

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Early Childhood Education


ARTICLE

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Abstract

This theoretical article, based on a literature review, aims to identify trends and theoretical-methodological contributions from graduate research conducted between 2021 and 2024 on the inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Early Childhood Education. Theses and dissertations available in the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD) were analyzed using the keywords: “early childhood education,” “inclusive education,” “autism,” or “ASD.” Thirteen studies were selected and discussed through thematic analysis, organized into three categories: diagnostic assessment of ASD, teachers’ and families’ perceptions of inclusion, and inclusive pedagogical approaches in Early Childhood Education. The results indicate advancements, such as valuing diagnostic practices sensitive to children’s individual characteristics, the need for continuous professional development for teachers, and the importance of collaborative relationships between family and school. However, barriers persist, especially limiting conceptions about child development and the insufficiency of integrated public policies.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education. Autism Spectrum Disorder. Inclusive Education.

A inclusão de crianças com Transtorno do Espectro Autista (TEA) na Educação Infantil

Resumo

O artigo, de natureza teórica e baseado em revisão de literatura, busca identificar tendências e contribuições teórico-metodológicas das pesquisas de pós-graduação realizadas entre 2021 e 2024 sobre a inclusão de crianças com Transtorno do Espectro Autista (TEA) na Educação Infantil. Foram analisadas teses e dissertações disponíveis na Biblioteca Digital Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações (BDTD), utilizando as palavras-chave: educação infantil, educação inclusiva, autismo ou TEA. Selecionaram-se 13 produções, discutidas a partir da análise temática em três categorias: avaliação diagnóstica do TEA, percepções docentes e familiares sobre a inclusão e abordagens pedagógicas inclusivas na Educação Infantil. Os resultados indicam avanços, como a valorização de práticas

diagnósticas sensíveis às particularidades das crianças, a necessidade de formação continuada para docentes e a importância das relações colaborativas entre família e escola. Entretanto, persistem barreiras, especialmente concepções limitantes sobre o desenvolvimento infantil e a insuficiência de políticas públicas integradas.

Palavras-chave: Educação Infantil. Transtorno do Espectro Autista. Educação Inclusiva.

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1 Introduction

The inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Early Childhood Education constitutes both a daily and political challenge for education professionals. This process is shaped by multiple dimensions: pedagogical, subjective, formative, diagnostic, familial, and institutional, all of which significantly influence the learning process and the effective sense of belonging of these children within early education settings, which are designed to provide meaningful experiences for all children, while respecting their particularities and potential. However, the implementation of inclusion in education, at all levels and particularly in Early Childhood Education, still faces obstacles marked by attitudinal barriers, gaps in teacher training, and insufficient integrated public policies.

School inclusion entails a profound transformation in the way we conceive of education. In this sense, true inclusion requires that all students attend the same classrooms together, enjoying the same educational opportunities, without being subjected to criteria of exclusion or segregation. For this to be fully realized, schools must move away from traditional practices structured around categories and diagnoses, and instead begin to recognize and embrace diversity as an element that enriches the school environment. Reinforcing this perspective, Hostins and Jordão (2015) emphasize that inclusive curricular practices must overcome reductive conceptions of learning, promoting pedagogical strategies that foster conceptual development for all students, especially those with disabilities.

As highlighted by Camargo and Bosa (2009), school inclusion is seen as an effective means for children with ASD to develop their social skills and expand their interactions by

providing them with opportunities to interact with peers of the same age group. Moreover, Chicon's (2018) studies indicate that adult mediation and the presence of more experienced peers in inclusive environments are fundamental for encouraging children with ASD to participate in play and develop their social interactions.

This topic has generated growing interest among researchers in the field of childhood, inclusion, and Early Childhood Education, which is why it deserves to be examined in depth, in order to grasp the nuances of the debates, the favored theoretical-methodological frameworks, and the guiding paradigms of research focused, more specifically, on the inclusion of children with ASD at this level of education.

Stricto sensu graduate programs have become privileged spaces for scientific production, particularly for master's and doctoral research addressing topics of national and international interest. In the field of education and Early Childhood Education, graduate research has revealed methodological approaches and perspectives that favor a broadened and differentiated understanding of the processes of inclusion and learning of students with disabilities, topics that warrant careful reading and discussion.

In this study, we present the methodology and literature review procedures adopted, as well as, in the discussion of results, the analysis of the studies collected, organized into three analytical categories: diagnostic assessment of ASD; ASD and inclusion from the perspective of teachers and families; and pedagogical approaches. The aim, therefore, was to address the following question: What are the trends and contributions that these studies have offered toward building more sensitive, inclusive, and collaborative practices for children with ASD in Early Childhood Education?

From this perspective, the present study aims to identify the theoretical-methodological trends and contributions of graduate research carried out between 2021 and 2024 on the inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Early Childhood Education.

2 Methodology

This theoretical study is based on a literature review, whose procedures allow for the organization, clarification, and synthesis of previously produced knowledge on a given topic, contributing both to the delimitation of the object of study and to the strengthening of the theoretical framework. As emphasized by Vosgerau and Romanowski (2014), this type of study enables the researcher to identify trends, recurrences, gaps, and relevant theoretical contributions, enhancing both analysis and investigative practice. When conducted with methodological rigor, the literature review goes beyond a simple survey of references, promoting a critical problematization of the material consulted. The authors also point out that the credibility of this type of production depends directly on the systematic nature of the selection, organization, and analysis of sources, requiring a careful and reflective stance on the part of the researcher.

