

PEDAGOGICAL RESOURCES IN STORYTELLING FOR AUTISTIC CHILDREN IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



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ABSTRACT

This article presents the preliminary results of a research in progress within the scope of the Graduate Program of the Professional Master's Degree in Inclusive Education. The study aims to investigate the influence of the use of pedagogical resources in storytelling as a strategy to promote the development of skills in autistic children in early childhood education, with emphasis on orality, reading, writing and social interaction. The research seeks to identify the most recurrent pedagogical resources in storytelling for autistic children, taking into account their specific needs and characteristics, and to analyze how this practice can favor understanding and interactions in the educational environment. The problem that guides the study is: how can pedagogical resources be used in storytelling to contribute to the learning of autistic children in early childhood education? The methodological approach is qualitative, exploratory and bibliographic (Gil, 2008), with thematic analysis by Bardin (2011). The research involved a survey in databases such as the Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations and the Portal of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel, in the period from 2013 to 2023. The results show the scarcity of scientific production on the subject, but highlight authors such as Silva (2022), Lima (2018), Queiroz (2017) and Battistello et al. (2020), who reinforce the importance of storytelling with pedagogical resources as an inclusive strategy that enhances child development.

Keywords: Autistic Child. Pedagogical Resources. Storytelling. Early Childhood Education.

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INTRODUCTION

This article presents the results of the ongoing research within the scope of the Graduate Program of the Professional Master's Degree in Inclusive Education (PROFEI) with the objective of investigating the influence of the use of pedagogical resources in storytelling as a strategy to promote the development of autistic children's skills in early childhood education, with a focus on orality, reading, writing and social interaction. Consequently, it was sought to identify the most recurrent pedagogical resources in storytelling for autistic children, considering their specific needs and characteristics in the context of early childhood education, in addition to verifying how storytelling can contribute to the interactions and understanding of autistic children in learning relationships in this educational environment. It is important to emphasize that the theme of this study is aligned with the perspective of inclusive education, based on the commitment to educational human rights, which aim to guarantee all children equal opportunities to access education (Rodrigues, 2021; Nozu and Preussler, 2021; Castro *et al.*, 2024).

For this study, the following problem was raised: how can pedagogical resources be used in storytelling practices and contribute to the learning of autistic children in early childhood education? Thus, the relevance of research on the theme is considered today, in order to contribute to future investigations, based on daily pedagogical practices in early childhood education.

The methodological development is guided by the qualitative approach, through exploratory and bibliographic research (Gil, 2008). The survey of academic productions took place in the databases of the Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD) and in the Portal of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes), with a time frame between 2013 and 2023. The selected materials were submitted to thematic analysis by Bardin (2011). With this, it was found that, although the survey of scientific productions was scarce, when referring to the use of pedagogical resources as a storytelling strategy for autistic children, even so, some studies stand out, such as Silva (2022), Lima (2018), Queiroz (2017) and Battistello *et al.* (2020), authors who dialogue and corroborate the discussion centered on storytelling for autistic children.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

CONSIDERATIONS ON AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The number of children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has grown in the context of early childhood education, just as any child has specificities in their abilities and challenges, as highlighted by Rogers *et al.* (2015). According to the Brazilian Society of Pediatrics (2019), the first signs of atypical development include language delay, absence of eye contact, and difficulty in social interaction (Castro, 2023). Impairment in communication and language development is variable, ranging from the absence of speech to a hyperformal expression (Wing, 1998).

In this scenario, it is considered relevant to know the needs of children with ASD in order to plan pedagogical practices that value their abilities and favor their own development (Camargo; Bosa, 2012). Storytelling can be a pedagogical strategy capable of attracting children's attention, stimulating orality, imagination and social interaction (Abramovich, 1997). For the author,

[...] Listening to stories can stimulate drawing, music, going out, staying, thinking, dramating, imagining, playing, seeing the book, writing, wanting to listen again. After all, everything can be born from a text!". The child, when listening to stories, experiences all these emotions. After all, listening to stories is the beginning, to become a reader, an inventor, a creator (Abramovich, 1997, p. 125).

