

Disability Studies in Education: some contributions to the Brazilian reality

Marivete Gesser¹

Anahí Guedes de Mello¹

¹Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), Florianópolis/SC – Brazil

By way of presentation

Brazil has quite broad and advanced legislation aimed at guaranteeing the right to education of people with disability, comprising laws, decrees, and other legal documents. Among the latter, it is possible to highlight, for example, the contentious resumption, in the third term of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, of the National Special Education Policy from the Perspective of Inclusive Education (Brasil, 2008), which guarantees the unalienable right to inclusion of students with disability at all levels of education, even though it suffered harsh attacks on its execution during the administration of the far-right government of Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2022), under the argument that children with disability “hindered” the school learning of the other students without disability in the same classroom. The Convention on the Rights of People with Disability (Legislative Decree No. 186/2008) and the Brazilian Law on the Inclusion of People with Disability (Law No. 13146/2015) are two important legal instruments presenting specific articles and/or chapters on education. Finally, we highlight Law No. 14723 of November 13, 2023, which amended Law No. 12711 of August 29, 2012, to provide for the special quota system program, guaranteeing reserved openings for access to federal higher education institutions and secondary-level technical education institutions for black, brown, indigenous, and quilombola students and students with disability, as well as those who fully attended secondary or elementary school in public schools.

Despite all the legislation and legal documents aimed at guaranteeing the right to education in Brazil, there are still many challenges to be faced to expand the access and permanence of students with disability in the educational field. The data obtained by the Continuous National Household Sample Survey (Continuous PNAD) on people with disability, conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2022), identified that the illiteracy rate of people with disability is almost five times higher than among people without disability (19.5% versus 4.1%). Primary education completion is also lower among people with disability (25.6% versus 57.3%). Regarding higher education, the 2021 data from the Higher Education Census (INEP, 2022) indicated that the number of undergraduate enrollments declared with a record of disability, pervasive developmental disorder, or high abilities/giftedness was 63,404, corresponding to only 0.71% of the total enrollments of students in undergraduate programs that year.

Given the enormous challenges imposed on the constitutional guarantee of the right to quality education for students with disability, even in a country like Brazil, which has numerous legal mechanisms aimed at this purpose, we highlight the relevance of this thematic section on disability studies in education. The goal is to disseminate the contributions of disability studies in education considering the Brazilian reality. To this end, we propose the displacement of essentializing and binary educational practices – in which dichotomies between the ‘medical model’ (centered on an individual’s body) and the ‘social model’ (centered on the context of barriers) or between ‘students with disability’ and ‘students without disability’ repeatedly cohabit in the classroom environment – to inclusive educational practices that embrace the differences in disability and outside it, i.e., that also consider in perspective disability at the intersection with other social markers of difference such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, generation, region, religion, among others that are structurally present in educational contexts. In our assessment, this perspective corroborates the arguments of Adriano Nuernberg (2015, p. 555), based on Baglieri et al. (2011), who stated that disability studies in education “focus primarily on the relationships and social places of disability in the context of human body variation”.

The field of disability studies in education rejects the models for understanding disability that, based on a conception grounded on the norm/deviation binomial, understand disability as limited to deficit, delay, or absence, thus pathologizing or relegating it to a condition that demands normalization or cure. In addition, disability studies are based on the principle that disability must be contextualized in the political and social spheres, favoring the interests, agendas, and perspectives of people with disability. In this sense, it is committed to social justice, the provision of equitable educational opportunities, and the full access of people with disability in society (Connor et al., 2008). In this thematic section, we also highlight the commitment to the rupture of the field with segregation in schools and/or classes separated

from social life to which people with disability have been subjected throughout history and the guarantee of participation in education systems committed to the construction of inclusive educational processes.