The survey was carried out between April 13 and 14, 2024, with an update on March 14, 2025, through the *Biblioteca Digital Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações* (BDTD) portal, using the search string: “educação infantil” AND “educação inclusiva” AND autismo OR autista OR TEA. In the initial survey, the following inclusion criteria were applied:

- Complete works;
- Available in PDF;
- Works addressing themes linked to the school context (Early Childhood centers) and the learning of children with ASD.

A total of 34 publications were obtained, to which the following exclusion criteria were applied:

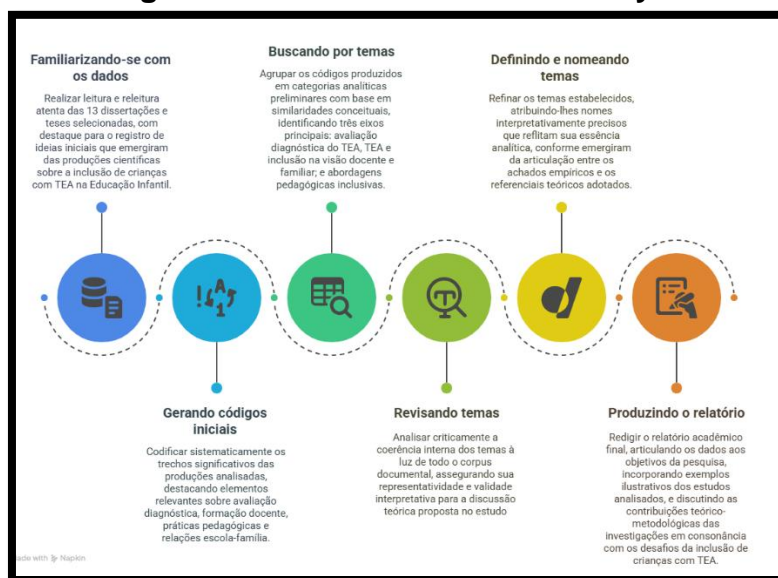
- Duplicate works;
- Those that did not address inclusive education in Early Childhood Education;
- Works focused on digital technologies;
- Review studies;
- Studies linked to other levels of education.

After this methodological refinement, the collection selected for analysis comprised 13 academic works, which were subjected to full reading and thematic analysis.

For the organization and interpretation of the extracted data, Thematic Analysis was adopted, given its recognized robustness in identifying patterns of meaning in qualitative investigations. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), it is a systematic and theoretically flexible method that allows the researcher to move beyond a superficial description of the data, fostering the construction of deeper understandings of the investigated phenomenon. This approach proves especially relevant in educational contexts, as it enables the emergence of categories that reflect the meanings attributed by the subjects involved in teaching and learning processes.

The analysis was conducted based on the six phases proposed by the authors, beginning with familiarization with the data through attentive and repeated readings of the dissertations and theses. Next, initial codes were generated to capture relevant aspects related to the object of study, which were then grouped into potential themes. After a careful review of the full corpus, the themes were refined and named according to their interpretive essence. Finally, the analytical report was produced, articulating the findings with the research questions and the theoretical framework. This methodological pathway led to the identification of three central categories that synthesize the trends, challenges, and contributions evidenced in the data: diagnostic assessment of ASD, teachers' and families' perceptions of inclusion, and inclusive pedagogical approaches. Figure 1 below illustrates this analytical process, visually representing the steps undertaken and the themes identified from the documentary *corpus*.

Figure 1 – Phases of thematic analysis



Source: Prepared by the authors based on Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006, p. 14).

Table 1 describes the works analyzed, identifying bibliographic reference, objective, type of work, and year of publication.

Table 1 – Theses and dissertations produced in the period 2021–2024

Nº	Referência	Objetivo	Tipo/Ano
1	MONTE, Márcia Mesquita. <i>Aquisição de linguagem em aluno/criança com Transtorno do Espectro Autista (TEA) na perspectiva dos docentes: um estudo de caso</i> . 112 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Ciências da Linguagem) – Universidade Católica de Pernambuco, Recife, 2022. Disponível em: http://tede2.unicap.br:8080/bitstream/tede/1611/5/Ok_marcia_mesquita_monte.pdf . Acesso em: 13 abr. 2024.	Investigate how teachers at a municipal public school in Fortaleza, CE, understand language acquisition in a student with autism.	Dissertation 2022
2	CAVARZAN, Daniele de Fatima Kot. <i>Roteiro para identificação de sinais de risco ao desenvolvimento na Educação Infantil (RISRD-EI)</i> . 296 f. Tese (Doutorado em Educação) – Universidade Federal do Paraná, Curitiba, 2021. Disponível em: https://acervodigital.ufpr.br/handle/1884/72602 . Acesso em: 14 abr. 2024.	Build a protocol for identifying risk signs for development in Early Childhood Education in infants and very young children.	Thesis 2021

