

THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN ATTACHMENT BOND WITH STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER ¹

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to analyze the understanding of a group of teachers from a preschool regarding the importance of an attitude based on sensitivity and availability for building an attachment bond between teachers and students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The procedure used was interventionist research, of the pedagogical type. Ten preschool teachers participated in the research. Observation, interview and document analysis techniques were used to collect data. The data collected were treated based on discursive textual analysis. The results point to the intervention meetings as moments of self-formation, in which the teachers thought, studied and reflected theoretically about their actions, acquiring more theoretical awareness about their practical acts and understanding that attitudes of sensitivity and availability affect the construction of an attachment bond and, consequently, the learning of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Keywords: autism spectrum disorder; attachment; school inclusion

La construcción de vínculo de apego con alumnos con Trastorno del Espectro Autista

RESUMEN

En esta investigación se tuvo como objetivo analizar la comprensión de un grupo de profesoras de una escuela de Educación Infantil a respecto de la importancia de una actitud basada en la sensibilidad y disponibilidad para la construcción de vínculo de apego entre profesor y alumnos con Trastorno del Espectro Autista. El procedimiento utilizado fue el de la investigación intervencionista, del tipo pedagógica. Participaron de la investigación 10 profesoras de la Educación Infantil. Para la recopilación de datos se utilizaron las técnicas de observación, la Interview y el análisis documental. Los datos recolectados se trataron a partir del análisis textual discursivo. Los resultados apuntan para los encuentros intervencionistas como momentos de autoformación, en que las profesoras pensaron, estudiaron y reflexionaron teóricamente sobre sus acciones, adquiriendo más consciencia teórica sobre sus actos prácticos y comprendiendo que posturas de sensibilidad y disponibilidad afectan la construcción de vínculo de apego y, consecuentemente, el aprendizaje de estudiantes con Trastorno del Espectro Autista.

Palabras clave: trastorno del espectro autista; apego; inclusión escolar

A construção de vínculo de apego com alunos com Transtorno do Espectro Autista

RESUMO

Esta pesquisa teve como objetivo analisar a compreensão de um grupo de professoras de uma escola de Educação Infantil quanto à importância de uma postura baseada na sensibilidade e disponibilidade para a construção de vínculo de apego entre professor e alunos com Transtorno do Espectro Autista. O procedimento utilizado foi o da pesquisa intervencionista, do tipo pedagógica. Participaram da pesquisa 10 professoras da Educação Infantil. Para a coleta de dados foram utilizadas as técnicas de observação, a entrevista e a análise documental. Os dados coletados foram tratados a partir da análise textual discursiva. Os resultados apontam para os encontros interventivos como momentos de autoformação, em que as professoras pensaram, estudaram e refletiram teoricamente sobre suas ações, adquirindo mais consciência teórica sobre seus atos práticos e compreendendo que posturas de sensibilidade e disponibilidade

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afetam a construção de vínculo de apego e, conseqüentemente, a aprendizagem de estudantes com Transtorno do Espectro Autista.

Palavras-chave: transtorno do espectro autista; apego; inclusão escolar

INTRODUCTION

The crescent inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Brazilian regular education has made educators doubtful when it comes to teaching and handling these students' behaviors (Camargo, Silva, Crespo, Oliveira, & Magalhães, 2020). There are plenty of students demonstrating difficulties, unpreparedness, and the perceptions of teachers regarding students with ASD (Favoretto & Lamônica, 2014; Sanini & Bosa, 2015), and pointing at the need to promote actions for initial and continued formation related to knowledge regarding the disorder and the best practices of pedagogical intervention (Camargo et al., 2020; Nunes & Schmidt, 2019; Nunes, Schmidt, & Nunes Sobrinho, 2021; Stetsenko & Selau, 2018). However, beyond the knowledge of practices that are based on evidence, it is understood that one of the important theoretical knowledges that a teacher needs is related to the comprehension of the development of attachment bonds and its implications in the learning process for students with ASD. Attachment between teachers and students is an important element to be considered in a classroom with students with ASD. Such attachment is closely connected with experiences students go through at school with peers and teachers, who frequently fail to give them credit for their learning potential (Borges, Magalhães, & Camargo, 2024). Bosa (2002a), for example, demonstrated the necessity to develop research works that intended to investigate the possible relation between a rudimentary skill that is a precursor of more complex social skills (shared attention) and the sort of attachment that is especially connected to the quality of care that they receive.

