

QUANDO A INCLUSÃO SE TORNA AINDA MAIS FRÁGIL: REPRESENTAÇÕES SOCIAIS DE PROFESSORES DURANTE A PANDEMIA DE COVID-19 EM BOA VISTA (RR)

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When inclusion becomes even more fragile: social representations of teachers during the covid-19 pandemic in boa vista (rr)

Resumo:

Este artigo analisa as representações sociais de professores da escola pública do Ensino Fundamental – anos finais, do município de Boa Vista, Roraima, acerca da inclusão escolar no contexto da pandemia da COVID-19. Fundamentado na Teoria das Representações Sociais (TRS) proposta por Moscovici, o estudo adota abordagem qualitativa, de natureza descritiva. Participaram da pesquisa 28 professores de duas escolas da rede pública estadual, cujos dados foram produzidos por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas e processadas com o auxílio do *software* IRaMuTeQ. Os resultados evidenciam que as representações sociais construídas pelos docentes foram marcadas pelo desamparo institucional, pela insuficiência de formação continuada e pelas limitações impostas pelo ensino remoto emergencial. A exclusão digital destacou-se como um elemento central, comprometendo o acesso e a participação dos alunos público-alvo da Educação Especial e aprofundando desigualdades educacionais já existentes. As narrativas analisadas revelam um mal-estar docente associado à responsabilização individual frente à fragilização das políticas educacionais e às precárias condições de trabalho durante a pandemia. O estudo aponta que a pandemia constituiu um período de cisão no processo de inclusão escolar, intensificando a exclusão dessa população e evidenciando fragilidades estruturais do sistema educacional. Ao registrar as representações sociais dos professores, o artigo contribui para a compreensão da inclusão escolar em contextos de crise e se configura também como um registro histórico de um período marcado pelo aprofundamento das desigualdades e pelo desamparo docente.

Palavras-chave: Representações sociais; Inclusão escolar; Educação Especial; Pandemia da COVID-19; Docência

Abstract:

This article analyzes the social representations of teachers from public elementary schools (final years) in the municipality of Boa Vista, Roraima, regarding school inclusion in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the Theory of Social Representations (TSR) proposed by Moscovici, the study adopts a qualitative, descriptive approach. Twenty-eight teachers from two state public schools participated in the study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and processed using the IRaMuTeQ software. The results reveal that the social representations constructed by the teachers were marked by institutional lack of support, insufficient continuing professional development, and the limitations imposed by emergency remote teaching. Digital exclusion stood out as a central element, compromising the access and participation of students eligible for Special Education and deepening existing educational inequalities. The narratives analyzed reveal teacher distress associated with

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individual responsibility in the face of the weakening of educational policies and precarious working conditions during the pandemic. The study shows that the pandemic constituted a period of rupture in the school inclusion process, intensifying the exclusion of this population and highlighting structural weaknesses in the educational system. By documenting the social representations of teachers, the article contributes to the understanding of school inclusion in crisis contexts and also stands as a historical record of a period marked by the deepening of inequalities and lack of institutional support for teachers.

Keywords: Social representations; School inclusion; Special Education; COVID-19 pandemic; Teaching.

1 INTRODUCTION⁵

This article aimed to analyze the social representations of teachers from public elementary schools (final years) in the municipality of Boa Vista, Roraima (Brazil), regarding school inclusion in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, grounded in the Theory of Social Representations (TSR), proposed by Moscovici (2011).

Teaching practice in Brazilian public schools is permeated by multiple social, cultural, political, and institutional factors that directly affect pedagogical practices and teachers' conceptions of the educational process. Among these factors, difficulties related to the school inclusion of students with disabilities and/or specific educational needs stand out, especially in contexts marked by social vulnerability, scarcity of resources, and fragility of public policies (Fachinetti, Spinazola and Carneiro 2021; Mantoan, 2015).

This scenario became even more complex from 2020 onwards, when the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to the adoption of strict sanitary measures, such as social distancing and the suspension of in-person classes. In Brazil, these measures resulted in the implementation of emergency remote learning, regulated as a temporary alternative for the continuation of the school year. Although necessary, this strategy highlighted and deepened historical inequalities in the educational system, especially regarding access to digital technologies, the internet, and adequate conditions for pedagogical support (Novoa and Alvin, 2021; Gatti, 2020).

