# Characterization of learning evaluation in multi-functional resources rooms for students with intellectual disabilities

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the evaluation process of students with intellectual disabilities. The objective is to show the assessment conducted by teachers who work in the context of specialized educational consultations (AEE) offered in multi-functional resources rooms in a Brazilian city. The methodology is based on collaborative research, through a focus group technique. The results indicate that the criteria for referral and evaluation of these students are based on their learning difficulties and/or identifying their inappropriate behavior. There are teachers who plan their approach according to the conditions reported by the student's evaluations. However, they face difficulties in establishing dialogues with regular teachers, which mean losses for these students.

KEYWORDS

evaluation; learning; students with intellectual; disabilities specialized educational; consultations multipurpose resources rooms.

# CARACTERIZAÇÃO DA AVALIAÇÃO DA APRENDIZAGEM NAS SALAS DE RECURSOS MULTIFUNCIONAIS PARA ALUNOS COM DEFICIÊNCIA INTELECTUAL

## RESUMO

O artigo aborda o processo de avaliação de alunos com deficiência intelectual. O objetivo é caracterizar a proposta de avaliação conduzida pelos professores que atuam no contexto do atendimento educacional especializado (AEE) oferecido nas salas de recursos multifuncionais (SRM) de um município brasileiro. A metodologia empregada é a pesquisa colaborativa, por meio da técnica de grupo focal. Os resultados indicam que os critérios para o encaminhamento e a avaliação desses alunos se baseiam nas dificuldades de aprendizagem e/ou na identificação de comportamentos inadequados. Há professores que planejam suas avaliações próximas das condições dos referidos estudantes, no entanto eles enfrentam dificuldades para estabelecer diálogos com os professores do ensino regular, o que implica prejuízos para esses alunos.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

avaliação; aprendizagem; estudantes com deficiência intelectual; sala de recursos multifuncionais; atendimentos educacional especializado.

# CARACTERIZACIÓN DE LA EVALUACIÓN DEL APRENDIZAJE EN LAS SALAS DE RECURSOS MULTIFUNCIONALES PARA ALUMNOS CON DEFICIENCIA INTELECTUAL

## RESUMEN

El artículo aborda el proceso de evaluación de alumnos con discapacidad intelectual. El objetivo es caracterizar la propuesta de evaluación llevada a cabo por los docentes que trabajan en el contexto de atención educativa especializada (AEE) que se ofrecen en salas de recursos multifuncionales (SRM) en una ciudad brasileña. La metodología que se emplea es la investigación colaborativa, por medio de la técnica de grupo focal. Los resultados indican que los criterios de derivación y evaluación de esos alumnos se basan en sus dificultades de aprendizaje y/o en la identificación de sus conductas inapropiadas. Unos maestros planean sus evaluaciones en forma próxima a las condiciones de tales estudiantes, sin embargo, afrontan dificultades para establecer diálogos con los maestros de la enseñanza regular, lo que implica perjuicios para esos alumnos.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

evaluación; aprendizaje; alumnos con discapacidad intelectual; sala de recursos multifuncionales; atención educativa especializada.

## INTRODUCTION

This article presents the results of studies about the assessment of learning by students with intellectual disabilities who use special education services (SESs) offered in multifunction resource classrooms (MRCs) in a municipality of Mato Grosso do Sul State, Brazil. The study[1] is part of the actions of the National Special Education Observatory (ONEESP), in which participate 22 Brazilian universities. From 2011 to 2014, the Observatory encouraged the integration of studies in Brazil about policies and practices related to inclusionary education in the country, to evaluate the implementation of Multifunction Resource Classrooms promoted by the Secretariat of Special Education of the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) (Brasil, 2010).

The research network is organized in three thematic areas: teacher education for inclusionary education; evaluation of students with special education needs[2] and teaching organization in the MRCs and regular classrooms. The MRCs are environments with special equipment, furniture and pedagogical and didactic material for offering special education services to students with disabilities, global development disorders or intellectual giftedness. They can be divided in Type I and II. Type I classrooms have desktop computers, monitors, earphones, microphones, scanners, laser printers, keyboards with protectors, regular and large trackball and mouse devices, laptops, accessible pedagogical material and games, alternative communication software, manual and electronic magnifying glasses, slant boards, tables, chairs, lockers and whiteboards. Type II classrooms present all the equipment listed above plus braille printers, braille typewriters, braille slates and stylus, abacuses, signature guides, accessible raised-relief world globes, accessible tactile metric geometry sets, talking calculators and braille tactile graphics software (*idem*).

The MRCs have been one of the main forms for organizing special education services (SESs) and their goal is to:

a) Support the organization of special education from a perspective of inclusionary education;

b) Assure the complete access of special education students to regular education in the same conditions as other students;

c) Provide accessibility and pedagogical resources to regular public schools;

d) Promote professional development and the participation of the school community (Brasil, 2010, p. 9).

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1   Entitled research: "O atendimento educacional especializado no estado do Mato Grosso do Sul: limites e possibilidades". Members: Alexandra Ayach Anache (coordinator); Antônio Carlos do Nascimento Osório; Fabiany de Cássia Tavares Silva; Celi Correa Neres; Marília Garcia Moraes Bruno; Aline Maria da Silva; Morgana de Fátima Agostini Martins.
2   Students with special needs is the official term for the target public of special education.

