

## The second teacher and the learning of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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### Abstract

This study is based on the premise that the second teacher significantly contributes to the inclusion of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. This article seeks to answer: what is the role of the second teacher in promoting the learning of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder? The aim is to understand this role through a systematic literature review grounded in studies that investigate pedagogical practices and the contribution of this professional in regular education. Dissertations and articles published between 2016 and 2023 were analyzed from the databases Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel, Scientific Electronic Library Online, and Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations. The results indicate that the second teacher plays a relevant role in mediating learning, but faces challenges such as inadequate training and poor infrastructure. It is concluded that it is necessary to strengthen teacher training and pedagogical strategies. The reflections are based on Mantoan, Prieto and Arantes (2006), who emphasize that pedagogical support is essential to overcoming barriers to participation.

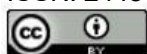
### Keywords

teacher; inclusive education; autism.

### O segundo professor e a aprendizagem de estudantes com Transtorno do Espectro Autista

#### Resumo

Este estudo parte da premissa de que o segundo professor contribui significativamente para a inclusão de estudantes com Transtorno do Espectro Autista. O presente artigo procura responder: como é a atuação do segundo professor na promoção da aprendizagem de estudantes com Transtorno do Espectro Autista? Tem como objetivo compreender essa atuação a partir de uma revisão sistemática de literatura fundamentada em estudos que investigam as práticas pedagógicas e a contribuição desse profissional no ensino regular. Foram analisados dissertações e artigos publicados entre 2016 e 2023 nas bases Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior, Scientific Electronic Library Online e Biblioteca Digital Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações. Os resultados apontam que o segundo professor desempenha papel relevante na mediação da aprendizagem, mas enfrenta desafios como formação inadequada e infraestrutura precária. Conclui-se que é necessário fortalecer a formação



docente e as estratégias pedagógicas. As reflexões apoiam-se em Mantoan, Prieto e Arantes (2006), que destacam o apoio pedagógico como essencial à superação de barreiras à participação.

**Palavras-chave**

professor; educação inclusiva; autismo.

## **El segundo maestro y el aprendizaje de los estudiantes con Trastorno del Espectro Autista**

**Resumen**

Este estudio parte de la premisa de que el segundo profesor contribuye significativamente a la inclusión de estudiantes con Trastorno del Espectro Autista. El presente artículo busca responder: ¿cómo es la actuación del segundo profesor en la promoción del aprendizaje de estudiantes con Trastorno del Espectro Autista? Su objetivo es comprender esta actuación a partir de una revisión sistemática de la literatura fundamentada en estudios que investigan las prácticas pedagógicas y la contribución de este profesional en la enseñanza regular. Se analizaron disertaciones y artículos publicados entre 2016 y 2023 en las bases de datos de la Coordinación de Perfeccionamiento de Personal de Nivel Superior, Scientific Electronic Library Online y Biblioteca Digital Brasileña de Tesis y Disertaciones. Los resultados indican que el segundo maestro desempeña un papel relevante en la mediación del aprendizaje, pero enfrenta desafíos como formación inadecuada e infraestructura deficiente. Se concluye que es necesario fortalecer la formación docente y las estrategias pedagógicas. Las reflexiones se basan en Mantoan, Prieto y Arantes (2006), quienes destacan el apoyo pedagógico como esencial para superar las barreras a la participación.

**Palabras clave**

profesor; educación inclusiva; autismo.

## **1 Introduction**

Educational inclusion is a fundamental principle of democratic societies. It aims to guarantee equal learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their needs. According to Mantoan, Prieto, and Arantes (2006), inclusion means embracing human diversity as part of the educational process. This requires schools to review their pedagogical, structural, and cultural practices constantly. Inclusive education recognizes and values the diversity of subjects, requiring adaptations in pedagogical practices to ensure effective and meaningful participation of all in the school environment. In recent years, educational institutions have recorded a significant increase in the number of students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders.

