THEMATIC SECTION: DISABILITY
STUDIES AND EDUCATION

The Meanings Attributed to Disability by Basic Education Professionals

Geisa Letícia Kempfer Böck[I]
Rose Clér Estivalete Beche[I]
Solange Cristina da Silva[I]

[I]Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina (UDESC), Florianópolis/SC – Brazil

ABSTRACT – The Meanings Attributed to Disability by Basic Education Professionals. For this article, which takes as its theoretical basis the field of Disability Studies in Education, we aimed to investigate the conceptions attributed to disability among educators working in basic education. The data was collected during a virtual training course in which more than 300 basic education professionals took part, using a socio-demographic questionnaire and another with open-ended questions before the training course, with thematic content analysis. The results provide theoretical and methodological contributions to the field of work from an intersectional inclusive perspective, in which basic education professionals can adopt ethical and intentional stances on care in their pedagogical practices to combat ableism.

Keywords: **Disability Studies in Education. Continuing Education. Ableism. Ethics of Care. Inclusive Education.**

RESUMO – Os Sentidos Atribuídos à Deficiência por Profissionais da Educação Básica. Para este artigo, que tem como aporte teórico o campo dos Estudos da Deficiência na Educação, objetivamos investigar as concepções atribuídas à deficiência entre educadores atuantes na educação básica. A obtenção dos dados ocorreu em uma formação virtual na qual participaram mais de 300 profissionais da educação básica, por meio de um questionário sociodemográfico e outro com questões abertas pré-formação e a análise foi temática de conteúdo. Os resultados trazem contribuições teórico-metodológicas para o campo de atuação em uma perspectiva inclusiva interseccional, na qual os profissionais da educação básica possam adotar atitudes éticas e intencionais do cuidado em suas práticas pedagógicas no combate ao capacitismo.

Palavras-chave: **Estudos da Deficiência na Educação. Formação Continuada. Capacitismo. Ética do Cuidado. Educação Inclusiva.**

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Introduction

Education, as a field of political struggle, has been strongly influenced by the global capitalist economy. This highlights the fact that the market and education tend to be aligned, causing curricular changes that are in line with current economic interests. Historically, we have seen political actions, supported by the media, that take away rights and make the conditions of teaching work more insecure at all levels of education. This process is evident in teacher training courses whose main focus is the practical dimension to the detriment of the historical, political and economic conditions that shape and define the training process and, consequently, pedagogical work. The fragmentation of training programs, encouraged by the notions of competences to be developed, distances future education professionals from the knowledge needed for an integral, ethical and aesthetic human formation committed to the society in which they are inserted.

To understand education as an instrument of emancipation, freedom and justice is to realize that it is resistance and a struggle against the dismantling and disrespect of the differences that exist and constitute subjects. There is a process of coercion against human complexities by encouraging and attempting to homogenize groups that insist on valuing and performing differences.

Nóvoa (2011, p. 14) points out that

> At the beginning of the 21st century, teachers reappeared as irreplaceable elements not only in the production of learning, but also in the construction of inclusion processes that respond to the challenges of diversity and in the development of appropriate methods for using new technologies.

To this end, the training ground for these professionals should be a fertile ground for learning and co-existing, encouraging future teachers to exercise ethical, aesthetic and politically committed practices with respect for individual differences.

In contrast to this perspective, the ever-present and veiled presence of ableism has characterized the curriculum in different ways, whether through sparse dialogue between disciplines, unbundling and focusing on certain content in a partial and intentional way, or through the fragile space dedicated to themes that publicize human specificities and promote confrontation with an idealized normocentric perspective of the student.

In view of the above, the aim of this study was to investigate the conceptions attributed to disability among educators working in basic education on an extension course in "Disability Studies", prior to their training on the subject. In order to achieve this aim, we have set ourselves the following specific objectives: a) to identify the previous conceptions of disability held by the participants in the continuing training course in Disability Studies; and b) to discuss the contributions of Disability Studies to the training of basic education professionals.