According to Brazilian decree 7.611 (BRASIL, 2011), special education services (SESs) are defined as the "group of institutionally and continually organized accessibility and pedagogical resources and activities" that aim to complement and supplement the education of students with disabilities and global developmental disorders. The support available in multifunction resource classrooms can be continuous or limited in time. This service should be integrated with the school's pedagogical program with the participation of the student's family. Article 3 of the decree strengthens the articulation between special and regular education, to assure access, participation and learning of the students considered the target public of special education. The current legislation establishes these definitions for the conditions of the target public:

> Disability: is a physical, intellectual or sensorial limitation that in interaction with several barriers may prevent a person's full and effective participation in society with other people. In the case of a student with a disability, the barriers that may prevent her complete schooling and participation are located in the school environment;
> Global Developmental Disorders: those that present alterations in neural and psychomotor development and which compromise social relationships and communication or produce motor stereotypes. Students with autism, autism spectrum disorder and child psychosis are included in this definition;
> Intellectual giftedness: a high potential and considerable involvement with combined or isolated fields of human knowledge: intellectual, academic, leadership, arts and psycho-motor skills, arts and creativity (BRASIL, 2010, p.7).

In the group of students with disabilities, those identified with intellectual disabilities comprise the majority in national statistics, according to Meletti and Bueno (2013). The American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2014) defines intellectual disability as a below average intellectual performance (IQ lower than 70), associated with adaptive limitations that occur before 18 years of age in at least two areas of abilities (communication, self-care, home life, social adaptation, health and safety, use of community resources, determination, academic functions, leisure and work). This perspective focuses on limitations generated in the environment where the person lives, including the barriers they may find in buildings, in furniture and in the attitude of family members and professionals.

Among the difficulties experienced by students with intellectual disabilities, school adaptation stands out. Many of these students are not able to learn to read and write at the appropriate age, because most of them do not have access, in the school environment, to the necessary support, such as assistive technology and flexible, adapted and customized curriculum. Araújo and Almeida (2014) point out the problems faced by teachers to teach these students the regular school content and to assess their learning process, particularly when they are in higher school grades and do not have the necessary requirements to be in such grades.

Brazil's Ministry of Education – through the current Secretariat of Continued Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion – has been promoting the

implementation of MRCs to provide support to the regular educational system in all its grades and programs. From 2005 to 2011, 39,301 multifunction resource classrooms were opened in all states of Brazil, serving 5,046 municipalities. (Brasil, 2012).

While the rise in the number of students with disabilities represents the expansion of services due to the current educational policies, the criteria and practices of evaluation and diagnosis used in Special Education Services networks must be observed. This is because "assessment can be presented as a generic professional competency that may comprise several different practices, in different styles, according to the choices made in each of the steps that must be followed in this process" (Sacristán, 1998, p. 303).

In this context, the purpose of this study is to analyze the forms of assessments conducted by teachers who work in special education services in MRCs in a Brazilian municipality. To achieve this goal, we will first organize the theoretical and methodological approach that guides the research and then present the results and the discussion in two thematic areas, which will offer information about the organization of the MRCs and about learning assessment.

## LEARNING ASSESSMENT IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

The evaluation of school learning is a complex topic, because it implies the construction of cultural values that permeate daily routines in schools. It can influence students' future schooling, leading to substantial changes in the ways of confronting different situations in the educational context. Sacristán(*idem*, p. 298) defines assessment as:

> […] any process through which one or several characteristics of a student, a group of students, a learning environment, educational objectives, materials, teachers, programs, etc., receive attention from an evaluator who analyzes and grades their characteristics and conditions according to some criteria or reference points to produce a judgment that is relevant to education.

From this perspective, the results of assessment are only valuable if they can guide teachers in educational planning. Therefore, the criteria and methodology, by expressing the curriculum goals set by the school's pedagogical policy program may be assessed and modified along the way (Sacristán, 1998). Other authors, such as Despresbiteris (1994), Souza (1994), Perrenoud (1999), Luckesi (1995, 1998, 2011) and Fernández (2002), also contribute to these reflections, helping teachers to construct learning assessment strategies to use them as supports for improving the school curriculum, fostering the student's academic success.

In this context, assessment has been used to diagnose, plan and verify students' academic performances, according to what they were able to learn during the course of their schooling. However, the proposals and practices for achieving

these goals are based on the theoretical concepts of the different curriculum types proposed in the school's pedagogical policies.

Souza (1994, p. 44) affirms that there is a "tendency to understand assessment as the process of judging the student's performance considering the proposed educational goals". After analyzing the main theories concerning this subject, Souza found that the assessment model that supports them is based on a proposal by Ralph Tyler (1981), which maintains that the purpose of assessment is to cause behavioral changes. A trend was also found to characterize it as: an activity that is broader than measuring learning outcomes, because it involves many steps of academic work, from planning to an appreciation of the results; it is procedural, involving the use of many measures and tools; and performs a diagnostic function, to provide feedback that will interfere in planning, involving all school professionals and students' families.[3]

Learning is a complex process, which involves cognitive, emotional and social dimensions. It is a process internal to individuals that leads them to the appropriation of knowledge. This implies the transformation of both the student and the object of learning. As a result, learning assessment requires attention to the organization of the environment, to the social relations established in the educational process and to the teacher's intentional actions in the elaboration of the didactic work.

