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Vygotsky's legacy in Brazilian inclusive education: (Trans)formation and singularity

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Abstract

Context and relevance. The study investigates the contributions of Lev Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory to Brazilian special/inclusive education, particularly regarding the constitution of the subject with autism in school contexts. The theoretical framework is grounded in the concepts of drama, freedom and singularity, understanding the schooling process as a privileged pathway of human (trans)formation. **Objective.** To analyse how pedagogical knowledge impacts the constitution of the child with autism, based on the notion of constitutive singularity. **Hypothesis.** The schooling process anchored in critical-emancipatory pedagogical knowledge operates as a promoter of the subject's humanisation, in opposition to traditional clinical approaches that reduce the subject to diagnosis and to ableist perspectives that position them in a state of devaluation. **Methods and materials.** The research, adopting a cultural-historical approach, was configured as intervention-research with an eight-year-old student with autism, enrolled in the second year of primary education. Video recordings, audio recordings, photographs, field diaries and interviews with the teacher, the child and his mother were utilised. Data were analysed through the microgenetic approach. **Results.** The analysis of two paradigmatic episodes of story retelling through illustration and physical education class evidences that the child, upon inserting personal elements into school tasks, manifests his will and singularises himself, expressing the drama of the social personality as a struggle for existence. **Conclusions.** Understanding singularity as a dialectical, historical, cultural and dramatic process allows us to overcome pathologising views and to recognise that disability is not a destiny, but a condition that, in relations with others and with culture, can be transformed into potentiality.

Keywords: Vygotsky, special/inclusive education, autism, drama, singularity, defectology

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Наследие Л.С. Выготского в инклюзивном образовании Бразилии: (транс)формация и психологическая уникальность

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Резюме

Контекст и актуальность. В исследовании рассматривается, как культурно-историческая теория Л. С. Выготского помогает развитию специального и инклюзивного образования в Бразилии. Особое внимание уделяется тому, как ребенок с аутизмом становится субъектом школьной жизни. Теоретическую основу работы составляют понятия драмы, свободы и уникальности. Школьное обучение рассматривается как особый путь, на котором человек формируется и преобразуется. **Цель.** Цель исследования — понять, как педагогические знания и подходы учителя влияют на развитие ребенка с аутизмом (прим. перевод.: при этом автор опирается на идею, что каждый ребенок уникален, и эта уникальность не просто “прилагается” к нему, а является основой, на которой строится его становление как человека). **Гипотеза.** Школьное обучение, построенное на критически-эмансипаторном педагогическом знании (прим. перевод.: то есть на знании, которое помогает ребенку осознать себя, критически относиться к окружающему миру и действовать самостоятельно, а не просто подчиняться правилам), помогает ребенку развиваться как человеку. Этому противостоят традиционные клинические подходы, которые сводят ребенка к диагнозу, и эйблистские взгляды (прим. перевод.: то есть взгляды, при которых человек с инвалидностью или особенностями развития считается «хуже», «неполноценным» и поэтому обесценивается), обесценивающие его. **Методы и материалы.** Исследование проводилось в рамках культурно-исторического подхода и было организовано как интервенционное. В нем участвовал восьмилетний мальчик с аутизмом, ученик второго класса начальной школы. Для сбора данных использовались видеозаписи, аудиозаписи, фотографии, дневники и интервью с учителем, самим ребенком и его матерью. Анализ данных проводился с помощью микрогенетического подхода. **Результаты.** Анализ двух показательных эпизодов — пересказа истории через рисунок и урока физкультуры — показывает: когда ребенок привносит в школьные задания что-то свое, он проявляет свою волю и обретает уникальность. Тем самым он выражает драму социальной личности — борьбу за то, чтобы существовать. **Выводы.** Понимание уникальности как диалектического, исторического, культурного и драматического процесса позволяет преодолеть патологизирующие взгляды и признать, что инвалидность не является приговором. При освоении культуры и во время общения с другими людьми инвалидность может стать источником развития.

Ключевые слова: Выготский, специальное/инклюзивное образование, аутизм, драма, уникальность, дефектология

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Introduction

The present study emerges from a doctoral investigation (Novaes, 2022) conducted with Miguel (a pseudonym), an eight-year-old child with a clinical diagnosis of autism, enrolled in the second year of primary education at a school in the interior of the state of São Paulo. Grounded in the theoretical-methodological assumptions of the cultural-historical approach, this empirical work is guided by the principles of intervention-research — understood as a practice constructed with the other, and not about the other. Such methodological orientation, central to our investigative stance, reflects a fundamental ethical commitment: the production of knowledge in the field of special education must proceed from dialogue, reciprocity and the recognition of the research participant as a subject of their own development, and not merely as an object of clinical or pedagogical scrutiny (Novaes, de Freitas, 2021).