3	<p>BUENO, Josiane Jocoski. <i>A aprendizagem de noções de quantidade por crianças autistas: um olhar a partir da atividade orientadora de ensino</i>. 183 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Educação em Ciências e em Matemática) – Universidade Federal do Paraná, Curitiba, 2021. Disponível em: https://acervodigital.ufpr.br/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1884/73519/R%20-%20D%20-%20JOSIANE%20JOCOSKI%20BUENO.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y. Acesso em: 13 abr. 2024.</p>	<p>Investigate the learning process of autistic children in <i>Educação Infantil 5</i> and the 1st year of Elementary Education, regarding notions of quantity, using learning-triggering situations.</p>	<p>Dissertation 2021</p>
4	<p>POLYCARPO, Emanuelle Lopes Eugenio. <i>Docentes e inclusão escolar: desafios em realizar práticas pedagógicas e intervenções com as pessoas com TEA</i>. 64 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Educação: Psicologia da Educação) – Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2023. Disponível em: https://repositorio.pucsp.br/jspui/bitstream/handle/39430/1/Emanuelle%20Lopes%20Eugenio%20Polycarpo.pdf. Acesso em: 14 abr. 2024.</p>	<p>Understand the difficulties stated by educators who work with and care for children with ASD.</p>	<p>Dissertation 2023</p>
5	<p>GONÇALVES, Maria Rozinetti. <i>Diagnósticos de deficiências e transtornos na Educação Infantil: dispositivos a serviço de quê?</i> 243 f. Tese (Doutorado em Ciências – Educação e Saúde na Infância e Adolescência) – Universidade Federal de São Paulo, Guarulhos, 2022. Disponível em: https://repositorio.unifesp.br/server/api/core/bitstreams/c9426ebc-a8a7-48bf-81cf-bccde553519e/content. Acesso em: 13 abr. 2024.</p>	<p>Investigate how diagnostic devices for disabilities and disorders affect processes of school inclusion in Early Childhood Education in a municipality in the state of São Paulo.</p>	<p>Thesis 2022</p>
6	<p>BRASIL, Gabriela Machado. <i>Representações sociais de pais sobre o transtorno do espectro do autismo e inclusão escolar</i>. 152 f. Tese (Doutorado em Educação) – Fundação Universidade Federal da Grande Dourados, Dourados, 2022. Disponível em: https://files.ufgd.edu.br/arquivos/arquivos/78/MESTRADO-DOCTORADO-EDUCACAO/Teses%20Defendidas/GabrielaMachadoBrasil%20-%20Tese.pdf. Acesso em: 13 abr. 2024.</p>	<p>Analyze parents' social representations of ASD and school inclusion and identify the influence of these representations on the inclusion process of children from preschool to the 3rd year of Elementary Education in the municipal school system of Dourados, MS.</p>	<p>Thesis 2022</p>
7	<p>RIBAS, Luana de Melo. <i>O processo criador da criança com autismo em espaços brincantes: imaginação-emoção e o coletivo</i>. 236 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Psicologia do Desenvolvimento Escolar) – Universidade de</p>	<p>Analyze the creative processes of children with autism and the importance of playful spaces in Early Childhood Education at a</p>	<p>Dissertation 2021</p>

	Brasília, Brasília, 2021. Disponível em: https://pgpde.unb.br/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2021_LuanadeMeloRibas.pdf . Acesso em: 14 abr. 2024.	public school in Brasília, through triadic observation: child with autism, object/toy, other.	
8	COSTA, Daniella Ferreira Roque. <i>O protagonismo das professoras de creche na detecção dos sinais precoces de Transtorno do Espectro Autista</i> . 121 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Ensino em Ciências da Saúde) – Universidade Federal de São Paulo, Campus Baixada Santista, São Paulo, 2022. Disponível em: https://repositorio.unifesp.br/server/api/core/bitstreams/32e0c7fd-9f06-4051-9769-d621906cea29/content . Acesso em: 14 abr. 2024.	Examine the views of <i>creche</i> teachers in the municipality of Santos, SP, on child development and the work carried out in the <i>creche</i> with children showing early signs of autism.	Dissertation 2022
9	MAURICIO, Karina Courel. <i>Formação continuada de professores dos Centros de Educação Infantil: TEA conhecer para atuar</i> . 142 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Educação) – Universidade Estadual Paulista, Presidente Prudente, São Paulo. Disponível em: https://repositorio.unesp.br/bitstreams/1bbdf6ad-2907-49fa-b2ed-b809f114a1d4/download . Acesso em: 14 mar. 2025.	Identify teachers' understanding of ASD, their perceptions regarding services provided to children with signs and/or diagnosis, and the continuing education offered to teachers working in <i>Centros de Educação Infantil (CEIs)</i> on this topic, considering the self-efficacy paradigm.	Dissertation 2024
10	MELONIO, Kennia Magdala de Sousa. <i>Intervenção precoce para crianças com transtorno do espectro autista na Educação Infantil: uma proposta para formação de professores</i> . 146 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Educação) – Universidade Federal do Maranhão, São Luís. Disponível em: https://tedebc.ufma.br/jspui/handle/tede/5786 . Acesso em: 14 mar. 2025.	Investigate the teacher training process aimed at early intervention for children with ASD at <i>UEB Carlos Salomão Chaib</i> , with a view to constructing a pedagogical guide.	Dissertation 2024
11	SOARES, Julio Cesar Pamplona. <i>Educação musical e autismo: concepções e ações docentes no projeto Musicalização Infantil de Blumenau/SC</i> . 165 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Educação) – Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina – UDESC, Florianópolis. Disponível em: https://repositorio-api.udesc.br/server/api/core/bitstreams/55132e92-de68-4294-960e-7671cc18dec0/content . Acesso em: 14 mar. 2025.	Understand how the conceptions of music teachers in the <i>PMI de Blumenau</i> about autism and inclusive education guide their actions in classes with autistic children within public <i>CEIs</i> in the municipality.	Dissertation 2023