Based on this perpective and on Sacristán's (1998) and Luckesi's (1998, 2011) arguments, we have chosen the procedural assessment, because we consider it to be effective for the learning of students who have significant school difficulties, as is the case of most of those identified with intellectual disabilities. It allows us to know the characteristics of students, environments, human resources, materials and the curriculum proposals that are articulated, which support or limit the learning processes and the criteria that are selected *a priori* and accepted as representative for indicating the success or failure of learning, as well as the meanings that are attributed to it for this purpose.

The continuous character of this form of assessment offers the opportunity to reflect on the relationship and or communication between teacher and student, encouraging changes in attitude, which can improve and construct methodologies that are closer to the student's learning possibilities.

> Learning assessment will only work well if there is clarity about what is desired (the pedagogical policy program), if there is investment in and dedication to the production of results by those who carry out the actions (execution) and if the assessment serves as a means to investigate and if necessary intervene in the pedagogical reality to achieve the best result. Without these requisites, the

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3  The authors analyzed by Sousa (1994) were: Ralph Tyler, Hilda Taba, William B. Ragan, Robert S. Fleming, W. James Popham, Benjamin S. Bloom, Thomas J. Hasting, George G. Madaus, Robert Ebel, Norma Grounlund, David Ausubel, Joseph Novak e Helen Hanesian.

pedagogical practice will remain incomplete and learning assessment will not play its true role (Luckesi, 2011, p177).

Luckesi (1995 and 2011, p. 35), upon considering the guiding function of diagnosis in learning assessment, states that this practice fosters the development of autonomy and learning skills because it constitutes a "dialectic moment of a 'notion' about the stage where one is and its distance in relation to the perspective that is presented as a point to be achieved in the future"(p. 35). Consequently, class management and students' limits and possibilities are given emphasis.

In terms of special education, learning assessment has generally been used to identify disabilities and refer students to specialized services, based on the "does not learn" criterion, indicating school success or failure. Anache (2012, 2011) shows that assessment in special education, mainly for students with intellectual disabilities, is limited in most cases to indicating the impossibilities generated by the condition of disability, rather than the student's possibilities for learning. Similarly, Pletsch and Glat (2012), upon analyzing these students' schooling process in Rio de Janeiro state, report a prevalence of using clinical diagnoses as a guide to educational practices.

Szymanski and Pellizzetti (2009) studied the difficulties involved in assessing knowledge in schools, analyzing a specific student with intellectual disability, they affirmed that the student's teachers were not comfortable that the assessment methodologies chosen were suitable for that specific purpose. Valentim (2011), when applying the curriculum reference to learning assessment in the field of intellectual disability in São Paulo state, to examine the learning process in Portuguese classes taught by three teachers, concluded that procedural evaluation displayed that it is effective because it considers the multiple responses of students to class lesson activities, and because of the effectiveness of an educational planning made for that specific group of students, thus allowing changes that encourage everybody to learn.

Upon analyzing the situation of inclusionary schooling in Brazil, Heredero (2010) proposed a curriculum adaptation, considering the construction of strategies and resources that could encourage the schooling of students with disabilities. To do so, there must be adaptations in the assessment process and criteria or indicators of the success or failure of the target public of special education must be established. Briant and Oliver (2012) also recommend investments of this nature, such as in continuous education for teachers, for the development of the educational situation of these students.

Bridi (2012) reinforces the need for investment in teacher education and reported that, in her study, the participating teachers had difficulties carrying out the initial pedagogical assessment of the students in special education services. Bridi affirmed that this influences decisions about students' referral to this service, and their inclusion in one of the categories of the MEC/INEP National School Census (Brasil, 2011b). The study also found situations in which teachers include in this service students with learning difficulties, but who are not diagnosed with intellectual disabilities. These students are not counted in official statistics.

The assessment of school learning of students with intellectual disability is a complex issue because it obscures the frail understanding of these people's learning

possibilities, and includes them in an educational space that is organized around an academic performance idealized by the norm, which is guided by the classification of results. Luckesi (1998) has warned about the contradictions generated in classification assessment, because a focus on checking and measuring results may facilitate access to knowledge (even if with restrictions) for some, but for others it may contribute to their dropping out of or paralysis in the learning process, thus canceling the guiding function of assessment.

Libâneo and Freitas (2013), based on Davidov's studies, add that pedagogical-didactic activity promotes psychological development for students, contributing to the formation of their personalities. They present some aspects that deserve attention in the organization of the teaching-learning process:[4]

> […] The first is the orientation of students' needs and reasons for the appropriation of human cultural wealth; The second is the formulation of study tasks with solutions that require students to experiment with the object to be appropriated; the third is that these tasks require students to analyze the conditions of specific concepts of theoretical knowledge and enable them to appropriate actions or general corresponding attitudes. (*idem*, p. 342)

Considering students with intellectual disabilities, the opportunities for school learning are overshadowed by the gravity of the students' conditions, because more is invested to identify their types of disability. In the realm of the school, the efforts must focus on the organization of the didactic work and schools must provide a group of activities that allow these students to develop their thinking (Anache, 2011).