We would like to highlight the importance of recognizing the conceptions of disability that permeate everyday school life, since these conceptions guide teaching practices, as indicated by Bock, Gesser and Nuernberg (2019), Bock et al. (2020) and Storey (2007).

The conceptions of disability indicated by the charitable, biomedical and social models vie for space on the educational scene. The understanding of the phenomenon of disability is portrayed through the idea of pity, or the lack centered on the body, generating incapacity or, from an opposite perspective, looking at the barriers that prevent the participation of these subjects. This has consequences for pedagogical practice, and is visible in the school context when we look at the place occupied or allowed for children with disabilities and their participation or not in school.

When a teacher has a charitable conception of disability, which is informed by religious culture (mainly Christian), their practices turn to charity, and helping those who have been victimized by life's misfortunes. The only thing left to do is to provide assistance so that the person can move on, which in turn leads to their perception of themselves as being in need of this charity and the lack of investment in their education by teachers and managers. This view, as shown by researchers such as Davis (1995), endorses attitudes of benevolence on the part of people without disabilities, making the teacher feel pity, assigning less challenging tasks, assuming that people with disabilities are only there to socialize and not as subjects of rights, thus enabling negligence in the organization of the team to meet their educational needs and in the fight for accessibility, making the government less responsible for ensuring their rights as citizens. The belief that someone can only gain access when someone charitable facilitates it does not guarantee that this person will receive a dignified education and exercise their civic rights.

Consequently, when teachers hold an idea based on the biomedical model of disability, their teaching practices in basic education tend to be grounded in the view that disability is an individual condition, caused by genetic, congenital or acquired issues, and that it needs to be treated or corrected in order for the student to fit into the standard of normality (Shakespeare; Watson, 2015). From this perspective, teachers can adopt teaching practices that are more geared towards correcting bodies, using individualized resources and strategies that end up segregating them from the rest of the class, separating students with disabilities from the others in group activities, indicating that they have low expectations for their academic performance and hence there is little justification for investing in the learning process, advocating the idea that they are only at school to socialize. In this way, the person is neglected while the disability is perceived and valued. The subject plays the passive role of patient (Augustin, 2012).

Contrary to this, from a conception based on the social model of disability, the teacher recognizes that the cause of the disadvantage is not in the subject, but in the contexts and inequitable opportunities for their learning, so the teaching practices end up being more inclusive, such as the use of curricula suited to the class as a whole, with strategies and resources that can support each and every learner (Tomlinson, 2004; Valle; Connor, 2014). The strategies adopted value diversity and collaboration between students, and there is an expectation and recognition of the academic performance of those who experience disability.

Authors in the field of Disability Studies, such as Tom Shakespeare and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, point out that the social conception of disability considers the importance of recognizing and eliminating the social barriers that limit or prevent people with disabilities from fully participating in society, and that school inclusion is a matter of human rights and social justice (Nussbaum, 2013). Therefore, teaching practices based on this conception seek to promote equal opportunities and the valorization of differences, as opposed to the segregation and discrimination practices present in the biomedical conception of disability.

Methodological path

School contexts are often transformed into research sites and the professionals who work in these spaces are routinely invited to take part in such studies. In contrast to an emancipatory research perspective, the information collected, the analyses made and the results obtained do not return to the field of research, and therefore do not provoke/instigate the transformation of the reality that motivated the study. This demotivates the professionals involved and reaffirms the imposing force of the existing structure. This way of doing research needs to be reframed, enhancing the place of the participant as a producer of knowledge, transforming and committing all those involved. As Ximenes, Pedro and Corrêa (2022, p. 6) argue, when carrying out research with teachers:

> [...] it is important to consider them as subjects-authors of their own training process, reducing the hierarchization between researchers and research participants and contributing to critical-collaborative reflection on their teaching practice, as well as the limits and possibilities of the various factors involved in their work.