12	LORENÇATTO, Adriana Terezinha. <i>A inclusão de alunos autistas de 0 a 3 anos na Educação Infantil da rede pública municipal de ensino de Cascavel - PR</i> . 109 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Educação) – Universidade Estadual do Oeste do Paraná/UNIOESTE – Campus de Cascavel, Cascavel. Disponível em: https://tede.unioeste.br/bitstream/tede/7506/2/Adriana_Loren%c3%a7atto2024.pdf . Acesso em: 14 mar. 2025.	Verify, analyze, and especially understand how the inclusion of autistic children ages 0 to 3 took place in the Municipal Early Childhood Education Centers (<i>Centros Municipais de Educação Infantil</i>) of the Municipal Public School Network of Cascavel, PR, considering the period from 2016 to 2019.	Dissertation 2024
13	NOVO, Ana Lúcia Branco. <i>O professor e a função do semelhante: contribuições para a educação inclusiva</i> . 122 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Educação) – Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo. Disponível em: https://www.teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/48/48138/tde-21102024-125506/publico/ANA_LUCIA_BRANCO_NOV_O_rev.pdf . Acesso em: 14 mar. 2025.	Investigate the teacher's role in sustaining the function of the <i>semelhante</i> in an inclusive school. A second objective was to follow its possible subjectivating effects on children who are the target population of special education.	Dissertation 2024

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the BDTD database.

3 Results and Discussion

Based on the full reading of the 13 works, the analysis was organized into three categories: diagnostic assessment of ASD, ASD and inclusion from the perspective of teachers and families, and pedagogical approaches.

3.1 Diagnostic assessment of ASD

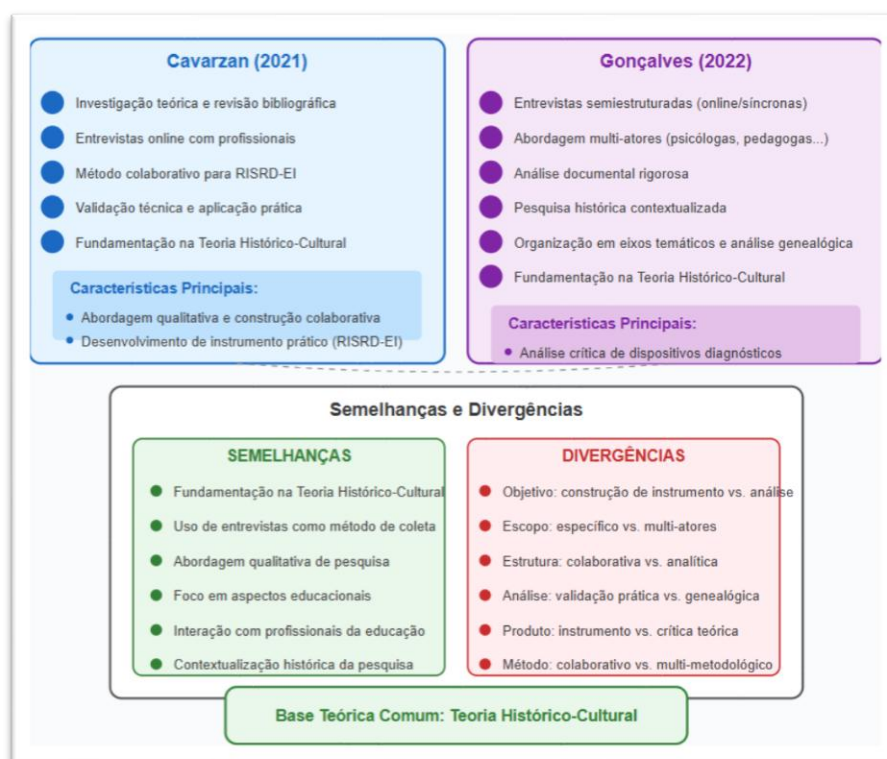
This category includes the works of Gonçalves (2022) and Cavarzan (2021), which employed qualitative research and were grounded in *Historical-Cultural Theory*. Both conducted semi-structured interviews with Early Childhood Education teachers, online, with Gonçalves also interviewing psychologists, school administrators, and pedagogues working at the school.

As a result, Cavarzan's (2021) study culminated in the construction of a collaborative framework entitled "Inclusive Practices with the Use of Developmental Risk Signs in Early

Childhood Education (RISRD-EI)” as a possible solution for inclusive school practices aimed at children with ASD. Gonçalves (2022), in turn, problematized diagnostic processes and their impact on the inclusion of children aged zero to five. The relevance of these studies lies in their diagnostic approach grounded in sociocultural frameworks, as forms of resistance to processes centered on ableism and medicalization.