In this context, learning assessment is characterized as a continuous and intervening process, which allows the identification of what students are able to achieve inside and outside the classroom, with or without the support needed to face and overcome school difficulties. For this purpose, it is important to respect the students' creations when confronting the challenges of educational activities, considering them as unique forms of expression of what was learned, subsidizing the construction of other and new educational proposals that allow the development of students.

## METHOD

Considering the fragility of learning assessments of students with intellectual disability, the purpose of this study is to describe the school learning assessment process carried out by teachers in multifunction resource classrooms that provide special education services in a Brazilian municipality.

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4   Teaching-learning implies the pedagogical relationship constructed in the organization of didactic work.

The municipality where the study was conducted, in the 2011-2012 period, had 4,039 enrolled students in the target public of special education distributed as follows: 2,950 in regular education, 932 in exclusive special education classes and 157 in youth and adult education. In special education services, 2,145 students were found in the target public. This data suggest that there is an increase in the enrollments of this public in regular education, requiring the implementation of MRCs to complement or supplement their schooling process.

The Municipal Education Department of the city studied reported that, in 2012, there were 56 multifunction resource classrooms (MRCs), serving 1,595 students. This included 2 Type II and 54 Type I classrooms. Some of them are prepared to deal with specific types of students. For example: 4 classrooms received 132 students with hearing disabilities, of which 54 are deaf and 77 hearing impaired;[5] two classrooms were for visually-impaired students, of which one is blind and 63 have limited sight; one classroom had 15 highly gifted students; and 49 classrooms had students with intellectual disabilities (ID) or global developmental disorders (GDD) with 937 students with ID and 55 diagnosed with GDD. Growth in the number of students diagnosed with intellectual disabilities can be observed from 2007 to 2012, because in 2007, 116 students in city schools had this diagnosis.

The study used a collaborative research methodology, which enables the integration of teachers and researchers "in both knowledge production processes and in the interactive development of the research itself" (Ibiapina, 2008, p. 25). According to Gatti (2005), this technique has been successful for understanding phenomena such as daily routines, attitudes, beliefs, values, prejudices, or other forms of cultural manifestation, providing teachers with a critical reflection about their work, as they participate in the construction of theories that result from the activities undertaken in the interactions during the research phases of: description, information, confrontation and reconstruction.

Hence, we asked teachers to describe their actions and encouraged them to talk about their experiences. In the following step, they were invited to respond to previously prepared questions about their activities. In responding, the participants discussed the concepts that guide the teaching-learning process, "promoting an opportunity to analyze the language used in classes, the goals and reasons for their actions, the social context, the school, the students and their needs, allowing them to understand the meaning of choices made during the teaching activity". (Ibiapina, 2008, p. 73-74). In the next step, the answers were compared with the guidance provided by researchers on the topic, encouraging them to think critically and to reconstruct teaching practices that should be implemented by the school.

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5   The names and definitions here are those used by the Instituto Nacional Anísio Teixeira (Brasil, s.d.). Therefore, the term deaf refers to students with hearing loss that prevents them from learning the oral/auditory language used by the community they belong to. Hearing disability is a hearing reduction that results in the decrease in decibels in sound perception, making it difficult to understand words. It may be light, moderate or deep.

After the approval of the project by the Ethics Commission,[6] we conducted two data collection phases. In the first we interviewed administrators from the Secretary of Municipal Education in the state capital, and they provided official documents indicating the number of students enrolled in special education, available teachers, classroom resources and the description of the services offered in the municipality. In the second phase, the focus group was formed with most of the teachers who attended on the day the study was presented. Of the 50 teachers present, 44 signed the Free and Informed Consent Form. We chose to divide them into two groups, to obtain more information.

We held 11 meetings, two of them monthly, each one for 8 hours a day. They were organized according to thematic areas related to the organization of the educational services in the MRCs, assessment and teacher education. These topics were initially approached through preliminary interviews in the focus groups and were then discussed with the invited speakers who are researchers in the field. The participants' statements were recorded in audio format and transcribed, which facilitated preparing the perspective for the reflection presented in this paper. When writing this article, we recognized the participants' requests to remain anonymous and that their opinions be presented as a group synthesis. For this reason, we decided not to distinguish the teachers' individual statements. Therefore, the verbal information will be identified as "(Transcrição do eixo "X", ONEESP, número de arquivo e paginação).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The assessment of school learning synthesizes the school culture proposed by curriculums, which guide the organization of the teaching process. As a component of the pedagogical act, it strives to understand the students' reality, to support educational planning (Luckesi, 2011). We have analyzed information about the characteristics of learning assessment of students with intellectual disabilities, considering the criteria that guide the composition of MRCs, as well as those that define the success or failure of these students' learning process.

### ORGANIZATION OF THE MULTIFUNCTION RESOURCE CLASSROOMS

The special education services offered in the MRCs are organized according to the educational need of the students considering their disability, as determined by law. Each municipality has autonomy to propose the implementation of this service.

The Municipal Secretariat of Education, where this study was conducted, has six centers. The professionals who work at them are pedagogues, educational psychologists, psychologists, occupational therapists and speech therapists. These professionals also provide support to special services in public schools. The technicians from the Municipal Center for Psycho-pedagogical Support

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6    Project approved by the Ethics Commission of the Federal University at Mato Grosso do Sul, Protocol n. 1988 CAAE 0127.1.049.000-11, August 29, 2011.

