

Inclusive education and the controversies between regular school and special school

A educação inclusiva e as controvérsias entre a escola regular e a escola especial

Educación inclusiva y las controversias entre la escuela regular y la escuela especial

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to map the controversies surrounding inclusive education, taking as a starting point the discussion between regular school and special school reopened by Decree 10.502/2020. The cartography of controversies was adopted as a method of investigation by the Actor-Network Theory (ANT), with the aim of studying inclusive education. For data analysis, the network was considered a “methodological tool” to map controversies and to analyze the educational policies implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. The principles of agnosticism, generalized symmetry, and free association were used as a reference. The results show that the proposal of the new special education policy affects inclusive education and interferes with the equal right of access and permanence of all students in regular education.

Keywords: Inclusive Education. Controversies. Regular School. Special School.

RESUMO

Este artigo tem por objetivo mapear as controvérsias que envolvem a educação inclusiva, tendo como ponto de partida a discussão entre a escola regular e a escola especial reaberta pelo decreto n.º 10.502/2020. Inicialmente, seguiram-se os caminhos propostos. Adotou-se a cartografia das controvérsias como método de investigação pela *Actor-Network Theory* (ANT), com o intuito de tensionar a educação inclusiva. Para a análise dos dados, considerou-se a *rede* como “ferramenta metodológica” para cartografar as controvérsias e analisar as políticas educacionais instauradas durante o período da pandemia da COVID-19. Tomou-se como referência os princípios do agnosticismo, da simetria generalizada e da associação livre. Os resultados demonstram que a proposta da nova política de educação especial afeta a educação inclusiva e interfere no direito igualitário de acesso e permanência de todos os alunos no ensino regular.

Palavras-chave: Educação Inclusiva. Controvérsias. Escola Regular. Escola Especial.

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RESUMEN

Este artículo tiene como objetivo mapear las controversias que rodean la Educación Inclusiva, partiendo de la discusión entre la escuela regular y la escuela especial, especialmente a partir del Decreto Nº. 10.502/2020. Se adoptó la cartografía de las controversias como método de investigación a través de la Teoría del Actor-Red (TAR) para tensionar la Educación Inclusiva. Para el análisis de los datos, se consideró la red como una “herramienta metodológica” para cartografiar las controversias y analizar las políticas educativas instauradas durante el periodo de la pandemia de Covid-19. Se tomaron como referencia los principios del agnosticismo, la simetría generalizada y la asociación libre. Los resultados indican que la propuesta de la nueva política de educación especial afecta la Educación Inclusiva e interfiere en el derecho igualitario de acceso y permanencia de todos los estudiantes en la educación regular.

Palabras clave: Educación Inclusiva. Controversias. Escuela Regular. Escuela Especial.

INTRODUCTION

This study is part of a growing field of research that problematizes inclusive education as an object of study and analyzes it based on laws, norms, people, discourses, and institutions, among other allies (Camargo, 2017; Figueira, 2017; Silva and Pedro, 2017; Silva Neto *et al.*, 2018). This issue has been widely discussed in the international community, following the Salamanca Declaration (1994), as well as at the national level, following the enactment of the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law (Brasil, 1996). Placing these objects (documents) at the center of the sociological debate undoubtedly allows us to understand the human being even better. However, an opposing movement created during the government of Jair Bolsonaro has sparked an intense debate in the scientific community and has reignited the struggle for the right to education for all.

Valle and Connor (2014) state that inclusion is an educational philosophy in which there is respect for all differences, not just disability, with the classroom being a space where diversity is recognized and respected. In the same vein, Silva (2011) argues that, in addition to providing a common space for students, schools must provide opportunities for students to learn. According to the author, this is only possible if we accept that difference is not necessarily a condition that prevents transformations in individual development. Although inclusive education is a right for all students, in this research we are going to deal specifically with the public defined in the National Policy for Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education (*Política Nacional de Educação Especial — PNEEI*), which are people with disabilities, autism spectrum disorder [ASD] and high ability/gifted. The PNEEI understands inclusive education as an educational paradigm based on the concept of human rights, which recognizes the right of everyone to learn and participate together, without discrimination, and emphasizes the role of the school in overcoming exclusion (Brasil, 2008). Similarly, the Brazilian Inclusion Law (*Lei Brasileira de Inclusão — LBI*) establishes that all children should be enrolled in the regular school system and opposes any form of prejudice or discrimination (Brasil, 2015).

However, when we look at the systematic actions in defense of inclusive education, we encounter contradictory positions. On the one hand, we have a proposal to fight for education for all in mainstream schools, which reflects the achievements of the disability movement, as well as advances in the legal and educational framework. On the other hand, the publication of Decree

10,502/2020, which proposes the National Policy for Special Education: Equitable, Inclusive, and with Lifelong Learning, sought to establish the return of special schools (Brasil, 2020). This went against the historical struggle of the political movement of people with disabilities in Brazil for the right to social participation and educational inclusion. This decree, among other things, allowed children with disabilities to be enrolled in special schools that were exclusively for the special education public (people with disabilities, ASD and high abilities), making it possible for them not to be enrolled in regular schools. This idea went against what is proposed in the current policy, the PNEEI (Brasil, 2008) and the LBI (Brasil, 2015), as well as other national regulations and international treaties, which guarantee that all children attend the same school, regardless of their characteristics or specific learning needs.

This decree instigated profound discourse, mobilized entities associated with the educational sector, and prompted research into the propositions delineated in this document, as well as their implications for education and public policies (Almeida *et al.*, 2020; Moreira, Silva and Silva, 2021; Rocha, Mendes, and Lacerda, 2021; Nunes and Rodrigues, 2022). Additionally, the promulgation of Decree 10.502/2020, which presented the proposal for a new special education law, gave rise to a comprehensive discourse surrounding the rights of individuals with disabilities and prompted a reexamination of the prevailing educational paradigm, unveiling elements that had previously been considered stable and were inherent to the segregationist model of special education. This impelled us to undertake a more systematic analysis, with the objective of mapping the divergent manifestations between those who advocate for inclusive education and those who favor special education. In the subsequent section, we employ certain concepts from the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to describe the phenomenon of hybridization that permeates inclusive education, i.e., the connection between humans and non-humans, in continuous mobility and action. Subsequently, we will be able to represent the objective in theoretical terms.

