

Use of short films as a pedagogical resource to discuss inclusion

A theoretical exploratory essay

I cortometraggi come risorsa pedagogica per discutere di inclusione

Saggio teorico esplorativo

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ABSTRACT: This theoretical exploratory essay aims to analyze how inclusion is approached in three short films: Ian, Cordas, and Fitas, emphasizing their use as a pedagogical tool in child education. School inclusion as a right of everyone requires that difference, disability, and accessibility be approached in a ludic language for little children. We concluded that short films can be useful to work specific matters of every target audience in special education.

KEY-WORDS: short film; pedagogical mediation; inclusive education; child education.

ABSTRACT: Questo saggio teorico esplorativo si propone di analizzare come viene affrontata l'inclusione in tre cortometraggi. Sottolineando l'uso di questi strumenti come risorsa pedagogica nell'educazione della prima infanzia. L'inclusione scolastica, essendo un diritto di tutti, richiede di affrontare le differenze, le disabilità e l'accessibilità con un linguaggio giocoso per i bambini piú piccoli. È stato riscontrato che i cortometraggi possono essere utili per lavorare su questioni specifiche per ciascun pubblico di destinazione dell'educazione speciale.

KEY-WORDS: cortometraggi; mediazione pedagogica; educazione inclusiva; educazione infantile.

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1. Inclusive Education

Since the 1990's, Brazil has been compromised to ensuring education to all children, regardless of their differences, starting the construction of an inclusive educational system, which implied changes in laws and the national guidelines for basic education.

“Inclusive education constitutes an educational paradigm based on the concept of human rights, which conjugates equality and difference as inseparable values” (Brasil, 2008, s.p), that is, it understands that all people are different, but their rights cannot be conditioned to these differences, be they physical, economic, ethnic, cultural, religious, or of gender.

From the perspective of inclusive education, special education, which so far was offered to people with disability in segregated spaces in parallel to formal education, was reconfigured into a support to education, going through all the levels of teaching, offering Specialized Educational Service (SES) and making available the resources and services for public students who are the target audience of the special education (TASE) (público alvo da educação especial - PAEE, in Portuguese). TASE students are those with disability, disorders of the autistic spectrum, or high abilities and giftedness (Brasil, 2008).

Thus, all children must have the right to education, but even over the years and with some progress in the area, there are still barriers to the materialization of this right, such as teacher training, lack of schools infrastructure, and barriers to access, permanence, and participation of TASE students in school practices, as it is discussed by Abramowicz (2003), Mendes (2010), Fachinetti, Nascimento and Giroto (2016).

According to inclusive perspective, all students should be registered in school and participate in all the practices that are developed, learning the proposed curriculum contents and progressing in school years.

In Brazil, basic education comprises child education (CE), high school 1 (ensino fundamental), and high school 2. The term child education is used to refer to all the education institutions for children from zero to six years of age. However, child education is mandatory only for children from four to six years of age (Brasil, 1996). One of the current challenges we face is making child education inclusive, as the first years of the child's life are considered essential for them to develop language, learn different skills, and socialize.

For a school to be inclusive, it is not enough to only ensure students' registration. It is necessary that it be organized to answer the specificities of everyone, including TASE students, ensuring accessibility, which can be understood as

the possibility and condition of range of this person with disability or with reduced mobility to use, with security and autonomy, spaces, furniture, urban equipment, buildings, transports, information, and communication, including its systems and technologies, as well as other services and installations open to the public, of public, private, or collective use, both in the urban and rural zones (Brasil, 2015, s.p, our translation).

That is, from the inclusive education perspective, it is important that the school, as well as society, eliminates the obstacles that harden or prevent the participation and the exercise of rights of the person to move, express, communicate, access information, understand, and interact (Brasil, 2015). As Amaral (1998) says, it is essential to keep in mind that inclusion is not restricted to the school, so it is necessary to think on accessibility in all of society's contexts.

One of the barriers that limit or prevent the participation of TASE people in school and society are the urban and architectural barriers in transport, communication, technology, and attitude (Brasil, 2015). Many actions or behaviors prevent or harm the social participation of TASE people, which makes the attitudinal barrier one of the main challenges to social and educational inclusion.