Connor et al. (2008) also highlighted the political commitment of disability studies in education to denounce and combat the oppression that positions disability as an essentialized, pathologized condition to be medicalized in schools, politics, institutions, and legislation. In addition, the authors highlighted that this field recognizes the political power that may be found in the activism of people with disability, the potential that this group has to disrupt discourses that position their experiences as dissonant from what is established as “normal-bodied”, as well as includes people with disability in the theorization about disability. Disability studies in education, which initially emerged with the social model of disability as their primary theoretical basis (UPIAS, 1975; Oliver, 1990; Barnes, 2012), have incorporated significant contributions from feminist disability authors, as well as carried out important dialogues with critical race studies and other fields that complexify the understanding of the experience of people with disability in the educational context.

We believe that the contributions of disability studies in education may fundamentally reverberate with the construction of an anti-ableist education, as proposed by Gesser (2020). The author briefly discussed how education aimed at people with disability has been forged throughout history and its relations with the processes of normalization, pathologization, and medicalization of difference, which exclude not only students with disability but all people who deviate from a normative ideal. Also, based on Campbell (2001; 2009), Mello (2016), and Taylor (2017), Gesser (2020) presented the implications of the reproduction of ableism – which tends to normalize and hierarchize the divergent existences of the “normal-bodied” standard – for the production of deviations and legitimization of exclusion processes in the educational context. Denouncing the ableism present in the educational context is fundamental since, as Böck (2019) highlighted, the ableist narrative incites the discourse of overcoming to the detriment of the construction of accessible environments open to a wide variety of people. In this direction, Gesser (2020) highlighted that the field of disability studies contributes to promoting inclusive educational processes aimed at embracing people with different characteristics and ways of relating to knowledge.

A very interesting example of this perspective that embraces a greater variability of people is in the *Contracartilha de Acessibilidade* (Accessibility Booklet) of the Brazilian Association of Anthropology (Mello et al., 2020), in which the authors proposed, based on Mingus (2010), that the technical dimensions and physical, behavioral, and cognitive technologies be thought and practiced based on a paradigm that considers an expanded definition of accessibility, based on the idea of disability justice¹. Therefore, based on the perspective that the experience of disability is multiple and complex, the authors pro-

posed using an approach that seeks to cripple accessibility practices, which nowadays still require framing from individualizing body norms and standards to render only some “deviations” readable and manageable. The authors pointed out that “To cripple is thought of here in the sense of decolonizing, mutilating, deforming, and injuring the hegemonic thinking about disability, access, and inclusion, causing cracks in it” (Mello et al. 2020, p. 4, our translation).

We understand that the dissemination of the field of Disability Studies in Education offers important contributions to the implementation of legislation already existing in Brazil through the construction of educational practices based on the ethical-political commitment to embrace and celebrate the presence of students with different human variations within the context of education. There is still a long way to go because, as we pointed out above, the data from the Continuous PNAD and Higher Education Census showed that there are many challenges for all students to be able to participate and advance in the different levels of education, with these being more significant for students with disability. We believe the texts in this thematic section, presented below, offer significant contributions to the Brazilian reality.

The article by David Connor and Jan Valle, titled *Disability Studies in Education — Past, Present & Future? A Brief Overview*, opens the thematic section *Disability Studies in Education* by providing a broad overview of disability studies in education. The authors began the text by presenting the genesis of disability studies in education while paying tribute to the critical special educators who sowed the seeds of this field by questioning the medical model of disability, which was widely accepted as the basis for the field of special education at the time. Based on the social model of disability, they defended the understanding of disability as a human variation that, from the normalization processes, was positioned by the medical model as a pathology. Next, Connor and Valle contrasted models of understanding disability, seeking to make visible that they have political implications in how education systems deal with people with disability. From the dialogue with critical authors of special education and with the knowledge produced by theorists of disability studies, the authors presented the basic principles of disability studies in education and examples of theoretical and practical approaches. Upon explaining how this field grew in the United States, they described its impacts on the interconnected domains of theory, research, practice, and policy. In addition, they described a wide range of contributions from experienced, newly established, and emerging scholars of disability studies in education who continued to expand and deepen their studies in an interdisciplinary manner, including, but not limited to, their use in teacher education, inclusive education, and the humanities. They also included intersectional understandings of disability, such as disability studies and critical race theory in education (DisCrit), Latinx DisCrit, and greater involvement in the Global South. Finally, they presented the emerging trends of the field, aiming to map their impacts for the future.