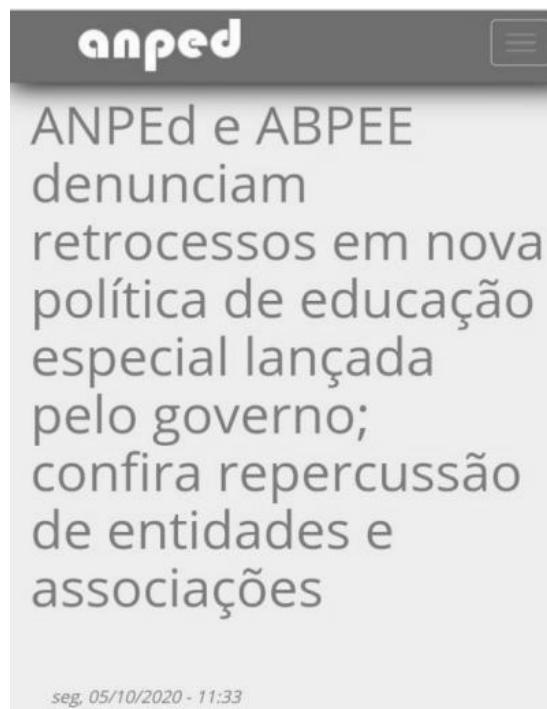
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND ITS CONTROVERSIES

Dear reader, from a Latourian perspective, we begin this section in the midst of a heated debate that puts inclusive education in check. We have taken the manifesto of the National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Education (Anped) and the Brazilian Association of Special Education Researchers (Associação Brasileira de Pesquisadores em Educação Especial — ABPÉE), which denounce the setbacks of the new special education policy, as the starting point for our reflections and theorizing. Figure 1 shows the call of these organizations to the community to be aware of the negative effects that this new policy could have, denouncing the reduction of the right to inclusive education and the possibility of segregating students with disabilities.

In the context of the movement for inclusive education and the defense of a school for all, Decree No. 10.502/2020 was published on September 30, 2020. It presented the proposal for the new Special Education Policy: Equitable, Inclusive, and with Lifelong Learning. As soon as it was publicly announced, this non-human ‘actant’ generated countless debates and demonstrations, both positive and negative. The notion of actants refers to those who act and who, in their action, cause several others to act, whether they are human or not; in other words, they produce movement and difference that mediate, transform, translate, distort, or modify the meaning of what they are supposed to carry, analyzed with the same degree of importance, whether they are human or not (Latour, 2012). What had been stabilized moved, and from then on divergent groups formed to defend or attack the principles and guidelines proposed by the decree, reigniting the discussion about special schools. The document, which is an actant, reopened the debate on the rights of the students considered to be the target of the special education policy (people with disabilities, global development disorders, and high abilities) and advocated some changes,

among them the possibility of enrolling students with disabilities in special schools, leaving it up to the family to choose between a regular school or a special school (exclusively for children with disabilities). This proposal goes against the basic principle of inclusive education, which is the right of all to learn together.

Figure 1 – News about the demonstration held by the National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Education and the Brazilian Association of Special Education Researchers.



Source: <https://anped.org.br>. Accessed on: Feb 15, 2021.

It is the responsibility of the State to guarantee the rights provided for in the public education policy and to create the objective conditions for inclusion, through the training of professionals in schools and universities, as well as accessibility in its various dimensions, in accordance with the National Guidelines for Special Education in Basic Education (Brasil, 2001). Thus, in the course of the debates, different groups were formed: those who supported the decree and the return of special schools, and those who opposed it, arguing that all children should be enrolled in mainstream schools. Hence the controversy.

The concept of controversy used in this work, according to Venturini (2010 *apud* Franco, 2014, p. 2), can be defined as follows: “Controversies are the most complex phenomenon observed in collective life. They are identified as issues that have not yet produced a consensus, on which actors disagree or agree in disagreement.” In other words, controversies are issues that generate debate, a difference of opinion between different actors. They are privileged situations for the analysis of social phenomena because, for ANT, reality depends on the way actants (human and non-human actors) act in unstable and uncertain situations (Salgado, 2018).

One controversy related to inclusive education concerns the concept of disability. There are those who understand disability as a pathology, something to be corrected or alleviated, and there are those who understand disability as a difference that causes harm to the individual when interacting with the barriers imposed by society. Although there is a tendency to understand disability based on the social model (disability as difference), there are still views based on the

biomedical model, on stigmas and stereotypes built up socio-historically, that see the physical diversity of this group as a disability/ pathology/ abnormality. In fact, their autonomy is erased, and they are placed in a situation of dependency and discrimination, either through marginalization or through segregation (Crochík *et al.*, 2013).

Analyzing phenomena because of controversies means putting oneself in the position of knowing nothing *a priori*. The phenomenon is still unknown; there are no certainties, it is science under construction (Latour, 2011). When the controversy is resolved, that is, when a consensus is reached and the debate ends, it stabilizes and becomes a black box until some event mobilizes other actants and associations to reopen the discussion, as happened with inclusive education after the publication of Decree 10.502/2020. Latour (2011, p. 6) says that the first decision we have to make as researchers when we enter the world of science and technology is to go through the back door, that of science under construction, and not through the entrance of finished science. In other words, we must map, follow the actants, observe the associations and transformations in the network related to the phenomenon we are studying, and see science in action.

We have taken the controversy reopened by the decree as the point of departure for our study. However, how do we highlight the disagreements and debates generated by the document? Where do we start? As Latour (2012) suggests, it is best to begin our journey “in the midst of things, in *medias res*¹” because, for the author, things act and can authorize, allow, provide, encourage, suggest, influence, block, impede, and so on.

Therefore, we would like to open this discussion by focusing on inclusive education, based on an analysis of the sociotechnical network that has been built throughout history up to its current configuration, which has been questioned and revised by some legal documents, such as Decree 10,502/2020, which divides opinions. In this position, we have a starting point to highlight a series of associations that can later be mobilized to explain the phenomenon. We understand associations as “a kind of connection between things that do not define themselves as social (Latour, 2006, p. 6). This set of associations, not fixed or stable but in constant transformation, is what constitutes the social.

The sociotechnical network that is part of inclusive education is made up of associations of human and non-human *actants* that connect and reconnect, configuring a reality in constant transformation. The network that Latour (1994) calls sociotechnical is a production of hybrid collectives (human and non-human) that emerges as a fertile space for the construction and circulation of knowledge and the new social configurations that are emerging today. The author uses the word “non-human” to highlight the complexity of situations that are always simplified by not paying attention to non-humans. According to him, dealing with non-humans in research means considering various entities that act: objects, technical devices, animals, plants, feelings, emotions, words, narratives, among many others (Cooren, 2010; Sayes, 2014; Houdart, 2015 *apud* Salgado, 2018).