While discoursing about the right to child education, Abramowicz (2003, p. 21) emphasizes that "the differences must be the motto of pedagogical action", that is, the differences must be seen and considered in the planning of experiences that integrate the school's routine to promote the learning and development of all children.

Inclusive child education requires care and education to consider the different rhythms, characteristics, and time of every child in order to identify specificities and conditions of disability not as markers of limit or inability, but as differences that need stimuli, intervention, and collaborative work with the SES teacher and/or the multi-professional team, understanding they are complementing services that favor development and inclusion, not substituting the school (Mendes, 2010).

The interaction of children with adults, other children, and the context in which they are inserted promotes learning as long as accessibility is ensured to all of them. We understand that “education will only be inclusive [...] if these little students, the children, see the school with their differences and change them” (Abramowicz, 2003, p. 22), for in the inclusive perspective it is the school that is changed to ensure education as everyone’s right.

2. Short film as a pedagogical resource in child education

The use of audiovisual resources in education spaces, especially the use of short and middle footage as a way to support the pedagogical practice has occurred since the beginning of the 20th century (Costa, 2013).

Understanding that technological resources are more and more part of school life (Ramos, 2014), it is necessary to think about the forms of incorporating them into the curriculum and children’s daily lives, paying attention to the implications of technologies in the teaching-learning process. This care proves to be more relevant when we deal with little children, to which the excessive use of screens is proven harmful.

By establishing a relationship between healthy development and digital media, we can cite that the exposition does not always constitute a harm to health as long as the supervision of its use is always established by the ones responsible for the child (Santana; Ruas and Queiroz, 2021, p. 174).

The use of technological resources, under the supervision of an adult and for an educational end, can be an important tool, especially when it comes to a ludic resource with content and language that is adequate to childhood.

It can be seen that technologies enlarge our view of the world, transform languages, and propose new ethnic models and new forms of learning reality. This way, the school, their managers, and teachers should discuss and understand their role in teaching-learning processes (Venturini and Medeiros, 2018, p. 81).

In this scenario, short films are a powerful pedagogical resource that can favor learning, making children the creative spectators of this form of audiovisual language.

By introducing short film in the curriculum, the school takes on as one of its main social functions thinking of the cinema beyond entertainment as a social and cultural element in a reflexive and critical way. And this implies recognizing the informational and training power of this language, capable of providing the assimilation and understanding of certain ideas, values, and concepts that would be hard to in another way; thus reinforcing the pedagogical character of the short film (Santos and Micolau, 2018, p. 182-183).

Seeking to enjoy the benefits of using a multimodal approach through the cinematographic language in the work with little children, it is up to the educator to evaluate the relevance of the audiovisual material and plan how it will be worked in order to contemplate the purposes proposed by the child education's curriculum.

When it comes to the process of school inclusion of TASE children, the worry that the educator must have in evaluating and planning how the short film will be used adds up to the need for this professional to know how to approach the matter of difference in the classroom. According to Venturini and Medeiros (2018, p.87, our translation),

[...] it is necessary to highlight that all this relevance and possible positive results of using short films in the teaching-learning process of students with disability, as well as for school inclusion will only happen if there are trained teachers who have this perception about the matter.

The inclusion requires the reformulation of the school in terms of curricular proposal, pedagogical practices, evaluation tools, and other aspects. In this sense, the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have made a significantly contribution, potentializing the students' skills and abilities, hence contributing to their autonomy, independence, and effective participation in the school context.

In the face of the diversity of pedagogical/technological tools that can be found in the ICTs scenario, adequate to the school scenario, feature the short films. Thus, using these media resources in the classroom has allowed innovation in the teaching-learning practice in the same way that it has made it possible the circulation of information in an attractive way (Venturini and Medeiros, 2018, p. 76, our translation).

