

The Performance of the School Psychologist in Schools for the Inclusion of Autistic Students in the Scenario of COVID-19

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During COVID-19, the repercussions on scholar dynamics, functioning and structure were inevitable, causing an impact on groups that, historically, are minority in relation to the scope of school inclusion policies, such as students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This scenario is followed by educational phenomena in the face of which School Psychology has collaborated with the advancement of research and knowledge production. This qualitative study, based on Historical-Cultural Psychology and Critical School Psychology, analyzed the role of the school psychologist in monitoring students diagnosed with ASD in the context of regular school during the pandemic. The following procedures were conducted: application of an online questionnaire; and semi-structured interviews with four school psychologists. As a result, three zones of shared meanings were built: the claim for the right to education with support and adaptations; the psychologist as the great savior of inclusion; the non-total inclusion that denounces the structure of injustice by school. The information suggests that professional performance was hampered by different obstacles in the pandemic, such as the difficulty imposed by school, overload of demands, and impasses in the implementation of inclusion historically experienced at school, revealing that the school structure still carries historical consequences of exclusion. These shared meanings have demanded a professional performance with more effort, resistance, and strategies that accept the demands of school inclusion, providing collective mobilization, together with school actors, capable of breaking down barriers, especially those related to capacitist concepts.

Keywords: school psychology, autism spectrum disorder, school inclusion, pandemic

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the way by which interpersonal relationships are established, since caution is required to avoid contamination by the virus. The school, as an institution of society, also needed to adapt the way to conduct the educational process, which led to implications for the inclusion process of people with disabilities who, historically, seek the right to an inclusive education (Galvão, Matos, & Xavier, 2018; Matos & Matos, 2018; Galvão & Marinho-Araujo, 2018).

With the pandemic in Brazil, one adopted measure to offer the continuity of the educational process for all students was by changing the modality from on-site to remote (using the internet). Over time, the on-site modality was reestablished, but, as the virus became a threat again for the population in each region of the country, the emergency remote teaching was defined again (Leuscure et al., 2020; Massarani et al., 2021; Silveira & Najjar, 2021; Ximenes et al., 2021).

With the intent to deconstruct crystalized perspectives and rigid ways of understanding the students, human development, and the learning process in the school context, the psychologist performs a relevant role in this institution (Marinho-Araujo, 2014b). Through these considerations, and the actual pandemic scenario which changed the lives of students, this research aims to present and discuss the current interventions by school psychologists to ensure the rights of all to development in the regular educational context, albeit in an emergency remote teaching format and subsequent gradual return to the conventional on-site format.

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Implications

The COVID-19 is understood as a disease produced by a virus known as “SARS-CoV-2” (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2). This is a variant of the Coronavirus. This disease was first identified in the year of 2019 in China, more specifically in the city of Wuhan (Leuscure et al., 2020). The new variant has peculiarities that explain the reason to start the pandemic, since it involves a high transmission rate with serious consequences for human health, such as considerable chances of death (especially for those with comorbidities) and hospitalization in intensive care services.

Due to the serious consequences of the contamination by the virus, the political-social structure for coping with the disease, during the year of 2020, consisted of the development and implementation of protective measures. Among them, it may be mentioned the social distancing and suspension of activities considered non-essential for society, in the attempt to maintain the population at home and, this way, avoiding agglomerations and, consequently, reducing the probability of contamination (Rodrigues, 2020).

The pandemic brought implications and challenges to the current educational context because of the government’s decision to close the schools and the implementation of the emergency remote teaching modality, which addressed, with limitations, school issues. This was a measure to continue the education process despite the pandemic crisis. Nevertheless, since it was a measure during a public calamity, it was not enough to address important educational demands, such as the investigation on how to adapt the new system to include students with disabilities (Datafolha, 2020).

The Sociopolitical Function of the School for Human Development

The school has an important sociopolitical role in the individual and social formation of the enrolled students. This is true because this institution enhances the establishment of relevant competencies and skills to build the worldview that the students will develop through the intentionally planned mediation by the school (Fleith, 2011).

However, it is important to emphasize that this place must have a dynamic character, due to the dependent relation with the social context. Besides, it must be understood as an organism, in the intention of attributing to all its components a key role to achieve the proposed goals (Guzzo, 2005).

Investing in research in the educators' conceptions about teaching, learning, and school inclusion is important, since they guide these professionals' understanding of several issues related to learning and human development at the individual and social level and, consequently, influence pedagogical practices and inclusion or exclusion strategies that are adopted (Marinho-Araujo, 2014a; Martínez, 2005).

