

**Public policies for inclusion in higher education:
case report of a transsexual student with Autistic Spectrum Disorder**

*Políticas públicas para inclusão no ensino superior:
relato de uma experiência com uma estudante transexual e com Transtorno do Espectro Autista*

*Políticas públicas para inclusión en la enseñanza superior:
relato de una experiencia con una estudiante transexual y con Trastorno del Espectro Autista*

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Abstract: The present study seeks to problematize the implementation of public policies for inclusion in Brazilian higher education based on the report of an experience with a transsexual university student diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder. The study is qualitative and exploratory in nature and data were collected from interviews. The main difficulties reported were the lack of specific training for teachers and didactic-pedagogical adaptations, and the failure to implement an individualized teaching plan. Psychotherapy, the university's accessibility and inclusion center, and the course coordination mediations contributed to reducing barriers to inclusion.

Keywords: Inclusion. Higher Education. Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

Resumo: O presente estudo busca problematizar a implementação de políticas públicas para inclusão no ensino superior brasileiro, a partir do relato de experiência com uma estudante universitária transexual e com diagnóstico do Transtorno do Espectro Autista. O estudo é de natureza qualitativa e exploratória, e os dados foram coletados a partir de entrevistas. As principais dificuldades reportadas foram a falta de formação específica de docentes e adaptações didático-pedagógicas, e a não implementação de um Plano de Ensino Individualizado. A psicoterapia, o núcleo de acessibilidade e inclusão da Universidade e as mediações da coordenação do curso contribuíram para reduzir as barreiras para a inclusão.

Palavras-chave: Inclusão. Ensino Superior. Transtorno do Espectro Autista.

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Resumen: El presente estudio busca problematizar la implementación de políticas públicas para inclusión en la enseñanza superior brasileña a partir del relato de una experiencia con una estudiante universitaria transexual y con diagnóstico del Trastorno del Espectro Autista. El estudio es de naturaleza cualitativa y exploratoria, y los datos fueron recopilados a partir de entrevistas. Las principales dificultades reportadas fueron la falta de formación específica de docentes y adaptaciones didáctico-pedagógicas, y la no implementación de un Plan de Enseñanza Individualizado. La psicoterapia, el núcleo de accesibilidad e inclusión de la Universidad y las mediaciones de la coordinación del curso contribuyeron para reducir las barreras hacia la inclusión.

Palabras clave: Inclusión. Enseñanza superior. Trastorno del espectro autista.

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Introduction

Despite advances in legislation and public policies, the inclusion of people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Brazilian higher education remains a formidable challenge to be overcome and operationalized by the academic community. In this study, our objective was to problematize the implementation of public policies for inclusion in Brazilian higher learning institutions, based on the elements of a case referring to a student from a public Brazilian university who is transsexual and suffers from ASD. Thus, we aimed at investigating her perception and voice her opinions on her most relevant experiences in university everyday life.

The study is based on accounts of the experience of a university student. The context was one of assistance at the Laboratory of Applied Psychology Services (LABSPA) at the UFGD. Her process of entrance and permanence in higher education was the result of intense collaboration, in different contexts and segments, between family and university. The study is of qualitative and exploratory nature. Data were collected from interviews aiming at understanding the implementation of policies of accessibility and inclusion in higher education, based on the perception of the student herself.

In order to understand the proposed objectives, the text was organized by means of four major points: 1) brief presentation of the legislations and public policies for inclusion and accessibility in Brazil, with a focus on higher education; 2) characterization of the context of higher education institutions (IES), in which the study participant is regularly enrolled, with a highlight on the student support nucleus, the Target Public of Special Education (PAEE); 3) presentation of elements of the case assisted by the LABSPA, and the results and discussions of the interview realized with the participant; and 4) conclusions.