Short films have a length less than 30 minutes, as well as characteristics that confer them a featured place as a technological resource in the work with children, such as: less number of characters, which lessens the complexity of the plot and allows a better understanding of the story; condensation of narrative, resulting in also more condensed language and action; reduced time of story, favoring the participation of children, which would not have the same tolerance in the case of a longer film; verisimilitude, that is, similar to reality, which favors the recognition and identification by the child; and the stories' emotional content, which raises empathy, making it possible to work matters related to affection, reception, and respect to others (Alcantara, 2014).

Another advantage of using short films in the school inclusion process is that children with disability can self-identify with characters who in general take on a leading role in the story, breaking the discourse of victimization and making it possible to deconstruct preconceived ideas about TASE people.

Thus, this work consists of a theoretical and pedagogical essay that will analyze short films whose main characters are TASE children and whose stories are developed around the process of interacting and socializing with other children, portraying situations of social exclusion and inclusion.

3. Analysis of Short Films

Using audiovisual resources is increasingly common, including in the routine of children who watch cartoons, movies, and videos. By developing interest and curiosity, these resources have been increasingly used in the school context as well, as they allow the students to know “a new culture, a new country, a new city, a new people and from this they will realize that the world is bigger than what they know and then they will look forward to having more knowledge” (Leite, 2013, p. 29, our translation).

Audiovisual resources can be used as a source of knowledge and information, making learning funny, because in general “they are hypnotizing, having colors, music, scenarios, stories, fantasies and for this they attract students' attention” (Rossi et al., 2024, p. 12, our translation).

However, it is important to highlight that allowing students access to an audiovisual resource does not constitute a class. It is necessary to sys-

tematize the knowledge, so the teacher can use this resource to “sensitize the class about a matter, be the center of a debate or other options, being essential to make it clear to the student what the teacher wants [...]” (Rossi et al., 2024, p. 10, our translation). The mediation of the teacher is essential because they are the ones who will conduct the reflections and learning raised from the chosen audiovisual resource, considering the indicative age range, time, length, and purpose of the learning. By explaining the use of the short film in the school context, the referred authors point out that pedagogical practices developed with this resource privilege the production of knowledge through pretending, imagination, and the child’s language, so they are relevant in child education.

Using short films can be a facilitator in the teaching-learning process and make it possible for the teacher, among other things, to make the students understand, interpret, and respect human diversity because, as Leite (2013, p. 34) argues, films can be a resource to “lighten the perceptions about the world, which end up making people think, rethink their attitudes and values, seeking to question mediocre, rigorous, intolerant, nihilist, and authoritarian actions”. That is, one of the possibilities of using short films in education can be working on emerging and necessary themes, such as children inclusion.

From this understanding of the use of audiovisual resources in the school context, specifically in child education, we highlight three short films that have in common TASE characters and talk about inclusion, prejudice, and accessibility: Ian, Cordas, and Fitas.

According to Vanoye and Goliot-Lété (2014, p. 189), the analysis of a film material “implies describing the constitutive elements of this for then to rebuild it”. That is, it is necessary to individualize every element for, then, to establish connection, attribute meanings”, as it was organized in this essay.

The short film Ian does not have speaking dialogue, and only uses images and sounds, approaching inclusive education with a focus on how society sees the person with disability, highlighting the prejudice suffered by them, seen as incapable and dependent on other people (Amaral, 1998).

The video begins with the character Ian, who has cerebral palsy, in a wheelchair, looking at the children playing at a school’s park and imagining himself sitting with them, eating a snack. This scene highlights how much the child wishes to interact and participate in the activities that

the colleagues experience, such as eating with friends, but the way the school's routine is organized can generally hinder or prevent this experience, being a barrier. In situations like this, it is common for TASE children to stay away from classmates during meals, be it because they need the help of an adult or because by being away from others the activity can be carried out faster. In these cases, there is an attitudinal barrier. Adults do not remember that despite the difficulties and the use of adapted utensils and/or aiding tools, it is the right of the child to participate in all experiences, including apparently simple moments such as eating a snack in the company of classmates, in which the child interacts, forms bonds, communicates, and hence learns and develops themselves.