The methodological diversity in research on the diagnostic assessment of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) proves to be a fertile field for scientific investigation, with approaches that complement and dialogue with each other. An analysis of the studies in this area shows that the works of Cavarzan (2021) and Gonçalves (2022) present both particularities and significant methodological convergences, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 – Characteristics of the methodological framework presented in research on diagnostic assessment of ASD

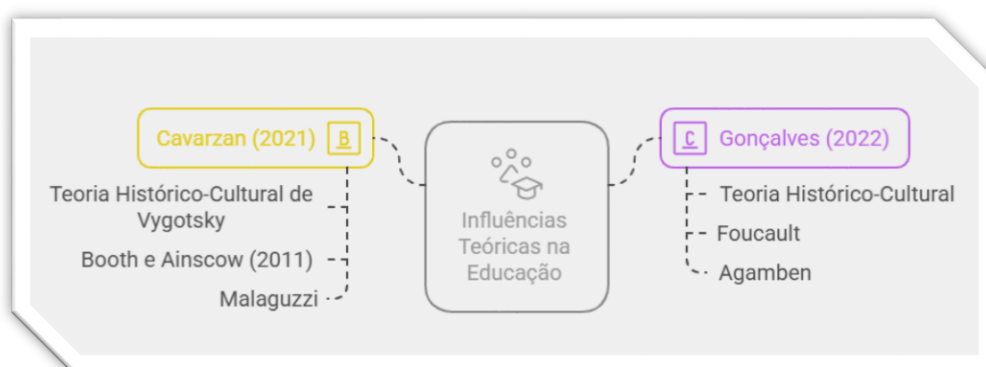


Source: Prepared by the authors based on research data.

The studies by Cavarzan (2021) and Gonçalves (2022) are anchored in *Historical-Cultural Theory*, though they employ distinct pathways. While Cavarzan (2021) combines a literature review with online interviews with education professionals, collaboratively developing the RISRD-EI instrument, Gonçalves (2022) adopts a critical and genealogical analysis of diagnostic devices, with semi-structured interviews directed at different school professionals. The similarities between the studies reveal a commitment to inclusive practices and to valuing the educational context, while the differences point to distinct methodological and analytical approaches. The comparison precisely synthesizes these convergences and divergences, showing how the same theoretical foundation can support diverse investigations, yet equally committed to the inclusion of children with ASD in Early Childhood Education.

Regarding the theoretical frameworks used in these studies, two main epistemological strands emerge in research on the inclusion of children with ASD, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3 – Diversity of theoretical frameworks presented in research on diagnostic assessment of ASD



Source: Prepared by the authors based on research data.

The image synthesizes the main theoretical matrices underlying two relevant studies on the inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Early Childhood Education. At the center of the representation stands Vygotsky's *Historical-Cultural Theory*,

which functions as a common and structuring axis for both investigations, by conceiving human development as a socially and culturally mediated process.

From this nucleus, different paths unfold. In Gonçalves's (2022) analytical study, in addition to the historical-cultural perspective, post-structuralist contributions from Foucault and Agamben are evident. From another epistemological standpoint, these authors problematize the power devices implicated in diagnostic processes and their influence on inclusion. Cavarzan's (2021) research, in turn, highlights the contributions of Booth and Ainscow, which provide support for inclusive educational practices, along with the *Reggio Emilia* approach, particularly in the ideas of Malaguzzi, who emphasizes sensitive listening and children's creative expression. The image therefore graphically represents the confluence and articulation of theoretical foundations that, though distinct, converge in their commitment to understanding the context in which the right of all to education is defended.

3.2 ASD and inclusion from the perspective of teachers and families

This category includes the studies of Mauricio (2024), Melonio (2024), Monte (2022), Lorençatto (2024), Polycarpo (2023), Brasil (2022), Costa (2022), and Novo (2024).

Mauricio (2024) underscores the relevance of continuing teacher education to improve their engagement with and relationships with students' families. According to the author, investing in this training strengthens teachers' confidence and security in their professional practice, especially in the inclusion of children with ASD. Consistent continuing education helps teachers to better understand the needs of these children and to create strategies that ensure a more welcoming and accessible school environment for all. Furthermore, the study emphasizes that the stronger this training, the greater the teacher's self-efficacy, resulting in more effective pedagogical practices capable of facing everyday challenges in the school context.

Melonio (2024) brought to light the insufficiencies in both initial and continuing training of Early Childhood Education teachers, pointing to the urgent need for greater specialized support within educational institutions to ensure early and appropriate

intervention. The author also highlighted the absence of significant early interventions in the school studied, due to the lack of professional support and the excessive number of students per classroom. She found that teachers receive little specific training on early intervention in ASD, and that the existing training has been more oriented toward conceptual discussions of inclusion in regular classrooms, with few practical strategies. This study aimed to construct a pedagogical guide with guidelines for teaching children with ASD, through formative meetings with teachers working on early intervention activities.