Adopting this perspective of symmetrical analysis proposed by Latour (1994), this study aims to map the controversies surrounding inclusive education, taking as its starting point the debate between mainstream and special schools reopened by Decree 10,502/2020. In the next section, we will present the research method that allows us to achieve the described objective.

METHOD

The research method used in this study is the cartography of controversies. This method consists in mapping the network of actants (human and non-human actors) that act and cause others

1 “Latin expression meaning ‘in the middle of things’. A literary narrative technique that consists of relating the events of the story, not at the beginning (*ab ovo* or *ab initio*), but at the crucial moment and in the middle of the action, as a way of captivating the reader’s attention. In addition, this technique makes it possible to suppress unpleasant incidents and attenuate the intervals between events which often disrupt the continuity of the action” (Infopédia, 2021).

to act. According to Silva and Barbosa (2018), it is an approach that allows the observation of the social fabric, the tangle of relationships and interactions between actors, and the exploration of their problems, assuming the function of visually representing and analyzing the traces they leave. The analysis of the phenomenon under study begins with a controversy, i.e., a fact on which there is no consensus. Once the controversy has arisen, the researcher must follow the actors involved in the sociotechnical network, following the facts in action, observing and describing the network of actors, which is not limited to human beings but to everything that has the capacity to act, to interfere, to prevent, to allow, to enable, to influence other actants. In this way, the researcher observes and describes the facts related to the phenomenon. In the analysis of the inclusive education network, we identified the issues that generate debates among its actants. For Lemos (2013, p. 55), the cartography of controversies is: “the place and time of observation, where associations are made and the ‘social’ appears before being frozen or stabilized in black boxes. The visibility of the network takes place in controversies.” In this way, our investigation starts from a fact in action, something that has not yet been stabilized and does not yet have a consensus. In this case, the discussion is based on the question of the most appropriate place for students with disabilities: the inclusive school or the special school?

To systematize the steps of our investigation, we were inspired by Nobre and Pedro (2010), who present the seven methodological rules proposed by Latour (2000) to study a phenomenon from the perspective of networks. The steps adopted are described below:

1. We have chosen a fact in action, a subject discussed, in this case inclusive education, which has been questioned once again since the publication of Decree 10,502/2020;
2. We have analyzed the controversies in motion by analyzing the network that includes inclusive education, its actants and associations;
3. We tried to map the controversies by following the paths of the actants and their associations and listening to the arguments of each divergent group to try to reach a consensus, bearing in mind that stabilization is a consequence of the resolution of controversies;
4. We consider that the resolution of the controversy will lead to the stabilization of the collective;
5. In exploring the paths and connections formed between each element, human or non-human, we place ourselves symmetrically, giving them equal importance in the analysis of the network, without giving any of them a leading role, we look at them symmetrically. In this way, we observe not only human actions, but also the transformations generated by documents, laws, objects, and all the non-human actants that are part of the network;
6. We show the extent of the network built up in the controversial situation and look for explanations around the debate. To achieve this, we follow the traces of the actants and the associations formed by inclusive education, established in legal documents, to identify the controversies on the way to its current configuration. Once the controversy was reopened with the publication of the decree, we mapped the controversies and discussions generated by other actants who entered the scene and fueled the debate;
7. We traced the entire network and selected categories of analysis to organize the arguments for and against the actants involved in the controversy. We present a position on the discussion and try to establish some stability.

The methodological steps adopted for a symmetrical perspective, as proposed by the TAR, included the analysis of documents (decrees, manifestos, legislation), facts that occurred during the mapping of the network, such as the speech of the Minister of Education, and the description of the arguments made explicit in the public hearing that involved the divergent groups, allowing the observation of humans and non-humans.

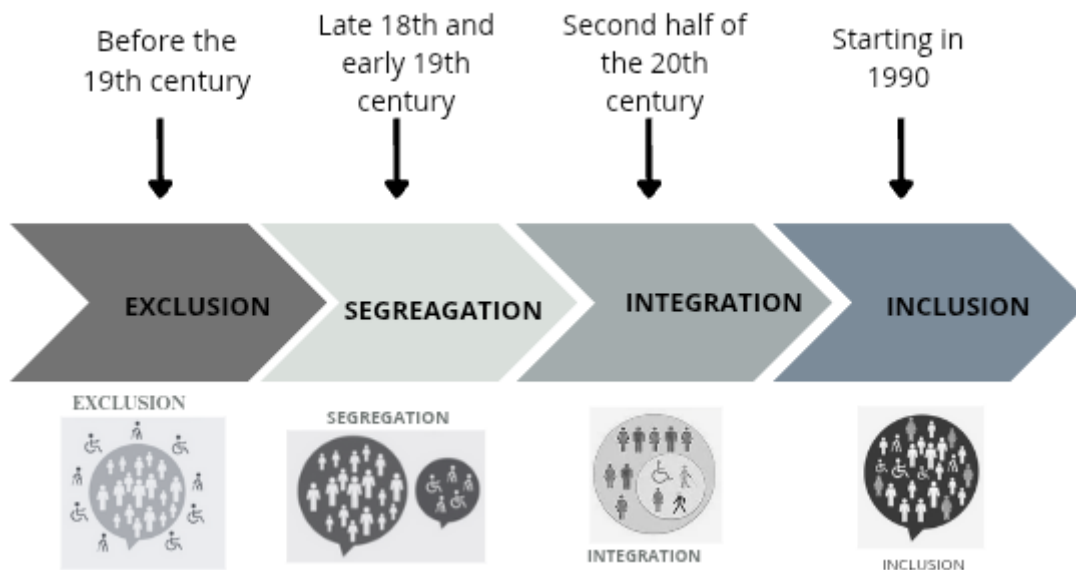
When we explored the network, we tried to map the controversies, of which there are several. We have one main controversy, but other smaller ones are associated with it. According to Venturini and Munk (2022), it is possible to break down controversies into smaller issues and show how sociotechnical debates are places where different issues intersect. For him, some issues are often so complex that they can be considered controversies. At the same time, most of them can be considered issues within even broader controversies.

