativa y de carácter exploratorio, con la aplicación de ciento cincuenta y un cuestionarios abiertos como técnica de recolección de datos. Como discusiones y consideraciones, se constató que los profesores de educación especial todavía conciben a la persona con discapacidad intelectual en una perspectiva de limitación de orden biológico en relación con las posibilidades de desarrollo y aprendizaje. Estas concepciones estigmatizantes contribuyen a la construcción de una postura pedagógica que comprende a la persona con discapacidad intelectual como un individuo delimitado por el no aprendizaje, sobre el cual hay poca o ninguna expectativa. Por otro lado, se observa el surgimiento de una tendencia que busca superar esa

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perspectiva en dirección a una concepción que apuesta por las potencialidades de la persona con discapacidad intelectual.

Palabras clave: *Educación especial. Discapacidad intelectual. Profesores especialistas.*

Introduction

Over the last decades, Inclusive Education has been designed from the perspective of the right of all students to education. This inclusive imperative has been outlined internationally since the 1990s, mainly grounded on the World Declaration on Education for All (1990) and the Salamanca Declaration (1994). In 2006, the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities took place. Adhering to these movements, Brazil has been drafting legislation aligned with this emerging paradigm, which resulted, for example, in the creation of the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law (LDBEN) No. 9394, of November 20, 1996; National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education in 2008 and other subsidiary documents.

Through this movement for the implementation of Inclusive Education public policies, teacher education has been impacted by the diversity of students in the school, as a mark that the universalization of education has brought to the school level, as the international and national legal guidelines at the school level have presented the challenge of developing an education approach for each and every one in particular. According to Melo and Mafezoni (2019), we understand the right to education as a basic premise of access, permanence and the right to learning. It is necessary that education professionals, supported by their education systems, propose reflections and changes that shape the inclusive practice built and concrete in their pedagogical proposal. However,

[...] such changes in the field of special education policy since its inception have provoked strong tensions that still persist among those who point to the need for a radical change in the way of schooling all the Special Education Target Audience in regular school classes [...] (MENDES, 2019, p. 6).

Regarding teacher education, it is important to think that the process of initial and continuing education for a perspective of school inclusion impacts on school culture and professional development. In this sense, there is a relationship between what is learned in initial and continuing education and what is done in pedagogical practice, decision making and its consequences. It is necessary to reflect that this (teacher) education, added to the development of public policies in education, need to promote more equality both in access and permanence, under the aegis of the right to learn of students with intellectual disabilities, who have historically been excluded from the schooling process.

Thus, considering the conceptual inaccuracy that still surrounds the notion of intellectual disability, this paper aims to understand how special education teachers in a municipality of the Greater Vitória Metropolitan Region (RMGV), in the state of Espírito Santo (ES), Brazil, conceive the person with intellectual disability. We assume that the understanding of the concept of intellectual disability and, consequently, of the person who lives this condition, influences the way the teacher will guide his performance with the

student and, possibly, how he will redefine the implementation of public policies and guidelines directed to the target audience of special education. In school, the lack of knowledge or misunderstanding of this concept leads to the development of a pedagogical planning that disregards the possibilities of work in the process of teaching and learning of the student, greatly impairing their development.

Method

This text is part of the discussions of a larger research project that aims to deepen the discussions about the concept of intellectual disability based on intelligence. The investigative method used in this research is qualitative and exploratory in nature. This perspective allows, in the understanding of Moreira and Caleffe (2008), exploratory research to be developed so as to providing an approximating overview of a given phenomenon.

Therefore, we used as a data collection technique the administration of 250 questionnaires on a day of continuing education for special education teachers in a municipality of RMGV/ES, obtaining the return of 151 questionnaires. Of the 151 special education teachers, 139 are graduated in the pedagogy course and 12 teachers are graduated in other degrees (four in Letters – Portuguese Language, three in Physical Education, two in Biological Sciences, one in Music and two graduated in Teaching). It is noteworthy that 146 respondents have postgraduate degrees in some educational area, especially in Special/Inclusive Education, a specialization that even enables those who are not trained in Pedagogy to occupy the position of special education teacher.