Legislation and public policies for the inclusion of people with disabilities in Brazilian higher education

The Education Directives and Bases Law no. 9.394 (BRAZIL, 1996) and the Inclusion Law no. 13.146 (BRAZIL, 2015) guarantee that all individuals must have access to education at all levels and modes. Therefore, no one must be excluded because of individual characteristics regarding human diversity. In 2005, the “Program of Accessibility to Higher Education – Incluir” was created by the Ministry of Education (MEC), under the aegis of the Bureau of Special Education (SEESP) and the Bureau of Higher Education (SESu), with the objective to

[...] foment the creation and consolidation of nuclei of accessibility to federal universities, who are in charge of the organization of institutional actions that guarantee the inclusion of people with disabilities into academic life, while bringing down pedagogical, architectural, and information-communication barriers resulting in the promotion of observance to legal requisites of accessibility (BRAZIL, 2013, p. 3).

The National Policy of Special Education, from the Perspective of Inclusive Education, outlined the actions for Special Education at universities:

In Higher Education, the transversal nature of special education gets itself realized by means of actions that promote access, permanence, and participation of students. Such actions involve the planning and organization of resources and services in order to promote architectural accessibility in communications, information systems, and pedagogical materials that must be provided during selection processes and during the development of all activities related to education and research (BRASIL, 2008, p. 17).

In addition, it is possible to highlight the fact that Law no. 13.409/16, which alters the number of vacancies in IES for people with special needs (PCD) after 2018. Such public policy, which predicts affirmative action for people with special needs in federal institutions of technical and higher education, has contributed to expressive growth in the number of PAEE students enrolled at Brazilian IES (detailed information on inclusion and the reservation of vacancies for people with disabilities in higher education can be assessed in Mendes (2022)). Such rather recent fact emphasizes the importance of investigating how the inclusion of these students has taken place in the different institutions. Article 3 of Law 15.409/16 determines that: /

At each federal institution of higher education, the vacancies referred to by article no. 1 of this Law will be taken, for every course and period, by self-declared black, mixed, and indigenous students or by students with special needs, in the terms of the legislation in proportion to the total number that must be at least equal to the respective number of black, mixed, indigenous, and students with disabilities at the unit of the federation where the institution is located, according to the last census by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics – IBGE (BRAZIL, 2016, p. 1).

In Brazil, people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are considered people with disabilities, according to Law 12.764 (BRAZIL, 2012). ASD is a major disorder that has become increasingly common. According to the *Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring* (ADDM) network, a monitoring program involving parents and eight-year-old children residing in the USA in 2020, the prevalence of the disorder is of one in every 36 children, and being four times prevalent in boys (MAENNER *et al.*, 2023).

According to the bio-medical model, and with the synthetizations of major current diagnostic manuals (DSM-5-TR, 2022; CID-11, 2022), ASD is a neurodevelopment disorder characterized by persistent deficits in communication and social interaction in different contexts, including losses in socioemotional reciprocity, and in verbal/non-verbal behaviors aiming at social interaction and relational skills. There is also the presence of behavior patterns, activities, restrict and repetitive behaviors. Individuals with ASD might display stereotyped and repetitive, as well as sensorial hypo and hyper sensibility (DSM-5-TR, 2022).

ASD might be classified into 3 levels of acuteness, defined by means of the need for individual support: Level 1 (Requires support); Level 2 (Requires substantial support), and Level 3 (Requires a lot of substantial support). Due to their neurodevelopmental nature, individuals with ASD display connectivity and activity that are atypical in some brain areas, as well as neuroanatomical differences in the front lobe, hippocampus, and cerebellum, combined with neurochemical alterations of the serotonin and dopamine neurotransmitters. Thus, the disorder's etiology is multi-factorial, if we take into consideration genetic and neurobiological factors (DSM-5-TR, 2022).

On the other hand, in a social model of the disorder, and based on a Vygotskian perspective, we understand that the disorder establishes itself as a limitation to be overcome in the social environment by means of focusing on the limitations of the environment, rather than the limitations that are intrinsic to the disorder, according to the author on the formal education of visually impaired children:

[...], the task consists of both the education of visually impaired children individuals and the re-education of those that can see. It is necessary to change the attitude of people who can see regarding blindness or blind people. The re-education of individuals who can see constitutes a social and pedagogical task of immeasurable importance (VIGOTSKY, 2022, p. 125).