To map the controversies, we will map the network surrounding inclusive education. We will go through the history of inclusive education and the legal documents that deal with the rights of people with disabilities and, in particular, the guarantees for their education; we will identify the actants who have mobilized issues and stirred up debate; finally, we will present five categories of analysis that include smaller controversies related to the main one that is linked to the discussion between inclusive and special schools. The categories were created based on the arguments for and against presented at the Supreme Court hearing, where interested parties debated and defended their points of view. In the next section, we will analyze the history of inclusive education and the actants that are or have been part of it: people with disabilities, laws, objects that help in the inclusive process, spaces, discourses, and the role that each of them assumes in each period.

EXPLORING THE TRAILS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

When we look historically at the history of inclusive education, we notice that there is a direct relationship between the way people with disabilities are viewed and the educational actions aimed at them. As we move along the timeline (Figure 2), this will become more evident.

Figure 2 – Timeline of inclusive education.



Source: Elaborated by the authors with free images from the Pixabay platform.

Galvão Filho (2009) states that the oldest records of humanity indicate that people with disabilities were considered abnormal, outside the human species. In this phase, before the 19th century, this population, if not exterminated, lived on the margins of society, excluded from collective life. This period was called exclusion. This situation began to change with the spread of Christianity, which began to oppose the extermination of these individuals and their total abandonment. However, instead of being killed, people with disabilities began to be segregated in institutions and spaces for the care and support of the poor, sick, and disabled.

In the 18th century, institutions were created exclusively for people with disabilities. This was the birth of special education. This phase is called institutionalization/segregation. In relation to ANT, we can see that in these first two phases, people labeled as incapable because of their physical or intellectual limitations were also ignored in their role as actants. Just as objects and their capacity to provoke action and change have been ignored throughout the history of sociology, as Latour (2012) shows us, people with disabilities were also denied this role in these periods.

It was not until the 20th century that a proposal to integrate people with disabilities into collective life emerged. This is the period called integration, in which special institutions had the role of “enabling the defective individual, incapable of social coexistence” (Galvão Filho, 2009, p. 89). There was a search for normality.

Until then, there was no other way to see this individual in the collective, who once again assumed the role of a passive agent, incapable of bringing about change. As Latour (2012) would say, a mere mediator. Furthermore, from an educational perspective, the focus continued to be on the human being, who was the only one capable of modifying another human being, who was considered incapable of qualifying for collective coexistence. These three previous phases characterize the traditional paradigm of education.

Since the 1990s, with an international movement criticizing the concept of normality, which does not consider the idea of human diversity, a new paradigm has emerged in Brazil, called inclusion. From this perspective, diversity is not seen as a problem but as something inherent to the human being (Galvão Filho, 2009). For this author (2020), in today’s society, the lack of identification with human differences that do not correspond to the established normality causes estrangement, devaluation, distancing, inequality, and discrimination.

From this period, actants such as international treaties and Brazilian legislation began to chart a different path for what inclusive education might mean. The Salamanca Declaration (1994), one of the most important international documents on social inclusion, provides guidelines for the formulation and reform of education policies and systems in line with the social inclusion movement. According to the Declaration, it is necessary to ensure that the education of individuals with disabilities is an integral part of the education system (Salamanca Declaration, 1994, p. 1). In line with this, the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Brasil, 2007) states that it is necessary to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels of education in an environment that maximizes the academic and social development of individuals with disabilities.

Among Brazil’s legal documents, the Federal Constitution of 1988 is an important milestone, as it establishes that education is the right of all and the duty of the State and the family. Article 206 states that education shall be based on the following principles, among others: “I — Equal conditions of access and permanence in school; [...] IX — Guarantee of the right to education and lifelong learning” (Brasil, 1988, p. 145).

The Constitution is an important milestone because it is accompanied by the 1996 National Education Guidelines and Bases Law (LDBEN), which reaffirms the constitutional principles, and, in Art. 59, states: “Education systems shall ensure that students with special educational needs are provided with: I — specific curricula, methods, techniques, educational resources, and organization to meet their needs” (Brasil, 1996, p. 25). In addition, in Chapter V, which deals with special education, the LDBEN states in §2 that educational assistance will be provided in specialized classes, schools, or services when, due to the specific conditions of the students, it is not possible to integrate them into ordinary regular education classes.

The 2008 PNEEI identifies two points of great importance: the transversality of special education, from early childhood education to higher education, and specialized educational assistance (SEA), to

be provided preferably within the regular school network. In other words, SEA is complementary to regular education and not a substitute for it.

The National Education Plan (2014–2024) has, as goal 4:

Universalize access to basic education and specialized educational care for the population between the ages of 4 and 17 with disabilities, global developmental disorders, and high ability or giftedness, preferably in the regular school system, with the guarantee of an inclusive educational system, multifunctional resource rooms, classes, schools or specialized services, public or contracted (Brasil, 2014, p. 1).

Law 13.146/2015, the LBI, states in Art. 27 that education is the right of people with disabilities and that they are guaranteed an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning, to achieve the maximum development of their physical, sensory, intellectual, and social talents and abilities, according to their characteristics, interests, and learning needs.

What is established in Brazilian legislation is in line with international documents and authors:

In school, all children and young people should be educated, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, cultural, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions. In turn, individual differences are not conceptualized as something negative to be combated but as a reference value, since they support and justify changes in the management of the school curriculum and, consequently, in the teaching and learning process (Unesco, 2008; 2015 *apud* Muñoz-Oyarce, 2021, p. 3).

Silva (2011) emphasizes that, unlike integration, which placed the problem on the subject, who had to be 'treated' to approach a standard of normality and adapt, inclusion considers that it is the responsibility of the environment in which the school is located to provide accessible conditions in accordance with the demands of the subjects.

In line with ANT, we can say that inclusive education has added other actants to its network, considering, in addition to humans, non-humans in connection, acting and transforming educational actions, as it has come to recognize the power of the agency of the classroom, teaching materials, technologies, furniture, and physical space for the effectiveness of inclusion. This is clear in art. 74 of the LBI, which aims to guarantee people with disabilities access to products, resources, and assistive technologies that increase their autonomy and quality of life. Assistive technology is thus seen as a non-human tool capable of giving greater autonomy to people with disabilities.

This change in perspective is due to a new way of recognizing difference and the person with a disability, who is no longer the only agent responsible for the success or failure of inclusion. Non-human actants begin to help or hinder the inclusion of special education students from an inclusive perspective.

In the inclusive paradigm, a person with a disability is considered a person who has a long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment that, in interaction with one or more barriers, may prevent their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (Brasil, 2015, p. 1).