In this investigation, the conception will be adopted on how someone understands issues related to the human being, society, himself/herself, and the world. This represents a form of lens to interpret what is around the individuals, and this is present in the way of acting on the world (Marinho-Araujo, 2014a).

Among the conceptions present in the school context, three will be cited, which are the most frequently observed. The first one, named innate conception, prioritizes the biological aspects in the interpretation of human development. The second one, named environmentalist conception, understands that the human being exerts a posture of passivity in the environment in which he/she lives, where human development will occur according to the presentation of stimuli that are offered. The last is the interactionist conception (adopted in this investigation), in which the individual is constituted through a relational process, merging biological aspects, the cultural, social, and historical context and his/her collective (Marinho-Araujo, 2014a; Marinho-Araujo, 2016). Therefore, while studying the conceptions that shape pedagogical actions, and which are linked to the socio-political function of the school, the actions of the school psychologist may be enhanced by the rupture of those with a deterministic nature and that inhibit the inclusive practice by the school.

Critical School Psychology in the Anti-capacitist Struggle

The school is conceived as a place to develop competencies and, therefore, human formation, based either on policies related to the democratization of education or on respect for human diversity in accordance with human rights (Dazzani, 2010; Fleith, 2011; Galvão & Beckman, 2016). However, some social representations are perceived in the school context, which may compromise an effective inclusion process, within a perspective related to the production of practice responses, considering the needs of the students present there (Martínez, 2015).

Considering what is defended by the literature in Critical School Psychology and the reality of the observed school context, it is emphasized that the presence of a psychology professional in that context, aiming to develop daily actions that privilege the potential of all students, certainly enhances the quality of social interactions in the inclusion process for all (Marinho-Araujo, 2014b; 2016).

The psychologist, based on a perspective that considers the dynamicity of context and the development process of the actors involved, exerts a professional commitment enhancer of human development, through a critical and emancipatory perspective (Marinho-Araujo, 2014b; 2016; Marinho-Araujo & Almeida, 2014). These interventions are not only directed to the present students, but also to all actors who are part of the school institution, because the psychologist's interest in this environment consists in intervening in subjective processes and carrying out the mediation of strategies capable of enhancing school inclusion processes, insofar as they bring reflections on planned and implemented practices (Dantas, 2012; Dazzani, 2010; Fleith, 2011; Galvão & Beckman, 2016; Galvão et al., 2018; Lima, 2019; D. C. Matos & P. G. S. Matos, 2018; Santos & Batista, 2015).

When thinking about school practices that are in line with the precepts of inclusive education, it is necessary to consider both the historical and current aspects. It is acknowledged that the struggle of this movement produced,

along the years, notable advances in several scenarios involving people with disabilities, whether in legal provisions that include them in education as basic right, or of a social nature for being a movement that is strengthened along decades and produces more visibility (Galvão & Beckman, 2016).

It is also possible to notice the actual challenges that surround the everyday life of people with disabilities and their families, as well as the resistance of some school institutions in accepting students with any kind of disability, or the existence of exclusive school practices aimed at students with disabilities or, still, the social prejudice that still exists and that may affect the development of autonomy, and the chances of entering the job market or of starting a family, for example (Galvão & Beckman, 2016).

The prejudice directed to individuals with disabilities is called capacitism. This term may be defined as the belief that people with some kind of disability are inferior to others without disabilities. More broadly, the capacitism starts from a conception that people with disabilities are on a very different level from others, under a logic of underestimation of capabilities that justifies discriminatory and criminal actions, harming and causing suffering to everyone who has any kind of disability, whether physical, cognitive, or neurodevelopmental (Camargo & Carvalho, 2019).

Campbell (2009) asserts that this practice is rooted in our culture, and it may be presented both explicitly and implicitly, since capacitism is the result of a historical vainglory of so-called “standard” groups (being composed of hetero-cis-normative people without disabilities), bringing, on the other hand, negative looks to anyone who does not fit into these standards of normality that have been built over the years. In counterpoint, Galvão and Beckman (2016) ratify the idea in the statement that “it is possible to observe that these children have a school life, which allows them to develop their own competencies in the process of basic schooling, even their access to higher education” (p. 204). And for this to happen with quality, it is important that actors from the school institution perceive themselves as active part in this process and adopt an inclusive stance towards such a context.