The conceptual architecture of this study is animated by a triad of categories — drama, freedom and singularity — which, although not explicitly systematised as such in Vygotsky's work, emerge organically from his dialectical, historical and cultural understanding of human development. The notion of drama (Novaes, 2025), in particular, finds its genealogical roots in Vygotsky's profound engagement with the literary imagination of Fyodor Dostoevsky and in his understanding of conflict as the engine of developmental transformation.

The choice of the Vygotsky' framework for the analysis of issues pertinent to special/inclusive education is by no means fortuitous. Vygotsky dedicated a significant portion of his scientific production to the field known as defectology — a domain of knowledge that, lamentably, remained on the margins of educational debates

for decades, both in the Soviet and Western contexts. The resurgence of interest in his writings on the subject over the last two decades has revealed the potency of his formulations for understanding the development of children with disabilities, particularly with regard to the emphasis on qualitative aspects of development, the centrality of social relations and the critique of approaches that treat diagnosis as destiny (Lubovsky, 2024; Rzyankina, et al., 2026).

For Vygotsky, disability cannot be reduced to an organic condition, but must be understood as a “social position” — that is, as a relation between the subject and their social environment, mediated by culture and history. This perspective, radically innovative for its time, implies that the “defect” is not an intrinsic characteristic of the subject, but a relational phenomenon, which can only be understood in the context of social interactions. As Vygotsky argues, the child with disabilities is not “less developed” than others, but develops differently, through alternative pathways, which must be understood and potentiated by education (Vygotsky, 1997). This perspective, however, should not be confused with an optimistic or romantic view of disability, as if supercompensation were an automatic or guaranteed process. On the contrary, Vygotsky emphasises that compensation is only possible to the extent that the child has access to adequate cultural mediations, particularly language and school education (Vygotsky, 1997). Without such mediations, the primary defect tends to generate increasingly serious secondary defects, in a downward spiral process that can culminate in exclusion and social marginalisation.

Contemporary research has increasingly recognised the relevance of cultural-historical activity theory for analysing systemic contradictions

in inclusive education (Yoo, Bal, 2026). In the Brazilian context, the precariousness of inclusive education has been documented by Camargo and Tada (2023), while Kumador and Muthivhi (2026) uncover cultural regularities underpinning the pedagogy of learners with disabilities. These studies demonstrate how cultural-historical approaches can reveal hidden assumptions that shape educational practices. The critique of behavioural and medical approaches that reduce education to a set of control and normalisation methods has been extensively documented (Yoo, Bal, 2026; Lubovsky, 2024; Kumador, Muthivhi, 2026). These approaches, often justified under the pretext of “early intervention” or “treatment”, fail to recognise the subject’s historicity and developmental possibilities. As Lim and Thaver (2025) demonstrate in their analysis of inclusive education in Singapore, even well-intentioned policies can perpetuate deficit-oriented perspectives when they are not grounded in a deep understanding of human development.

In the Brazilian context, readers of Vygotsky assume the task of recovering the Vygotsky’ legacy for special/inclusive education, seeking, particularly, its ethical-political foundations, in light of Vygotsky’s critique of bourgeois and fascist psychology. Such an endeavour seems particularly necessary at a historical moment in which, paradoxically, the advancement of inclusive school policies coexists with the strengthening of behaviourist and medicalising approaches that, under the pretext of “early intervention” or “treatment”, end up reducing education to a set of techniques of control and normalisation (Yoo, Bal, 2026; Lubovsky, 2024). The absence of a comprehensive review of the field of methodologies and empirical research prevents an objective assessment of the novelty of the conclusions formulated and the significance of the obtained results in terms of refuting the approaches that the author criticises.

Materials and methods

This intervention-research, grounded in a cultural-historical framework, was conducted during the 2019 academic year in the state of São Paulo. The study focused on “Miguel”, an 8-year-old student diagnosed with autism in his

second year of primary education, alongside his teacher (“Quezia”) and her trainee (“Esther”). Miguel is autonomous, communicates well, maintains excellent interpersonal relationships, and possesses basic literacy and numeracy skills. Fieldwork frequency was gradually reduced in the second semester to prevent excessive student attachment to the researcher.