The above text, quoted in the LBI, shows that ANT is right to say that the association between human and non-human actants in the network is what explains the facts because, in other words, what the law highlights is that the obstacle to the full and autonomous participation of people with disabilities in collective life is caused not only by physical or intellectual impediments, but also by their interaction with barriers.

According to Sasaki (2009), these barriers can be architectural (in physical space), communicative (in communication between people), methodological (in methods and techniques of leisure, work, education, etc.), instrumental (in instruments, tools, utensils, etc.), programmatic (in public policies, legislation, norms, etc.), and attitudinal (in society's behavior towards people with disabilities). In each of these types of barriers, we can see the ability of various non-humans to act in ways that directly interfere with the inclusive process.

From this standpoint, inclusive education advocates the presence of people with disabilities, ASD, or high abilities in mainstream schools, and it is not the sole responsibility of these individuals to succeed in school life. This is shared with the school, resources, management, technologies, teaching materials, and other non-human actants. Inclusive education is also recognized internationally:

Inclusive education emerges with the aim of eradicating the various forms of oppression that exist and of achieving an educational system for all, based on the principles of equality, participation, and the avoidance of discrimination, within the framework of a truly democratic society (Arnaiz, 2003 *apud* Paz-Maldonado, 2020, p. 4).

Despite the historical struggle to defend and strengthen inclusive education, as described above, we have seen a movement to oppose and question this educational configuration, which advocates that people with disabilities should have the right to study in mainstream schools. This shift in position will become more evident in the next section, in which we will map the controversies that have arisen since the approval of Decree 10,502/2020, describing the parts of the document that deviate from the current national policy that defends regular schools and opposes special schools.

DECREE 10,502/2020 AND THE BOILING CONTROVERSY

The promulgation of Decree 10,502/2020 triggered a series of interactions and disputes that reflect the complexity of social and educational relations in the context of inclusion. Through the lens of ANT, this decree can be understood as an actor who mobilizes a network of agents — including families, educators, educational institutions, and politicians — each with their own perspectives and interests.

In this scenario, the decree not only establishes guidelines, but also provokes a firestorm of controversy that exposes the tensions between inclusive education and the provision of specialized schools. Almeida *et al.* (2020) and Nunes and Rodrigues (2022) argue that the decree compromises the educational and linguistic rights of deaf and other disabled students. Meanwhile, proponents of specialized schools see the proposal as a way to meet the specific needs of these students. The cloud in Figure 3 was created using the word cloud page, which allows users to create word clouds from text online. By attaching the Decree 10,502/2020 file, the tool generated a cloud with the most frequently occurring words highlighted in a larger, such as *education, special, special class, and learning*, as we can see below:

The graphic representation of the cloud gives us an initial idea of the central concepts present in the document. This tool helped us to map the points in the decree that relate to the main controversy of this study, showing the associations and connections with inclusive and special education. In trying to trace the controversial points, we reflected on the different arguments used by each group.

Article 1 establishes the National Policy for Special Education: Equitable, Inclusive, and with Lifelong Learning. Through it, the Federal Government, in collaboration with the states, the Federal District, and the municipalities, will implement programs and actions aimed at guaranteeing the right to education and SEA for students with disabilities, global development disorders, and high abilities.

Figure 3 – Cloud of words contained in the Decree 10,502/2020.



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The definition of the proposed new policy as equitable, inclusive, and with lifelong learning is a point to be noted throughout the document. Equitable means that it has fairness, equality, and equivalence. So let us continue with this perspective.

The new policy considers: “I — Special Education — Type of schooling offered, preferably in the regular school system, to students with disabilities, global developmental disorders, and high ability or giftedness” (Brasil, 2020, p. 1). The term gives priority to the regular school, with the possibility of offering education to this specific public in other spaces. This definition is also used in the document:

VI — Specialized Schools — Educational institutions designed to provide educational assistance to special education students who do not benefit in their development when included in regular inclusive schools and who require multiple and continuous support (Brasil, 2020, p. 6).

TAR teaches us to ask how these needs are defined and by whom? Which students would not benefit from inclusion in regular schools? Should multiple forms of support be provided in specialized schools? The existence of specialized schools reveals a controversy about the effectiveness of inclusion. On the one hand, there is the defense of inclusion as a right; on the other, there is the argument that specialization is necessary to meet specific needs. From a Latourian perspective, this allows us to explore how these different voices articulate and compete within the network, creating tensions that need to be addressed.

There is also an indication of what specialized classes are:

VII — Specialized Classes — Classes organized in inclusive regular schools, with access to architecture, equipment, furniture, pedagogical projects, and didactic material, designed to meet the specificities of the public for which they are intended, and which must be managed by qualified professionals to fulfill their purpose (Brasil, 2020, p. 2).

Specialized classes would be exclusive classes for students with disabilities. Thus, they would be within the regular, inclusive school but in separate classes. In the Latourian view, these elements are not just supports, but actors that shape the educational experience. Analyzing how materiality influences the interaction between students and educators reveals the interdependence between physical space and pedagogical practice. Another question arises from the excerpt above: why should qualified professionals be in specialized classes and not in regular classes? Let us look at another excerpt:

VIII — Bilingual Schools for the Deaf — Mainstream educational institutions in which communication, instruction, interaction, and teaching are carried out in Libras [Brazilian Sign Language] as a first language and in written Portuguese as a second language, for deaf students who choose to use Libras, deaf students, deaf-blind students, deaf students with other related disabilities and deaf students with high ability or giftedness (Brasil, 2020, p. 2).

Bilingual schools for the deaf teach Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) as the deaf person's first language and written Portuguese as a second language. Nevertheless, could not Libras be taught to all students in mainstream schools to create an equitable education? Would deaf people no longer attend mainstream schools?

We also have this explanation in the section: "X — Inclusive Regular Schools — Educational institutions that provide specialized educational services to special education students in regular classes, specialized classes, or resource rooms" (Brasil, 2020, p. 2). In inclusive mainstream schools, specialized educational assistance is provided in a complementary and/or supplementary way, in a shift opposite to the regular class shift, allowing students with disabilities to attend the same classroom as students without disabilities, a legal and constitutional guarantee.