Initial studies by John Bowlby originated the first formulations and the postulates of the attachment theory. Attachment, according to Bowlby's proposal, is constructed along the first childhood, by means of interactions between the child and the caretakers (Bowlby, 2019a, 2023). Thus, attachment is the result of an affection-based relation among partners.

Considering the need for new studies and insufficient investment on new research works on these themes from the perspective of inclusive education, it is believed that studies that investigate and interventions that promote attachment bonds in children with ASD in the school context can help eradicate misconceptions referring to the possibilities of development and the disabilities that are associated with these children (Santos, 2017). The development of safe attachment to a teacher/caretaker, who is sensible and available to respond the needs of students with autism, might contribute to successful

inclusion. This requires knowledge and understanding by these professionals on the theory of attachment and its implications in the school context for a student with autism. Thus, researchers had the objective to analyze the perceptions of a group of teachers at a child education school regarding the importance of an attitude that is based on sensibility and availability for the construction of attachment between teachers and students with ASD.

METHOD

The adopted procedure was based on interventionist research of the pedagogical type (Selau, Hammes, & Gritti, 2016). The intervention method aimed at developing a project for the distance formation of teachers by means of the web videoconference model. To Khatib and Chizzotti (2020), this communication tool promotes an environment where it is possible for people to communicate and collaborate freely, which might produce an impact on learning. The formation took place at a time of social isolation, imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, which justifies the adopted model.

8 meetings were conducted, with a course load of 1 hour per week, adding up to two months of work. Before the meetings, a text was sent to the participants, by *e-mail*, referring to the topic that was going to be approached. The texts were selected in accordance with the theoretical referential of the research. The initial 20 minutes of the meetings were used for the explanation of the content by the researcher/teacher. The rest of the time was spent on the realization of a discussion of the presented content and of the material that was read with the participants.

10 teachers of child education participated in the research, at the average age of 51,2 years, all female and residents of the city of Pelotas, in the south of Brazil. The criterion for the selection of participants was that they should be teachers from a given school (the name of the school remains confidential) in the municipality of Pelotas. This school is a reference for assistance to students with ASD in the city under investigation.

The procedures for the gathering of data for assessment of the intervention were: observation (Marconi & Lakatos, 2021), interview and documental analysis (Mattar & Ramos, 2021). All ethical procedures regarding the scientific research with human beings were followed. The interventions occurred between October 20, 2021 to December 08, 2021.

A total sum of 8 observations were realized, recorded and transcribed by the researcher teacher (first author). The result is a length of 6 hours and 50

minutes of observations. A protocol was used, of which the observation was guided by the following questions: What were the languages used by the individuals? What are the relations among the teachers? What do they say about their practice and about their students with ASD?

Interviews with 9 teachers were realized (one teacher could not be interviewed due to personal matters). The interviews were recorded and transcribed and researchers obtained a total length of 2 hours and 47 minutes of recorded material. A semi-structured interview script was used. It contained the following questions: what did you understand by attachment? Would you say that attachment between teachers and students might help in the process of inclusion for students with ASD? How? Which practical elements develop attachment? What do you do in the classroom to develop attachment? Or what could you do? What did you understand by sensibility? How do teachers demonstrate sensibility or how can they adopt it in their pedagogical practice? What did you understand by availability? How do teachers demonstrate availability or how can they adopt it in their pedagogical practice?

The documental analysis was made with the material that was written by the teachers. It was proposed that, at the end of the intervention, on a piece of paper, participants answer the questions, so that they could register what they had learned concerning the approached theme. Five written reports were produced. The number of 8 meetings was determined by the saturation of data. The length of 6 hours and 50 minutes in addition to 2 hours and 47 minutes of interviews and techniques that were triangulated with the documental analysis, proved enough for the realization of the study.