When talking about school inclusion, there is a tendency to refer to it only as the inclusion of students with disabilities in a school environment that conceives a certain standard development to be followed. This conception brings a particularization of the individual in his/her need, apart from the collective reading that must be carried out in the development process of all and, to be transformed, it is important to enhance the educational institution to critically perceive the barriers in the establishment of more innovative and creative pedagogical proposals (Fleith, 2011; Martínez, 2005).

The Autistic Person and the Process of Social and School Inclusion

The Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is understood as a condition that may affect any person, regardless of race or culture, and it may involve different characteristics. The individual diagnosed with ASD, being a form of existence in the world, may express himself/herself in various ways. The behavioral characteristics of ASD change along the development process, depending on the quality of interactions with other people (Assunção Junior & Kuczynski, 2018).

It is important to emphasize that there is a certain confusion between the nomenclature “disorder” and “disease”. A disorder refers to an altered state of certain biological conditions, but not always it is related to a disease frame. Thereby, a perception is adopted in this research from which ASD is not considered a problem, but a characteristic of the uniqueness of the individual, while everyone has uniqueness.

Scientific productions, regarding the inclusive practices in the school environment and students diagnosed with ASD, have taken a large proportion over the years (Camargo & Bosa, 2012; Chicon, Oliveira, Garozzi,

Coelho, & Sá 2018; Fiaes & Bichara, 2009; Gaspar & Serrano, 2011; Lemos, Salomão, & Agripino-Ramos, 2014; Mattos & Nuernberg, 2011; Sanini, 2011), obtaining relevant evidence about such practices and, furthermore, emphasizing the importance of the actors in the school environment, since they are mediators of interactions that occur in this context, and they need to participate in the consolidation of relationships between children, including those with atypical development, taking into account the particularities of their condition.

It is possible to notice that, when it comes to inclusion processes, there is a tendency to relate these movements to students diagnosed with ASD, even considering that the intentionality of inclusive education is another, with an emphasis on the collective. With this, considering the social landscape, the students diagnosed with ASD, along with the entire academic community, benefit from the proposal of inclusive education, achieving success in reducing the attitudinal barriers, making possible the development of various competencies and social skills for all those involved. According to Assumpção Junior and Kuczynski (2018), the “autism is a complex developmental disorder, which involves delays and impairments in the areas of social interaction and language, including a wide range of emotional, cognitive, motor and sensory symptoms” (p. 21).

Once the school institution, even if in a veiled way, still considers a behavioral pattern of academic development, it is possible to identify certain prejudices suffered by people who deviate from this pattern. The study by Lemos, Salomão, Aquino, and Agripino-Ramos (2016) corroborates this thought by presenting its results, showing that most of the teachers involved in the investigation were in process of reformulation of their conceptions about students diagnosed with ASD, due to the routine interaction with them in the school environment.

In this direction, the purpose of this investigation was to analyze the performance of the school psychologist in monitoring the teaching-learning process of students diagnosed with ASD in the context of the current educational practices derived from COVID-19. The specific goals consisted of identifying the theoretical-methodological foundations of performance in school psychology; to know the emerging demands of the school routine regarding the inclusion of students diagnosed with ASD by the psychologist's perception and analyze the adaptation processes and pedagogic decision making along the conduction of hybrid and remote activity.

Method

Study Design

The theoretical-methodological foundation of this study is affiliated with Critical School Psychology, allied epistemological and methodological bases of the historical-cultural perspective of human development (Vygotsky, 1999; 2003). The object of study is understood as a complex, dynamic, multifaceted, and socially constructed phenomenon. This qualitative research followed a flexible and processual line while developing information, where multimethodological intervention strategies were adopted (González Rey, 1997; 2003; 2005).

Participants and Research Field

This study was conducted with four psychologists who worked with the basic education public of the private regular education network, in the city of São Luís-MA (Brazil). The participation of the professionals was mediated by signing a consent form in research with humans. The established criteria for inclusion of participants were: (1) professionals with a degree in Psychology and in accordance with the registration at the Regional Council of Psychology-22^o Region; (2) professionals who were part of the school's staff or were in contact with the public of basic education; and that (3) worked directly in monitoring the inclusion process of students diagnosed

with ASD. Furthermore, the exclusion criteria referred to professionals who did not match the mentioned characteristics, or to those who were on vacation or sick during the period corresponding to data collection.

Ethical Aspects

This research was approved by an ethics committee in research with humans (authorization No. 4.284.271). The participants signed an informed consent form, and the foreseen procedures were conducted in accordance with Resolutions of the National Health Council, 510/2016, 466/2012 and its complements.