We can see in the first three definitions in the law some change from what is proposed in the current policy. In the inclusive paradigm, there are no special schools or classes because they are considered segregated spaces that are historically outdated. In defining the concept of special education, the decree states that it should preferably be offered in the regular network without being compulsory, as advocated by the National Policy for Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education (Brasil, 2008). Bilingual schools for the deaf would also represent an exclusive space for the deaf, who would live only with their peers, without contact with hearing students. One of the guidelines of the policy is:

I — To provide specialized, quality educational services, in inclusive regular classes and schools, specialized classes and schools, or bilingual classes and schools for the deaf, to all those who require this type of service, to ensure their social, cultural, academic and professional integration, in an equitable manner and with the possibility of lifelong learning;

II — To ensure that bilingual deaf schools or classes are available for deaf, deafblind, hearing impaired, other disabilities, or related high-ability and gifted students (Brasil, 2020, p. 4).

The excerpt highlights the intention to provide "specialized and quality educational care" in different contexts. From a Latourian perspective, inclusion is not just an ideal, but also a social construction that depends on the articulation of multiple actors. This construction includes policies, educational practices, qualified professionals, and the school community itself, all of which interact to define what "social, cultural, academic, and professional inclusion" means. Among the special education services and resources included in the decree are:

VII — bilingual classes for the deaf;

VIII — specialized classes;

IX — bilingual schools for the deaf;

X — specialized schools;

XI — pole schools for specialized educational care (Brasil, 2020, p. 5).

When we examine the text of the decree in question, its guidelines and services, we see a strong emphasis on the creation of specialized classes and schools exclusively for the target population

of the policy, including institutions for the deaf. These spaces evoke, in the light of the historical trajectory of the education of people with disabilities, the phases of segregation and integration, characterized by an educational vision that perpetuated prejudice and exclusion. In this context, a false homogeneity was sought in classrooms, denying the rich human diversity.

Inspired by Latour (2012), what is evident is not a proposal for coexistence between a diverse and heterogeneous collective, but, on the contrary, an incentive for separation and classification. The term “equitable”, present in the definition of the law, is contradictory in relation to what the document actually mobilizes: the creation of special schools and the displacement of students with disabilities from regular education to segregated environments. This dynamic makes us question the relationships that are established and how policies shape the educational experience, highlighting the need to rethink the networks of actors involved in building a truly inclusive education.

Among the measures to implement this special education policy, the decree establishes:

- I — Developing management strategies for inclusive mainstream schools, specialized schools, and bilingual schools for the deaf, including guidance on the roles of the family, the student, the school, specialized professionals, and the community, and standardizing procedures for developing specialized teaching materials;
- II — Defining strategies for the implementation of bilingual schools and classes for the deaf and for the strengthening of existing bilingual schools and classes for the deaf (Brasil, 2000).

Once again, there is the idea of creating specialized schools and classes, as well as bilingual schools for the deaf, promoting the creation of parallel spaces that replace the regular inclusive education system. Various associations and professionals related to education have spoken out against the decree, considering it a step backwards for inclusive education. However, there are also groups in favor of the changes. Sassaki (2020), in his analysis of Decree 10,502/2020, raises several criticisms of the text. He points out that it does not comply with legal norms that have already been in place since the 1990s in defense of inclusive education, such as the World Declaration of Education for All (UNESCO, 1990) and the Salamanca Declaration, which formalized the construction of inclusive education systems, inclusive schools for students with and without disabilities, as well as the Federal Constitution (1988) and the Brazilian Law for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities (Brasil, 2015). In defense of inclusive education, the aforementioned author states that it is a step backwards to allow the family to participate, along with the multidisciplinary team, in the decision-making process regarding the most appropriate educational alternative. He also argues that the phrase “most appropriate educational alternative” camouflages this initiative, which aims to return to segregated special education.

However, the most regressive guidelines, in his opinion, are those that propose to provide specialized and high quality educational services in inclusive classes and schools, specialized classes and schools, or bilingual classes and schools for the deaf to all those who require this type of service. Sassaki (2020) wonders: Why was “quality” mentioned only in the context of SEA? Why is there a suggestion that only specialized schools provide this level of quality?

The scientific community associated with the Disability and Accessibility Thematic Group of the Brazilian Association of Collective Health (Abrasco), the Committee for Accessibility and Inclusion of People with Disabilities of the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz), the Observatory of Special Education and Educational Inclusion (OBEE) and Acolhe Down also opposed the decree. For them, the decree violates the Constitution because it allows the segregation of people with disabilities under the old justification of including “special people” in “specialized environments”, and violates

the autonomy of mothers and fathers of people with disabilities to decide what they think is best for their children, including education (Abrasco, 2021, p. 1).

The Manifesto, by accusing Decree 10,502/2020 of violating constitutional rights because it gives more autonomy to mothers and fathers of people with disabilities, reminds us of the power of agency that non-human actants have in social phenomena. The legal device, a non-human, influences decisions about which institution is best for enrolling students with disabilities. In terms of the agency of objects, Latour (2012, p. 108-109) notes that, in addition to serving as a background for human action, things must authorize, permit, grant, stimulate, induce, insert, influence, interrupt, enable, and prohibit.

Anped, through its Working Group on Special Education (WG15), and ABPÉE, together with other organizations, have also expressed their opposition to the decree, as mentioned above. According to these institutions, this document leads to the privatization of education. In addition, they believe that by returning to the biomedical model of disability the document reinforces processes of segregation and discrimination against special education subjects. According to Diniz, Barbosa, and Santos (2009), the biomedical model of disability maintains that there is a causal and dependent relationship between physical impairments and the social disadvantages experienced by people with disabilities, a thesis that, as the authors state, has been challenged by the social model of disability. The LBI defines the concept of disability from the opposite perspective to the biomedical one, adopting the social perspective of disability, which considers “a person with a disability as a person who has a long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment that, in interaction with one or more barriers, may prevent their full and effective participation in society on equal terms with other people” (Brasil, 2015).

Thus, the Manifesto opposes this perspective, which places all the responsibility for educational failure on people with disabilities because it believes that it is social barriers that prevent people from participating fully. In agreement with this idea, ANT says that, when analyzing a social fact or phenomenon, it is necessary to take into account the entire network of associations and actants connected to what is being observed. There is no single person responsible because, for Latour (2012, p. 72), we never act alone; every action is shared, or rather, every action is assumed by others who lead us to act in a certain way and influence our decisions. This is also true in education, in the actions of learning and teaching, of inclusion or exclusion, several actors are responsible, not only people.

The National Union of Teachers of Higher Education Institutions (Andes) also opposes the decree, pointing out in a note that the new policy could, among other things, transfer public resources to private institutions, freeing the state from public investment in public schools, as well as the return of outsourcing in special education. The union argues that inclusive education has nothing to do with the creation of special schools/classes and asserts that inclusive schools need policies of access and permanence, with conditions of equity, accessibility, continuous training, methodologies, and an environment suitable for all students (ANDES-SN, 2021, p. 1).