Therefore, it is a matter of understanding the disorder not as mal-function, but as a “[...] the qualitatively differentiated potential that difference brings out” (FARIA *et al.*, 2021, p. 07). In this interim, overcoming a disorder is, in fact, overcoming social limitations that compromise the development of individual learning. Regarding these aspects, adaptations in attitudes, spaces, and curriculum are fundamental when it comes to bringing down barriers that hinder educational inclusion. As an example of inclusive practices that are legally guaranteed by public policies, we mention the presence of a specialized accompanying professional, from Specialized Education Assistance (AEE), of professionals giving support, and of curricular adaptations, that might be systematized into an Individualized Learning Plan (PEI).

In fact, students with ASD have the right to specialized accompanying professionals (Law no 12.764, 2012), who in practice can be referred to as accompanying teachers, pedagogical assistants, educational assistants, pedagogical support teachers, therapeutical accompanying people etc. (MAYER *et al.*, 2019). In addition to the main teacher, and specialized accompanying professionals, we also have support professionals (Law no. 13.146/15), who can be defined as people who carry out activities related to nutrition, hygiene, and transportation of students with special needs, acting in different spaces and school activities, comprehending all levels and modes of teaching, in public and private institutions (BRAZIL, Law no. 13.146/15, Art. 3º).

Also, students with ASD have the right to attend the AEE, because special education is realized in all modes of education (BRAZIL, 2009). However, it is important to mention the fact that the availability of the AEE for students with ASD, though still prescribed by Brazilian public policies, is not yet fully advertised and provided in higher education (EVARISTO; ASNIS; CARDOSO, 2022). Likewise, students with ASD have the right to an adapted curriculum, which is traditionally systematized in a PEI – a plan that aims at responding to students’ individualities, when it comes to their difficulties and potentials/resources, as well as characteristics of their context. Thus, the student-centered plan model started to identify necessities and provide education that responded to their demands (TANNÚS-VALADÃO, MENDES, 2018).

Inclusion of students with ASD in higher education: specific features of the Federal University of Grande Dourados

Especially after the 1990s, the presence of people with disabilities in higher education has intensified as a result of public policies designed to promote access, permanence, and good academic performance among this contingent (CABRAL, 2018). Da Silva *et al.* (2020), by mapping out the contingent of students with ASD in Brazilian higher education, based on data provided by the Anísio Teixeira National Institute for Educational Research and Studies (INEP, 2017), indicate that there were 546 autistic students in higher education, while most were male (61,5%) with a female minority (38,5%).

In higher education, people with disabilities (PCD), such as ASD people, might face diverse difficulties. Some major barriers are: architectural, which regard physical spaces designed to prevent PCD people from getting around campus safely and independently (1); communicational because of difficulties to obtain access to information made available by the university (2); pedagogical, related to pedagogical methods and course materials that are unsuitable (3); and, finally, attitudinal, which are related to attitudes of prejudice against classmates and teachers regarding PCD students (CASTRO; ALMEIDA, 2014).

By reviewing the literature on the process of inclusion into higher education, Da Silva *et al.* (2018) identify the role played by the teacher as vital and most of the assessed studies. The teacher is the most important connection and the chain of support to PAEE students. Also, the authors believe is essential that formation on inclusion establishes itself as a continuous thing that goes beyond punctual courses.

Among the challenges for teachers, in addition to continuous formation, there is the initial formation of teachers for their practice because the theme of inclusion in education is not always approached as a major content (ANTUNES; AMORIM, 2020). Besides that, Antunes and Amorim (2020) emphasize the budget difficulties in higher education inclusion policies. In studies that investigate the perception of students with ASD in higher education (AGUILAR; RAULI, 2020, OLIVEIRA; ABREU, 2019; SANTOS *et al.*, 2020), two common points stand out: the importance of qualification of teachers and the importance of listening to the perceptions of those who are the target public of inclusion policies.