In the context of inclusive education, the impacts of the pandemic proved even more significant. Students with disabilities faced additional barriers related to the lack of pedagogical adaptations, the limitation of technology-mediated interactions, and dependence on family support to carry out school activities. Simultaneously, teachers had to reorganize their practices in a short period of time, often without adequate training, sufficient institutional support, or technological resources compatible with the demands of remote teaching (Saldanha, 2021; Lima, Novato, Carvalho, 2022).

Given this reality, understanding how teachers constructed meanings regarding school inclusion during the pandemic becomes fundamental for analyzing the educational practices developed during this period. The TSR offers a relevant theoretical and methodological framework for investigating how teachers construct meaning, interpret experiences, and guide their actions in daily school life, especially in contexts of crisis and abrupt change (Miguel, Estevão, Roggero, 2022).

From a social standpoint, this study is justified by the need to give visibility to teachers' experiences and perceptions in the face of the challenges of school inclusion during the pandemic, contributing to reflection on more equitable and sensitive pedagogical strategies that address the specific needs of students eligible for inclusive education. From a theoretical standpoint, the research contributes by linking Inclusive Education to the TSR, expanding the analysis of how the meanings attributed by teachers guide their pedagogical practices in crisis contexts. From a legal perspective, the study engages with the principles and normative frameworks that guarantee

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the right to inclusive education, reaffirming the need for its implementation even in emergency situations.

Thus, analyzing teachers' social representations of school inclusion in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, this article looks for contribute to the contemporary educational debate, providing support for critical reflection on pedagogical practices, teacher training, and public policies aimed at building a more inclusive and socially committed education, as well as constituting a historical record of the professional distress, tensions, and challenges experienced during the pandemic period in the educational context of Boa Vista, Roraima.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Inclusive Education is grounded in the principle that all individuals have the right to access, continuation, and, learning in mainstream education, respecting their individual characteristics and specific educational needs. This perspective understands diversity as a constitutive element of the educational process and recognizes that inclusion goes beyond enrollment, requiring pedagogical, structural, and human conditions that guarantee the effective participation of students (Carvalho; Ceccim, 2006; Felício; Fantacini; Torezan, 2016).

However, the implementation of Inclusive Education faces historical and social limitations, especially in contexts marked by inequality, social exclusion, and the weakening of public policies. These limitations became even more evident in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the closure of schools and the adoption of emergency remote teaching as an alternative for the continuation of the school year (Shigemura *et al.*, 2020; UNESCO, 2020). In Brazil, this reorganization of education exposed structural weaknesses in the educational system, widening existing inequalities, particularly in access to digital technologies and pedagogical resources (Santos, 2020).

Within the context of Inclusive Education, the impacts of the pandemic proved to be even more severe. Students with disabilities faced obstacles related to the lack of curricular adaptations, the limitation of pedagogical interactions, and the weakening of institutional support offered by schools. According to Souza and Dainez (2020), remote learning is not equivalent to face-to-face learning, especially given the precarious living conditions of students, teachers, and

families, as well as the difficulty of ensuring inclusive pedagogical practices in the home environment.

In this scenario, social exclusion has taken on new forms, manifesting itself through digital exclusion, difficulty in keeping up with school activities, and the intensification of educational inequalities. According to Santos (2020), the pandemic deepened existing social inequalities, affecting historically vulnerable groups more intensely, including students eligible for Special Education. These conditions produced a context of unease that permeated daily school life, affecting both students and teachers.

It is in this context that the TSR presents itself as a fundamental theoretical and methodological framework for understanding how teachers constructed meanings regarding school inclusion during the pandemic. Developed by Serge Moscovici, the TSR understands social representations as socially elaborated and shared forms of knowledge that guide practices, behaviors, and interpretations of reality (Moscovici, 1961; 2012). These representations articulate cognitive, affective, and symbolic dimensions and are deeply influenced by the historical, social, and cultural context.

According to Jodelet (2001), social representations constitute complex phenomena that manifest themselves in everyday life and express values, beliefs, attitudes, and images shared by a social group. They allow individuals to familiarize themselves with what initially appears new, threatening, or destabilizing. In this sense, the COVID-19 pandemic can be understood as a disruptive event that demanded intense processes of re-signification from teachers regarding their practices and conceptions about school inclusion.

From the standpoint of the TSR, the unease experienced in the pandemic context can be analyzed as a subjective expression of the objective working conditions of teachers, marked by overload, insecurity, and the fragility of educational policies aimed at inclusion. According to Abric (2000), social representations function as guides for action, orienting the practices and stances of individuals in the face of lived situations. Thus, understanding teachers' social representations makes it possible to analyze how they interpreted the difficulties of inclusion, social exclusion, and the challenges imposed by remote teaching.