According to data from the Santa Catarina State Department of Education available in the electronic system Educação na Palma da Mão, as of July 4, 2022, 6,009 students in the spectrum were enrolled in the state education system: 2,055 in the Elementary and 2,181 in the Middle Years (Santa Catarina, 2022).

To ensure the right to learning and inclusion of these students, Resolution No. 100 of the Conselho Estadual de Educação de Santa Catarina (CEE/SC), from December 13, 2016, establishes the requirement of a second teacher in regular education in the state of Santa Catarina. This professional must collaborate with the head teacher to overcome barriers that arise throughout the educational process.

According to Article 2 of the previously mentioned resolution, a second teacher is made available for classes with students who have been diagnosed with multiple disabilities, impaired social interactions, impaired academic functionality, or physical disabilities. This teacher is considered a fundamental human resource for achieving the right to inclusive education (CEE/SC, 2016). Unlike figures such as therapeutic companions, school mediators, and classroom assistants, whose roles are often limited to behavioral or functional support, second teachers have specific pedagogical responsibilities provided for in educational regulations. Those second teachers integrate the teaching-learning process in conjunction with teacher planning (FCEE, 2021).

Although legislation guarantees access to services provided by a second teacher, implementing school inclusion in the daily routine of institutions still faces several obstacles. The practical reality reveals structural, pedagogical, and formative challenges that hinder the institution of effective inclusive practices. Therefore, it is crucial to critically examine these challenges, study them, and find solutions to overcome them.

Consolidating truly inclusive education requires more than granting students with disabilities access to regular classrooms. It means fostering a school culture that recognizes and values differences as an educational principle, rather than adhering to the logic of homogenization and superficial adaptations. This perspective requires a significant transformation of how schools organize time, spaces, relationships, and knowledge.

In this sense, thinking about inclusion requires shifting the focus from disability to the unique qualities of individuals. As Rodrigues and Gai (2016, p. 136) state, "We

propose thinking about singularities and differences. We propose thinking about their relationships and the rhizomatic ways in which thought, body, meaning, art, desire, and becomings constitute us as machines." This vision calls on us to understand the school as a space of creation where learning occurs through the multitude of interactions and the constant reinvention of pedagogical practices.

In this context, the role of the second teacher is to contribute to the development of more sensitive pedagogical practices, especially for students on the autism spectrum. Their role should not be viewed as providing individualized technical support, but rather as participating in a collective, collaborative process of fostering inclusion. This process requires ongoing training, active listening, and a commitment to transforming educational practices.

While the head teacher is responsible for developing the curriculum and leading school activities for the whole class, the second teacher's role is to foster the comprehensive development of students on the spectrum by building the necessary bridges and respecting their unique needs while promoting their intellectual and social autonomy. According to Mantoan, Prieto, and Arantes (2006), pedagogical support is essential for overcoming barriers to learning and participation. It is also a dynamic process that requires constant adaptation to the unique challenges posed by each student.

A critical reflection on the role of the second teacher must also consider the risks of disjointed action, which may inadvertently reinforce segregating or partial support. In this sense, they must be integrated into a collective pedagogical project, built based on co-responsibility and ongoing training of school professionals, as pointed out by Mantoan, Prieto, and Arantes (2006), school inclusion implies the transformation of institutional culture, practices, and policies toward the construction of a school for all.

From this perspective, it is necessary to carefully examine pedagogical practices aimed at providing services to students with autism, critically analyzing how they are implemented in schools. To this end, the present article seeks to understand the role of second teachers in promoting learning for students on the spectrum. This objective is pursued through a systematic literature review of academic studies that investigate

pedagogical practices and the contribution of these professionals to the inclusive educational process.

## 2 Methodology

The review of studies in this study started with a clear and objective question, as guided by Gomes and Caminha (2013). So, we sought to answer the following question: what is the role of the second teacher in promoting the learning of students on the autistic spectrum?