Among the obstacles faced by the students identified in the aforementioned studies, it is possible to highlight stiff pedagogical and obstacles for pedagogical and curricular adaptations, like on information concerning specific details of ASD by the academic community and changes caused

by the condition such as difficulty to focus, sensorial and emotional overload, and difficulties in social interaction. Also, Oliveira and Abreu (2019) emphasize that the specific interests of ASD students might be instrumentalized in academic activities that promote their development and learning.

The percentage of students with disabilities who are regularly enrolled in higher education represents 0,45% of 8 million enrolled students (BRAZIL, 2016). Locally speaking, in Mato Grosso do Sul, there are 522 PAEE students attending public institutions of higher education, while 50 students are in the public system, 492 attend federal institutions, and 30 attend institutions in the state education system (INEP, 2017). However, although public policies for inclusion in higher education have produced an increase in the number of PAEE students in the IES, there are obstacles to be overcome *in loco*.

In the context of the federal university of Grande Dourados (UFGD), the period from 2007 to 2014, the Laboratory of Accessibility and Inclusive Practices (LAPEI) was the most important institutional context/space that was responsible for supporting and guaranteeing access and permanence of PAEE students at UFGD (NOZU; BRUNO; CABRAL, 2018). In 2015, after administrative restructuring, the Multidisciplinary Nucleus for Inclusion and Accessibility (NuMIAC) established itself as responsible for the execution and supervision of policies for accessibility and inclusion at university. The NuMIAC is an organ that is supplementary to the university administration. It aims at implementing a service of academic and professional orientation for universities students with disabilities, general development disorders, or even students gifted with super intelligence.

Among the actions coordinated by the NuMIAC, it is possible to highlight the ones of promotional architectural accessibility, communication, information systems, and pedagogical materials. Nozu, Bruno and Cabral (2018) indicate that in the year 2017 there were 42 students registered who were self-declared as PAEE at the UFGD, which represents a significant increase, considering that in the year of 2012 there were 16 registered students in the same group. We want to emphasize that the actions realized by this organ of support for PAEE students, especially the ones of formation and development of awareness in the general academic community regarding the needs of these students are indispensable for the realization of inclusion and higher education.

Thinking of the process of inclusion of people with ASD in higher education, requires understanding ASD in adult life, in combination with the crossing of specific themes that are relevant to the age group, such as sexuality and sexual orientation. Concerning this aspect, they are pioneering works that investigate people with ASD and the transsexual community and with the gender dysphoria, according to studies by Bejerot and Eriksson (2014) and Van der Miesen *et al.* (2018), Øien, Cicchetti and Nordahl-Hansen (2018) and George and Stokes (2018).

Øien, Cicchetti and Nordahl-Hansen (2018), in the systematic review on the literature on gender dysphoria, sexuality, and ASD, found 47 articles on the theme and indicated a significant increase and the number of studies on those themes in the last decade, especially after 2015. George and Stokes (2018) intended to compare the gender dysphoria between naughty man and the 219 women with ASD with 103 men and 138 women without ASD. Their results indicated that individuals with ASD how are more diverse in their identities of gender than the general population.

It is important to emphasize a collective note by the *Autistic Self Advocacy Network* (ASAN), *National Center for Transgender Equality* (NCTE), and the *LGBTQ Task Force* with the title “the rights of transgender autistic people and people who are gender nonconformists”. And the referred note, the autonomy, dignity, and self-determination of autistic people who are non-cisgender is defended. That is, according to the authors, they are caretakers, health professionals, and family members of autistic people who deny their gender identity with the justification that autistic people are not capable of understanding they are all gender, or make decisions on how to express it, or that not even being able to identify their own gender is a symptom of the disorder.

These problems indicate the need for more in-depth understanding of the experiences of adult people who are transsexual or have ASD. According to the warning given by the note by the *ASAN, NCTE and the LGBTQ Task Force*, lack of knowledge and prejudice might add more difficulty to the hard everyday lives of people with ASD since they have to live in this society that is not inclusive and such a reality might affect the mental health of these peoples.