The questions contained in the questionnaire were open, in total of ten, among which was asked “what is your conception of person with intellectual disability?” After reading and analyzing the answers obtained through the questionnaires, we built five analysis categories: i) the person with intellectual disability is someone with learning and/or reasoning disabilities (38 replies); ii) the person with intellectual disability is someone who needs to be cared for, needs the support and/or attention of others (31 replies); iii) people with intellectual disabilities are those who have limitations and/or disabilities with their own time in different ways of learning (30 replies); iv) a person with intellectual disability is someone who has their own time and has different ways of learning; v) the person with intellectual disability is someone with potentialities and/or is a subject with rights and duties (29 replies).

We study the responses through content analysis, based on Bardin (1988), that is, we break down, identify and analyze groups formed by representations, categorizing meanings and making it possible to understand the subject studied. According to Bardin (1988), everything that is said or written can be subjected to content analysis. According to Laville and Dionne (1999, p. 214-215), “[...] content analysis consists of demonstrating the structure and elements of this content to clarify its different characteristics and extract its significance [...]”. A wide range of research objects can be applied: attitudes, values, representations, mentalities, ideologies etc. We emphasize that this is not a rigid method, but it is based on the reconstruction of the meaning of a content.

Social imagination, stigma, normality and pathology

In order to assist us in discussing teachers' conceptions of people with intellectual disabilities, we draw on Bronislaw Baczko, who discusses social imagination; in Erving Goffman, who will assist us with his analysis of the conception of stigma; and Georges Canguilhem, who offers contributions on the dichotomy between normality and pathology. Thus, Baczko (1999) explains that the social imagination corresponds to an effective mechanism of control of collective life, as well as the exercise of authority and power.

The power that unifies the social imagination is based on the fusion between truth and normativity, values and information, through which the logic of symbolism operates. This way, through the social imagination, the collective designates its identity, creating a representation of itself, marking the distribution of social roles and positions, as well as expressing and imposing some common beliefs. Thus, a totalizing representation of society is produced as an “order”, according to which each element has its place, its identity, and its *raison d'être* (BACZKO, 1999, p. 27-28).

It is, therefore, the set of regulating forces of collective life, the social imagination not only indicates to individuals that they belong to the same society, but also conforms the internal social divisions, emphasizing the figure of the “Other”, its internal divisions and institutions, that is, the social legitimacy of discourses and practices.

Inserted in the body of social imagination, social representations are transported from the symbolic universe to the social world, acting on strategies of domination and the determination of social spaces. “From classifications, determinations, divisions produced by social groups and classes, symbols and figures that position and condition life in society are created” (CHARTIER, 2002, p. 61). In the wake of thought, states Chartier (1990, p. 17) “[...] that social ideas do not result in neutral discourses, but rather form practices and strategies that impose legitimacy and authorities that are by no means 'natural' [...]”.

“Social imagination is based on symbolism and, consequently, the construction of a symbol is strongly structured and endowed with great stability” (BACZKO, 1999, p. 29), which is why the theme of intellectual disability must also be seen as a discursive and institutional target inserted in the social imagination developed in modern western societies. Derived from this force that regulates collective life, intellectual disability is part of the imagination as an effective determination, having a direct impact on the educational process.

In this line of thought, we present the concepts of stigma and normality/abnormality, representations predicted in the symbolism of social imagination as constructions of biological/natural determination – and not in their true guise, that of classification discourse and social division. For Erving Goffman (1988), the concept of stigma is now applied to various social contexts. The author explains that the stigma was constituted by the Greeks and represented corporeal signs that aimed to highlight something extraordinary or negative about the morality of those who owned them. Cuts or fire marks were made on the skin of the individual, proving to be a criminal, slave or even traitor.

Someone with stigma, that is, marked, should be avoided, especially in public places, because this person was polluted (GOFFMAN, 1988). The author states that the term “stigma” relates to a profoundly derogatory attribute that can confirm the normality of some and the abnormality of others. Goffman (1988, p. 13) teaches that the definition of attributes categorized as “normal” or “natural” ensures the existence of labels for the purpose of creating requirements with a potential retrospective, a “virtual social identity”. “In contemporary times, stigma is seen as a clear sign of a hidden failure, social mischief or iniquity, generating in the individual a label of distress or shame” (GOFFMAN, 1988, p. 12-13).