(NUMAPS)[7] inform the Special Education Division (DEE/SEME) about the need for specialized evaluations. The research participants reported that the criteria used by teachers are: a need to repeat a school year, cases of serious convulsions, delay in speech development and difficulties in the literacy process, as indicated in the following statement:

> […] if this student: has already been interned, if […] he has had seizures or delayed beginning to walk or speak, […]based on these indications, for example, failing several school years, even attending school for 3 or 4 years has not learned to read, […]" (Transcrição do Eixo 1, ONEESP, arquivo 2, p. 2).

The regular education teacher prepares a report with observations about the student's academic performance, and sends it to the pedagogical coordination of the school, which in turn, calls the municipal psycho-pedagogical support technicians. The teachers say that they request evaluations for those students who have learning difficulties and who do not meet the standards of regular education students, and when a student's behavior is not in keeping with other classmates of the same age, as can be noticed in the following situation:

> […] because, in fact, what is the concern of teachers in the classroom, if the student is progressing – or not – in the learning process, so, how should this learning difficulty be observed? Ah, he has a general difficulty, from copying [behavior], developing or more in understanding, or his behavior in relation to an activity, because he does not sit down, does not copy, rips up the notebook or the activity [sheet], throws the… It always comes down to the fact that we have a standard to follow. If one does not comply with this standard, we observe something is wrong, it may be behavioral, emotional, right? […] Well, in fact, it is a whole, you observe the student as a whole (Transcrição do Eixo 2, ONEESP, arquivo 2, p. 5).

Most teachers interviewed attribute the causes of students' difficulties to endogenous factors, defined by Rotta, Ohlweiler, Riesgo (2006) as learning disorders. Nevertheless, the learning difficulties cited are also a result of a combination of many pedagogical, social, cultural and emotional factors, which characterize the complexity of the situation.

Specialized evaluations are offered by the Special Education Department of the municipal Secretariat of Education and are complemented by partner institutions, which have multi-professional teams that work in education and healthcare to support students with disabilities. If a disability is observed in students, they are referred to the MRCs and or other special services. The official reports do not mention the student's learning process or development. They present the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) (OMS,1997) code and requests for specialized services (Anache, 2012). This practice is based on a medical model, which

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7    Municipal centers for pedagogical support.

requires descriptive methods, such as tests or similar tools to collect data about the possible mental disorder of the person who is being evaluated (Fernández, 2002, p. 145). This process takes about a year, because it depends on the availability of health professionals. Moreover, it depends on the family's commitment to taking the child to the appointments. During this period, the students are often sent to an MRC with the authorization of a NUMAPS professional, as shown in this report:

> […] there is this official report criterion, even required by the census, but it does not mean the [process] is concluded, that the student who needs special attention will be excluded from everything until the official report arrives. Because this report may take a long time. Then, there is the report criteria. It is preferable that there is a report, but if a need for this student to be followed up was noticed, he will not wait all this time, because it can take a really long time (Transcrição do Eixo 2, ONEESP, arquivo 2, p. 12).

The case study is prepared by the MRC teachers with the support of the psycho-pedagogical support technicians. The orientations that result from this process guide the preparation of the Special Education Plan. The families are communicated about the results of the evaluations and the measures needed to provide education for their children.

The relationship between not learning and a disability drives the referral of this public to these special services. The identification of a disability is given priority over information about their learning characteristics, because, in most situations, they are obscured by the difficulties, as affirmed by Plesch and Glat (2012). Moreover, we found that the guidelines proposed by the American Association on Mental Retardation – AAMR (2006)[8] for identifying an intellectual disability and planning the support needed[9] to ease the student's disability were also not mentioned by the research participants, reinforcing previous studies, as stated by Anache (2012, p. 227):

> […] There is a tendency to only analyze the individual's intellectual disability, thus compromising the proposal of an evaluation that may offer professionals conditions to broaden their procedures, to improve their tools for evaluating the physical, emotional and social characteristics of the people referred and their environment. This line of reasoning also compromises understanding of the learning processes.

If education is a right for everybody, the need for a medical report to guarantee the right of a student with an intellectual disability to enroll in the MRCs

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8  Now known as the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities – AAIDD.
9  The support may include services, professionals, furniture, assistive technology resources, adapted spaces, educational technology, among others to enhance students autonomy.

must be questioned. It is necessary to invest in evaluations that report on a student's learning process, guiding teachers towards more appropriate methodologies to organize their teaching. It is worth noting that Technical Note n. 04, issued by the Directorate of Special Education Policy of the Secretariat of Continued Education Literacy and Inclusion (SECADI) of the Ministry of Education (Brasil, 2014), dispenses with the requirement for an official report to enroll students with disabilities in schools and MRCs. Its presence in the Individual Educational Plan should be complementary, not a guide for the educational process.