In addition, Andes points out that as far back as 2008, with the PNEEI, the creation of special schools only for students with some type of disability was already outdated, since that policy advocated enrollment in regular classes with complementary specialized support. Moreover, he argues that the LBI imposes on public authorities the obligation to improve the educational systems to guarantee the conditions of access, permanence, participation, and learning through the provision of services and accessibility resources that eliminate barriers and promote full inclusion.

For its part, the National Association of Members of the Public Prosecutor's Office for the Defense of the Rights of People with Disabilities and the Elderly (Ampid) points out that the Constitution of the Republic, in article 208, item III, provides for the guarantee of SEA for people

with disabilities, preferably in the regular school system. It also states that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities argues that any differentiation, exclusion, or restriction based on disability that has the purpose or effect of preventing or rendering impossible the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, social, civil or any other field, constitutes discrimination.

According to a report by BBC News Brasil (Barifouse, 2021), Maria Teresa Mantoan, a researcher at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp) and a reference figure in studies on inclusion, said in an interview that the decree promoting the creation of specialized schools for people with disabilities violates the Federal Constitution and the LDBEN (Brasil, 1996). She explains that the latter is based on the constitutional principle that education is for everyone and does not allow for special schools or classes because these do not offer the basics, such as stages and levels of education, and cannot provide certificates.

On the other hand, the Unified Movement of the Visually Impaired of Belo Horizonte (Mudevi) issued a technical note supporting the decree. It claims that the document assumes a democratic character when it recognizes the right of those involved to choose where to study. It also argues that the movement is made up of many people with disabilities who have experienced the reality of mainstream and specialized schools and therefore have the right to express their opinion on the matter and decide which school best meets their special educational needs. Regarding the right to choose a special school, Crochík (2012, p. 49) says: “Some may understand that studying in special schools is not segregating because education is also exercised in the universality of the right, but the right of children to study together is violated.”

In relation to the bilingual education proposed in the new policy, the Brazilian Coalition for Inclusive Education — a group of 45 civil society organizations working in the areas of human rights and education of people with disabilities, children, and adolescents — has expressed its opposition to the approval of the bill. The organization argues that the bill, by proposing that bilingual education (Libras as a first language and written Portuguese as a second) be taught in schools, centers, and/or special classes, without guaranteeing any interaction with other social groups, is a step backwards in terms of inclusion policies and the rights of deaf people, whether they are signers or not, as it reinforces a paradigm of exclusion and discrimination. Moreover, it points out that the right to bilingual education in mainstream schools has already been guaranteed in our legal system since 2005.

On December 1, 2020, Supreme Court Judge Dias Toffoli suspended Decree 10,502/2020, which proposed the establishment of the National Policy for Special Education: Equitable, Inclusive, and with Lifelong Learning. The injunction was issued in Direct Action of Unconstitutionality (ADI) No. 6,590, to be submitted for review by the Plenary. The plaintiff in the unconstitutionality action was the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB), which claimed that the real aim of the decree was to discriminate against and segregate students with disabilities by promoting the creation of segregated schools and classes for this group.

In the midst of the debate generated by the special school versus regular school controversy, another actant stirred up the debate even more. The Minister of Education, Milton Ribeiro, during an interview with TV Brasil’s *Sem Censura* program (Figure 4) on August 9, 2021, caused controversy by stating that the inclusion of students with disabilities “hinders” the learning of other children who do not have disabilities. He went on to talk about “inclusivism,” which he defined as the situation in which a child with a disability is included in a regular classroom alongside children without disabilities. For him, in this situation, the child was not learning and was “getting in the way” of the rest of their classmates because the teachers did not have the team or the knowledge to deal with such a student. This speech had plenty of repercussions and provoked many expressions of rejection on social networks, as many considered his position prejudiced.

LEGAL RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Inspired by Latour (1994; 2011; 2012), we note that the arguments against Decree 10,502/2020 are revealed as a network of agents and interests that oppose the idea of a step backward in human rights. The existence of specialized schools is perceived as a disconnect from the proposal of inclusive education, which calls for a reconfiguration of educational structures to accommodate the diversity of students with disabilities. Advocates of inclusive education emphasize that it is the responsibility of the state to create the necessary conditions to ensure that schools are accessible, removing the barriers that hinder teaching and learning, since the school is a collective space that should serve everyone.

They also argue that the decree is a form of segregation and point to the lack of public policies that effectively promote the rights of people with disabilities. They call for the prioritization of budgets and the recognition of educators as essential measures to strengthen inclusion.

Finally, through the lens of TAR, the need to align national legislation with the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has become a fundamental requirement. This convention, which has the status of a constitutional amendment, establishes that the decree violates the Constitution, which guarantees specialized educational assistance (AEE) for people with disabilities, preferably in the regular school system, ensuring equal conditions of access and permanence for all students.

ASPECTS RELATED TO DIVERSITY

When analyzing the discussions about the decree, there is a significant divergence in the understanding of disability and its relationship to the collective. Inspired by Latour (1994; 2012), for some actants involved in the debate, human diversity is seen as an obstacle to participation in a heterogeneous environment. These actors claim that students with disabilities need specific resources and services that recognize their alternative ways of interacting with the world and learning objects.

On the other hand, groups opposed to segregation in special education argue that inclusive education is essential to promote less discriminatory and more respectful connections and interactions, such as Rocha, Mendes, and Lacerda (2021). They emphasize that this approach benefits not only students with disabilities, but also those without, by fostering acceptance of human differences and developing ethical principles. This expanded interaction reduces prejudice and increases the ability to meet the specific needs of all students through accessible pedagogical practices.

This understanding is consistent with the perspective that disability is not in the person, but in the barriers created by the environment, such as lack of adequate training for teachers, administrators, and other professionals, as well as deficiencies in physical, architectural, curricular, technological, and attitudinal accessibility. Thus, ANT invites us to see these interactions as a complex network in which each actor and factor contributes to building a more inclusive educational environment.

AUTONOMY OF CHOICE FOR STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

The decree's provision for families to choose the most appropriate school for their children with disabilities was seen by many as a step forward. This autonomy is seen as positive, as mainstream schools do not always meet the specific needs of children with disabilities, especially those with more severe impairments. However, it is argued that enrollment in environments that offer support only during after-school hours can be detrimental to those who need continuous and varied support.