Stigma must be understood in the relationship of those who create it, that is, in the duality of those who produce the label and those who receive the derogatory symbol. The attitude of the “normal ones” implies recognition by those who undergo the stigmatization procedure. The individual finds himself trapped in a double contingency, being discredited - when his characteristic is evident - or “discreditable” - when his characteristic is not yet known to those present in his environment (GOFFMAN, 1988). Moreover, in terms of “moral career”, “[...] the stigmatized individual learns and incorporates the view of the normal ones, confirming the beliefs in which he was molded and labeled, not seeing a personal stigma but a general identity or label” (GOFFMAN, 1992, p. 41).

In this alignment, Georges Canguilhem, especially about his concept of “normal” and “pathological”, clarifies that

[...] The measurement of the “normal” – under which the variants could constitute the concept of pathology – cannot be conferred on any living organism except through an act of value, an action that comes from a field beyond scientific logic: Thus, defining what is abnormal is more than recognizing the existence of a norm, it is no longer a detectable disposition as a fact, but a value relation, an attachment to a position (CANGUILHEM, 2012, p. 23-24).

It would only be possible to understand what is normal or pathological with the initial understanding of what life itself is – a dynamic polarity, with the oscillation of an organism at different times, which occurs throughout human existence. Canguilhem (2012) understands that the relations between normality and abnormality are shaped by cultural, historical, geographical elements and movements typical of each social time. The very modifications of medical practices are generated by the alteration of social structures. Therefore, it would be impossible for medicine to be considered a static science, but understandable from the statement that a scientific fact only occurs in a particular cultural and historical context.

This duality, as we saw with Goffman, corresponds to a discourse that should not be reduced in a logical antithesis, but as a result of the production of certain knowledge that accompanies the discourse and practice of institutions in force in the social body. Intellectual disability, therefore, seen as a stigma attributed to the student, is the result of duality with the position of normality recognized in institutional language. Due to the repeated practice of disclosure of this symbol of abnormality, applied to the context of intellectual disability, a social imagination is formed and shaped; imagination that identifies in the figure of the other

a possible entity of exclusion and determination of the characteristics of normality that pervade modern and contemporary practices.

Teachers' conceptions about people with intellectual disability

We seek to understand the conception of special education teachers about people with intellectual disabilities and from the data collected and analyzed, we identified five categories in relation to people with intellectual disabilities. The first category points out that the person with intellectual disability is conceived as someone with learning and/or reasoning disabilities, with a total of 38 answers.

We obtained answers such as: “Person who has difficulty learning, understanding and performing activities that are common and routine for most people [...]”; “A person who has difficulty solving problems, understanding abstract ideas”; “They are people who have difficulties in performing activities, with a delay in intellectual development to understand or solve problems [...]”. About this way of looking at the person with intellectual disability, we infer that there may be the perception that intellectual disability is a manifestation of an organic and individual nature, therefore medical, linked to a lack of intelligence, disregarding social relations.

From this perspective, as Baczko (1999, p. 28) explains, social imagination corresponds to a set of specific symbolic references that the whole collectivity produces, “through which it perceives itself, divides and creates its purposes”. Social symbols designate both the object and the subject's reactions to that object, and introduce values and shape behaviors, leading individuals to common action. A totalizing representation of society or of a phenomenon is produced, “according to which each element has its place, its identity, and its *raison d'être*”.

To conceive the person with intellectual disability as someone with learning and/or reasoning difficulties has deep roots in this social imagination built over time. The way of signifying the phenomenon of intellectual disability influences the way the person with intellectual disability is understood. On this issue, Leijoto and Kassar (2017, p. 103) analyze that, “from the seventeenth century to the first decades of the twentieth century, medicine played a leading role in the diagnosis and care for people with disabilities, which favored the predominance of an organicist approach in the education of this population”. The five predominant criteria considered for the definition of this condition were “[...] the character of its constitution, the irreversibility of the condition, the intellectual deficit, the characteristics of adaptive behavior and the period in which the problem arises”.