An analysis of the studies by Monte (2022) and Lorençatto (2024) reveals important convergences, even though they were conducted in different contexts and with different approaches. Both researchers present strong critiques of biologicist and reductionist perspectives on child development, particularly when it comes to children with ASD. Monte (2022) found that attitudinal barriers among teachers often stem from biologicist, cognitivist, and behaviorist views, which end up restricting inclusive practices. Lorençatto (2024), in turn, critiques these approaches, still predominant in diagnoses and pedagogical interventions, arguing that the focus on medical diagnosis undermines the developmental possibilities of autistic children. Both authors stress the importance of teacher education, especially for those working directly with autistic children. Lorençatto (2024) emphasizes that, in order to build inclusive education, it is necessary to go beyond mere pedagogical practice—it is essential to invest in both initial and continuing teacher education, as well as to ensure counseling and ongoing support for pedagogical practices carried out in the classroom.

Polycarpo (2023) points out the practical difficulties faced by educators, particularly regarding inadequate school infrastructure and gaps in teacher training. The author's research highlights the importance of transformations in educators' perceptions of ASD as an essential step toward more inclusive and effective practices, also suggesting that continuing education is key to addressing these challenges. Brasil (2022) likewise highlights the role of preschool teachers in the early identification and intervention with children with ASD and suggests the creation of an internal collaborative network that

promotes exchanges among professionals, in order to ensure continuity in pedagogical actions and improve communication among the teams that serve the child at different times.

To discuss parents' social representations of ASD, Costa (2022) highlights how these directly influence the process of school inclusion. Her research reveals the importance of active collaboration between family and school, as well as specialized continuing education for all professionals involved, to ensure both care and the academic development of children.

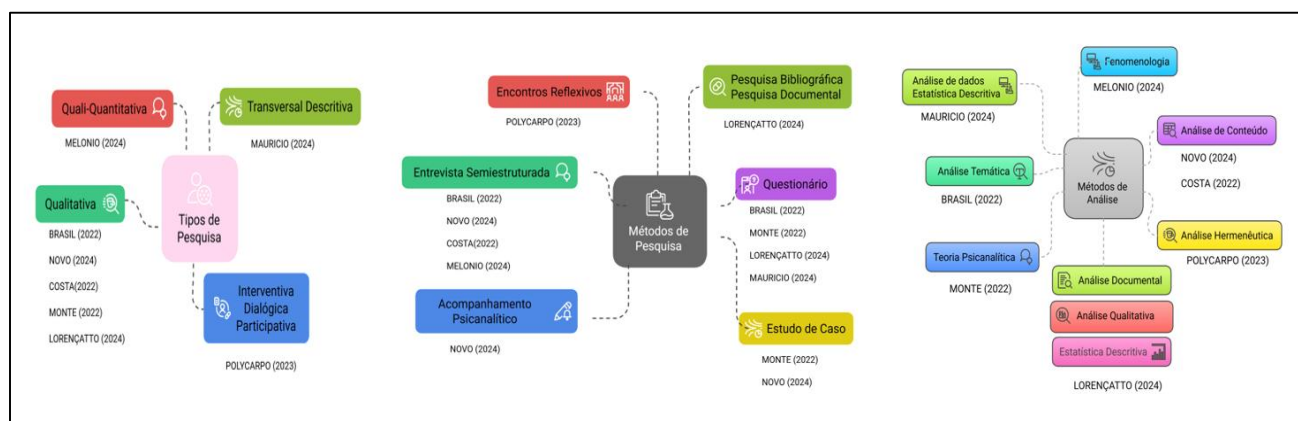
Monte (2022) and Novo (2024) approach the inclusion of children with ASD from complementary perspectives. In a case study with four Early Childhood Education teachers, Monte (2022) analyzed how teachers understand the language of autistic children and pointed to a still limited view, centered on verbalization. Her critique underscores the need to broaden this understanding, allowing other forms of expression—such as gestures and movements—to be recognized as legitimate manifestations of language. For the author, real inclusion only exists when the child is recognized as a subject of language. Novo (2024), drawing on psychoanalysis, emphasizes the symbolic role of the teacher as mediator of the function of the *semelhante*. She shows that teaching practice directly influences the child's subjective constitution, especially in social bonds. Inclusion, according to her, goes beyond pedagogical adaptation and is achieved through the acceptance of differences and sensitive listening.

Both authors stress that effective inclusive practices depend on teacher training that values subjectivity, recognizes children's singularities, and broadens the concept of language as a form of belonging. In short, the studies converge significantly in recognizing the importance of specialized continuing education, the appreciation of communicational singularities and children's individual potential, as well as the urgent need for inclusive, integrative, and contextually grounded educational policies and pedagogical practices.

Regarding the methodological framework of studies on ASD and inclusion from the perspective of teachers and families, there is notable diversity of investigative approaches. The studies present a variety of methodological designs, with pluralities also in data collection and analysis instruments. Figure 4 illustrates this diversity, which reflects

the complexity of the issues and allows for a multidimensional understanding of the educational inclusion of autistic children.

Figure 4 – Methodological frameworks of studies on ASD and inclusion from the perspective of teachers and families



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the studies analyzed.