The second text that makes up the thematic section was authored by Susan Baglieri and titled *Teaching, Care, and Inclusive Education: A Disability Studies Perspective*. From the dialogue with disability studies and disability justice, emphasizing collective access, the author described how inclusive education may advance toward the ethics of care and the understanding of care as work that should be valued, with attention to teacher education. To this end, from the reality of the United States, the author criticized the meaning of “inclusion”, which is centered on disability while being attuned to the ways ableism intersects with other systems of oppression. Thus, Baglieri pointed out that the practice of inclusive education must be centered on the notion of justice. She argued that an inclusive education practice focused on justice is not based on the promise of (potential) productivity or the specific independence/dependence of the students. Instead, the opportunity to experience caring and being cared for in the context of a learning community shapes youth engagement and preparation to implement and carry forward democratic living. It concluded the text by presenting a preliminary attempt at fundamental elements in teacher education programs. Among these, the author highlighted the importance of instrumentalizing teachers to position care as a practice of justice, which, from our point of view, underlies critical pedagogy; supporting the creation of a classroom community by teachers to facilitate the creation of collective access, and supporting teachers in identifying, describing, and defending dignified and fair working conditions that acknowledge care as specific work, not a charitable action.

The article written by Gisele De Mozzi, titled *Destabilizing disabilities: a crippled implications analysis*, aimed to articulate reflections on the meeting with one of the participants of her doctoral research with the knowledge from critical social psychology, school and educational psychology, disability studies in education, *crip* studies, and the neo-materialist and intersectional feminism. The author proposed to cripple the analysis of implications by incorporating ableism and disability as analytical categories in the research processes in the direction of destabilizing the hegemonic thinking and the instituted notions about disability, normality, and capacity. To cripple the analysis of implications, the author suggested betting on the ethical-political power of the existence of difference, anticipating and desiring diversity in the most diverse spaces, contexts, and academic temporalities, destabilizing hegemonic knowledge, and, finally, assuming an ethical-political position committed to the anti-ableist struggle. According to Mozzi, “[...] the expansion of entry of a diverse audience in federal higher education institutions makes it necessary to rethink their structures, paradigms, epistemologies, references, practices, and pedagogies” (our translation).

The article by Marivete Gesser, Valéria Aydos, Pamela Block, and Paula Xavier da Silva on *Ableism in educational trajectories and the production of access fatigue* presented some results of interinstitutional research with the purpose of understanding, based on an inter-

sectional perspective, the implications of ableism in the trajectories of black women with disability. The article, based on feminist disability studies and disability studies in education, sought to make visible the implications of ableism in producing access fatigue. From the analysis of the information obtained, the authors identified that ableism is a producer of what Anika Konrad (2021) named *access fatigue*. The narratives of the participants pointed out that access is still often understood as an individual problem and that the intersection of disability with gender and race may further hinder its claim. It was also identified that access fatigue sometimes results in enrollment lockouts, program switches, and even withdrawal from completing undergraduate studies. In addition, the understanding based on the medical model and neoliberal capitalism that access is a problem of the individual and that they must seek the means to obtain it by themselves was intrinsically present throughout the educational trajectories of the respondents. Thus, they were forced to constantly negotiate access individually with teachers, classmates, and family members even though, in line with current legislation, educational institutions should have a network of services aimed at promoting accessibility for all people who need it.