The collected data were treated by means of the discursive, textual analysis of Galiazzi and Moraes (2020). The referred process employs a cycle of analysis that is configured into three stages (unitarization, categorization, and communication), which present themselves as a movement that leads to the emergence of new comprehensions regarding the researched reality. In this research, by means of the induction method, researchers organized the corpus material into sets of similar information, by means of an intense process of comparison and contrast.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of the results, two categories were revealed (*Children with disabilities at the child education school; Attachment and ASD*), which originated subcategories, which were subsequently discussed. The *attachment and inclusion* subcategory presents the results that refer to the possible contributions that an attachment bond between teachers and students with ASD might make to the inclusion of these students at regular learning schools. All participants comprehended that the creation of an attachment bond between

student and teacher helps in the process of inclusion of students with ASD. Regarding this theory, they perceived the importance of treatment and the type of bond that teachers will have with these students, which will bear direct influence on their inclusion process. To Teacher O (Interview 6), teachers present school to students with ASD, teachers are in charge of creating a relation of complicity, and of making students feel safe in the new environment. By means of affection, teachers end up as the connection between students and school. The attachment bond between a student with ASD and the teacher, then, becomes favorable and helps inclusion. Teacher G (Interview 2) punctuates that “by means of the attachment bond and care taking, students can feel safe in the school environment and have the opportunity to fully develop”.

Although studies on attachment generally focus on the relationship between children and the mother figure (Bowlby, 2019, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c), this behavior can be projected towards many other individuals (Bowlby, 2023). Ramires and Schneider (2010) remind us that attachment is a “type of bond in which someone’s sense of safety is closely linked to the figure of attachment” (p. 26). In child education, this is demonstrated when a child experiences a context that is unfamiliar and disconnected from primary references of attachment, they will seek for proximity to a figure that is considered capable and that pays attention to their needs (Mattos, 2013). Bowlby (2023) himself emphasizes that a baby, when it is born, has an array of routes that are potentially open: the way a child is going to follow is influenced by the environment the child encounters, especially the way this child is treated. Thus, the teachers’ observations are corroborated by Bowlby’s theory (2023), because the way a child is received by teachers influences their development.

During the meetings, it was possible to construct a concept of attachment, based on Bowlby’s theory (2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2023), but discussed from a pedagogical perspective. In the *Concept of attachment and types of attachment relations* subcategory, researchers observed the results that refer to the concepts of attachment that were constructed by the teachers. Their definitions of attachment were related to: 1) attachment as a human necessity (Teacher M, Interview 5; Teacher MR, Interview 4; Teacher O, Interview 6); 2) as a feeling of safety for children based on the teacher’s reception (Teacher J, Meeting 5; Teacher R, Interview 1); 3) attachment related to attachment bonds among those who were involved (Teacher G, Interview 2; Teacher MR, interview 4; Teacher O, Interview 6; Teacher P, Interview 7); 4) attachment as a connection between Teacher and student (Teacher J, Meeting 5; Teacher J, Interview 3; Teacher P, Interview 7; Teacher T, Interview 8); 5) attachment as a relation that results in protection and safety (Teacher J, Interview 5; Teacher R, Interview 1; Teacher M, Interview 5; Teacher

G, interview 2; Teacher MR, Interview 4; Teacher V, Interview 9; Teacher P, Interview 7); 6) attachment as a relation of proximity that transmits a relation of proximity that results in trust (Teacher R, Documental Analysis 1; Teacher M, Interview 5; Teacher V, Interview 9).

Based on the participants' observations, from a pedagogical perspective, attachment is an attachment bond between students and teachers, created by necessity, which leads to a feeling of safety for children, which allows students with ASD to explore the environment more easily and interact better with others. This comprehension gets closer to the one by Bowlby, especially when the author argues that "by referring to attached children [...] I mean that this person is strongly predisposed to look for proximity and contact with this person and also predisposed to do that under specific conditions" (2023, p. 40).