To prepare the Individual Educational Plan, the MRC teachers consider the results of each student's case study discussions, the orientations from their regular education teachers and also the content planned to be covered. Thus, at the beginning of each semester, the planning is reviewed and adapted to the students' learning situations, focusing on each one's previous school performance, as can be seen in the following statement:

> […] through the case study, […] you already have the observation of the student, right? Then you [decide], during the year what you are going to work on […] at least mine is like this, right? The objectives, the activities, you know. the whole issue of development, right? So, at the beginning of the year you prepare the individual Special Education Services plan, […] the goals you want to achieve […] according to the student's need […]. (Transcrição do Eixo 2, ONEESP, arquivo 2, p. 13).

The diagnostic reports, based on the case study, do not show how the information about the student will be collected and how the Special Education Service will be conducted, or even if there are regulated procedures for conducting the process. Curriculum differentiation and learning opportunities must be considered, as well as the interactions with the environment where the student is. The purpose of the diagnosis based on the case study must be to:

> […] match the tasks and resources with the results presented by the students, in such a way that it can be integrated in the pedagogical level to assure successful learning. The student's internal variables are not emphasized while the analysis of the curriculum tasks are highlighted to define more appropriate goals for each individual (Fernández, 2002, p. 225).

The Individual Educational Plan for students with intellectual disabilities is considered a differentiated strategy for guiding their educational process and, therefore, it must be related to the regular school planning and construct and register the special pedagogical strategies for promoting the learning and development of these students, regarding both social and school abilities. Given its continuous nature, it needs to be periodically assessed and reviewed considering the development levels in the school process (Pletsch; Glat, 2012). Moreover, it helps schools improve their curricular proposals.

Fernández (2002) warns us that care must be taken so that learning assessments are not conditioned by a standard behavioral norm expected of some groups. The educational conditions offered to students with intellectual disabilities and their different forms of expressing what they learn must be considered. There seems to be little investment in enriching the educational curriculum proposed for these students.

There is a difference between a learning assessment based on criteria and one based on norms. The former refers to the proposal of goals to be achieved by students in the teaching-learning process and the latter positions it according to a norm applied to their reference group (Luckesi, 2011).

About the work methodology in the MRCs, the teachers declare that, until 2009, working with educational projects had been better, but that this varies according to each one's theoretical reference and also depends on the conditions of each student group: "the project is what guides me" (Transcrição do Eixo 2, ONEESP, arquivo 2, p. 13). Thus, they prepare the classroom planning according to the number of students, individually or in groups. The number of students per class may vary according to the school location and the level of gravity of the disability.

The MRC teachers mention difficulties in conducting planning in conjunction with regular education teachers. The failure in their communication directly affects students' school performance. This situation is due to the number of schools served by one MRC, to the hours when planning is conducted and to the difficulty in transportation of teachers and students between schools.

In conclusion, there is a need to organize the municipal Secretariat of Education so that interchanges can occur between regular classroom teachers and MRC teachers. This interchange must also take place with the pedagogical staff at schools that do not have these special classrooms. The pedagogical team responsible for the school life of students who use the special education services must also be improved. Moreover, the MRC teachers must conduct planning that identifies students' needs and the knowledge they have. According to Fernández (2002, p. 229) this pedagogical intervention must be: […] "accompanied by an evaluation or diagnosis and continuous orientation, with appropriate coordination and follow-up". He adds that: "These assessment processes should refer especially to the design, tutoring and assessment of intervention strategies, rather than decisions about students' classification and description […]" (*idem*, p. 239), emphasizing the evaluation of the processes and the variables of the curriculum processes.

Educational assessment with a diagnostic function should guide the work of teachers. Therefore, the variables in this context must be analyzed to identify students' progress and thus promote adaptations in lesson planning according to the newly defined goals.

## SCHOOL LEARNING ASSESSMENT IN THE MRCS

As previously mentioned, because it is procedural and provides orientation, learning assessment is intended to improve education, encouraging reflection and discussion. It involves teachers, school professionals and family, demanding many tools, considering the students' learning characteristics and emphasizing

conversation/discussion, observation, self-assessment, peer observation, comments, dialogues, questions, feedback, portfolios, individual education plans, among others. Because it is prospective, it is not restricted to the results in test and exams, which show only what students can do based on previously assimilated content (Luckesi, 2011; Tunes; Tacca; Martínez, 2006; Sacristán, 1998).

The statements of the research participants' indicate that regular education teachers prioritize results in exams and work conducted by students with intellectual disabilities, while MRC teachers strive to conduct a procedural assessment, because the municipal Secretariat of Education recommends the use of portfolios or reports to register the activities and performances of students with intellectual disabilities. As the teachers explained:

> […] constantly assessing, everyday. Every activity automatically produces an assessment, right? If you keep a portfolio, a sequence of activities where you take notes, you will be assessing everyday. For example, depending on the project, I prepare a portfolio […] (Transcrição do Eixo 2, ONEESP, arquivo 2, p. 13).

> […] when you prepare a special education plan, […] at least for six months, right? These activities, along the process, you keep assessing and at the end of the process, […] you will analyze them like this, […] if you see any changes, if you need to change the resources, if the student will really need that resource (Transcrição do Eixo 2, ONEESP, arquivo 2, p. 14).

> […] the starting point is when you realize the ability he has. So, within this ability, we explore working with all of his difficulties. (Transcrição do Eixo 2, ONEESP, arquivo 2, p. 14).