The article by Geisa Leticia Kempfer Bock, Rose Clér Estivalet Beche, and Solange Cristina da Silva addressed *The meanings attributed to disability by basic education professionals*. It is a research report with the aim of investigating the meanings attributed to disability by professionals who work in the basic education system of three municipalities in southern Brazil. The information obtained in the research pointed out that the meanings attributed by teachers to disability were still mostly based on the biomedical model, circumscribing disability as incapacity or “lack” relative to what is considered typical. However, an understanding of disability that situated it as a relational experience established in the body/environment relationship was also identified, understanding barriers as impediments to the participation of people with disability in the context in which they are inserted. The results of the study corroborated the importance of conducting training that aims to modify the meanings attributed to the experience of disability so that this impacts educational practices with students with disability.

The article by Carla Biancha Angelucci, titled *BPC at School Program and care policies for people with disabilities*, addressed the public policy *Programa BPC na Escola* (Continuous Benefit Program at School Program) to apprehend the school reality of students with disability in the municipality of Suzano/SP from an organized and intentional government action, with foundations, execution parameters, and monitoring. The analyses were based on 337 questionnaires applied to the beneficiaries of the program. Although the research material allowed readings on different fields of the rights of people with disability (leisure, work, urban mobility, health, justice), the analyses were limited to the rights to social protection and education, implemented, respectively, by the municipal social assistance and educa-

tion policies. The results evinced some challenges to public policies like the *BPC na Escola* program, such as the unequal distribution of care and the need to break with the conception that it should be limited to the private sphere and incorporate intersectionality and intersectorality in public policies.

Finally, we would like to point out that this thematic section does not exhaust discussions in disability studies in education but fosters the emergence of more research and inventive and critical strategies in different educational contexts. We believe that the expansion of this field in Brazil may contribute to the expansion of the very notion of “inclusive education”, enhanced by the notion of the school as a space for promoting care from the perspective of democracy, feminist ethics, and justice.

Note

- ¹ At Round Table 04 of the 7th National Meeting of Antropology of Law (ENADIR), which was attended by Mello, Fietz, and Rondon (2021), Mello and Fietz proposed the translation of the term “Disability Justice” into Portuguese as “Justiça Defiça”.

References

- BAGLIERI, Susan et al. [Re]claiming “Inclusive Education” toward cohesion in educational reform: Disability studies unravels the myth of the normal child. **Columbia University**, New York, Teacher College, v. 113, n. 10, p. 2122-2154, 2011.
- BARNES, Colin. Social model of disability: valuable or irrelevant? In: WATSON, N.; ROULSTONE, A.; THOMAS, C. **The routledge handbook of disability studies**. London: Routledge, 2012. p. 12-29.
- BÖCK, G. L. K. **O Desenho Universal para a Aprendizagem e as contribuições na Educação à Distância**. 2019. Tese (Doutorado em Psicologia) – Universidade Federal Fluminense, Florianópolis, 2019.
- BRASIL. Ministério da Educação. Secretaria de Educação Especial (SEESP). **Política Nacional de Educação Especial na Perspectiva da Educação Inclusiva**. Brasília, DF: MEC/SEESP, 2008a. Disponível em: <http://portal.mec.gov.br/arquivos/pdf/politicaeducspecial.pdf>. Acesso em: 10 mar. 2024.
- BRASIL. Decreto Legislativo nº 186, de 9 de julho de 2008. Aprova o texto da Convenção sobre os Direitos das Pessoas com Deficiência e de seu Protocolo Facultativo, assinados em Nova Iorque, em 30 de março de 2007. **Diário Oficial [da República Federativa do Brasil]**, Brasília, DF, 2008b. Disponível em: https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/congresso/dlg/dlg-186-2008.htm. Acesso em: 10 mar. 2024.
- BRASIL. Lei nº 13.146, de 6 de julho de 2015. Lei Brasileira de Inclusão da Pessoa com Deficiência (Estatuto da Pessoa com Deficiência). **Diário Oficial da União**, Brasília, DF, 2015. Disponível em: http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2015-2018/2015/lei/l13146.htm. Acesso em: 10 mar. 2024.
- BRASIL. Lei nº 14.723 de 13 de novembro de 2023. Altera a Lei nº 12.711, de 29 de agosto de 2012, para dispor sobre o programa especial para o acesso às in-

stituições federais de educação superior e de ensino técnico de nível médio de estudantes pretos, pardos, indígenas e quilombolas e de pessoas com deficiência, bem como daqueles que tenham cursado integralmente o ensino médio ou fundamental em escola pública. **Diário Oficial da União**, Brasília, 2023. Disponível em: https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2023-2026/2023/lei/l14723.htm. Acesso em: 02 nov. 2023.