Despite these perceptions, the participants did not make any distinctions between attachment and attachment behavior. Bowlby (2023) distinguishes attachment from attachment behavior. By thematizing someone who is attached, he refers to the children's predisposition to seek, get closer, and keep in touch with familiar people, under specific conditions. In the other hand, attachment behavior refers to the action performed in order to obtain or keep proximity with specific individuals who are considered as more provided with aptitude to solve problems. Attachment behavior (as well as sexual behavior, exploratory behavior, nutritional behavior, and caretaking behavior) is an example of behavior with biological roots. Each one of these behaviors contributes to the survival of the species and has its own function. Thus, to Bowlby (2023), attachment behavior is pre-programmed to develop when conditions are favorable. That does not imply saying that the appropriate models of behavior are observed completely without being learned. The author indicates that, by means of observation and interaction with peers, appropriate models of attachment behavior are learned. Also, according to the quality of the relation between the person who is attached and the object of attachment, there might be some type of emotion: if everything is all right, there is a sense of security; if the relationship is imperiled, there are feelings of jealousy, anger, and anxiety; there is a rupture in the relation, which is caused by pain. So, there is strong evidence that the way an individual's sense attachment behavior organizes itself, also depend on the types of experiences they go through. In this sense, it is fundamental that teachers understand the differences between attachment and attachment behavior because such comprehension might have an impact on the way they comprehend the relation between attachment and ASD (1) and in the way of observing a child with ASD (2).

The way Teachers see children with ASD (1) must begin with a comprehension of how children manifest

attachment. Regarding children with ASD, although Kanner and Asperger² did not mention it in their initial description of the disorder (Bosa, 2002b), this adaptative attachment behavior can be indistinctly observed among humans. For a long time, people with autism were described and understood as without the capacity for attachment to other people due to their difficulties in the socio-communicative area which are marked by attitudes of isolation and aversion to social interaction. However, many subsequent research works that investigated attachment in children with ASD do not share this view. The results of the literature review which investigated attachment in children with ASD made by Sanini (2006) pointed out that children with autism are capable of distinguishing their mothers or caretakers from strangers, that the demonstration of attachment does not take place by means of behaviors which are different than those of children with typical behavior and that there is a display of behaviors that are indicative of safe attachment relations. The same conclusions were obtained from a meta-analysis including studies on autism and attachment conducted by Rutgers, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Van Ijzendoorn and Van Berckelaer-Onnes (2004). Results demonstrated that the development of attachment is compatible with autism, although the seriousness of the disorder and the presence of intellectual deficit as comorbidity are more associated with unsafe attachment, evidence that keeps being obtained and debated in a more recent systematic review conducted by Teague, Gray, Tonge and Newman (2017) regarding protection and risk factors for the establishment safe attachment relations.

Sanini, Ferreira, Souza and Bosa (2008) also observed that 10 investigated children with ASD, in comparison to children with typical development and Down's Syndrome, clearly distinguished their parents from those of strangers and directed more attachment behaviors to the person to played the role of caretaker. It was possible observe differences in the quality of expression of attachment. According to what was indicated in the literature, children with ASD express differently their attachment to other people. However, the non-conventional way of demonstrating attachment does not imply absence of this behavior. Thus, it becomes important to get to know the factors that influence the development of relations of safe attachment and the developmental results for individuals with ASD (Giannotti & Falco, 2021, Teague et al., 2017).

Concerning the way a child with ASD displays necessities and requests, Bosa (2002a) and Sanini (2006) suggest that, in order to understand them, it is necessary

¹ The first publications on autism were written by Leo Kanner (1943) and Hans Asperger (1944), who, independently (the first in Baltimore and the second in Vienna), provided systematic reports of the cases they accompanied and the respective theoretical suppositions for this syndrome, which was unknown until then (Bosa, 2002b).

to let go of conventional forms of observation (2): it is necessary to be attentive to the particularities with which children manifest their attachment behaviors. Giannotti and Falco (2021) defend that an examination of attachment in ASD requires taking into consideration the developmental stage of a child and the use of appropriate methods for their age. The authors register, for example, the prevalence of studies with children at pre-school age to the detriment of older children, children of school age, and adolescents. Although the study by Rutgers et al. (2004) does not find statistically relevant differences in the safe attachment of children based on chronological development, Giannotti and Falco (2021) emphasize the need for studies that include the assessment of implicit representations of attachment and its implications on older children.