We found that the relationship between intellectual disability and the weakness of reasoning occurred through the intervention of medicine/psychiatry and psychology that understood it as a solely organic phenomenon that, according to the French perspective, could be measured by scales and statistical models, in a relationship with the school that was, at a given historical moment, based on the moral instruction of individuals, discrediting the learning possibilities of these people. It is important to highlight that some doctors of the time

proposed the education of the “idiots”, betting on their educability through moral medicine. In this sense, Pessotti (1984, p. 41), in historical analysis in relation to the Aveyron Savage and Jean Marc Itard's medical-pedagogical care at the end of the 19th century, explains that “moral medicine was the generic designation for the activities of clinical psychology and psychiatry”.

The historically made association between intellectual disability and cognitive limitations, another factor that greatly contributed to the rooting of this conception in the social imagination, refers to the use of Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests to measure the “mental age” of those who do it. According to Bridi (2013), the first intelligence test was designed in 1905 by researchers Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon (Binet-Simon test), who blamed an alleged inadequate development of intelligence among students who could not learn in public schools in Paris. However, despite numerous criticisms of IQ testing at the time, it been consolidated into the collective imagination as the most qualified instrument for measuring intelligence, revealing the still predominant conception of intelligence as innate and static, as it had been conceived since the nineteenth century. Thus, the person is placed as the center of the problem, when there is an emphasis on his performance, affirming cognitive delay as an individual characteristic, and thus reinforcing an expectation regarding learning at school. The permanence of this psychometric perspective, which is closely related to the conception of intellectual disability as a biological and individual factor, also ends up not “[...] problematizing intellectual disability as a social production, the result of the relationship between biology and culture in the constitution of human subjects” (CARNEIRO, 2017, p. 81), thus excluding the cultural dimension that involves the construction of the very concept of intelligence and intellectual disability.

The conception of intellectual disability that predominates in the social imagination of the respondents contributes to a “pathologization” of the subject, who is seen as having innate deviation or organic abnormality (CANGUILHEM, 2012, p. 12), a fact that contributes to the stigmatization process of the individual, who comes to be regarded as someone “not completely human” (GOFFMAN, 1988, p. 15). This perspective in no way contributes to the teaching and learning process of people with intellectual disabilities, since it suppresses teachers' expectations regarding their students' development.

Taking into account the expectations related to the person with intellectual disability discussed above, we list the second category, which postulates the person with intellectual disability as someone who needs to be cared for by the other, who needs support and/or attention. In this category, there were 31 responses, indicating: “Person who needs the other to develop”; “They are students dependent on others until they find their autonomy”; “People with disabilities are those who somehow need help in some area for better learning”; “They need attention, regardless of whether there is a lot of commitment or not”; “It's an individual who goes through a process that sometimes needs a lot of attention to get their learning done with dedication, affection and love, because they occasionally go through a difficult time and you need to be careful with this student”.

Baczko (1999, p. 30) states that social imagination has “an impact on individual and collective behavior”. The symbol of intellectual disability, embodied in the person,

encourages an action that is common to people, linked to care, support and attention. When in contact with someone with intellectual disabilities, depending on how we conceive them, one can judge by appearance and/or attitudes, seeing an alleged weakness that would require care and support. In response to this impression comes a conduct full of compassion and pity, typical feeling directed at one who is seen as incapable. It is necessary to give care and attention to all people, as long as this happens without excess that deprives individuals of their autonomy. Acting in a perspective of deprivation of autonomy, the tendency is to act as if the person were unable to perform activities that may be common, regardless of whether or not they have intellectual disabilities. Behind a generous look, one can find the underestimation of the other, limiting people with intellectual disabilities to the limits of childhood, in a condition of permanent disability and dependence on the other. On the other hand, mentioning “care” may reveal to us the teacher's charitable attitude towards students with intellectual disabilities.

Thus, Goffman (1988, p. 14) points out that “the attitudes we, normal people, have towards a person with stigma and the actions we undertake towards them are well known, as they are the answers that benevolent social action tries to soften and improve”. The benevolent attitude, implied in the teachers' answers, is possibly linked to the Brazilian tradition of segregating education directed at people with intellectual disabilities, as well as linked to the philanthropy of private associations (KASSAR, 2011), which denotes lack of knowledge about both the condition of intellectual disability and the possibilities in the pedagogical practice.