Thus, it is important to highlight the importance of psychotherapeutic support for the anguish related two body issues, which, according to Barros, Lemos and Ambiel (2019), when in combination with actions by the psychosocial support network, might result in improvement of the quality of life of transsexual people. Within this network, it is possible to include the role played by education institutions and the assistance for students.

Review of the literature showed that, as a result of the advances in public policies for inclusion in Brazilian higher education institutions, it is possible to observe a significant increase of PAEE at universities, which highlights the importance and the necessity of studies that dedicate themselves to promoting inclusion by means of the experiences of these students in higher education. In addition, it is possible to identify and then increasing interest by the academic-scientific community on ASD in adult women. Therefore, that is a very incipient research area.

In this sense, inspired by Brazilian inclusion policies and the specificities of the UFGD, the present study aims at problematizing the implementation of public policies for inclusion in Brazilian higher education, based on elements that are present in the account by a transsexual university student with the diagnosis of ASD. We will now present methodological details and after that elements of the experience and of the case in question.

Method

We have decided to realize a case study of exploratory and the qualitative nature that, according to Minayo (1999), is the one that “[...] applies itself to the study of the history, the relations, the representations, the beliefs, the perceptions and the opinions, which are products of the interpretations by humans on how they live, produce the artifacts and themselves, feel and think” (p. 57).

Data were collected by means of a semi structured interview that was specifically designed for the present study. It contained 6 major questions/axes: 1) in general, what do you make of the efforts for inclusion and accessibility within the UFGD? (Ex.: identify possible problems in accessibility, infrastructure, attitudes, communication, support centers, physical space characteristics such as classrooms, cafeterias etc.); 2) what do you think of the way teachers and classmates deal with autism? What do they seem to know about it? (Ex.: do they seem to understand the problem? Are they willing to learn more about it? Do the teachers seem to be trying to adapt the pedagogical material?); 3) do you notice actions by the teachers and classmates that prove barriers for learning and well-being at the university? (Ex.: examination methods, content systematization, teamwork); 4. Have you ever been discriminated in the university of environment because of being autistic? If your answer is yes, has the experience produced an impact in your life?; 5) Would you like to change something about your experience and the university context? Which adaptations do you consider important and should be done in order to improve your experience in the university?; and 6.) Have you ever needed support and looked for the multi disciplinarian Center for inclusion and accessibility (NUMIAC) of the UFGD or any other responsible equipment? How did they deal with your request? (Did they already know it? Was there any interest to learn more? Is there formative preparation to deal with students with ASD? The interview was given by the two authors in the rooms of the LABSPA and later on, it was analyzed qualitatively while the characterization of the participant here denominated A., and the other information presented now. It is also possible to emphasize that some information of the clinical history of the

participant or omitted or adapted in order to preserve her identity or satisfy the purpose of the authors, while preserving the content of the accounts and experiences.

Experience Report with A.

A. is a 20-year-old graduation student at the UFGD. She is a transsexual woman with a diagnosis of ASD from 2022. She is hypersensitive to noise and, therefore, constantly needs headphones, displays selectiveness and rituals regarding food, which makes it impossible for her to eat at the university, for example. She stands out for her formidable intelligence, and a strong interest in astrobiology and themes in the area. Besides that, she has manifested interest in becoming a school teacher in the future, which emphasizes the essential nature of higher education in her personal trajectory. A. Started psychotherapy at the LABSPA in 2023, after referral by the coordination of her original course, and is being supported in the Specific Supervised Internship by the first author of the study with the supervision of the second author.

To A., communicating difficulties related to ASD leads her to not externalize some of her adaptive needs in the classroom. That is a very characteristic behavior of ASD, considering that the disorder might cause significant loss in the quality of social interactions (APA, 2022). Regarding her general perception of the efforts for inclusion and accessibility at the UFGD, A. mentions that, in terms of infrastructure, she has difficulty to get her bearings in the campus. That is the reason why she suggests putting up signs around. She says some of these already exist in the building where she attends her classes. Such difficulty highlights the architectural barrier that students with disabilities might face in higher education (CASTRO; ALMEIDA, 2014), since the physical organization of the institution makes it difficult for people with ASD to move around safely and independently because of their altered sensorial processing. Regarding this aspect, the participant also reports that she gets disorganized when the teachers cancel classes or change rooms on short notice. It is important to highlight the importance of predictability in the routine of people with ASD. Such predictability reduces anxiety and increases feelings of safety.