During the meetings, it was possible to observe that there are several types of attachment relations and what matters to teachers is the treatment of the pedagogical element. Observing the speeches of the interviewed teachers, researchers identified the comprehension that the construction of an attachment bond does not invalidate the existence of other types and, even when it comes to safe attachment, it can be displayed in different ways (Teacher R, Interview 1; Teacher O, Observation 5).

To Bowlby (2023), it is possible that the same child will develop different forms of attachment with different people, which might be the result of the way it is treated. Based on this argument, Sanini et al. (2008) observed differences in the quality of expression of attachment in children with ASD and reached the conclusion that, because of their condition, they express their attachment to people in a different way. Thus, the behavior of students with ASD cannot be considered as avoidance-oriented, for example, promoting a so-called forceful inclusion into the categories proposed by Bowlby (2023) and restricting itself only to external behaviors for analysis. There are perception and cognition alterations that imply an attitude of "social distance" in students with ASD (Sanini, 2006) who must be taken into consideration when the objective is to develop a safe relation between teachers and students with ASD. The teachers were able to recognize that they also expressed themselves in different ways, and things are not different for children with ASD: the basic premise is that people express themselves in different ways. Therefore, it becomes necessary to know other people to get along well, no matter if they have a disability or not.

Just like people express themselves in different ways, there are different attitudes that can be adopted and benefit the construction of an attachment bond, described in subcategories named *Teachers' attitudes*. Such attitudes have been listed (and will be described in detail later on): willingness; ability to realize the project in collaboration with families; trustworthiness; ability to create a suitable environment; proximity; clarity,

objectiveness, and patience; intervention whenever necessary.

In this sense, it is primordial that teachers feel willing to get involved (Teacher MR, Interview 4; Teacher R, Interview 1; Teacher J, Interview 3; Teacher T, Interview 8). By talking about someone who is attached to someone else, Bowlby (2023) refers to the fact that this person is willing to seek proximity and contact, so, attachment only happens when there is willingness. In this case, it is necessary for teachers to be willing to construct an attachment bond with the children with ASD. Therefore, seeing students as individuals with the potential to learn is an important factor when it comes to investing in affection-based relations and learning for children.

Another attitude that was emphasized was the ability to realize a project in collaboration with families (Teacher J, Interview 3; Teacher T, Interview 8; Teacher O, Interview 6; Teacher MR, Interview 4). Such relation carries important information on children, their development, habits, routines, attachments, and tastes. It also provides us with clues as to how to proceed in classrooms that include students with ASD. This is the reason why, in Camargo et al. (2015) and Borges, Camargo and Valle (2024) find an orientation for a project that is based on the collaboration with families and might expand the project realized at school to other environments, while promoting the generalization of learned skills. Teachers need to be trustworthy individuals (Teacher T, Interview 8; Teacher J, Interview 3; Teacher O, Interview 6; Teacher R, Interview 1; Teacher M, Interview 5).

According to Mattos (2013), by entering Child Education, children find themselves in an unfamiliar environment, away from primary attachment figures, while trying to find someone to attach themselves to and adapt to this new situation. A trust-based situation is only possible when there is proximity relation, which must be kept by the access to the reference figure. A posture of proximity to students is referenced by the Teachers (Teacher P, Interview 7; Teacher R, Interview 1), which, according to Bowlby (2023), is primordial in the construction of an attachment bond and for learning.