A portfolio is one of the tools for accompanying a students' lives, promoting their global understanding, to make meaningful and informed decisions about their learning processes. It contains notations that offer a range of resources for evaluating students' school performances (Fernández, 2002). This procedure was only recommended to assess students with intellectual disabilities and was used exclusively by MRC teachers, thus revealing a lack of integration between the teachers of the two educational programs and the fragility of the organization of pedagogical policies in schools, thus opposing, the principles that guide inclusionary education.

Students with intellectual disabilities do not always participate in all assessment activities proposed by the regular education teacher and not all teachers make adaptations in the assessment activities. All necessary changes are made by the assistant teachers who work in these classrooms. Additionally, MRC students cannot repeat a year and, in many cases, regardless of their performance, they are passed with a grade of 6.0, as one teacher explained:

[…] when I began working in public schools, the teachers who were there (in my place) and the school itself said: Look, his goal is 6.0. Then I questioned: but why 6.0? When you first arrive, you think it has to be like everyone says, but later, you start changing your concepts, with knowledge, with studies (Transcrição do Eixo 2, ONEESP, arquivo 2, p. 20).

The following statements allow questioning if the grades of 6.0 attributed by teachers in class councils to their students with intellectual disabilities reflect the quality of their learning experiences. Luckesi (2011) argues that grades are only a memory of students' performance quality at a certain moment of their lives and, therefore, cannot be confused with their learning.

[…] on the Council […] we take the portfolio, his grade. There are more arguments there than when the teacher justifies that no, there is no way. So, teacher, where is the student's portfolio with what was noted about him? If there is none, we have to make a report. Why does that student have no grades? Is it possible that he did not [improve] in anything. There in the report you see…beautiful, wonderful, because it's a six. (Transcrição do Eixo 2, ONEESP, arquivo 2, p. 22).

The MRC teachers understand that a dialogue with their colleagues from regular education is necessary to discuss the learning progress of the students with intellectual disabilities in different educational situations, as indicated by the statement:

[…] to assess a student based on his own conditions, what he did, what he could do in the first school term and what he is (doing now). So, we have always tried to do this because, as we see, we note that when the teacher measures the performance of a student with a disability compared to the development of the group, the student is at a disadvantage, […] so we always try to guide teachers like this, right, to keep assessing and looking at aptitudes, the reproductions that these boys present, based on the difficulties that they had presented and that have been overcome […](Transcrição do Eixo 1, ONEESP, arquivo 2, p. 18).

The common practice in most schools is to pass everybody, as stated by one participant: "they have to pass […] here we have two schools that are keeping them back […] because all the others pass them, most of them pass"*(*Transcrição do Eixo 1, ONEESP, arquivo 2, p. 24-25). This was a strategy used to reduce the age-grade distortions, because there are students with intellectual disabilities who are left behind for many years, with no conditions to continue their studies, and they stay with the younger ones, becoming infantilized and, consequently, preventing their development. Antunes and Glat (2013, p.3) add that:

[…] curriculum organization which reflects the infantilization of students with intellectual disabilities causes serious damage to their development, as they keep repeating the same content or the same grade for years, without

investments in pedagogical procedures that may allow them to achieve more complex learning levels. This ends up demotivating students, creating a passive attitude (in students and families who also do not hold great expectations) and sometimes even leads them to dropout.

In addition, the methodology used for this purpose is the same adopted for the other students, maintaining the logic of homogenization, as demonstrated by Valentim (2011). The students' real development and their potential to learn in the different educational conditions that are offered to them are just not considered. This situation shows the fragility of the tools used in the assessment of learning of contents, abilities, conducts and methods employed, as pointed out by Luckesi (2011) who affirmed:

> This means that, on one hand, no essential content can be left out and, on the other hand, the way the content was practiced in the classroom is the way the learning should be assessed: if a content was worked with in a simple way, the tool must operate at the same level; if the content was addressed in a complex manner, the tool must also operate in a complex manner (*idem*).

In addition, we were not informed about the official guidelines of the municipal Secretary of Education that regulate the assessment process in MRCs; this indicates that the criteria for evaluating school performance are attributed according to each teacher's understanding. Sacristán (1998, p. 309) warns that the problem with assessment is in an "approach with a dispersion of the meanings that each one attributes to the ideal criteria with which they compare students' achievements". This aspect requires more analysis, because there are teachers who defend learning assessment based on previously established criteria.

The regular education teachers give priority to the students' academic performance in activities such as reading, writing and solving math problems, comparing them to the group average. The teachers who participated in this study believe dominating this content is important and they value other aspects of students with disabilities, mainly those related to their social abilities. Villas Boas (2011) maintains that it would be productive to establish criteria for learning assessment considering the students' conditions.

The problem with assessment is not only in prioritizing the objectivity of the criteria for school performance, but in selecting those that represent success or failure of students with intellectual disabilities. It is thus urgent to invest in collaborative research that involves both teachers and students in the pedagogical work to be constructed and developed in schools.

Two opposing positions may be found among teachers: one that strives to overcome the culture that treats disability as a pathology and another that surrenders to this understanding. Evidence shows that the norm-based assessment is still the most common in regular education and criteria-based assessment has been recommended by MRC teachers, to provide conditions to identify the achievement of goals established for each student, without classifying each one. However, care is needed in this case, because criteria are choices constituted in the social and

cultural context and they depend on many factors, mainly on the social conceptions of education, student and disability.