Data were collected through class observations, teacher discussions, and family interviews, documented via multimedia recordings and field diaries. To investigate the role of pedagogical tasks, the impact of pedagogical knowledge on classroom practices, and the student’s developmental process, the study employed a microgenetic analysis (Göes, 2000; Meira, 1994; Wertsch, 1988). This involved a five-stage process: selecting and transcribing episodes, identifying the child’s participation modes, analyzing knowledge-constitution relations, and synthesizing developmental indicators.

For this article, two paradigmatic episodes (Episode 1 in Literacy and Episode 5 in Physical Education) were extracted from the broader doctoral corpus (Novaes, 2022). They were selected for providing rich microgenetic indicators of Miguel’s volitional acts and clearly illustrating the dialectical relationship between pedagogical knowledge and his constitution across distinct contexts. Intervening episodes (2, 3, and 4) were omitted due to space constraints and lesser thematic relevance. (Note: a typographical error in the original text referencing “episode four” on page 12 should correctly read “episode five”).

Results

Results are presented in two axes of analysis that dialogue with the specific objectives of the study, with emphasis on a paradigmatic episode that expresses the drama of Miguel’s singularisation in the school context.

Episode 1 — Miguel in Reading and Writing Practice — Retelling via Illustration of the Cordel “The Gossiping Old Woman”.

Contextualisation: We are in the Portuguese language class. Teacher Quêzia takes the register and reads the story of the gossiping old woman. Miguel pays attention. At the funny mo-

ments he smiles, sometimes excessively, to the point where Teacher Quézia or trainee Esther say, “Miguel, if you don't stop I'll tell your mother”. At the end of the story, the children are asked to do a group task, a retelling of the story through drawing. Concurrent with this moment, Teacher Quézia resumes a passage from the story.

T. 1: Teacher Quézia: said Maria to Rita, said Rita to Sofia, said Sofia to Neusa, said Neusa to her aunt, not even the internet reached all that commotion.

During the teacher's resumption of the story, Miguel, who was in the middle, moved to the end, smiled and at the same time bit his little finger's nail. Mariano, leaning against the wall, is no longer smiling and Isabel smiles awkwardly, as if she is embarrassed. After the teacher's resumption ends, Isabel takes the drawing for Quézia to see, Miguel continues biting his little finger's nail, and now scratches his head.

T. 2: Teacher Quézia: look how cool what they did (and shows the drawing to the class). What did you do? Let Miguel and Mariano explain a bit.

Miguel walks towards Quézia, holds the drawing with both hands, looks at it, while Mariano and Isabel push each other to see who will tell.

T. 3: Teacher Quézia: what did you do, tell me?

T. 4: Miguel: (speaks and points at the drawing) here I forgot things and I forgot Ben 10

T. 5: Teacher Quézia: what does Ben 10 have to do with the story?

While Quézia questions Miguel, Isabel and Mariano smile, Miguel looks at his colleagues, and smiles, concurrent with his laughter, he glues both hands between his legs and crouches a little to look at the drawing, he rocks twice, forwards and backwards.

T. 6: Teacher Quézia: no, okay, I don't want to know what Ben 10 has to do with the story? I want the story!

T. 7: Miguel: we drew, we were in the city

T. 8: Mariano: gossiping

T. 9: Teacher Quézia: was he gossiping? Hmm... you may sit down.

The children go to sit down, continue smiling. Teacher Quézia looks at me and asks “Prof, do you think it's right to draw Ben 10? It's not

in the context”, I respond “no”, and Quézia asks me what I think about asking the reason for the drawing, I agree with the idea.

T. 10: Teacher Quézia: why did you put Ben 10? Why Mariano?

T. 11: Isabel: it wasn't me who drew it

T. 12: Mariano: (speaks seriously and points at Miguel) it was him who asked!

T. 13: Teacher Quézia: Miguel, why did you ask for Ben 10?

T. 14: Miguel: (stops smiling, looks at the teacher and responds) because I like it!

T. 15: Teacher Quézia: but was there Ben 10 in the story of the gossiping old woman?

T. 16: Miguel: (speaks as if in a children's chorus) nooo... (and laughs)

T. 17: Teacher Quézia: no... you're supposed to draw the gossiping old woman, and not Ben 10, okay?

T. 18: Miguel: (speaks again as if in a children's chorus) okaaay...

Discussion

In this episode, the task proposed by the teacher was the retelling of the story through illustration. Miguel, however, subverts the task by inserting the character Ben 10, demonstrating his will and personal tastes. When questioned about the reason, he responds “because I like it!” (T. 14), evidencing that, for him, the task had a meaning beyond the mere reproduction of the story told by the teacher. This movement expresses the drama of the human social personality understood as a struggle for existence: Miguel, upon bringing Ben 10, not only executes a school task, but singularises himself, affirming his freedom in the face of the impositions of the pedagogical context.