These same researchers also point out that research-training has been used in different ways and with different intentions in order to train and emancipate people, in which the production of knowledge is underpinned by the development and continuous reflection of pedagogical praxis, anchored in the unity of theory and practice. In this sense, our research is in line with the proposal of inseparability between teaching, research and extension, forming a unified whole with these pillars, which is very important in terms of producing scientific knowledge and social transformation. As Campos (2020, p. 6) shows us, “bringing the university closer to basic education schools can give new meaning to the teaching-research-extension triad, so that theoretical knowledge in conjunction with practice promotes transformative actions".

This research methodology has emerged in education as an important possibility for the development of emancipatory research that has the following hallmarks: horizontality in the relationships between collaborators; the dialectical movement between theory and practice; and critical reflection on the aspects that involve the teachers' field of activity, always considering the socio-political context that engenders the micro-social reality (Ibiapina, 2008).

The "teacher-training research" methodology was used in this investigation in the following stages:

1. Planning and initial diagnosis – identifying the problem or challenge in teacher training that we wanted to investigate. This stage included mapping the current training situation in different education networks, in which we held conversations with teachers at different times, as well as pedagogical coordinators, managers and others involved in the training process;
2. Defining goals and planning of actions – based on the problem identified, we established the research-action goals and planned the actions to be carried out in order to achieve those objectives. This stage included defining intervention strategies and activities to be carried out throughout the process;
3. Implementation of actions – time to put the planned interventions into practice, so we aligned the research project with the extension program, aiming for synchronicity of time and actions, making the path more fluid and organic. In line with the chosen research concept, we used the extension program, which includes teacher training using the theoretical basis of Disability Studies in Education;
4. Observation and data collection – during the development of the extension course, we carried out systematic observation and collected data on the practices and interventions undertaken by the education professionals involved, using the Moodle virtual environment. The course activities served as a space for collecting information relevant to the research locus;
5. Reflection and analysis of results – at this stage, reflections on the data collected, based on the participants' comments, made it possible to identify challenges and progress made throughout the process. Considering that this is a research-training project, we were able to count on the effective participation of the teachers and others involved in the virtual forums that were made available in the Moodle Learning Environment and also in the synchronous classes, in the dialogues with the guest speakers, allowing for reflection on the initial conceptions presented in the questionnaire;
6. Replanning and new actions – from what we had experienced up to that point in the research, we organized new actions and strate-

gies. This cycle of planning, action, observation and reflection was repeated until all the research goals had been achieved; and

7. Documentation and release of results – this was the moment to record all the actions taken, the changes observed and the lessons learnt throughout the research process. Because we understand our commitment to the field of research, as well as to all those involved in the process, we endeavored to share the results and conclusions with the academic community and other interested parties, such as through the writing of this article, in which we set out the initial analyses of the study.

Authors such as Selma Garrido Pimenta (2005), in her studies on teacher training, and Ibiapina (2008), in the context of research-action, are important references to support the application of this research methodology. These authors have contributed to the development and consolidation of this approach, providing guidelines and theoretical foundations for carrying out research-action in the area of teacher training, which dialogues in a very coherent way with the theoretical field of Disability Studies in Education.

Context and research participants

The initial research took place in direct relation to an extension action promoted by the *Laboratório de Educação Inclusiva* (Inclusive Education Laboratory) (LEdI/Udesc). As mentioned, research-training is inseparable from teaching, research and extension. As such, we organized training for basic education professionals, in which three municipal education networks were allocated a total of 300 places. The course was held in distance learning mode, with synchronous and asynchronous sessions from 10/03/2023 to 07/08/2023, with a total workload of 60 hours.

The course on Disability Studies in Education aimed to enable reflection on school practices in welcoming human variations from an intersectional inclusive education perspective, based on the theoretical field of "Disability Studies in Education".

The program covered the following topics:

- Topic 1 – History and Conceptions of Disability;
- Topic 2 – Ableism and Ethics of Care;
- Topic 3 – Universal Design for Learning and Collaborative Planning; and
- Topic 4 – Accessibility – change the school to not change school.