We understand that, even with the establishment of a timetable, unforeseen events always happen and that is the reason why it is important to develop, in a psychotherapy context, strategies for A. to handle unpredicted situations. Likewise, it is pertinent to work with teachers on the importance of clear, objective communication with A. on every alterations and adaptations as soon as possible. This last task is one of the attributions and potentials of the NuMIAC/UFGD, according to which, by decree no. 7.611/2011, the accessibility nuclei intend to “eliminate physical barriers **to communication and to information that restrict**

academic and social participation and development for students with disabilities” (BRAZIL, 2011, our highlights). Furthermore, A. emphasizes the fact that each teacher has their own standards for grading and their own teaching methods becomes another difficulty (ex.: the use of different teaching platforms and routes for communication). Concerning the way teachers and classmates handle ASD A. reports that only one teacher, who was the father of an autistic son, seemed to know a little more about the disorder and, therefore, seemed more aware. For example, at a certain moment, this same teacher asked her if doing an assignment in a group made her uncomfortable and allowed her to accomplish the task by herself.

Da Silva *et al.* (2018) remind us that teachers play an essential role in the process of inclusion in higher education, and according to Faria *et al.* (2021), it is advisable to comprehend the teachers’ function as promoters of development, who must take into consideration, in their teaching strategies, the level of development of each student, while leading to conditions for learning to effectively take place. Despite the central character of this role, it is not reasonable to propose that actions be focused solely on the teacher, since the educational success of a PAAE student is a collective responsibility of the whole academic community. Therefore, it is also a responsibility of the support center for PAAE students, of managers, of technicians, and of other students.

Concerning the actions by teachers and peers that can be regarded as barriers for learning, A. mentions that the examination method by means of objective tests does not bother her but she admits that she has difficulty with content that escape her hyper focus, which might cause difficulty to concentrate during lessons. Also, she reports that the way content is systematized also compromises her performance and her learning. She emphasizes her preference to learn by means of visual schemes (maps, pictures, graphs, videos) and, on the other hand, their difficulty to realize the reading of long texts. Thus, according to Oliveira and Abreu (2019), we keep in mind that the specific interests of the students might be used in academic activities in order to benefit learning and overcome pedagogical barriers (CASTRO; ALMEIDA, 2014).

A. reported that, during field work, due to her food selectiveness, there were occasions when she felt pretty uncomfortable by the available food choices, but she failed to report her discomfort at the time. A. never goes to the university restaurant because of her hypersensitivity and hyper-reactivity, the same conditions that prevent her from going to college by public transportation. She reports that she has never felt discriminated for having ASD or for being a transsexual woman in higher education. She also says that she is free to use the ladies’ room. A. is aware of the existence of the NuMIAC/UFGD and affirms that she has already been there twice. She comments that she was very well received and treated with

attention and respect. They even asked her what they could do to make her feel better. This report highlights the potential of the nuclei of accessibility and proactivity of the NuMIAC/UFMG who, according to decree no. 7611 (BRAZIL, 2011), must try to eliminate barriers that restrict the social and academic development of PAEE students.

Although A. perceives and recognized the institutional investments and movements towards her acceptance and inclusion at the IES, we notice during the interview that A. makes a lot of effort in order to fit into a traditional pedagogical model, which very often fails to contemplate details. In her report, it gets clear that A. developed strategies for coping with limitations and stay in the classroom and learn the conventional pedagogical methods used by most of the teachers. Among her strategies, we wish to highlight the fact that she manages to calm herself down and concentrate more easily by drawing a black hole (restricted interest) in the whiteboard. She also sits away from the air conditioner (noise), and likes to mentally repeat interesting ideas.