The articulation between Inclusive Education and the TSR therefore allows school inclusion understanding

as a phenomenon traversed by subjective and contextual dimensions. By considering the experiences lived by teachers during the pandemic, it becomes possible to analyze not only the material conditions of remote teaching, but also the meanings attributed to pedagogical practices and the possibilities of inclusion in a context marked by inequalities and social tensions.

3 METHOD

This study is designed as a qualitative study of a descriptive nature, grounded in the theoretical framework of the TSR, as it allows for the understanding of the meanings socially constructed by participants, considering that human actions are guided by meanings that demand analytical interpretation (Alves-Mazzotti; Gewandsznajder, 2000). The research was conducted in the second semester of 2022 in two state public schools in the municipality of Boa Vista, Roraima, which offer the final years of elementary education and serve students eligible for Special Education in regular classes.

The study included 28 permanent teachers from the final years of elementary school, 14 teachers from each institution. Of the total participants, 25 (89%) were female, and, 3 (11%) were male. Regarding self-declared race, among the women, 13 (52%) identified as Brown (*parda*), 6 (24%) as white, and 6 (24%) as black; among the men, 3 (100%) identified as Brown (*parda*). The age range of the female teachers varied between 39 and 62 years, and among the male teachers, between 41 and 55 years, with an approximate average age of 45 years. Years of teaching experience ranged from 19 to 35 years among women and from 20 to 28 years among men, indicating a group with extensive professional experience in the public school system.

Among the female teachers, 1 (4%) had a teaching degree, 9 (36%) a bachelor's degree, 13 (52%) a *lato sensu* postgraduate specialization, and 2 (8%) a master's degree; among the male teachers, 3 (100%) had a bachelor's degree. Regarding experience with Special Education, the length of time working with students eligible for Special Education ranged from 2 to 33 years among women and from 3 to 28 years among men. All participants worked in regular classes that included students with intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments, visual impairments, autism spectrum disorder, high abilities, and giftedness.

For data collection, semi-structured individual interviews were used, organized around three analytical axes - contingencies, strategies, and practices - defined based on the literature on school inclusion and the TSR. Textual data were analyzed using the IRaMuTeQ software (*Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires*), which allows for statistical and lexical analyses of textual corpora (Camargo; Justo, 2013). The Descending Hierarchical Classification technique was employed to identify the meaning structures present in the participants' accounts.

The interpretation of the results was conducted in light of the processual approach of the TSR, as proposed by Jodelet (2001), considering the social, historical, and symbolic contexts of the production of the statements, allowing an understanding of how teachers constructed meanings regarding the difficulties of inclusion, the pedagogical strategies, and the practices developed in the context of the pandemic.

4 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The data analysis reveals that the social representations constructed by the group under investigation regarding school inclusion in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic were constructed within a context of profound contingencies, which required the mobilization of emergency strategies and the reworking of pedagogical practices. In light of the TSR, it was understood that such representations constitute socially shared symbolic productions, anchored in the concrete experiences lived by teachers and traversed by historical, social, and institutional determinants (Moscovici, 2003; Jodelet, 2001).

Regarding contingencies, the results indicate that the teachers constructed meanings of school inclusion during the pandemic as a process marked by pre-existing structural weaknesses, exacerbated by the public health crisis. Among the central elements of this theme, the feeling of institutional lack of support standing out, strongly associated with the lack of support from administrative bodies, the scarcity of pedagogical resources, and the lack of specific training for inclusive work in a remote environment. This feeling is evidenced when one of the teacher's states:

[...] -Regarding the education department, we did not receive any support; that is all I have to say - zero support, both before and after the pandemic. Regarding the so-called "regular" students, there

was no support. So you can imagine the students included in Special Education... we have no support. That is the truth. As I am from the field of physical education, I once took a course aimed at training to work with these students, but that was many years ago. The course was very good, but I believe it was about ten years ago. They did offer some courses and meetings, but they were very limited during the pandemic (Deponent 07).

This fragment expresses a social representation of inclusion as a process in which responsibility is transferred from the institution to the individual teacher, which resonates with Moscovici (2003), who argues that representations are constructed as ways of making intelligible a reality marked by tensions and contradictions. Professional distress among teachers emerges, in this sense, as a subjective dimension produced by work overload and the precariousness of pedagogical work.