For this article, we will focus on analyzing the first course activity, an initial questionnaire, organized using Google Forms, which was answered without identifying the participant or the school network. This document sought information to identify the group's profile and some of the conceptions that these professionals held, especially about what and how they perceived disability to be. We would like to emphasize that the questionnaire was drafted by the teacher-researchers of this article, in conjunction with researcher Laureane Marília Lima da Costa[1] who acted as a facilitator in the extension program to which the research is linked.

In this first activity, in addition to describing the profile of the course participants, the sociodemographic questionnaire also included open-ended questions about the concept of inclusive education and disability. This activity was completed by 143 of the 300 participants enrolled on the course. Although the document included various pieces of information, the question that mobilized this study was – "When we say DISABILITY, what comes to mind? Tell us a little about your understanding of disability". For this question in particular, we received 131 answers. The results will be presented below, followed by analyses based on the categories that emerged from the basic education professionals' statements.

Results

To analyze the answers obtained, we first identified the main categories that emerged from the statements made by the education professionals; then we categorized each entry referring to the answers to the question on the concept of disability. As researchers, we checked the 131 answers, of which 120 were in total agreement with the categories, resulting in an agreement rate of 91.60%. However, it is important to emphasize that we disagreed with 11 of the answers, resulting in a disagreement rate of 8.40%.

After collective discussion and analysis, the discordant answers were revised, culminating in a reduction in the rate of disagreement, considering the majority of our votes. This process highlighted the importance of a careful and reflective approach to analyzing and interpreting the results.

In addition, the answers were categorized according to the approach adopted by the participants, resulting in 91 answers (69.46%) categorized as belonging to the biomedical model, 32 answers (24.42%) attributed to the social model and eight answers (6.10%) that could not be identified.

Table 1 – Analytical categories

Category	Quantity of answers	Percentage
Biomedical Model	91	69.46%
Social Model	32	24.42%
Not identified	08	6.10%

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

The results obtained highlight the different perspectives and opinions in the sample studied, which could have significant implications for understanding the subject in question and, consequently, for teaching practices. Based on the results, we can see the complexity of analyzing responses in academic research, emphasizing the need for careful and ethical approaches to data interpretation. The following discussion was organized on the basis of the two main categories that emerged regarding conceptions of disability: biomedical and social.

Discussions

It is important to note that this research arose from the concerns instigated by the extension courses that the researchers have been running for more than a decade, including undergraduate and graduate courses linked to teacher training. The course participants' interest in other theoretical perspectives primed and motivated them to look more deeply into other ways of conceiving and relating to disability and were regularly recorded in the evaluations. In this way, we set ourselves the challenge of scientifically proving the scope and importance of employing efforts in the field of extension, which motivate practices based on the ethics of care that respect and value the presence of people with disabilities in the educational space. To this end, in this pilot study, we initially intend to ascertain whether the research-training has achieved the proposed objectives in the sense that the participants are not just objects of enquiry, but active participants who act on the local reality, based on the reflection instigated by the research. From here, we will be planning further, broader stages, which will involve partnerships with researchers linked to Higher Education institutions in different regions of Brazil, to be discussed and aligned in a way that is committed to the anti-ableist struggle and connected to people with disabilities.

When it came to categorizing and preliminarily analyzing the answers provided by the course participants in the initial questionnaire, we were faced with the challenge of interpreting the relationship between meaning, pertinence and language, since language reflects and allows us to articulate meaning and experience (Potter; Wetherell, 1987; Widdicombe; Wooffitt, 1995). However, as there is no linearity in research involving real women and men, some of the answers were assertive and determined in their structure, allowing the researchers to interpret them more objectively, while others needed to be revisited and rediscussed collectively in order to extract their essence. Furthermore, others, due to their sentence structure, punctuation, and choice of a broad, generalized connotation or use of incomprehensible terms, were classified as Not Identified (NI). Although they are few in number, they are also significant, as they lead us to consider the locus of this research and the extent to which being linked to the academic context can influence the answers obtained.