To deepen the investigation, additional questions were raised, such as:

- What is the role of the second teacher in the context of inclusive education for students on the autism spectrum?
- How does the second teacher's role contribute to overcoming obstacles and promoting the autonomy of these students?
- Do educational policies sufficiently address the needs of these students, or is there room for improvement?
- How does the second teacher's role impact the learning process of students on the autism spectrum?

The field of education in Brazil has been the subject of significant research, dissertations, and theses, particularly regarding the role of second teachers in the schooling process for students on the spectrum. This subject has received mounting academic attention as inclusive practices have come to the forefront of contemporary educational discourse (Oliveira; Leite, 2022).

According to the literature, interaction between the second teacher and the student with autism is crucial for the success of school inclusion. Promoting clear communication, organizing predictable routines, and providing individualized support are considered essential strategies for these students' academic progress. Furthermore, the second teacher plays a significant role in adapting curricular activities, using visual aids, and creating more welcoming and inclusive environments. This fosters active student participation in daily school life (Weizenmann; Pezzi; Zanon, 2020).

In this context, we began the process of selecting studies that specifically addressed the role of second teachers in promoting learning for students on the spectrum. The inclusion criteria were academic publications about the Education field, written in Portuguese, between 2016 and 2023. This timeframe ensured the timeliness and relevance of the analyzed sources, and the Portuguese language ensured the content's accessibility to the Brazilian context.

The materials were collected in August 2023, based on the definition of descriptors and selection criteria. This methodological approach allowed us to organize the search process and ensure the reproducibility of the study selection.

The research was carried out by consulting the following databases:

- Catalog of Theses and Dissertations of the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (Capes).
- Biblioteca Digital Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações (BDTD).
- Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO).

The descriptors used to operationalize the searches were: "autism" and/or "second teacher" and/or "learning." These terms were chosen for their relevance and ability to cover the main aspects related to the object of study. Additionally, it was decided to restrict the selection to productions in Portuguese to ease the understanding of the results and favor their practical application in the Brazilian educational context.

A systematic review is a type of review that uses rigorous methods and predefined criteria to identify, select, evaluate, and synthesize the results of relevant research on a specific topic. The goal is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of knowledge (Botelho; Cunha; Macedo, 2011). This type of review seeks to minimize bias through clear, replicable procedures.

After collecting the materials, the selected articles and dissertations were read and critically analyzed. The goal of this phase was to extract relevant information and answer the research question and gain a deeper understanding of the role of the second teacher in promoting the learning of students on the autism spectrum.

Each paper was carefully evaluated, considering aspects such as the methodology used, the results obtained, and the conclusions presented by the authors. This approach



sought not only to identify best practices and recurring challenges but also to assess the consistency and scientific quality of the analyzed research.

To organize the extracted data, analysis tables were developed to summarize the central information from each study, such as objectives, contributions, challenges, and conclusions. Tables 2 and 4 were important tools for systematizing and deepening the findings, allowing for a comparative view across studies and favoring a thorough and critical analysis of the data.

The process of reading and analyzing academic productions allowed the construction of a comprehensive and well-founded panorama of the role of the second teacher in the context of Brazilian inclusive education, contributing to the strengthening of the debate and the proposal of more effective pedagogical practices supporting students on the spectrum.

### 3 Results and discussion

Initially, 286 academic productions related to the theme were identified. After applying a specific thematic filter for the area of Education, this number was reduced to 28 productions. Using exclusion filters is essential to ensuring the integrity and relevance of the results of a systematic review, guaranteeing that only the most relevant studies are analyzed in depth. After carefully reading the summaries and titles, five studies that fully met the inclusion criteria were selected.