In this scenario, the third category names the person with intellectual disability as someone who has limitations and/or incapability and who, in most cases, is not able to learn and perform the same activities as other people. In this category, there is a relationship between intellectual disability and absence and incompleteness, which, in turn, are revealed through the idea that the person with disabilities is someone who does not have the same possibilities as individuals considered “normal”: “A person with a limitation, that is, for genetic reasons or reasons acquired throughout life”; “A person with difficulty or limitations in the perception of the world”; “A person who is retarded and learns more slowly, within his or her limitations”; “Person who has some intellectual limitations”; “Intellectual disabilities are those who, for some reason, have a functional disability that will result in underperforming”. Thus, those expressing the sign of “abnormality” are given some values, depending on the nature of their difference.

It is also important to emphasize that, in this category, three teachers answered: “It is a child like any other, but with limitations, but capable of performing school and personal activities like the other”; “These are students (people) who have their limitations but are people with the ability to learn”; “People with intellectual disabilities are able to learn respecting their limitations, they will require different methodologies, in order for the student to learn them”. These speeches are mixed with a possibility of pedagogical practice, hence the importance of continuing teacher education, because teacher training in special education and for school inclusion has not been configured in a simple way, either by the construction

of historically produced pedagogical practices or by the way this teacher training has been designed (CAETANO, 2009).

Together with the analysis of the first and second categories, we observe a complementary relationship, as for the respondents, due to a “cognitive deficit”, the person with intellectual disability presents incapability that prevents them from progressing intellectually. Taking this analysis to the school level, it can be inferred that special education teachers have low expectations about their students' development and learning, whose “limits” seem to represent an insurmountable obstacle to their learning. Also, in a study carried out on intellectual disability in the conception of special education educators, Rossato and Leonardo (2011, p. 80-81) state that the result of the study revealed “[...] lack of development perspective in relation to people with intellectual disabilities. Their learning possibilities are limited to the organic aspect [...]”. In one of the reports obtained from one of the special education teachers, one perceives the importance given to the “minimal” result achieved with their students. According to the authors, “when something “good” is achieved with this student, however “small”, the barrier is overcome” (ROSSATO; LEONARDO, 2011, p. 81, emphasis in original). Consequently, the stigma cast on the person with intellectual disabilities may influence the teacher to disregard the potential of that student, considering any attempt to teach him/her unproductive.

From the analysis of the questionnaires, we find that there is a tendency regarding the conception of special education teachers in relation to their students with intellectual disabilities. Schütz (2006), De Vitta, De Vitta and Monteiro (2010), Raymundo (2010), Teles (2010), Valentim and Oliveira (2013) and Camizão (2016) concluded that most teachers consider that intellectual disability imposes cognitive limits on those who have this condition.

We understand that it is fundamental that, when developing their activities with students with intellectual disabilities, the teacher focuses on the student's potentialities, and not on the supposed “limitations” that make learning difficult. This is because, like any other human being, people with disabilities can also learn. The supposed “limitations” should not be used as an excuse for not doing their work with the same commitment as that done with students without disabilities. We agree with Melo and Mafezoni (2019) that the education of people with disabilities should be based on the same parameters and objectives as those for people without disabilities. The difference in the routing of actions and practice is working by offering techniques, instruments and didactic-pedagogical methods.

In the continuation of the discussion, we built the fourth category, which points to the understanding of the person with intellectual disability as having their own time and different ways of learning. We highlight some answers from teachers: “A person who has the capacity, within his or her own time, to live and integrate into society”; “They are capable persons who are unique human beings and who will advance in their pace”; “This student learns in his or her time, so we have to have different activities to encourage them with learning”; “A person who is able to learn, but in a different and longer way, and the target of much affection and love”; “People have a different way of interpreting what's happening around them”.

Canguilhem (2012, p. 48) explains that the term “normal” has always been attributed to “that which does not lean either left or right”, remaining “just in the middle; hence two

senses are derived: it is normal what is as it should be; and it's normal [...] what is found in most cases of a given species or what is the mean or modulus of a measurable characteristic". For the author, the logic of the discourse of normality comes from the establishment of parameters by the institutions that dictate knowledge and, therefore, insert signs of standardization. The existence of normal is not something concrete, but a cross-dressing element of scientificity, that is, an arbitrary statement that generates normativity to the social context. Therefore, the scientific methods established by the biomedical areas have long dictated a distinction between normality and pathologies, unfolding in the understanding of what would be abnormal. Hence the manifestation in the category under discussion, since Canguilhem (2012) had already pointed out that the objects of measurement of physiology burden pathology in terms of identification, that is, there would be no "ontology" of abnormality, but a label to be employed.