As described above, the research was carried out with students from an extension project, which had widely publicized its links with the university and the study group that discusses the principles of the Social Model of Disability. Perhaps, and this is a preliminary interpretation, the choice of generalized answers and/or those not linked to the charity model may reveal an attempt to bring their answers into line with the supposed expectations of academia. This is a bias that needs to be explored in greater depth, not least considering the importance of this first stage for the general context envisaged for the study.

Biomedical understanding of disability: incapacity and/or lack

Our society produces exclusions on a daily basis in a bid to dominate and colonize society in order to maintain normocentrism (Brogna, 2005) and guarantee the homogeneity of the species, which directly affects those with disabilities. In the school environment, a place that mirrors and reproduces social values, concepts and ideologies, this logic is perpetuated in the conception of disability and, consequently, in pedagogical actions. From a biomedical perspective, disability is centered on the body and it is the body that is the focus for the development of activities, in the sense of adapting it to the context, so that it comes as close as possible to normality, considered to be an ideal to be achieved.

This conception of disability imposed on people with disabilities on a daily basis determines their self-perception and the way they experience disability, defining a marginalized place in the educational space. The understanding of disability as a lack and not a power means that all the efforts made by this person will be fruitless, not allowing him or her to achieve the ethos of completeness in relation to the normative standard. In the categorization process, the word “lack” was present in the responses of 20 participants. Participant 7 (P7), when asked what disability is, says that it is: “Deficit, lack. Disability indicates something incomplete. I don’t particularly like the term. But I understand its applicability”. This participant, even though she dislikes the word, uses it because, in her view, lack is a natural attribute, attributing to people with disabilities a state of incapacity, corroborating what participant 11 (P11) points out: “Disability is the incapacity or lack of ability to carry out an activity to the standard considered normal for human beings, as a result of a deficiency”. It is this comparison with normality, imposed by the biomedical conception, that imbues such individuals with a condition of inferiority and, consequently, subalternity, incompleteness and the incapacity to manage their lives. This perception of disability as a lack is historically and culturally constructed. As Ciantelli, Leite and Nuernberg (2017) argue, the naturalization of normative demands makes people with disabilities feel indebted to normative standards.

For participant 19 (P19), “Disability is the definition of people who have some physical or non-physical characteristics that prevent them from carrying out an activity to the standard considered normal for human beings”. This concept, based on comparing what is normal, transfers the disabled person to a state of incapacity. This way of conceiving them as “less”, incapable, is based on the definition of ableism and provokes and strengthens the process of exclusion. For Campbell (2001, p. 44), ableism is "a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produce a particular type of self and body (the body standard) that is projected as perfect, typical of the species and therefore essential and fully human. Disability is then considered a diminished state of the human being".

In line with this concept, Mello (2016) explains that ableism is established by comparing those with and without disabilities, in which the supposed abilities of the non-disabled, who are seen as normal and superior, serve to show the supposed limitations of those with disabilities, who are viewed as abnormal and inferior.

Campbell (2008), when discussing internalized ableism, comments that, from childhood, people with disabilities are inserted into a world in which disability is seen in a negative light and this message is reaffirmed on a daily basis, causing an internalization of negativity. According to Campbell (2008, p. 3), "All of us, regardless of our subject positions, are molded and formed by the politics of ableism".

Another important aspect that emerged in the participants' comments is the fact that disability is attributed to a special need, as portrayed by participant 40 (P40), "Disability refers to the thought of a special need, since we live in a society that is still not very inclusive. Impediments of a physical, mental, intellectual or sensory nature". Placing disability in a "special" ethos, on the one hand, legitimizes the inoperability of teachers, since what is special falls under the remit of a specialist, understood here as being a Specialized Educational Assistance ("SEA") professional, or even a health professional such as a psychologist, doctor, speech therapist, among others.