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

To know the meanings and senses attributed to the performance of the school psychologist in the context of the pandemic, and the inclusion practices adopted by the schools in the regular private education system, an initial contact was established with the psychologists to inform about the research and its purposes and to verify their availability to participate in the study. Thereafter, an application of an online questionnaire to the school psychologists was conducted. Finally, a face-to-face or online meeting was conducted through a digital platform (Microsoft Teams). The instruments used in this phase by a mediator were: (a) a digital form for data collection and (b) a semi-structured interview script.

The information obtained throughout the research was analyzed through the search for zones of meaning and sense of Historical-Cultural Psychology (Vygotsky, 1999), which underlies the developed thematic indicators. From the common statements of the interviewees, it was possible to find zones of meanings related to their experiences. The zones of shared senses by the participants were built by the researchers in their interpretation of the organized statements. This process allows access to reality due to the interpretation of the indicators by which the participants' senses are shared on individual and collective platforms.

From this foundation, the reality becomes accessible by the researcher due to interpretation of the indicators by which the participants' senses are built and shared in their individual and collective experiences. By analyzing the individual interviews through the process previously described, it is possible to enhance the interpretation and the elaboration of indicators based on information about the research members (Gonzalez Rey, 2005).

Results

The results obtained during the first phase of this investigation were organized with information from participants related to the completion time of the Psychology course, time working as school psychologists, and specificities of the initial and continuing training in School Psychology. Figure 1 shows information about the completion time of the undergraduate course and continuing training in the field of School Psychology.

According to Figure 1, regarding the year to complete the undergraduate course, two participants obtained the degree of psychologist seven years ago and the two remaining, six years ago. As to the time working in School Psychology, it can be noticed that two participants have five years of experience in the field and, in the case of the two remaining, four years.

Regarding continuing education (*lato sensu* specialization), all participants obtained a degree in one area of knowledge: autism spectrum disorder—ASD (one participant); Psychology in Education (one participant); Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) to ASD (one participant); Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) to ASD and Related Disabilities (two participants); Neuropsychopedagogy (one participant). In relation to postgraduate education, two participants have a master's degree, one in Education and the other in Psychology. Another

participant is still with her master's degree in Education in progress. Next, Figure 2 shows data on the specificities of training in the undergraduate course in Psychology by the participants.

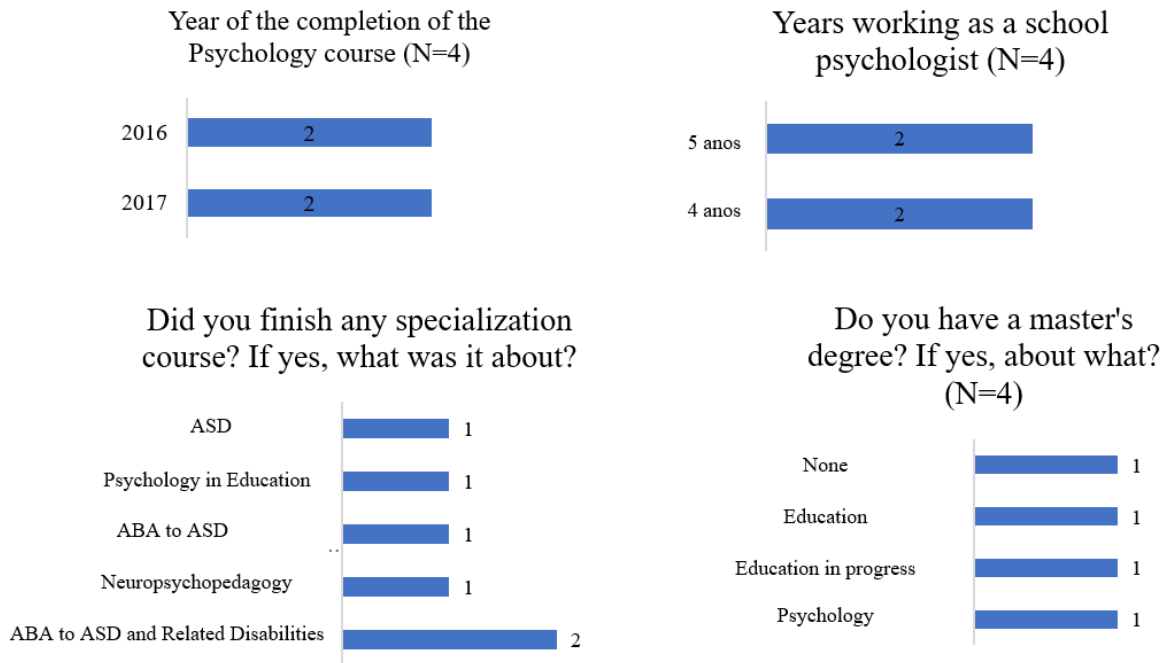


Figure 1. Completion time of the psychology course and time working as school psychologist.