Within this same axis, the teachers in this study pointed to the intensification of social and educational inequalities as a decisive factor in the difficulties of inclusion. Digital exclusion was recurrent in the participants' accounts, highlighting that many students with disabilities were unable to continuously access remote activities. As one deponent reported:

[...] - interaction was quite difficult due to internet access, not everyone had access to reliable internet capable of supporting an interactive class. In practice, educational technologies were mostly used for lecture-style classes - (Deponent 24).

This account shows that social representations of school inclusion came to incorporate digital exclusion as a structuring element, reinforcing Jodelet's (2001) understanding that representations are shaped by the material and symbolic conditions of everyday life.

Within the axis of strategies, the results show that, faced with the contingencies imposed by the pandemic, the teachers in this study mobilized alternatives to maintain some pedagogical connection with students eligible for Special Education. The use of digital technologies, especially *WhatsApp*, emerged as a central strategy, taking on new meaning as the main space for pedagogical mediation. This shift in meaning appears clearly in the following excerpt:

"[...] - sending a video or a photo; the student would also record themselves doing the activity. During remote teaching, the main tools were social media,

WhatsApp, and, videos recorded on mobile phones" - (Deponent 16).

In this context, technology was represented simultaneously as a possibility and a limitation. Although it allowed for some continuity in teaching, it also highlighted its limitations in the face of the specificities of Special Education. This ambivalence confirms the dynamic nature of social representations, which are structured in fields of tension between the possible and the desirable (Moscovici, 2003).

Another recurring strategy was the strengthening of the relationship between school and family. The group under investigation began to attribute a central role to families in mediating pedagogical activities, especially in supporting students with disabilities. This movement is expressed in the following statement:

"[...] - sometimes she did not want to do it, but her mother would gently encourage her, and we would also talk to her; she eventually completed the activity, we know she did it in her own time" (Deponent 06).

This fragment highlights a social representation of inclusion as a shared practice, collectively constructed between teachers and families, which reinforces the relational dimension of the inclusive process.

Within the axis of practices, the results indicate that the pandemic caused a profound reconfiguration of pedagogical practices. The teachers reported the need to adapt content, make curricula more flexible, and create accessible materials without having specific training to do so. This process appears to be associated with both suffering and professional learning, as the following excerpt reveals:

[...] - we learned in one year what was supposed to be learned in ten years. We had grown accustomed to that routine; the tools were there, but we did not feel the need to use them. If classes had remained in person, we would not have explored these technologies or sought to improve through them (...) we can improve classes much more. There are many teachers who do not know how to properly use the data projector and other available tools. If there were courses in this area, it would improve things a lot - (Deponent 01).

Inclusive practices came to be developed experimentally, marked by trial and error and constant adjustments. In light of the TSR, this movement can be understood as a process of objectification, in which new practices take concrete form from lived experiences (Jodelet, 2001).

The analysis of the results allows an understanding of the social representations constructed by the group of public elementary school teachers in Boa Vista, Roraima, regarding school inclusion in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which were produced from experiences lived in a scenario of disruption of school routines, weakened working conditions, and intensification of educational inequalities. In light of TSR, these representations constitute socially elaborated forms of knowledge, which enabled teachers to interpret reality, organize meanings, and guide their actions in a context marked by uncertainties (Authors, 2023).

The difficulties faced during the pandemic were perceived by teachers as a result of the lack of institutional support, insufficient continuing professional development, and the limitations imposed by remote teaching, especially in serving students eligible for Special Education. The shift of institutional responsibilities to the individual sphere of the teacher produced professional distress that permeated daily school life, manifesting itself in work overload, insecurity in the face of pedagogical demands, and the need for constant improvisation. According to Souza and Dainez (2020), remote teaching highlighted the gap between the demands of inclusive education and the real conditions for its implementation, especially when the specific needs of students with disabilities and the social conditions of their families are disregarded.

In this context, digital exclusion came to be incorporated into social representations as a structuring element of inclusion difficulties. The impossibility of continuous access to remote activities for many students revealed that educational inequalities not only persisted but were amplified during the pandemic. This understanding aligns with Santos (2020), who states that the health crisis made historical inequalities visible, affecting socially vulnerable groups more intensely. From the perspective of TSR, these representations allowed teachers to anchor the unprecedented experience of the pandemic in already known problems of the educational system, rendering intelligible a reality marked by restrictions.

At the same time, the results show that teachers mobilized alternatives to maintain the pedagogical bond and ensure, albeit in a limited way, the continuity of the educational process. Digital technologies, especially communication applications, took on new meaning as possible spaces for pedagogical mediation, even

though their limitations were recognized. This shift in meaning expresses the practical dimension of social representations, since, according to Jodelet (2001), they guide behaviors and actions in daily life. In parallel, the closer relationship between school and family became central, being understood by teachers as a condition for supporting students with disabilities, which implied a reorganization of educational relationships.