Gabel and Connor (2008) discuss the medical significance given to disabilities, which, by placing them in this locus, become individual issues. The person with a disability becomes the subject of treatment, the object of intervention, disregarding any interventions to improve the social and political processes that are fundamental to ensuring the conditions necessary for a full and dignified life. From this same perspective, Valle and Connor (2014, p. 60) criticize special education, which for more than 30 years has been based on the biomedical model "instead of 'treating' the social processes and policies that constrain the lives of people with disabilities".

The idea of treating disability is expressed in the concept expressed by participant 22 who said:

> Disability means a person who has been diagnosed with something for which there is no cure, but who can and should develop their abilities so that they can have a better life expectancy. I don't see disability as a hindrance or a label, but rather as different specificities that can be explored to improve and develop each person's capacity (P22).

When the perspective is the development of ability, we are subliminally referring to the correction of bodies. After all, there is an effort to make them more able or to develop the maximum of their corporeality in order to get closer to the conceived idea of normality. Under this aegis, people with disabilities were, for many centuries, segregated in presumably corrective institutions, under the impact of medical or educational knowledge. In these spaces, their bodies were tortured, tied up, cooled, medicated and isolated from social and family life. Allegedly, all the treatments, teaching methods and intentions were aimed at the full development of their abilities, the correction of their defects and the adjustment of their behavior. It was based on the principle of ability that we tainted human history with eugenic methods and practices, in the pursuit of perfect, healthy, beautiful and productive bodies. This process delegitimized and interiorized men and women, condemning them to the margins of social life and ratifying the "domination sustained by the privileges of normalization." (Nardi; Kveller; Machado, 2018, p. 12).

When we look at the locus of education, the discussion of ability becomes the basis for maintaining and defending the still segregated spaces of special education. To move forward in this discussion, we need to delve deeper into the issues of biopolitics, which justify routines of comparison, differentiation, hierarchization, homogenization and, consequently, exclusion (Foucault, 1988). These are processes that ratify and define the place of people whose bodies insist on not fitting the idealized model and who gradually become docile and servile to neoliberal capitalist ideology. Participant 136's (P 136) response materializes this discussion: "The word that initially comes to mind when talking about disability is lack, but that doesn't mean absence. Lack can be supplied, replenished, remedied". The perception expressed by the participant, that a disabled body can be "remedied" with the use of techniques, strategies and curricular adaptations, most likely suggested and organized by special education, expresses the thinking that permeates the collective of schools. This justifies delegating pedagogical decisions to qualified professionals and, consequently, relieving oneself of the political commitment to propose pedagogical strategies to embrace human diversity (Bock; Nuernberg, 2018).

Social understanding of disability: a relational experience

According to researchers Tom Shakespeare (2006) and Carol Thomas (1999), from the perspective of the Social Model of Disability, having a body with impairments is part of intersectional and human characteristics. In other words, disability is conceived as relational and intrinsic to the subjects' life experience. It is relational because it is founded on the body/environment relationship, perceiving barriers as impediments to their participation in the context in which they are inserted. It is intersectional because the being is complex and has multiple characteristics.

Authors such as Nancy Fraser (2008) and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) contribute to our understanding of the intersectionality of the disability experience by emphasizing the importance of considering the multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion that can affect these people due to their intersection with other identity characteristics, such as gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, regionality, financial conditions, religiosity, among others that shape them. This intersectional dimension is revealed in the comments made by some of the research participants when they point out that "Disability is one of the many characteristics, connections and markers that traverse and constitute each subject" (P 70), or indeed when they say that "It is one characteristic among so many others of the human being." (P 107).

From this intersectional perspective, people with disabilities are perceived without categorical distinctions that place them on levels of ability, and disability is the experience of a body situated in a context that can be more or less oppressive, depending on the conception of disability and other social markers that form the subject.