In the following scene, in which Ian plays with a dinosaur with the other children in the school's yard, he finds barriers: architectural in the access to the park toys and attitudinal in the laughter of his classmates by seeing him falling while trying to run and climb the toys. The scene shows practices that are common in child education that evidence how the space and the routine can be organized in a way that excludes children with a physical disability as they do not present accessibility, putting Ian's differences as a limiter for his participation. In the described situation, Ian isolates himself and goes back to reality, portrayed by him by disintegrating himself of this space and appearing again in the wheelchair, separated from the other children by a fence, which represents the exclusion that occurs when he stays on his own, just looking.

Every time Ian finds barriers to interact and play, the short film reproduces a scene of him disintegrating himself and going back to stay on the other side of the fence, outside the park, the games, and the interaction space. However, it is important to remember that in child education, children's learning and development should happen through playing, so when situations like that happen, the right to education is not being ensured, as it is only inserted in the school's space, but do not participate in the activities, interact, and learn as it is predicted by inclusion. Playing is the axle that structures the pedagogical practices in child education (Brasil, 2010, 2017), so being excluded from games is a barrier to accessing the curriculum.

The short film shows the sadness and frustration of Ian and his mother in seeing his classmates playing and interacting while he is limited, away from everything and everyone, showing the view that many people have about disability, feeling pity, seeing only the disability and not

the child, who despite the differences and specificities can also interact, play, and learn. The prejudice that TASE people face, also called ableism, is fixed as a crime in the current law (Brasil, 2015), but it is still present in society.

Close to the end of the video, Ian guides the wheelchair to the park and goes inside, being seen by his classmates who smile at him and start to interact. This scene reproduces what many times happens in society, which is organized without thinking about people and only makes changes when they start to be part of the place; “the opportunity of the meeting” that can make it possible for the other to know the different, as Amaral (1998) defends while discoursing about inclusion.

Throughout the video, Ian makes an effort to be like the other children and do what they do in an attempt to be accepted. But when he is the way he is, a boy with cerebral palsy in a wheelchair, the children see him, which is pictured by the fence that is broken, representing the overcoming of ableism and the opportunity for a genuine meeting that inclusion promotes, respecting Ian’s differences.

This short film can be an excellent resource for children to think about how the child with physical disability feel when they do not participate in the school’s experiences and so that they think about ways of including these people, not only in classroom activities but in all the school’s context. The ludic activities should be adapted to allow the participation of all children, since “playing is a pedagogical resource that also favors inclusion” (Silva, 2020, p. 5).

The short film *Cordas* also has as a theme the inclusion of a child with cerebral palsy, the character Nicolás, who uses a wheelchair. At the beginning of the video, Maria meets Nicolás, the new friend at the orphanage who is registered in the same class as hers at the school. By showing Nicolás arriving at Maria’s class, the teacher presents him by saying: “he is a special student, so he will need your help while he is here”. The teacher’s presentation is prejudiced, as she associates the disability with being dependent on another person, embarrassing Nicolás for, although he does not speak, he hears and understands what happens around him, noticing his classmates getting away from him. It is possible to understand that this is an attitudinal barrier, that is, the teacher’s presentation contributes to the other children getting away from the character instead of welcoming the difference and respecting it.

This kind of treatment that the teacher offered Nicolás does not fit with the perspective of inclusive education, as it reinforces the difference that he presents, as if the other children were not also different from each other.

Maris gets curious about seeing the new classmate and smiles at him, showing the importance of seeing the person and not the disability, something similar to what is discussed in Ian's short film. Such scenes can be used to raise reflection about prejudice and ableism.

Followingly, the short film shows the teacher pushing Nicolás' wheelchair by the school's park, putting him in the shadow, away from the children and the games that are happening. Once again, there is the representation of prejudice and ableism when the teacher chooses for him, decides where he will stay and how his participation in that activity will be, observing his classmates' interaction by far. This scene also represents the attitudinal barrier, the teacher's action of not allowing Nicolás' participation in the game, assuming that he cannot do it or can get hurt, excluding him. In no time he was asked about what he preferred. The fact of not expressing verbally does not mean that he does not understand and that he cannot communicate in another way. This fact of associating the absence of speech with the inability to understand what is said and to express themselves is also an attitude based on a representation of disability as inability, obstacle, hindering, or, in this case, preventing the child from expressing their wish.