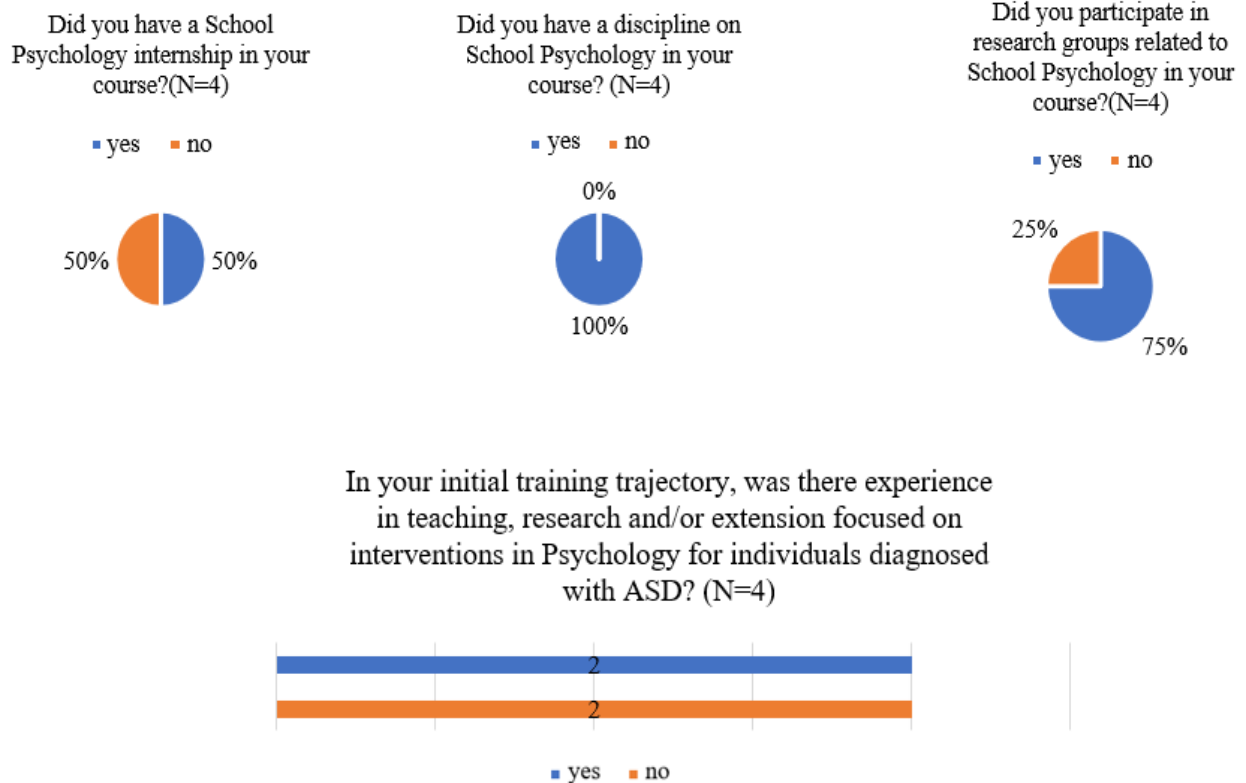


Figure 2. Data on initial training in the psychology course.

As it can be seen in Figure 2, regarding data on the specificities, it can be noticed that the offer of disciplines in School Psychology applied to the training of all participants at the undergraduate level. Nevertheless, the internship offered in School Psychology was only granted for half of the participants. As to the participation in research groups on School Psychology, three of the professionals indicated that they had this experience. And, regarding teaching, research, and extension practices involving students diagnosed with ASD during the undergraduate course, two of the participants confirmed these experiences in their initial training.

In the second stage of the study, it was conducted a semi-structured interview with the same school psychologists who answered the online questionnaire. Thematic indicators were built, followed by the analysis of zones of shared senses. Table 1 shows the main results from the interviews divided in three thematic indicators and the respective zones of shared senses.