The presence of criteria to determine the approval of students with intellectual disabilities for the following school grade has been the object of various discussions and opinions are divided. There are teachers who understand that students must keep up with their reference group to justify their presence in the regular education group. Others defend the importance of respecting the students' learning processes, controlling the content and adapting how to teach it, by using ludic strategies.

In the opinion of the first group of teachers, performance is essential for demonstrating that a student can be approved, just like his or her peers, without a diagnosis of disability. For the second group of teachers, this aspect is less important. In both situations, the educational process and, consequently, the assessment of learning are conditioned by the students' intellectual disability, because it is either denied, by demanding results that are similar to the normal curve, while at other times it is respected, as teachers focus on their abilities to respond minimally to what is expected considering their conditions.

The academic fate of students with intellectual disabilities is sealed, due to their conditions, revealing the iatrogenic effects of the diagnosis in their schooling processes, which traps them into classifications, prescribing treatments and measures from the logic of a normative behavioral standard. Thus, the students are subsumed to their cognitive deficit and their learning possibilities are not considered, which may be expressed in other situations of their life.

Generally, the teachers who participated in this study have shown their dissatisfaction with the way they their students with intellectual disabilities are evaluated, expressing concern about the established practices. Everything indicates that a dynamic assessment seems to be pertinent for offering clues about the relationships that are established in the school context. However, the difficulty lies in how to implement this in a curriculum organization based on meritocracy.

## CONCLUSION

The study of the school learning assessment made by teachers in Multifunction Resource Classrooms in a Brazilian municipality raised some issues that deserve attention. These include difficulties regarding suitable methodologies for teaching students with intellectual disabilities, given that those used in regular education do not always consider the learning conditions of these students, as they are based on normative behavior standards, always comparing the disabled students with ideal patterns for the students' ages and grades. We reaffirm the need to establish criteria for an operational learning assessment that is previously delineated in the school's pedagogical policy program, in the educational plans, in the contents and in the methodology adopted, which requires articulation between the teaching modalities.

The statements of the participants in the focus group indicate close relations between students' disabilities and their academic performances, generating stereotyped evaluations regarding their real learning conditions. This attitude is

based on learning frameworks that prioritize only the cognitive domain of this process and do not recognize the students' motivations, interests and experiences (Anache, 2012).

One of the aspects related to school learning assessment is the distortion between students' ages and their grades, since some students are not able to pass a grade and remain in the same grade for many years. For example, we found 17-year-old students in initial in elementary school grades together with seven – to nine-year-olds. Meanwhile, there are students who are passed with a grade of 6.0, not knowing how to read, write and or master the four basic math operations. The first situation is related to a norm-based assessment, while in the second the criteria are over shadowed by the label placed on the student. This issue will require further research, because continuous progress of students without the establishment of guidelines for learning criteria does not contribute to the academic success of this public.

This study found that school learning assessment seemed to be understood as a synonym for evaluation of academic performance, and low performance was one of the requirements for referring students to diagnostic services. This simplification is not compatible with the principles of inclusionary education.

The number of students diagnosed with intellectual disabilities due to low academic performance deserves attention, because in some situations, the official report is crucial for them to have access to special education services, and with priority to the MRCs. This situation may be motivated both by the influence of the culture of deficiency in evaluations of school learning and by the need to prove a disability to receive a continuous social security benefit.

The Basic Education Census (Brasil, 2013) data for 2007 to 2012 registered a 78.2% increase in enrollments of the target public of special education in regular education classrooms. However, there is no information about the frequency and the schooling results of these students in this educational context (Pletsch; Glat, 2012), requiring future research of these issues.

Investments are needed to improve teaching quality and, consequently, the learning assessment, valuing the teachers, enabling them to develop collaborative partnerships with other teachers and with the families of students in MRCs, encouraging them to work from the perspective of inclusionary education, promoting the development of all students. Luckesi (2011) states that the entire academic community must invest in building a special curriculum proposal to attend to the entire diversity of students who have the right to grasp the cultural assets available in society.

Assessment, as a guide for the learning process, allows teachers to interfere in and plan the school curriculum based on the different responses of students when facing academic challenges in their schooling. In this context, it is research of the student's academic life and, thus, it must follow strict scientific methodology.

The purpose of this study was to collect information about school learning assessment by means of collaborative research. We had no intention of judging the quality of the services offered by the participating teachers, but to share what we learned about this topic:

a) The evaluation of school learning of students with intellectual disabilities requires overcoming an organic perspective about the learning potential of these individuals;

b) There are limits in the access to knowledge about the learning possibilities of students with intellectual disabilities;

c) School learning assessment is considered as a synonym of academic performance, which is restricted to the evaluation of some academic skills;

d) Difficulties with the methodology used to implement the educational process, and with the learning assessment interfere in the quality of the information provided about the learning conditions of these students in the MRCs;

e) Dynamic assessment proved to be the most effective. However, teachers requested greater investment in this issue, as well as significant changes in the organization of the educational system in the municipality;

f) It is necessary to overcome the iatrogenic effects of the classification reports issued by experts about the characteristics of students with intellectual disabilities, to avoid producing negative expectations about their learning conditions and to foster investment in the support and resources needed to make their education possible.

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