During the public hearing, it became clear that, while this option is not unanimously desired by families, opponents highlighted a trend in the federal government's direction that seems to favor the special education model over inclusive education. This stance raises concerns because the choice of special education can segregate students with disabilities and limit their interactions with the rest of the school community, which goes against the constitutional principles of inclusion.

TAR helps us to understand these dynamics as a network of interconnected actors in which family decisions, government policies, and educational structures influence each other. Thus, the notion of inclusion becomes a complex issue in which adequate support and articulation between different actors is essential to ensure that all students can coexist in a diverse educational environment, in the terms put forward by Moreira, Silva and Silva (2021) and Rocha, Mendes, and Lacerda (2021).

SCHOOL CONDITIONS AND STRUCTURE

The groups advocating for the return of specialized schools and classes argue that regular schools lack adequate infrastructure, accessibility, appropriate materials, and qualified professionals, as required by the Education Guidelines Law and the Federal Constitution. They claim that poor teaching can have serious consequences for students, while special schools provide the conditions for people with disabilities to develop autonomy and be fully integrated into the world of work. For them, these schools are essential to provide differentiated and specialized care, in contrast to the studies of Moreira, Silva and Silva (2021) and Rocha, Mendes, and Lacerda (2021).

In counterpoint, from a Latourian perspective, we argue that the opponents point out that the necessary adaptations in mainstream schools require significant investments and that the PNEE emerges in a context of budgetary constraints for public policies, especially in education. They argue that spending on special education is disproportionate to the number of students enrolled in mainstream education. With adequate funding, the inclusive model has the potential to overcome these limitations, requiring the provision of accessibility resources, technology, and appropriate teaching materials. They therefore argue that investment should be directed to mainstream schools, as the special school model has proven ineffective.

TAR allows us to see this discussion as a complex network of interconnected actors, where different perspectives on inclusion and education reflect different interests and needs. Dialogue among these groups is crucial to building a truly responsive education system to diversity, recognizing that inclusion requires more than simply coexisting, but rather a commitment to transforming educational practices.

BILINGUAL SCHOOLS FOR THE DEAF

In the context of bilingual schools for the deaf, several groups have emerged in support, including members of the deaf community who see bilingual education, even in an exclusive space for the deaf, as an advantage. Inspired by Latour (2012), for these actants, inclusive education, as it is configured, undermines the linguistic rights of deaf people, since mainstream schools often do not offer Libras instruction. Therefore, they consider bilingual education as a fundamental right.

On the other hand, groups opposed to the decree argue that it is silent on oralized deaf people who do not use Libras as their main means of communication, such as Mantoan (*apud* Barifouse, 2021) and Moreira, Silva and Silva (2021). They claim that the standard does not recognize the diversity between deaf groups and prioritizes one segment over another. In addition, these opponents argue that, if children are educated in an inclusive environment at an early age, the next generation will be able to communicate fluently in Brazil's two official languages: Portuguese and Libras.

By following the network that outlines the controversy between the mainstream and the special school, and by observing the interactions and associations between all the actants involved — human and non-human — we can make some critical reflections on the perspectives presented by the divergent groups. This analysis highlights the need for an approach that recognizes and integrates the multiple forms of communication and linguistic rights of all deaf people and promotes a dialogue that is truly inclusive and representative.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

After the “black box” was opened with the enactment of Decree 10,502/2020, several controversies related to inclusive education arose and associations between human and non-human actants were formed. To achieve the goal of mapping the controversies, we followed the traces of inclusive education in a historical analysis of its trajectory until the proposal of a new special education policy. We identified the actants and observed their associations in the network, trying to understand the changes and transformations caused by the different elements. We traced the demonstrations against and in favor of enrolling children in special education, mapped the document that intensified the formation of divergent groups, and appropriated the arguments of each side to understand the central controversy. Based on this tracing of the network, we arrived at some conclusions, which, it should be emphasized, are not closed and stable, but always susceptible to transformations and associations that change the scenario again.

The arguments mobilized by the publication of the new special education policy, proposed in Decree 10,502/2020, which would have an impact on educational inclusion, point to an attempt to disregard the legal norms already established in defense of inclusion since the Salamanca Declaration, undermining the right to equal conditions of access and permanence in regular education for all students, contrary to the precepts of Brazilian legislation. In addition, the document revives a prejudiced view of disability associated with the biomedical model, which presents human diversity as an obstacle to collective participation, generating segregation and discrimination against students considered the target of special education.

We also note that the decree seeks to influence parents of children with disabilities to opt for specialized educational spaces, leading them to believe that these are more qualified, with teachers prepared to meet the specific needs of the students. There is a clear devaluation of the inclusive mainstream school. Furthermore, instead of investing in the mainstream school to reduce barriers to access for students with disabilities, the document promotes the privatization of education, with the aim of transferring public resources to private institutions to encourage a return to outsource special education.

For the inclusive model to work efficiently, it needs public policies, funding, and investment in teacher training. In this way, it will be able to overcome the limitations in the structural conditions of schools and acquire assistive technologies, teaching materials, and support materials necessary for the development of students. As for deaf students, it is necessary to invest in the teaching of Libras in mainstream schools to break the communication barrier that hinders learning and interaction in the school environment. Instead, the decree encourages deaf students to be sent to spaces designed exclusively for them, depriving them of collective interaction.

In light of all that has been analyzed, observed, and mapped in the legislation, documents, and facts mobilized by Decree 10,502/2020, we can say that it promotes segregating and discriminatory practices that represent a step backward in the education of people with disabilities. This study has brought to light a symmetrical view of events related to inclusive education. It was possible to see other elements involved in the actions of inclusion or exclusion. Non-human actants have always been part of actions shared with humans or even other non-humans, but they have been invisible.

The research indicated that educational inclusion depends on resources, policies, technologies, accessible environments, and practices. These requirements are also only possible through the association of humans and non-humans. As Latour (2012, p. 72) states, actions are taken by others who guide us to act in a certain way and influence our decisions. This is also true for the actions of inclusion or exclusion. Several actants are responsible for this, not just people.

It is important to mention that on January 1, 2023, when Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva took office as the new president-elect, he revoked Decree 10,502/2020, reinforcing the continuity of the National Special Education Policy from the perspective of inclusive education. Thus, a new direction was given to the debates on regular and special education. We will continue to follow the flow of the network and observe the direction that inclusive education will take from now on.

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