**Table 1** – Selected articles and dissertations

Nº	Title	Author	Program and Institution	Keywords	Source	Year
1	Social representation of teachers of students with autism about the teaching and learning processes	Claudia Elci Bervig Lemos	Universidade do Noroeste do Estado do RS – Education in the Science	Inclusive education; autism; inclusion	BDTD	2016
2	Development and learning of students with autism in the classroom	Monalisa de Oliveira Miranda Redmerski	Universidade Católica de Brasília – Education	Learning; development; autism; teacher perception; student perception	BDTD	2018
3	Teachers' conception about the inclusion of the student with autism: a bibliographic research	Fernanda Delai Lucas Adurens e Camila Mugnai Vieira	Universidade Estadual Paulista (Unesp)	Teachers; special education; autistic disorder; school	SciELO	2018
4	The role of the second	Juliana	Universidade do	Second teacher;	Capes	2019

Nº	Title	Author	Program and Institution	Keywords	Source	Year
	teacher in the teaching and learning processes of inclusion students	Ampese Lazzarotti Dias	Oeste de SC – Education	school inclusion; teaching and learning		
5	Challenges in the schooling process of children with autism in the inclusive context: guidelines for continued education from the perspective of teachers	Síglia Pimentel Höher Camargo <i>et al.</i>	Universidade Federal de Pelotas (UFPeL) – Education	Inclusion; autism; continued teacher training	SciELO	2020

Source: Authors' own (2023).

No doctoral theses that met the criteria established in this review were located. Thus, the analysis focused on three master's dissertations and two scientific articles. It is important to note that these works were produced in different regions of Brazil: three in the south, one in the southeast, and one in the midwest.

Among the most recurring keywords identified in the studies, the topics are highlighted: learning, autism, second teacher, inclusion, teaching process, pedagogical strategies, special education and teacher. The terms “autism” and “inclusion” appeared in three studies, followed by “learning” and “second teacher”, which were mentioned in two productions each. Terms such as “ordinary class” and “perception” also stood out, albeit less frequent.

The first analyzed dissertation is by *Claudia Elci Bervig Lemos* (2016), titled *Social representation of teachers of students with autism about the teaching and learning processes*, adopted a qualitative approach through case study. The research was conducted at an elementary school in the municipality of Santa Rosa, Rio Grande do Sul. It involved teachers, principals, coordinators, and students in the third year of elementary school, including a student diagnosed with autism. Data was collected through class observations and recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

The study investigated the teaching and learning processes employed by teachers working with a class that included a student with autism. The study sought to understand how these processes impacted the acquisition of scientific concepts and student development. The results revealed a lack of teacher preparedness in dealing with students on the spectrum, underscoring the necessity of specialized continuing education and institutional support. This lack of training is further evidenced by data from the Censo Escolar



da Educação Básica (Brasil, 2023), which indicates that only 40.5% of teachers participate in continuing education programs. This figure is still far from the 50% target established in the Plano Nacional de Educação.

The second dissertation, entitled Development and Learning of Students with Autism in the Classroom and prepared by Monalisa de Oliveira Miranda Redmerski (2018), also used a qualitative approach, analyzing multiple case studies. Data collection involved observations, interviews, and document analysis in elementary school classrooms.

The results showed that teachers used various strategies to monitor the development of autistic students. These strategies included adapted activities, systematic observations, differentiated evaluations, oral expression, and behavioral analysis. However, the research revealed that these strategies were not always applied in an organized and continuous manner, which hindered the effective monitoring of students' progress.

One of the most relevant findings was the importance of the emotional bond between teachers and students. The students themselves identified this bond as a motivating factor for school engagement. In line with the perspectives defended by Carvalho (2014) and Freire (1996), the author highlights the need to recognize the specificities of each student and value their individuality in the learning process. These authors emphasize the importance of affectivity in education without compromising its integrity and rigor.

In short, Redmerski's (2018) research emphasizes the importance of pedagogical practices that prioritize active student listening, curriculum adaptation, and strengthening social-affective bonds as essential strategies for achieving school inclusion for students on the spectrum.