However, activities that awaken the imagination and social interactions can be challenging for autistic children due to the situations that may arise in these personal relationships and in "make-believe" (Chiote, 2013; Rogers *et al.*, 2015). Thus, the use of pedagogical resources, such as toys, puppets and sensory objects, helps the child to interact, engage in the narrative and develop cognitive and social skills, as long as they are planned with intentionality in early childhood education.

THE USE OF PEDAGOGICAL RESOURCES IN STORYTELLING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Storytelling, enriched with pedagogical resources, can make educational processes more attractive and promote the engagement of autistic children. Resources such as books, toys, puppets, music and tactile objects work as concrete stimuli that arouse attention and favor the imagination, as highlighted by Busatto (2012) and Perrow (2013).

The use of objects during activities can increase the focus and engagement of children with ASD, creating opportunities for interaction and communication (Rogers *et al.*, 2015). These authors reinforce the importance of experiencing "make-believe" experiences in learning interactions with autistic children, considering that this process occurs naturally in the formation of typical children. Thus, autistic children will require greater attention in this teaching and learning process, since their brain may be intended for the development of abstract thinking.

In this sense, they suggest activities with toys, animals, objects, which gradually instigate the imagination, as being a long-term activity that can take one or two years to complete, but that can start immediately. In this context, stories can be excellent motivations for make-believe, bringing the imitation of characters, playfulness and symbolic play.

The telling of a story can trigger many learning possibilities and affects human formation itself, especially in the psychological, intellectual, emotional and even spiritual dimensions (Busatto, 2012). It can even be used to arouse children's interest in a certain topic, a playful way to promote the teaching and learning of knowledge that becomes valuable in the daily life of early childhood education.

The author also describes the importance of using objects to tell stories, which can be from matchboxes, toothpicks, cloths, or a simple handkerchief indicating a wind blowing, time passing, a flower blooming, in short, something that will play with the imagination. For Vygotsky (2005), imagination is an absolutely necessary condition for almost every brain function of the human being.

Musical stories, for example, have significant potential to motivate and stimulate the participation of autistic and non-autistic children, by combining sensory and playful elements (Louro, 2021). Consequently, it creates opportunities for interaction and participation among children, with listening, trying to follow the melody, gestures, dramatizing the characters, etc. In addition, contact with children's books strengthens the child's relationship with literature and also helps in their language and communication development (Abramovich, 1997).

Rogers *et al.* (2015) also reinforce the importance of teaching "make-believe" to autistic children, which from the age of two happens naturally in typical children, unlike those with ASD who need to be taught, he explains that in autism, there are parts of the brain that are important for abstract thinking, such as the frontal lobe, which develops more

slowly and are not so well interconnected with other parts of the brain, so they end up having difficulties with "make-believe" and later with abstract thinking.

In this sense, the author suggests activities with toys, animals, objects, which gradually instigate the imagination, as being a long-term activity that can take one or two years to complete, but which can start immediately. Strategies such as role-playing, the use of simple accessories, and the exploration of "make-believe" allow children to experience new concrete and interactive experiences, expanding their cognitive, social, and emotional skills (Rogers *et al.*, 2015; Vygotski, 1997).

Many authors affirm the importance of music and what it can exert, it has always had an enigmatic relationship with autism, as surprising musical abilities are not uncommon in these people (Louro, 2021). For this, it must be presented from an early age in early childhood education, with lullabies, sung games, musical stories, among others (Perrow, 2013). Thus, musical stories, as a pedagogical resource, have the power to delight children, making classes more attractive and pleasurable.

Another important resource is the children's book. Rogers *et al.* (2015) reiterate that during activities with books, parents can sit a doll or the stuffed animal next to them, show images and say their names to their child and then to the stuffed toy. By interacting with the images of the books, the toys, it provides the opportunity to exchange glances and communication in this affective relationship between the child and his parents. This daily contact with books, in addition to narrative listening, children establish a relationship with symbols, images, codes, letters, words, which become important for their own development, especially that of the autistic child.

For Abramovich (1997) there are many ways to read, to live with literature closely, adults need to provide this contact to children, for all the wonder that is the journey through the world of letters. In this way, there are many resources that can be used in storytelling with the participation of autistic children, as long as they are in the field of their interest. It is configured as a sound instrument, visual resources, books, toys or objects, whose focus provides pleasure.