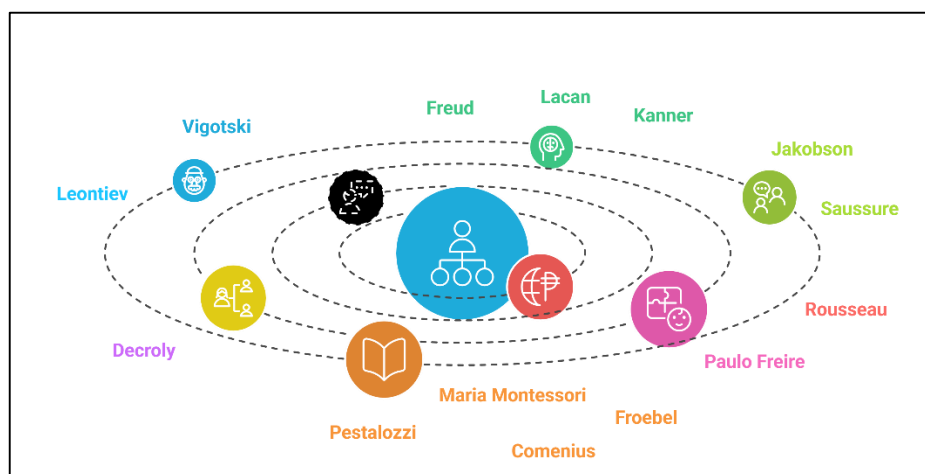
The methodological panorama presented reveals a dynamic connection between research types, methods employed, and analyses conducted, reflecting the complexity and plurality of investigations on educational inclusion. Initially, a diversity of approaches can be observed in research types, encompassing predominantly qualitative perspectives, as in Brasil (2022) and Novo (2024), and mixed (quali-quantitative) perspectives, as illustrated by Melonio (2024). Specific modalities also stand out, such as the participatory, dialogical, and interventional research emphasized by Polycarpo (2023), as well as the cross-sectional and descriptive research of Mauricio (2024).

These approaches are directly articulated with the research methods adopted by the authors, highlighting the significant use of the semi-structured interview, applied in studies by Costa (2022) and Melonio (2024), and the choice of techniques such as reflective meetings (Polycarpo, 2023) and psychoanalytic follow-up (Novo, 2024). A consistent use of case studies can also be seen, as verified in the research of Monte (2022) and Novo (2024), along with the application of questionnaires, as pointed out by Lorençatto (2024), Mauricio (2024), Brasil (2022), and Monte (2022).

Finally, in the data analysis stage, a wide range of techniques is evident, ranging from qualitative, documentary, statistical, and descriptive analyses (Lorençatto, 2024) to hermeneutic analyses of meaning (Polycarpo, 2023). In addition, Brasil (2022) opted for thematic analysis, while Melonio (2024) employed phenomenology to capture the participants' subjective nuances. Thus, it becomes clear how each methodological choice reflects a commitment to different epistemological perspectives that enrich the understanding of the educational realities under study.

The studies analyzed on the inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) from the perspective of teachers and families reveal significant theoretical diversity, demonstrating researchers' efforts to capture the complexity of the subject, as represented in Figure 5.

Figure 5 – Theoretical frameworks presented in research on ASD and inclusion from the perspective of teachers and families



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the studies analyzed.

The frameworks mobilized span different strands of educational, psychological, and social thought, including contributions from historical-cultural psychology, psychoanalysis, critical pedagogy, and linguistics. Authors such as Vygotsky (2022), Freud (1913/1930), Paulo Freire (1987), Jakobson (1954/1960), and Montessori (1870–1952), among others, appear in the studies in an articulated way, enriching the understanding of child

development, inclusive pedagogical practices, and the role of relations among school, family, and child. This plurality reflects both the breadth of perspectives on ASD and the need for approaches that consider subjectivity, language, and the sociocultural context. By integrating different fields of knowledge, the studies point to an expanded, sensitive, and contextualized understanding of inclusion, reaffirming that it is not constructed solely through pedagogical strategies, but also through listening, bonding, and valuing the singularities of each child.

3.3 Pedagogical approaches to teaching children with ASD in Early Childhood Education

Three qualitative studies address this topic: Bueno (2021), Ribas (2021), and Soares (2023). Ribas (2021) draws on *Historical-Cultural Theory* to problematize policies and pedagogical practices in Early Childhood Education for children with ASD. The author analyzed a pedagogical experience involving the creative processes of autistic children in *playful spaces*. Her study identified possibilities for the inclusion and protagonism of these children and their peers in creative processes within the preschool setting. Thus, she concluded that ensuring the rights to play and to interact depends on full access to school and the full participation of all children.




Bueno (2021) also investigated the learning of autistic children in the classroom. The results indicated that the learning process becomes evident when the teacher organizes instruction to meet the child's needs, taking into account both their limitations and potentialities. The study highlights that every autistic child is unique and that even when at the same developmental level, each expresses themselves in different ways.

In the field of music education, Soares (2023) investigated how music teachers' conceptions of autism and inclusive education guide their practices. The research revealed that although initial conceptions of autism focused on difficulties, within the focus group an understanding emerged that emphasized the singularities of autistic individuals. Inclusive education was associated with people with disabilities and with respect for individuality. The presence of autistic children influenced pedagogical practices, leading to both

individualized and collective adaptations, many of which were initiated by the children themselves. Teachers reported a gradual increase in autistic children's interaction and responses to musical activities, despite challenges such as disruptive behaviors and insufficient initial training. Strategies such as selecting musical repertoire and flexibilizing pedagogical proposals were considered valuable for inclusion.