The third article, written by Fernanda Delai Lucas Adurens and Camila Mugnai Vieira (2018), presents bibliographic research analyzing teachers' perceptions of including students with autism in school. The methodology adopted consisted of a literature review to answer the guiding question: "What are teachers' conceptions about the inclusion of students with autism?". The search for studies was conducted at the Biblioteca Virtual em Saúde (BVS) and Scielo, using terms related to the theme and

applying inclusion criteria such as: Portuguese language articles, free access and publication in the last ten years.

The results indicated several difficulties faced by teachers in the process of inclusion of students with autism, such as the lack of specific training, the scarcity of adequate teaching materials, the absence of multiprofessional support, and the need for greater interaction with families. The research also emphasized the importance of the second teacher's performance, demonstrating that mediation by an adult combined with an interactive context positively influences the behavior of students with autism. The presence of the mediator encouraged more proactive behaviors, such as taking the initiative, smiling, and making eye contact (Adurens; Vieira, 2018).

In short, the study emphasizes the importance of investing in the initial and continued education of teachers, as well as multiprofessional support and specialized resources. According to the authors, teacher training is fundamental to the success of school inclusion policies.

Dissertation 4, developed by Juliana Ampese Lazzarotti Dias (2019), investigated *The role of the second teacher in the teaching and learning processes of inclusion students*. Through a qualitative approach and the application of an exploratory questionnaire, the author analyzed the perceptions and practices of the second teachers working in Inclusive Education.

The results indicated that additional teachers recognize the importance of school inclusion and collaboration with head teachers. However, they have reported difficulties in pedagogical articulation and challenges related to school infrastructure, especially regarding the necessary adaptations to adequately support students with special educational needs (DIAS, 2019).

The research also showed the existing gap in the initial and continued education of these professionals, suggesting the urgency of public policies aimed at teaching qualifications for inclusive education. Measures such as reflecting on pedagogical practices, implementing collaborative planning, and promoting improvements in the physical structure of schools were pointed out as essential for the consolidation of an effective school inclusion.

The author emphasized the importance of respecting the different cognitive, physical, and social conditions of students. This includes recognizing inclusion as a fundamental right and basic principle of quality education, as stated in the Salamanca Declaration (1994).

The article, *Challenges in the Schooling Process of Children with Autism in an Inclusive Context: Guidelines for Continued Education from the Perspective of Teachers*, by Siglia Pimentel Höher Camargo, Gabrielle Lenz da Silva, Renata Oliveira Crespo, Calleb Rangel de Oliveira, and Suelen Lessa Magalhães (2020), investigated the main difficulties and barriers that teachers face when caring for autistic children in regular schools.

The methodology adopted was qualitative, using semi structured interviews that addressed personal data, academic education, experience with autistic students, pedagogical difficulties, and teaching strategies used.

The results emphasized the importance of continued education and revealed that many teachers feel unprepared to meet the unique needs of autistic students. Without proper training and specific pedagogical resources, it is difficult to promote significant and inclusive learning. Thus, the study recommends investing in continued education programs that address the real needs of teachers to ensure favorable conditions for the learning and development of autistic students.

According to the authors, continued education, when directed and contextualized, becomes a crucial element for the realization of school inclusion, contributing to the overcoming of the challenges faced by educators in the daily life of schools (Camargo *et al.*, 2020).

To systematically organize the information extracted from the selected studies, Table 2 was created. It contains the main categories of analysis synthesized from the studies. Audience, field of study, year of publication, research type, data collection and analysis methodology, and key concepts and research problems covered.