This is why we see the school environment as a mirror of these social practices, whose conceptions are carried over into pedagogical practice, a fact that reaffirms the importance of uncovering the conceptions that guide pedagogical endeavors. After all, according to one of the research participants, "[...] disability must go beyond a person's physical or sensory limitation and consider the importance of inclusion and accessibility to ensure that all people have equal rights and equal opportunities to participate fully in societal life" (P 31).

This participant reaffirms the importance of one of the assumptions discussed in the social model, which is effective participation that ensures, safeguards and encourages agency (Butler, 1993) for people with disabilities in the different sectors of their lives. To this end, it should be borne in mind that life in society only takes place in a way that is interdependent and interwoven with a network of relationships that are necessary for survival (Kittay, 2011; Tronto, 2007) and that

> [...] autonomy as interdependence allows us to reposition the dimension of help in our relationships, without disqualifying the process of autonomy – if we are all interdependent, we all need help. Asking for help is not just an appropriate action, but an essential one (Gonçalves, 2018, p. 63).

Another participant sees disability as "something that determines that a person interacts with the world in a unique way and that in a certain situation they will need support or resources" (P 42). Her account reveals how necessary it is to act on contexts, remove barriers and implement resources to broaden the possibilities for all people to participate, a premise that is in line with the propositions of theorists who discuss the ethics of care.

The ethics of care in the school context, based on the ideas of Eva Kittay (2011), Garland-Thomson (1997) and other disability studies theorists, emphasizes the importance of fostering caring relationships in the educational environment, both publicly and collectively. This approach recognizes that each individual has unique and distinct needs, and advocates the importance of valuing the diversity and uniqueness of each person. In this sense, care becomes not just a question of physical assistance, or something in the field of assistance, with its hierarchies of power, but also emotional and social, ensuring that all students feel accepted and respected, as the participant points out when she emphasizes “Respect differences.” (P 28).

Participant 82 emphasizes this relational perspective and the need to overcome barriers in order to promote access, when addressing a “unique subject, with particularities that need to be respected. It is precisely at school that we need to think about the different forms of pedagogical interventions that favor participation.” (P 82).

This excerpt highlights the importance of recognizing the uniqueness of subjects and promoting pedagogical interventions that respect their particularities, which resonates with authors such as Carol Gilligan (2014), known for her work on the ethics of care, and Nel Noddings (2002), who emphasizes the importance of caring relationships in the educational context to ensure a welcoming and inclusive school environment. In addition, the premise of curricular access can be underlined, as researchers in the field of disability studies have shown different possibilities for promoting access and, among these possibilities, we would like to draw attention to Universal Design for Learning, which can be considered a proactive practice in removing barriers, as indicated by different international researchers such as David Rose and Anne Meyer (2006), Anne Meyer, David Rose and David Gordon (2014), Margaret King-Sears (2009), Frederic Fovet (2020) and researchers from Brazil such as Geisa Bock (2019), Solange Silva et al. (2020) and Ana Paula Zerbato (2018).

These practices contribute to breaking down structural ableism in school contexts, because according to Ferreira et al. (2023, p. 15), “teacher training needs to be linked to an inclusive, intersectional perspective, and to an understanding of disability based on the theoretical field of disability studies, in order to tear down the structural ableism present in schools”.

The findings of the research show that some basic education professionals are moving closer to a social understanding of disability, but it is still necessary to establish a training agenda that enhances anti-ableist practices, because according to Participant 124, talking about disability “sounds more like the attention I need to pay when it comes to providing an egalitarian teaching environment, in terms of my work”.

Final considerations

In this stage of the research, we sought to analyze the models used to understand disability that permeate and constitute the conceptions of basic education professionals. The path taken in this study and reported here, albeit in its initial form, registers what took place during an extension course on Disability Studies, including a questionnaire, which revealed these conceptions and was completed by the course participants prior to the start of their training on the topic.