Table 1

Thematic Indicators and Zones of Shared Senses during the Interview

Thematic indicators	Zones of shared senses	Interview records
The sociopolitical function of the school	Claiming the right to education with support and adaptations	<p>“It also depends a lot on the school because, for example, this school, where the children didn’t return, didn’t give much opening for their return, you know? The school was kind of putting difficulties, even though we said that the children needed to stay in school because it was their right”. (P1)</p> <p>“[...] Two sisters, and both needed tutors, and they never were able to go back to school because the school only said that it would accept a tutor for just one of the children. The school claimed that the classrooms were full, so it has been difficult to include the children and their tutors [...]”. (P1)</p> <p>“The school was not sending the adapted materials for the remote classes. Our professional team requested these adapted materials, but not every school met the demand and, therefore, we had to carry out the adaptation process”. (P3)</p> <p>“The reality that I see is prejudice, let’s say so, very complex. In the reality that I live, they are under judicial injunction from the public prosecutor’s office because the children with ASD cannot go back to school. The school creates many barriers”. (P3)</p> <p>“We had a difficult moment with the onset of the pandemic. I heard that many autistic children evaded from school, at the request of the context of the school institution”. (P4)</p> <p>“The school said that no adaptation process would be conducted because the activity was the same for everyone”. (P4)</p>
The demands of the school psychologist in the pandemic	The psychologist as the savior of the homeland in the inclusion of students diagnosed with ASD	<p>“The school psychology was like a savior of the homeland, solving all people’s problems [...] all teachers came to talk to me and show me the students with problems, and what they could do. We were seen as types of saviors to solve all school problems”. (P1)</p> <p>“I think that they expected us to do the whole process, that we would get everything for ourselves and that the child would no longer need the school to adapt anything”. (P1)</p> <p>“Look, it was very plural, assistance to students of the most diverse types of demands [...] besides, there was the reading of the lesson plans we have here, that is, the individualized education planning (IEP). We also had training meetings with teachers, and with the team of interns [...] besides, we had a few demands of the organizational part of school [...] although we were aware about our role, the demands were so intense that we end up getting involved in several other sectors”. (P2)</p>
The school inclusion of the student diagnosed with ASD	The half inclusion that denounces the structure of injustice by the school	<p>“[...] There are teachers and teachers, schools, and schools, but some of them (a minority) tried to include and succeed”. (P1)</p> <p>“[...] it was not an inclusion process that we would like it to be [...] we have the plan inclusive of last year, which we were not able to apply the way we would like due to the resistance of the school. So, it was not a very satisfactory process for us. We were frustrated last year”. (P2)</p> <p>“First, as I have said at the beginning of the interview, the school was not sending adaptations. Sometimes, the children were not assisted, even when they tried to call the teacher...they were ignored. I think there was no inclusion”. (P3)</p> <p>“I think that there was no inclusion. I think that the laws end up giving loopholes, so that this process of inclusion is not inclusion, it is segregation, unfortunately, because the idea of inclusion is just leaving the child in the classroom”. (P4)</p>

Discussion

Considering the information collected through the online form, it is possible to notice that the professionals have a training time equal or above five years. This reality may be explained by the recent insertion in working fields, inside the establishment of Psychology as a profession in the State of Maranhão (Brazil) (Galvão, Carvalho, & Matos, 2017; Galvão & Marinho-Araujo, 2018). Besides, it is important to assert that there was also an expansion in contexts involving the advisory practice to students contemplated by inclusive education and who are enrolled in regular teaching schools.

It was noticed that all participants have a postgraduate title, which possibly influence the practice of the school psychologist. This information is consistent with the findings of contemporary literature in Critical School Psychology. The studies describe that it is important that the professional psychologist search complementary training for acquisition of professional competencies that guide his/her performance (Marinho-Araujo, 2016).

Data showed that the participants work in more than a teaching level inside basic education, encompassing from kindergarten through high school. Besides, they all work in private schools, alerting the need for studies that encompass public education. The importance of such studies may be evidenced through cross-sectional data collected, when the participants spoke that private schools are prime locations while public schools, during pandemic, took a longer time to reestablish the onsite teaching. Finally, it is important to mention that, regarding the participants of this research, three of them work advising in School Psychology for the care of children diagnosed with ASD, making sporadic visits to the regular school where they are enrolled (Martínez, 2010).

The second stage of this research consisted of the implementation of semi-structured interviews. The participation of the psychologists related to the perception about their performance, regarding the inclusion processes adopted. Next, through the shared sense zones, the evidenced data will be discussed.