It was possible to observe that there was little flexibility by some of the teachers in their pedagogical practices and an articulation, with limitations though, between the support organ for PAEE students and course teachers. There were no significant changes in the pedagogical methods of all teachers. In order to overcome all pedagogical barriers (CASTRO; ALMEIDA, 2014), that hinder learning for A., we can point at the need for curricular adaptation that will contemplate all specific characteristics of this student, and at the collaborative production of an individualized education plan (DA SILVA; CAMARGO, 2021), involving the course coordination, health professionals, and teachers. A PEI is an instrument for collaborative work that proposes an approach that is focused on the student and is based on the student's particularities – level of education, age, level of development, previous knowledge and skills – aiming at the outlining of educational objectives and leading to an assessment of the student's progress (DA SILVA, CAMARGO, 2021).

The PEI must contain an educational objective, based on the educational plan of a discipline and methodology, considering the particular characteristics of the student. We suggest the flexibilization of attendance requirements made it possible for the student to study at home at some moments with the possibility of learning by videos or articles in the English language. In addition, associating the contents of the curricular components with the student's interests have become methodological strategies that were positively regarded by the student. For example, ASD is one of the student's interests and in the discipline named Development and Learning Psychology, the student will have the opportunity to realize an activity on the disorder.

At last, we wish to emphasize the effects of the barriers to inclusion into higher education in the mental health of the participant with ASD. In this specific case, the scarcity of curricular and attitudinal accessibility contributed to the construction of a strong, mistaken belief by the participant that she does not have the social skills to interact with their peers. A. reported that she never talks to any of her classmates and that she has no friends in the university. Loneliness, also a problem when she was at school, became one of the reasons why she sought psychotherapy. During the interviews, it was possible to observe that the discomfort by the participant, in her social relations, was not due to a lack of social skills. Rather, it was due to the fact that she did not feel comfortable to show that she interacted with people in an atypical way and that it would outline the need for interventions in the social, rather than individual, realm. Such fact reveals the importance of actions and interventions with neurotypical people that interact with individuals with ASD. As an example, we can mention a research that has been recently published on an intervention realized with university students with the intention to increase knowledge and diminish stigma over ASD. Promising results were found by means of an analysis of the networks (ARAÚJO; SILVA; BANDEIRA; GILLESPIE-LYNCH; ZANON, 2023). Interventions of this nature could be realized also with teachers, staff members, administrators etc. thus, we highlight the essential character of effective inclusion in higher education that might end up in improving the psychological scenario of PAEE students.

Conclusions

The report on the experience with one university student with ASD made it possible to problematize the implementation of public policies for inclusion at a Brazilian public university. The review on the literature has demonstrated that it is the responsibility of the IES develop concrete actions that lead to more than the mere integration of PAEE students at the IES, a real, respectful inclusion regarding the needs of each student, considering the specific characteristics of each disability and the reduction of barriers for learning. It is necessary that these actions be present throughout the trajectory of the PAEE student in the institution, in the selection process, registration, and curricular/attitudinal adaptations during graduation, in permanence actions, and so on. It is a challenge that demands participation from the whole academic community, with a highlight on administrators and teachers.

Based on an analysis of the case of a transsexual woman with ASD who was enrolled in higher education at a Brazilian IES, we insist on the importance of the academic community knowing about the ASD, with the objective to create spaces that in fact embrace

neurodiversities and contemplate the behavioral heterogeneity of humans. In general, based on the perception of A., the most important difficulties reported in the process of inclusion were lack of specific formation for teachers and pedagogical adaptations, and the failure to implement an individualized education plan. On the other hand, psychotherapy, the nucleus of accessibility and inclusion at the university and the mediations of the course coordination contributed to reducing the barriers for inclusion, approximating the practices of the premises of the current public policies.

Finally, the study made it possible, based on the participant's perception, to understand some barriers for inclusion, as well as strategies that facilitate learning and well-being for students with ASD in the university context. For example, researchers mention the use of visual aids, objective communication, avoidance of figures of speech, reduction and elimination of stimuli that cause sensorial discomfort in different environments, the importance of predictability and of routines in academic activities, in addition to attitudes characterized by creativity, flexibility, empathy, and tolerance.

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