The primacy of the perception of disability, identified in the results, expressed by basic education professionals came from a biomedical perspective. This leads us to conclude that in the school environment the change in practices towards a focus on social barriers, which are what really prevent children and young people with disabilities from participating and learning, is still incipient. The emphasis is still on the disability located in the subject, signified as a lack, an injury and the discourse that people with disabilities are less able, revealing the ableist nuances that overflow into education. We are concerned about this because the conception of disability adopted by education professionals governs and guides their pedagogical practices and, in this sense, they do not focus on eliminating the social barriers imposed on the person, but on an attempt to normalize bodies.

In a country like Brazil, where great strides have been made in terms of legislation guaranteeing the rights and accessibility of people with disabilities, socio-economic structures still persist that strengthen perceptions of disability as deficit and incapacity, which ends up having major repercussions on the structural and structuring ableism of basic education.

The variability of students that comprise the school context requires work that guarantees the conditions of access and participation for all, but this work must be attentive to the intersectional characteristics of oppression that are present in the school collective. Although the proposed research does not emphasize the issues of ableism, ethics of care, interdependence and intersectionality, we cannot fail to mention the importance of these categories in promoting a truly inclusive education. Therefore, among some of the possibilities for breaking down ableism and promoting an education based on these categories, we present UDL (Universal Design for Learning) as a fundamental alternative, as it takes into account the different learning styles of each student, which requires curricular flexibility to meet the specificities that arise in the classroom.

The results showed the need for training that breaks with the biomedical perspective of approaching disability, so that practices can be reconfigured to guarantee participation and educational justice for all students. As such, promoting Disability Studies in Education, with training that is based on the mission and purposes of this field, has proved to be of great importance and has had quite beneficial effects on the consolidation of an inclusive culture in everyday school life. However, there is still a need for more research into the effects of continuing training based on the theoretical field of Disability Studies in Education, with the aim of understanding how these practical changes take shape, based on the actions of a research-training program. In addition, greater investment is recommended in emancipatory research, which encompasses the initial and continuing training of basic education professionals, based on discussions that reveal the ethical-political and collective commitment to an education that is attentive to the variability of students.

Finally, we believe that this study can contribute not only to the theoretical-methodological field, but also to the professional practice of educators, encouraging the adoption of ethical and intentional attitudes of care in their pedagogical practices. The challenge now is to disseminate these reflections and experiences in order to expand the positive impact of continuing education in basic education and promote a more inclusive and equitable society.

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Note

[1] *In Memorian.* We note here the contribution made by a fellow researcher who, through her feminist activism, has left us lessons and the strength to continue in the anti-ableist struggle.

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Geisa Kempfer Bock is a Professor at the Laboratory of Inclusive Education (LEdI) of the Distance Education Center (Cead) at the State University of Santa Catarina, a professor in the Professional Master's in Inclusive Education/PROFEI/CEAD, and in the Academic Doctorate PPGE/FAED/UDESC. She holds a degree in Special Education from UFSM, a Master's in Education from UFSC, and a PhD in Psychology from UFSC.
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0272-2686
E-mail: geisa.bock@udesc.br

Rose Clér Estivalete Beche works as a professor at the Distance Education Center of the State University of Santa Catarina, coordinates the NAC (Educational Accessibility Center) of CEAD, and is a researcher and extensionist affiliated with the Laboratory of Inclusive Education (LEdI) at Cead. She holds a degree in Pedagogy (2002), a Master's in Education from UFSC (2005), and a PhD in Education from the Postgraduate Program in Education at UDESC (2023).
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1306-6100
E-mail: rose.beche@udesc.br

Solange Cristina da Silva is the Coordinator of the Laboratory of Inclusive Education (LEdI) at the Distance Education Center (Cead) of the State University of Santa Catarina, a professor in the undergraduate Pedagogy program and the Professional Master's in Inclusive Education/PROFEI/CEAD. She has a degree in Psychology from Unimep, a Master's in Education, and a PhD in Psychology, both from UFSC.
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5479-4879
E-mail: solange.silva@udesc.br

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