**Table 2** – Categories of analysis of productions (2016-2023)

Categories of analysis	1	2	3	4	5
Target audience	Teachers	Teachers	Teachers	Teachers	Teachers
Field of study	Special education	Inclusive education	Special education	Inclusive education	Inclusive education

Categories of analysis	1	2	3	4	5
Year	2016	2018	2018	2019	2020
Research type	Qualitative	Qualitative	Literature review	Qualitative	Qualitative
Data collection	Observations, interviews and document analysis	Observations and interviews	Bibliographic research	Exploratory questionnaire	Semi-structured interviews
Type of analysis	Interpretive	Interpretive	Exploratory	Interpretive	Exploratory
Key concepts	Teacher training; autism; school inclusion; teaching and learning	Development; autism; learning; perception	Teaching conceptions; inclusive education; autism	Second teacher; inclusive education; continued education	Inclusive education; autism; continued education; obstacles
Research problem	Analysis of the teaching and learning processes of students with autism	Teaching strategies in the monitoring of students with autism	Teaching conceptions on the inclusion of students with autism	Challenges and practices of the second teacher in school inclusion	Difficulties and obstacles faced by teachers of students with autism

Source: Authors' own (2023).

The analysis of the selected productions reveals important convergences, particularly regarding the lack of continued teacher education and the fragility of institutional conditions for inclusion. Teacher education appears as a recurring element in all the analyzed studies, sometimes as a challenge and sometimes as a recommendation, which reinforces the idea that technical and pedagogical preparation still falls short of the requirements of inclusive practice.

Another common aspect among these productions is the emphasis on fostering emotional connections and active listening as effective pedagogical strategies when working with students on the spectrum. As Lemos (2016) and Redmerski (2018) pointed out, personalizing practices and respecting the unique needs of students are crucial for their success in school.

Though each study employs different methodologies, the findings regarding the teaching perception of the role of the second teacher are coherent. Specifically, the data from Dias (2019) and Adurens and Vieira (2018) indicate that collaborative performance and direct learning support help minimize pedagogical obstacles. However, many

professionals report difficulty communicating with the head teacher or confusion about their responsibilities.

In terms of gaps, studies that consider the perspectives of autistic students are lacking, indicating an opportunity for future investigations. Furthermore, only one of the analyzed productions deals directly with the second teacher as an institutionalized figure, demonstrating the need to broaden the debate on his professional identity, specific training, and recognition within public policies.

The findings of this systematic review, therefore, allow us to state that, although there are positive initiatives in inclusive practice, structural and formative challenges that compromise the consolidation of the figure of the second teacher as an effective agent of school inclusion are still persist.

## 5 Final Considerations

Revised studies have shown that the presence and performance of a second teacher significantly impact the overall development of students with autism. Direct interaction between this professional and students was found to play a central role in promoting inclusive education. The second teacher is responsible for developing personalized pedagogical strategies, adapting the curriculum, and fostering inclusive environments, which are fundamental elements that stimulate the active participation and academic progress of these students.

The performance of the second teacher, therefore, transcends support to the learning process: it is essential for overcoming barriers, the promotion of autonomy and the recognition of individual students' individual skills, contributing to the construction of more equitable and significant school trajectories.

Although research on inclusive education in Brazil has expanded our understanding of public pedagogical practices aimed at specific needs, the analyzed studies highlight the continuous need for investments in teachers' initial and continuing education, robust educational policies, and adequate pedagogical resources. These actions are essential to ensuring quality education for all students, regardless of their circumstances.

Thus, this systematic review brought relevant contributions to the field of inclusive education, by highlighting the importance of the second teacher in promoting students with autism. It also pointed out valuable directions for future research, especially regarding the improvement of pedagogical practices and the strengthening of school inclusion, reaffirming the need for effective commitments to build a school truly for all.

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**Responsible editor:** Lia Machado Fiuza Fialho

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**Translator:** Marina Pompeu

#### How to cite this article (ABNT):

MOURA, Daniel de; WAGNER, Flávia; REIS, Éllen da Silva Rufino dos. O segundo professor e a aprendizagem de estudantes com Transtorno do Espectro Autista.

*Educação & Formação*, Fortaleza, v. 10, e15476, 2025. Disponível em:

<https://revistas.uece.br/index.php/redufor/article/view/e15476>



Received on March 26, 2025.

Accepted on May 28, 2025.

Published in August 20, 2025.