In this scenario, it is also important that teachers create a suitable environment for the development of attachment, and subsequent learning (Teacher R, Interview 1; Teacher T, Interview 8; Teacher G, Observation 3). According to Mattos (2013), sensibility and availability, in combination with a safe environment and of predictability, lead to the establishment of safe attachment. To Bowlby (2023), the co-regulation of behaviors leads to cooperation. The teachers need to make their practice flexible, and respond to the students' needs and/or preferences in order to obtain their cooperation in the realization of propositions, and which end up becoming valid for both. Thus, it is necessary to adapt to students, especially when it comes to inclusive

education. Modifying space, methodologies, and the organization of an environment is a sensible attitude by the teacher. Some things will be possible, others will not, but whatever is within the reach of teachers must be modified and adapted for these students. According to the Teachers (Teacher R, Interview 1; Teacher T, Interview 8; Teacher O, Interview 6), the plan does not always include students with ASD, so it becomes necessary to make this planning flexible in order to contemplate the needs of these students.

A clear, objective, and patient teacher is able to contribute to the learning process of students with ASD (Teacher M, Observation 8; Teacher G, Observation 8). Being objective and able to provide simple and clear instructions as to what students are expected to do are attitudes that are listed by Camargo et al. (2015) and Santos and Lyra (2016) and that help in the comprehension of students with ASD. According to the authors, the activities for students with ASD must be presented step-by-step, so that they can understand the teacher's proposition and realize the activity.

According to Bowlby (2023), therapists must play the role of promoters, "actively intervening only when clearly necessary" (p. 25), some of the Teachers mentioned the teachers as intervenors (Teacher P, Interview 7; Teacher T, Interview 8). Teachers must never be passive and should be able to know when to take initiatives, and intervene with students only when necessary.

Although recent literature indicates blank spaces that need to be better investigated in the area of attachment and autism theory, there is consensus that the atypical development does not exclude the possibility of the development of attachment relations. This conclusion, especially referring to the public of Child Education, is shared by Santos (2017), which emphasizes the relation between the construction of attachment behavior in the school environment with teachers and the exploration of the environment and the engagement in pedagogical activities. In fact, a crescent body of evidence points at improvements in shared attention, in playtime behavior, and in the educational aspects of children with ASD and safe attachment is hinted at by Teague et al. (2017).

Subcategory *Concept teacher's sensibility* presents results that refer to the concepts of sensibility that are constructed by the Teachers: 1) sensibility is a comprehension that we are all different from each other (Teacher R, Interview 1; Teacher J, Interview 3); 2) identification of what other people feel like and like (Teacher R, Interview 1; Teacher G, Interview 2; Teacher MR, Interview 4, Teacher J, Interview 3; Teacher M, Interview 5; Teacher P, Interview 7); 3) the capacity to perceive the signs by the children in order to respond suitably to the students' needs (Teacher O, Interview 6; Teacher R, Interview 1; Teacher M, Interview 5; Teacher V, Interview 9; Teacher T, Interview 8; Teacher MR, Interview 4); 4) familiarity with students (Teacher

R, Interview 1; Teacher MR, Interview 4; Teacher P, Interview 7; Teacher V, Interview 9); 5) preoccupation with the students' full formation (Teacher G, Interview 2); 6) Attention (Teacher O, Interview 6; Teacher P, Interview 7); 7) Empathy (Teacher P, Interview 7).

By sensibility we understand that it is the capacity to perceive and interpreting children's signs (Bowlby, 2023). The participants' observations lead to the notion that sensibility, from the pedagogical point of view, is characterized by a teacher that is able to recognize the preferences and needs of students. Based on that, the teacher is able to build a biological proposal that responds to needs and potentialities. The teacher's sensibility is connected to getting to know students and use the knowledge to develop an effective pedagogical practice.