Regarding methodological diversity, the studies reveal the richness of the pathways adopted to investigate inclusive practices with autistic children. As shown in Figure 6, all of the studies followed a qualitative approach, with variations in data collection instruments and investigative foci, reflecting the specificity of each context and the commitment to attentive and detailed listening.

Figure 6 – Methodological frameworks presented in studies on pedagogical approaches

Característica	Bueno (2021)	Ribas (2021)	Soares (2023)
 Tipo de Pesquisa	Qualitativa, estudo de caso	Qualitativa	Qualitativa
 Coleta de Dados	Observação, registros em diário de campo, entrevistas	Observação, registros em diário de campo, entrevistas	Questionário, grupo focal
 Foco da Pesquisa	Aprendizagem de conceitos de quantidade através da mediação	Processo criativo em contextos de brincadeiras	Concepções e práticas sobre musicalização

Source: Prepared by the authors based on research data.

The studies by Bueno (2021), Ribas (2021), and Soares (2023) adopt a qualitative approach, seeking to understand educational practices from the lived experiences of participants. Bueno (2021) relies on a case study to investigate how children learn notions of quantity through mediation; Ribas (2021) privileges the creative process present in

collective play; and Soares (2023) analyzes practices and conceptions related to *musicalização*. For data collection, Bueno (2021) and Ribas (2021) used observations, field diaries, and interviews, while Soares opted for questionnaires and focus groups, emphasizing exchange among participants. In common, all three studies rely on attentive listening and daily experiences as rich sources of meaning.

Pedagogical approaches aimed at children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are built on multiple theoretical references that intertwine in teaching practice, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7 – Theoretical frameworks of studies on pedagogical approaches



Source: Prepared by the authors based on research data.

The image illustrates a network of theoretical frameworks that contribute significantly to studies on pedagogical approaches for children with ASD in Early Childhood Education. At the center of this panorama stand the foundations of *Historical-Cultural Theory*, represented by Vygotsky, Leontiev, and Luria (2010), whose emphasis on social mediation supports a processual understanding of learning, expanding the possibilities of intervention with children with disabilities and, in particular, with children with ASD. *Historical-Cultural Theory* is a common reference across the three studies, applied to different domains: music, mathematics, and play/creative process. The contributions of Oliveira (2015),

Oliveira and Parizzi (2022), and Silveira, Oliveira, and Dias (2021) prove to be relevant, especially in addressing aspects such as music in the development of children with ASD, while authors such as Barros (2021) and Aires Filho (2020) offer current reflections on diversity. The works of Coutinho (2013), Rodríguez (2009), and Souza (2019), although not literally proposing curricular strategies, broaden the debate that makes it possible to construct them. Together, these references form a solid and plural basis for pedagogical practices sensitive to singularities.

Also noteworthy among the theoretical frameworks used are the studies of Góes (2000) on microgenetic analyses and Moura (1996), who deepens the understanding of interactive processes in research. In the same line, Bueno (2021) and Ribas (2021) share the use of the *microgenetic method/analysis* for investigating processes. Bueno (2021) stands out for employing *Atividade Orientadora de Ensino* (Teaching Guiding Activity), while Soares (2023) focuses on the concepts of *teacher knowledge* (Tardif) and *inclusive knowledge* (Coutinho).

As can be seen, the studies analyzed reveal innovative and powerful experiences, ranging from the development of pedagogical evaluation protocols to the creation of training materials and projects that use play, art, music, and listening as central elements of mediation with autistic children.

4 Final Considerations

This article aimed to identify theoretical and methodological trends and contributions from graduate research conducted between 2021 and 2024 on the inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Early Childhood Education. Thirteen *dissertations* and *theses* available in the *Biblioteca Digital Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações* (BDTD) were analyzed, seeking to understand how these works have contributed to the construction of more sensitive, inclusive, and collaborative practices, based on qualitative frameworks.

The results show that the implementation of the inclusion of children with ASD in Early Childhood Education requires much more than compliance with legal guidelines or the goodwill of professionals. It is a complex process that demands strengthened public policies, continuous investment in teacher education, intersectoral coordination, and active listening to families, combined with a pedagogical stance sensitive to the singularities of each child. Attitudinal barriers, biomedical and behaviorist conceptions, the fragmentation between education and health, and the lack of institutional support still persist, limiting the consolidation of truly inclusive practices.

The studies analyzed, mostly qualitative, provide relevant contributions for a symbolic, affective, and social understanding of childhood differences, emphasizing the teacher's role as mediator, whose attentive listening and sensitive presence constitute the foundations of inclusion. As a limitation, this study was restricted to works recorded in the BDTD between 2021 and 2024, which confines the scope to a specific period and database of academic production.

The findings indicate the need to strengthen public policies, expand teacher training processes, and invest in intersectoral actions involving education, health, and family. The analyses themselves highlight that inclusion should not be reduced to curricular adaptations, but rather embraced as an *ethical-political project* of recognizing diversity, capable of seeing the child with ASD beyond the diagnosis, in their creative potential and in their unique ways of relating to the world.

Thus, it is reaffirmed that the school should be conceived not only as a space of socialization or legal compliance, but as a territory of belonging, listening, and valuing childhoods. By gathering and systematizing a representative set of academic studies, this article provides support for educators, researchers, and policymakers committed to building more humane, democratic, and plural schools, in which all childhoods have their rights respected, their voices heard, and their presence valued.

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