The pedagogical practices developed during the pandemic were marked by adaptations, curricular flexibilizations, and the production of accessible materials, largely carried out without specific training or adequate technical support. This movement highlighted both the suffering resulting from overload and professional learning processes built in daily practice. According to Nóvoa (2020), in crisis contexts, teaching work tends to be reorganized based on experience, collaboration, and the capacity for reinvention, elements that were present in the teachers' narratives.

Teacher subjectivity (Novaes, 2015; Sousa & Novaes, 2023) emerges in this process as a central element of the social representations constructed during the pandemic. The reported professional distress is not limited to an individual feeling, but expresses a collective experience produced in social interactions and objective working conditions. In light of TSR, this distress can be understood as a constitutive part of the representations, articulating cognitive, affective, and symbolic dimensions that guided teachers' actions in the face of the demands of school inclusion in an adverse context (Moscovici, 2012; Jodelet, 2001).

Finally, the results indicate that this study goes beyond the analysis of pedagogical practices and also constitutes a historical record of a period marked by intense social unease. The COVID-19 pandemic can be understood as a total social fact in Marcel Mauss's terms, since it simultaneously mobilized social, educational, economic, political, and subjective dimensions, profoundly affecting ways of living, working, and teaching. The social representations of teachers, by capturing meanings, tensions, and strategies constructed during this period, become symbolic testimonies of a unique collective experience, allowing an understanding of how school inclusion was experienced and understood in a context of profound instability. In this sense, the study not only analyzes an educational phenomenon but also contributes to the social memory of a time

when the school, teachers, and students were affected by an unease that reorganized practices, subjectivities, and the meanings of teaching practice.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The analysis of the social representations constructed by the group of public elementary school teachers (final years) in Boa Vista, Roraima, regarding school inclusion in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, reveals that this period functioned as a significant rupture in the educational process, with direct impacts on teaching work and on the schooling of students eligible for Special Education. The representations constructed by the teachers consistently express the experience of a context marked by institutional lack of support, the widening of educational inequalities, and the intensification of social exclusion of this population.

The data show that school inclusion, already fragile before the pandemic, was further compromised by the adoption of emergency remote learning. The lack of systematic support from governing bodies, insufficient continuing professional development, and precarious material and technological conditions produced a scenario in which teachers began to assume, individually, responsibilities that should be institutional. This condition appears recurrently in the narratives analyzed and reveals a representation of inclusion as a process sustained almost exclusively by the teachers' efforts, even in the face of insurmountable structural constraints.

Digital exclusion emerged as a central element in these representations. The lack of access to the internet and adequate devices significantly compromised the participation of students with disabilities in school activities, deepening existing inequalities. Teachers recognized that, for many of these students, the connection with the school was weakened or interrupted, which shows that remote learning did not guarantee minimum conditions for equity. In this sense, the social representations analyzed reveal that the pandemic not only exposed but also amplified the educational exclusion of this population, as already pointed out by Souza and Dainez (2020) and Santos (2020).

At the same time, teachers reported mobilizing strategies to maintain some pedagogical connection with students, especially through the use of digital technologies and the intensification of the relationship

with families. These strategies, however, are understood by the teachers themselves as partial and insufficient solutions, adopted in an emergency context. The pedagogical practices developed during this period were marked by improvised adaptations, lack of technical support, and learning by doing, which shows that the reorganization of teaching work occurred without the necessary conditions for the effective implementation of school inclusion.

This study, therefore, highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic constituted a period of rupture in the field of Inclusive Education, in which the structural weaknesses of the educational system and the insufficiency of policies aimed at students with disabilities and the teachers who work with them became visible. The social representations analyzed serve as a record of the tensions, limitations, and contradictions experienced in this context, revealing that school inclusion was profoundly compromised and that teachers worked under conditions marked by the lack of institutional support.

In that regard, these final considerations also take on a critical and denunciatory character. They denounce the widening educational exclusion of students eligible for Special Education during the pandemic and the way in which teachers were left to manage structural problems individually. By documenting these representations, the study contributes to the social memory of this period and reinforces the need for future public policies to consider the real working conditions of teachers and the specificities of Inclusive Education, lest they reproduce, in new crisis contexts, the same forms of exclusion and abandonment evidenced here.

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