Shared sense zone 1: Claiming the right to education with support and adaptations. Through the analysis of the collected data, it was possible to notice shared senses that name this subsection. Besides, it is plausible the creation of the zone of shared meanings entitled “the fight for the permanence of the child in the school context and for quality development processes”. From that it can be noticed that the school’s position was polarized in relation to welcoming students who needed to be in this environment, by right. Corroborating with this, P1 said: “It also depends a lot on the school because, for example, this school, where the children didn’t return, didn’t give much opening for their return, you know? The school was kind of putting difficulties, even though we said that the children needed to stay in school because it was their right”.

The reopening of the school during pandemic (when it was safer) was only possible because many people in the city of São Luís, capital of the State of Maranhão, were quickly vaccinated (São Luís, 2021). Thereby, it is important to point out a historic view about education in Brazil, where it may be considered that it is a scenario of great educational inequalities, from the students’ entry process to those who remain in such institutions, experiences that are crossed by prejudices arising from social, race, gender, and ableist factors, while, legally, the right to education is a right of all (Macedo, 2021).

Regarding the pandemic context and its implications, the school, that sometimes seems to be a place to build the individuals’ identity through the mediation of learning processes, and sometimes seems to be a place for segregation and denial of access to education for the public with atypical development, needs to allow the crossing of social inclusion practices to ensure, with quality, the right to education. This questioning is also evident in the speech of P3 and P4, respectively: “The reality that I see is prejudice, let’s say so, very complex. In the reality

that I live, they are under judicial injunction from the public prosecutor's office because the children with ASD cannot go back to school. The school creates many barriers"; "The school said that no adaptation process would be conducted because the activity was the same for everyone".

The school, during the pandemic, needed to change to ensure the continuity of the teaching-learning processes, as it can be seen in Silva et al. (2021). Nevertheless, it is important to think about the change and the public to whom the process happened continuously, once that in the school community there are not only students with typical development.

Shared sense zone 2: The psychologist as the savior of the homeland in the inclusion of students. It is understood that offering a quality education for the school community always was a challenge in the guidelines of the professionals that make up such institution. In the context of the pandemic, this challenge became more intense, threatening the teaching-learning process. The school psychologist needed to reflect on his possibilities of acting in this context. In the pandemic scenario, the psychologist needed to reinvent his/her work, facing problems arising from the school itself, regarding inclusion. P1's statements show such a scenario: "The school psychology was like a savior of the homeland, solving all people's problems [...] all teachers came to talk to me and show me the students with problems, and what they could do. We were seen as types of saviors to solve all school problems"; "I think that they expected us to do the whole process, that we would get everything for ourselves and that the child would no longer need the school to adapt anything".

These statements may be understood in a causality of events, since, if the professional was seen as a type of savior of the homeland inside school, so, he/she could cover the adaptation demands to favor the inclusion of students in the new teaching model. Due to the crystallization of this social perception about the work of the school psychologist, the deconstruction of such understanding, within a context as adverse as the pandemic, proved to be an arduous but necessary task (Leal, Melo, & Sales, 2021). This need may be evidenced in the following arguments from P2: "Look, it was very plural, assistance to students of the most diverse types of demands [...] besides, there was the reading of the lesson plans we have here, that is, the individualized education planning (IEP). We also had training meetings with teachers, and with the team of interns [...] besides, we had a few demands of the organizational part of school [...] although we were aware about our role, the demands were so intense that we end up getting involved in several other sectors".

It is understood that, in fact, acting in Critical School Psychology requires the possibility for the psychologist to transit in several environments inside the institution. However, this movement is guided by an extensive contemporary literature that defends a collective performance inside the school context, that is, although there is the access to several pieces to form a puzzle (that is the school), all actions are aimed at intervening in teaching-learning processes, in favor of the development of the academic community (Nunes, Lima, Sousa, Souza, & Silva, 2021). In that case, an important demand that arises in the new context for the school psychologist is related to the socio-emotional issues of students and teachers resulting from the pandemic and its consequences. Regarding the performance of school psychologists with this public, Nunes et al. (2021) said that it is important to welcome students and teachers with care, respecting the limits of the professional scope at school. Also, the school community must be aware that this is not a clinical action.

Shared sense zone 3: The half inclusion that denounces the structure of injustice by the school. Through data analysis it was possible to identify shared meanings considering the defense of psychologists for complex and effective inclusion processes, favoring the development of students diagnosed with ASD. The main demands currently encompassing work in School Psychology are those related to the inclusive education. The public of

inclusive education refers to neurodiverse students, that is, students with different developmental processes of a so-called social pattern. The inclusion of this public inside the regular classroom is a process as complicated as continuous because the educational institutions usually make entry difficult by trying to persuade parents that the school does not have sufficient accessibility resources. However, by law the school is prevented from prohibiting the enrollment of any student (Magnabosco & Souza, 2018; Nunes et al., 2021).