Maria, who appears jumping a rope, sees Nicolás and goes to him, asks a lot of questions, and tries at every cost to communicate with him. Although she does not get a verbal answer, she keeps interacting, trying to include him in all activities common among the children, such as playing with a ball and jumping rope. Although in different ways, Maria makes Nicolás play, and he seems to like this interaction by looking at her. Scenes that show inclusion go beyond ensuring the access of the child to school. It is necessary that they participate, interact, and learn, even though they need changes in the activities or adapted materials.

The following scenes show Nicolás arriving at the school, but still Maria tries to cheer him up, playing music for them to dance. Even though with limitations, Nicolás seems to like the game and imagines himself dancing with Maria, without cerebral palsy.

In the end scenes of the video, Maria sees her friend's wheelchair and listens to the orphanage's director saying that he died. Although no fur-

ther explanations are given about what happened to Nicolás, the short film brings as a message how much the friendship and interaction with this friend marked Maria, making her see the world in another way, beyond the barriers, showing that, 20 years later, she becomes a teacher in a Special Education center.

The interaction portrayed in the short film *Cordas* shows how living with differences allows us to have a greater understanding of the other, their needs, characteristics, and specificities, and can contribute to reducing prejudice against people with disability. And, because it is short, with direct and accessible language, it can be worked with children in child education, helping them think about ways to interact and include TASE children.

In the short film *Fitas* we have as character Renee, a 13-year-old girl with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). At the beginning of the video, Renee appears sitting on a boat holding a cellphone listening to three barks that sound in sequence, in *looping*. This is what names the short film in English.

Then appears a teacher explaining to a boy, Marcus, that he will make the boat ride with Renee, “the girl who does not speak”, as Marcus defines on receiving the teacher’s instruction. Once he gets on the boat, Marcus notices the pattern of Renee’s restricted and repetitive behavior, which does not have verbal communication. But he understands what she says, as it happens with many people with ASD.

Marcus tries to communicate with Renee by asking what she wants to do, suggesting they can do some maneuvers, but she gets agitated and communicates with him with an *emoji* on the cellphone, showing a poop, which indicates she needs to go to the bathroom. Marcus understands and takes her there, noticing that in the path Renee plays of touching her hands on the high grass. Marcus comes and goes in the path sometimes so that the girl can have fun, also experiencing the feeling that seems to give Renee so much pleasure; feeling the grass. The scene portrays the hypersensitivity that is common to some people with ASD, as well as the possibilities of communication when they are not vocal. It is scenes that can help children understand the behavior of people with ASD.

To try to please Renee, Marcus takes the boat to a tunnel so that she hears the echo of the barks that she likes so much to hear on the cellphone, but another boat passes, and she gets scared, and nervous, and lets the

phone fall in the lake. Once again, the short film presents behaviors that are common to autistic people, who have a crisis when they are exposed to the excess of sensory stimuli and present or increase the stereotypes.

At this moment, Marcus is bewildered, and not knowing what to do, tries to communicate with Renee, but he cannot, so he sits and waits until she calms down. After some time, he apologizes and then, calmer, she touches the grass and reproduces the sound of the barks as she did on her cellphone. Marcus also repeats the sound, and she looks him in the eye, connecting with him, a scene that portrays the possibility of interaction between people with and without ASD, although in different ways. Followingly, Renee helps Marcus put the boat on the water and they go back to the other margin of the lake, ending the short film.

In addition to evidencing the behaviors that are common in people with ASD, the video explores communication and attitudinal barriers. However, the video shows that interaction and communication with a person with ASD is possible, in this case, through gestures, facial expressions, and the use of symbols. As Abramowicz (2009, p. 22, our translation) defends, “we need to give conditions for all voices, mainly the whispering ones, to speak and echo so that we can also listen”.

When school inclusion begins in the first years of life, it is an opportunity for children to live naturally with classmates with a disability, because the prejudice that in general is socially learned is not yet internalized. The work with short films allows approaching social and subjective matters related to the barriers experienced by people with disability in a ludic, creative, and dynamic way, being a valuable pedagogical resource in the context of child education.

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