The category now analyzed about the concept of intellectual disability fits into what has historically been considered "abnormal": a bias that deviates from the standard of normality, remaining outside the right middle ground; as most people consider that the person with intellectual disability runs away from the righteousness of normal people, hence the person with intellectual disability has his or her own time or learns in different ways, not complying with the standard of "what is as it should be".

The answers contained in this category, in a way, represent a breakthrough, compared to the answers that simply understand the person with intellectual disability as someone "with learning and/or reasoning disabilities" or as "someone with limitations and/or inability". Understanding the person with intellectual disability as someone who "has his or her own time and/or different ways of learning," at least indicates that the respondent sees this person as a human being capable of development, removing him or her from the limits of "non-learning", as long as it is not embedded in the statements the possibility of leaving the teaching-learning process without planning and without direction. If so, we return to a vicious circle that nothing needs to be taught to people with intellectual disabilities. In this sense, the uniqueness of students with disabilities would not be contained in their cognitive disability, but in the method to be employed by the teacher in his or her teaching and learning process.

In sum, the last category comprises the person with intellectual disability as someone with potential and/or as a subject of rights and duties. In this sense, we perceive a movement in relation to an alignment with Inclusive Education, rescuing people with intellectual disabilities from the dimension of learning disabilities, limits, dependence on others, but seeing them as citizens in all their complexity, with potential as well as rights and duties. This is certainly a reflection of recent efforts to promote Inclusive Education, which seeks to offer a way of educating that does not discriminate against the individual over his or her physical and intellectual condition.

Since Brazil became a signatory to international conventions and declarations in the 1990s, it has been the duty of the country to ensure the universalization of the right to education towards Inclusive Education. Prior to this inclusive movement, what has been in place for many decades in Brazil has been a separation between educational services for people with disabilities and those offered to so-called "normal" people. This separation

resulted in a parallel system of education, “[...] so that serving students with disabilities occurred incisively in separate places from other students [...]”, revealing itself as a preference rather than an exception in the history of Brazilian education (KASSAR, 2011, p. 62).

As this segregationist paradigm only came to be questioned at the end of the twentieth century, it is understandable that most special education teachers are still subject to the social imagination that extols the supposed absences, limitations and difficulties attributed to people with intellectual disabilities. However, the tendency that seems to emerge indicates the construction of a thought focused on the enhancement of rights, duties and potentialities of this special education audience. This trend over the next decades will surely overcome the segregationist and stigmatizing paradigm imposed on people with intellectual disabilities.

Final remarks

Through this study, we present and discuss the conceptions that special education teachers from a municipality of RMGV/ES, Brazil, share about the person with intellectual disability. We understand that the confusion surrounding the concept of intellectual disability linked to the person, influences pedagogical actions, harming or contributing to the student's teaching and learning process.

The predominance of stigmatizing conceptions, together with the particularities of the local reality, contribute to the construction of a pedagogical posture that sees the student (person) with intellectual disability as an individual delimited by “non-learning”, about whom there is little or no expectations. The damage deriving from these conceptions rests on the naturalization of a school culture that does not strive to contribute to the development students with intellectual disabilities, constituting a mere sterile compliance with the educational legislation.

Although most of the answers are aligned with stigmatizing conceptions, there is the emergence of a new paradigm, aimed at understanding the person with intellectual disability as a subject of rights and potentialities. This new social imagination, truly aligned with the aims of Inclusive Education, represents a growing trend not only among those who work with the target audience of special education, but also among all school subjects.

In order for this trend to be consolidated, one possibility is that the initial and continuing education of special education teachers who support Inclusive Education be freed from a social imagination, as well as from the stigma and its relationship between the normal and the pathological, which is harmful to pedagogical practices. The social imagination of the 21st century needs to be detached from the organicist conceptions of the last century, making it possible to understand intellectual disability through a historical-cultural bias, without reducing its specificities, according to which the person with disabilities is considered a whole subject for development and learning.

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Notes

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