CAMPBELL, Fiona K. "Inciting Legal Fictions: Disability's Date with Ontology and the Ableist Body of the Law." **Griffith Law Review**, London, v. 10, n. 1, p. 42-62, 2001.

CAMPBELL, Fiona K. **Contours of Ableism – The production of disability and abledness**, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

CONNOR, David J.; GABEL, S. L.; GALLAGHER, D.; MORTON, M. Disability studies and inclusive education--Implication for theory, research, and practice: Guest editor's introduction. **International Journal of Inclusive Education**, v. 12, n. 5-6, p. 441-457, 2008.

INEP. Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira. **Censo da Educação Superior 2021**. Brasília: Inep, 2022. Disponível em: https://download.inep.gov.br/educacao_superior/censo_superior/documentos/2021/apresentacao_censo_da_educacao_superior_2021.pdf. Acesso em: 25 mar. 2023.

MELLO, Anahí G.; GAVÉRIO, Marco Antônio; von der WEID, Olivia; AYDOS, Valéria [Comitê Deficiência e Acessibilidade da Associação Brasileira de Antropologia]. **Contracartilha de acessibilidade: reconfigurando o corpo e a sociedade**. Brasília; São Paulo; Rio de Janeiro: ABA; ANPOCS; UERJ; ANIS; CONATUS; NACI, 2020. 14p.

MELLO, Anahí Guedes de; FIETZ, Helena; RONDON, Gabriela. "Entre os 'direitos das pessoas com deficiência' e a 'justiça deficiente': reflexões antropológicas a partir do contexto brasileiro" [vídeo]. In: VII ENADIR - ENCONTRO NACIONAL DE ANTROPOLOGIA DO DIREITO, 2021. **YouTube...** agosto 2021. Disponível em <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVPdIWzaS8A> Acesso em: 12 fev. 2022.

MELLO, Anahí Guedes. Deficiência, incapacidade e Vulnerabilidade: do capacitismo ou a preeminência. capacitista e biomédica do Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa da UFSC. **Ciência & Saúde Coletiva**, Rio de Janeiro, v. 21, n. 10, p. 3265-3276, 2016.

NUERNBERG, A. H. Os estudos sobre deficiência na educação. **Educação & Sociedade**, Campinas, v. 36, n. 131, p. 555-558, abr. 2015.

OLIVER, Mike. **The Politics of Disablement**. London: Macmillan, 1990.

TAYLOR, S. **Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation**. **The New Press**, 2017.

UPIAS. Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation; Disability Alliance. **Fundamental Principles of Disability**. 1975.

Marivete Gesser has a PhD in Psychology from the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) with a Post-doctorate at the State University of New York/Stony Brook/USA. She works as an associate professor in the Department of Psychology at UFSC and coordinates the Center for Disability Studies (NED-UFSC). She receives funding from the CNPq-PQ grant level 1D.
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4091-9754>
E-mail: mariveteg@gmail.com

Anahí Guedes de Mello is an anthropologist with a PhD in Social Anthropology from the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC). She is currently a researcher at the Center for Disability Studies (NED) with UFSC's Department of Psychology, and an associate researcher at Anis – Institute of Bioethics; member of the Brazilian Association of Anthropology (ABA) Committee on Disability and Accessibility and of the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO) Working Group for Critical Studies on Disability.
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5536-7171>
E-mail: anahigm75@gmail.com