In this sense, preliminary studies demonstrate that storytelling, combined with the use of pedagogical resources, can be an inclusive and promising practice in early childhood education, especially when in this educational process the involvement with autistic children is supported by intentional planning, based on the needs and specificities presented by the children.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological path chosen to follow the present study is qualitative and exploratory in nature, based on bibliographic research (Gil, 2008). The development of research that aims to extract meanings and intentionalities that reside in social relations, particularly in the educational spaces of basic education. We consider this context as one of the most important *locus* that directly affects human formation, as well as "providing greater familiarity with the problem presented" (Gil, 2008, p. 41).

The data collection of the exploratory phase with academic productions took place in the following databases: Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations and Capes Portal, using the time frame of the last 10 years, 2013-2023. The analysis procedure was carried out through thematic analysis, considering the following descriptors: autistic child, storytelling, pedagogical resources.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria of the analyzed articles were based on the title of the papers, with analysis of the abstracts, leaving open the year of publication for the last 10 years, from 2013 to 2023. The "thematic analysis" of Bardin (2011) sought to analyze the information presented in them, regarding the link with the theme of the study, thus excluding studies published before 2013, and others in which the subject exposed did not match the theme, requiring conversation with the study proposal. Thus, bibliographic references were used that contributed to infer knowledge about the theme studied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the analysis of research carried out in the area of storytelling for autistic children, it can be seen that resources can be a significant alternative to work with children who have autism. However, few studies have been conducted specifically addressing this topic. The following table presents some results of these researches, with a survey of academic productions with the following descriptors: autistic child, storytelling, pedagogical resources. The time frame between 2013 and 2023 is delimited. Initially, a total of four articles, three master's dissertations and two doctoral theses were obtained.

The final refinement initially considered the title, the summary, the abstract, analyzing which materials would be closer to the theme of the intended study, selecting for full reading the texts that most dialogue with the research proposal, filtering for a scientific article, two master's dissertations and two doctoral theses.

Table 1. Search results by descriptors

Year	Title	Author(s)	Kind
2020	Storytelling for autistic children	Viviane Cristina de Mattos Battistello, Ana Teresinha Elicker, Lovani Volmer, Rosemari Lorenz Martins	Article
2022	Dialogic reading: effects of an oral reading program in children with and without autism	Stefhanny Nascimento Lobo e Silva	Thesis
2019	Telling and retelling stories in science teaching-learning from the perspective of Inclusion	Helen do Socorro Rodrigues Dias	Dissertation
2017	Dialogic reading: effects on the development of verbal behavior in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	Lara Rodrigues Queiroz	Dissertation
2018	Promotion of Interest in Children with Autism from an Assistive Educational Platform with Electronic Puppet	Roceli Pereira Lima	Thesis

Source: Prepared by the authors

In the research carried out by Silva (2022) with the Reading and Communication Program for Children with Autism (Proleca), which consists of a set of storytelling techniques and practices in order to favor the engagement of children with autism in the reading task. Evidence was found of situations experienced in the family, which made use of playful strategies to tell stories, where autistic children were concentrated for longer in the performance of their tasks. It was also observed in the children's behavior a directed attention to the activities performed. In addition, the children began to retell the stories after the reading sessions.

In the studies by Battistello *et al.* (2020) the moments of shared reading with children with mild autism used the Recall program (*Reading to Engage Children with Autism in Language and Learning*) (Whalon; Delano; Hanline, 2015). Initially, parents and teachers began to use question words for the naming of nouns and verbs during storytelling. In the next moment, the strategy was to make a card with a set of three images, taken from the ARASAAC Portal (Centro Aragonés de la Comunicación Augmentativa y Alternativa). For each question, assuming only one correct answer to be pointed out by the child. Next, a resource was presented that can be an alternative to work reading with children with ASD, which allows the mediator to carry out interventions throughout the storytelling to expand the child's understanding. Different moments that, in some way, involve the children's attention.