In their reflections on which attitudes would be sensible in practice, the teachers thought of the following possibilities: regular self-criticism (Teacher P, Interview 7); proximity to child (Teacher R, Interview 1); Attention to the student's manifestations (Teacher V, Interview 9); Detection of the signs that the student gives out, and awareness of what the students likes and dislikes (Teacher O, Interview 6); real familiarity with the student, based on the signs the student displays, and the ability to respond to that and propose activities that the student can realize, that is, willingness to act in accordance with the student's needs (Teacher T, Interview 8; Teacher G, Interview 2; Teacher O, Interview 6); adoption of an agreeable tone of voice and that is in accordance with a respectful attitude (Teacher O, Interview 6); manifested interest in the things the student likes (Teacher O, Interview 6; Teacher M, Observation 8; Teacher V, Observation 8); access to the materials the school provides and, whenever possible, opportunities for the child to have access to favorite contents (Teacher T, Interview 8); organization based on the student's needs (Teacher R, Interview 1); propensity to reinvention (Teacher T, Interview 8). To these teachers, these are some elements that reveal the teacher's sensibility, in practice, and end up taking on many of the attitudes that, in their opinion, a teacher must have regarding a student with autism in the context of inclusion. The association between the caretaker's sensibility and safe attachment for children with ASD lacks further investigation (Giannotti & Falco, 2021), but the formative basis of this affection-based relation has been considered, not only with parental figures, but also with caretakers and teachers in the school environment (Mattos, 2013).

Subcategory *Concept of teacher availability* presents results that refer to the participants' concepts of availability. Thus, they conclude that availability means: 1) availability to provide assistance to the student and their needs (Teacher R, Interview 1; Teacher T, Interview 8); 2) openness to listening (Teacher J, Interview 3); 3) promptness to respond to the student's needs and

requests, while providing encouragement and help whenever necessary (Teacher MR, Interview 4; Teacher P, Interview 7; Teacher T, Interview 8; Teacher V, Interview 9); 4) promptness to respond, when requested, to encourage and provide assistance, though not directly interfering, that is, ability to wait until the student asks for help (Teacher MR, Interview 4; Teacher O, Interview 6); 5) being attentive, being helpful, and actually help (Teacher P, Interview 7; Teacher T, Interview 8).

By availability, it is understood that it means “being available, ready to respond, when requested, to encourage and, maybe, provide assistance, though only actively intervening when clearly necessary” (Bowlby, 2023, p. 25). The participants’ observations are in alignment with this definition because, their opinion, is the teacher’s decision to be there for the student with ASD when needed, and also the teacher’s decision to remain there and pay attention to the student’s needs.

The results of the research that present a pedagogical point of view on the definition of availability, discussed by the participants, are important contributions to pedagogical practice with students with ASD (and, also, with the other students). The constructions of the participants describe guidelines for interventions with students with ASD that can be used in other school realities.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research aims at analyzing the perceptions of a group of teachers at a Child Education school regarding the importance of an attitude that is based on sensibility and availability for the construction of an attachment bond between a teacher and a student with ASD. The results point at the intervention meetings as moments of self-formation, in which the teachers though over and theoretically reflected on their actions, while acquiring more theoretical awareness regarding their practices and realizing that attitudes of sensibility and availability affect the construction of attachment bonds and, consequently, the learning process for students with ASD.

Based on the participants’ reports, it was possible to notice the levels of perceptions that teachers obtained during the intervention. They demonstrated that they acknowledged the importance of their professional attitude, as direct influencers of the construction of safe attachment that produces an impact of the learning processes of all students, including the ones with autism, although not all concepts related to Bowlby’s theory have been fully comprehended. It is possible to accept the possibility that, by getting safely attached to the teacher, it becomes possible for the student with ASD to feel safe, and to stay in classroom and explore the pedagogical moments that are provided there and have access to scientific knowledge.

It is concluded that school performance in Child Education is related to a feeling of safety; the attachment

to individual and environmental matters. Children with ASD that go to school seek for a sensible and capable figure so they can get attached and, thus, adapt to the new environment: a safe attachment bases can help a child be better able to explore the environment. The construction of this connection can be encouraged with certain attitudes by the teacher, who might regulate their behavior in order to be in harmony with the child. An attitude of sensibility and availability may lead to cooperation and adaptation by the child at school, as well as their inclusion and learning. The need for future studies on the theme is evident.

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