From that it is evident that the pandemic context allowed the school to use similar avoidance mechanisms, since it was claimed for the parents of neurodiverse students that it was not possible to adapt the teaching-learning process for these students when the remote emergency teaching was being implemented (Nunes et al., 2021). Plus, the law 11,299 in the State of Maranhão offered a 100% discount on the tuition fees of the students with atypical development, but, in return, it exempted the school from any responsibility for these students. The perception of the participants in this research also matches the panorama brought. P1, for example, said: “[...] There are teachers and teachers, schools, and schools, but some of them (a minority) tried to include and succeed”. P3, in turn, said: “First, as I have said at the beginning of the interview, the school was not sending adaptations. Sometimes, the children were not assisted, even when they tried to call the teacher...they were ignored. I think there was no inclusion”.

From the interweaving of data collected with the scientific literature, it was possible to trace a certain linearity about the history of inclusive education in Brazil. Initially, it is possible to consider that the school inclusion processes were not consolidated on the national scene yet, not even in the on-site teaching modality, even with all the years of existence of the National Policy on Special Education in the Perspective of Inclusive Education, in addition to more than 30 years of discussions on this topic both in the country and around the world (Nunes et al., 2021). This brings to light that, even the constitutionally guaranteed right in Brazil, there are still social barriers to its effective implementation. Besides, it is possible to say that the impact occasioned by the pandemic affects even more the inclusion processes and, at the same time, it strengthens the school's resistance to including. And it also reduces the courage of parents in exposing their children with atypical development to the school context, strengthening this way a scenery of continued segregation of these students.

During the analysis of the collected reports along the conduction of the research, it was noticed that it was not possible to perform a qualitatively sufficient interpretation to contemplate the first specific goal previously described, since it could not be noticed in the verbalizations of the participants what are the theoretical-methodological foundations used. From that, it can be noticed that, in the dialogues of the psychologists, it is not considered relevant to bring up such issues when the acting possibilities are talked about in the school context.

There were limitations in this study because it was a local study, conducted in the context of only one city, in an exclusively private environment, which may interfere, somehow, with the generalization of results to other contexts. However, it is understood that it deals with a current thematic, demanding more research to expand this discussion, favoring a better understanding of the performance of psychologists in school contexts, including in times of implementation of remote teaching in which neurodiverse students need to have their right of access assured.

Final Considerations

The pandemic forced the society and institutions to rethink their way of existing. The school, among the institutions, was forced to propose new alternatives for the continuity of the teaching-learning process. However, as an institution susceptible to criticism regarding the exclusionary and segregation practices, there were also

questions about in which perspective these alternatives are based on, since an evasion movement of neurodiverse students deserves notice, more specifically those diagnosed with ASD, in this context.

From law 13.935/2019 (Brasil, 2019), it is defended that the school psychologist be part of the school's staff, to get to know that environment well. However, there is still today an advisory practice through which the psychologist makes sporadic visits and guidance to the institution. This professional exerts a practice of relevance and claiming the rights of students with atypical development to access regular education. In this adverse context, it became a complex and multifaceted task, either because it can be realized that the educational institutions are making the process of accessing the regular education difficult, or because the educational teams were faced with a reality that puts them upside down, demanding an active and creative posture.

With the goal of analyzing the activity of the school psychologists in accompanying the teaching-learning process of students diagnosed with ASD in the context in which the current educational practices derived from COVID-19, the collected data in this study suggested that this activity was crossed by several obstacles within the pandemic context. These obstacles may be related to the difficulty imposed by school, considering the overload of demands or the impasses of implementing inclusion processes even before the pandemic, which requires new practices to accommodate the demands still within the assumptions proposed by Critical School Psychology.

It can be noticed that there are still great barriers to an effective social inclusion process of neurodiverse people, in all contexts they may access. The school is one of these contexts. From the findings discussed, it is important to suggest (1) the conduction of research regarding the implications of the pandemic for the work of the school psychologist; (2) the conduction of research on the implications for public education; (3) and the conduction of research on the relation proposed in the current study, but in other places in the country, since each State and region has its own characteristics that cross society as a whole and, consequently, the training and professional performance in School Psychology.

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