Queiroz (2017) in his studies highlights that one of the contexts conducive to developing verbal behavior and quality in interaction in children with ASD is the pleasant storytelling environment. Dialogic reading allows the child to have a participatory posture in front of storytelling, which is stimulated through participation strategies in the formulation of questions and answers. Autistic children understand and see the world in a peculiar way, and storytelling can help them understand this world, drawing their attention and bringing them closer to the imaginary world (Oliveira *et al.*, 2017).

Lima (2018) used the resource of Information and Communication Technology in Education, Engineering and Affective Computing models, developed, in the light of Socio-Historical Theory, an Assistive Educational Platform capable of enabling the promotion of the affective state of interest in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The educational activity was developed through children's storytelling and the use of a technological resource, a robotic device, of mediating action, called Electronic Puppet, being used to mediate the children's story. This resource is specially designed for this investigation. The results were positive with regard to joint attention, and in the affective state of interest of the autistic children, however, they were elementary school children, which is not the age group of the focus of this research, but shows a possibility of resource to tell stories.

The studies by Dias (2019) used pedagogical resources for storytelling for people with disabilities, which included autistic children, all between six and nine years old. Various materials were used for the narrative of the stories. One of these resources were signs with the scenarios on the magnetic board and, as the story was told, the characters and objects were nailed to the boards. Thus, the story was being materialized by the teacher and students. The results of the research show that the use of storytelling and retelling of stories with resources enhances the dialogical interaction between the subjects, favoring the teaching-learning process. "Everyone was very committed to retelling the stories, especially for being able to handle the resource, each student told it in their own way and within their possibilities" (Dias, 2019, p. 83).

In this sense, the use of pedagogical resources for storytelling can constitute a significant path for autistic children in relation to interaction and communication, through the mediation of the adult in the proposed activity. Storytelling allows the mediator to intervene during the telling, which favors both the understanding of the world and the child's own development. Pereira, Gonçalves and Custódio (2024, p. 3) point out that "[...]

Storytelling carries with it a great creative power that can be captured by those who listen to it. It is a reconnection with ancestry, with history that is not written, but belongs to the world." However, this process can later encourage them to read, write, create new forms of communication and express themselves. According to Vygotsky (1997), having a disability does not imply less development, but rather a development that occurs in a different way.

CONCLUSION

By analyzing the influence of the use of pedagogical resources in storytelling as a strategy to promote the development of skills in autistic children in early childhood education, with emphasis on orality, reading, writing and social interaction, we found that the integration of pedagogical resources to oral narrative contributes positively to the promotion of essential skills in these children, stimulating communication, imagination and social interaction. The use of concrete objects, adapted books, toys, and other visual materials enriches the storytelling experience, providing children with a more accessible, dynamic, and inclusive environment.

It is noteworthy that storytelling with the use of pedagogical resources also favors linguistic development, as well as strengthens autonomy and the ability to interact in different contexts. This strategy, when planned and developed in a way that is sensitive to the specificities of autistic children, enables curricular adjustments that respect individualities and stimulate integral development.

In the academic sphere, the study expands the discussion on inclusive education, highlighting the need for more research on innovative pedagogical practices that can benefit the learning process of autistic children. The scarcity of research identified in the initial survey reinforces the importance of deepening the debate on inclusive methodologies, enabling new approaches and guidelines that can guide teacher training and pedagogical intervention in early childhood education.

From a social point of view, the results contribute to a more equitable education, highlighting storytelling as an accessible practice that strengthens the bond between educators and children, in addition to promoting more welcoming and inclusive environments. The appropriate use of pedagogical resources can be an important ally to reduce barriers to access to knowledge, expanding the possibilities of development and socialization of autistic children.

Even in progress, the research has some limitations, such as the restriction to theoretical studies and the absence of practical interventions that could offer a more in-depth analysis of the results. In addition, the scarcity of specific literature on the use of pedagogical resources in storytelling with autistic children reinforces the continuity of research, in order to delve into more robust and consistent empirical data.

Finally, it is understood that storytelling, combined with the use of pedagogical resources, represents a promising strategy for inclusive education, with great potential to positively impact the development of autistic children in early childhood education. In addition, this practice contributes to the construction of a more inclusive and conscious society, capable of recognizing and respecting the singularities of each child, autistic or not, valuing their potential and their way of interacting with the world.

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