This subversion can be read through Yoo and Bal (2026) analysis of systemic contradictions in inclusive education. Drawing on cultural-historical activity theory, the authors demonstrate how educational systems often reproduce exclusionary tensions between prescribed curricula and students' agency. Miguel's insertion of Ben 10 is not a mere deviation; it is an agentic act that reveals the contradiction between the teacher's expectation of a faithful

retelling and the child's legitimate desire to bring his own world into the school task. Similarly, Kumador, and Muthivhi (2026) uncover cultural regularities underpinning the pedagogy of learners with disabilities. In this episode, the regularity that expects children to reproduce the story without personal additions clashes with Miguel's singularity, highlighting the need for pedagogical approaches that recognise the cultural and historical situatedness of the learner. Lubovsky (2024) reinforces this point by arguing that the principles of cultural-historical theory must guide special education towards the development of higher psychological functions, rather than the mere training of behaviours. Miguel's act of drawing Ben 10 can therefore be understood as an exercise of imagination and volition — higher psychological functions that the pedagogical task inadvertently enabled.

The child's will to illustrate the cartoon character goes beyond the need to create the story; it is Miguel's personality singularising itself in the school plot. Vygotsky mentions that the volitional act (the will) is the fruit of the interrelation of the subject with others based on what makes sense to them (Vygotsky, 2010). In this regard, Delari Junior states that to choose something (volitional act) it is necessary that the subject acts in the world beyond their need and that they have the possibility and repertoire to choose (Delari Junior, 2011). It is important to emphasise that processes of singularisation do not oppose teaching. In this episode, the teacher “wants to apprehend what the students understood of the cordel genre”, but “the prescribed task is subverted by Miguel”—indeed, the teacher is focused on her objective and points out to Miguel what she expects of the task. This situation needs to be seen as part of the educational process; for this reason, there is no opposition between the educational process and processes of singularisation.

Vygotsky (2000) understands human development as a dramatically constituted process, in which contradictions are not obstacles to be overcome, but the very engine of development. The crisis, the conflict, the inner struggle, all these phenomena, which traditional psychology tends

to consider as pathologies, are, for Vygotsky, constitutive dimensions of the human. This dramatic understanding of development radically opposes any approach that conceives development as a linear, harmonious and predictable process (Rzyankina, et al., 2026). Nell, De Villiers, and Griessel (2022), in their reflections on teaching piano to young children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders, similarly highlight the importance of attuning pedagogical structures to the child's spontaneous expressions and interests. Their work resonates with Miguel's case: just as a piano lesson can become a space for genuine musical agency when the child's initiatives are welcomed, the literacy task could become a space for singularisation when the child's personal repertoire is not suppressed.

Freedom, in turn, emerges in this context as the capacity to act upon one's own development, to choose between possibilities, to create new directions for life. Vygotsky emphasises that freedom is not an innate property of the subject, but an achievement of development, which occurs in the relation with the other and with culture (Vygotsky, 2000). The volitional act, which Vygotsky analyses in his studies on consciousness and will, is the moment in which the subject appropriates their own action, transforming necessity into freedom (Vygotsky, 2010). Lim and Thaver (2025), in their situated perspective on inclusive education in Singapore, argue that meaningful inclusion requires attending to the specific socio-cultural contexts in which learners act. Miguel's freedom to choose Ben 10, albeit within the confines of a task that did not anticipate it, exemplifies the kind of situated agency that inclusive education must nurture rather than constrain.

Singularity, finally, is the concrete expression of the process of humanisation, insofar as each subject, upon appropriating culture, does so in a unique, unrepeatable manner, producing a particular configuration of senses and meanings. For Vygotsky, singularity does not oppose universality; rather, it is the form through which the universal realises itself in the particular (Vygotsky, 2009). The word, for example, is universal in its meaning, but singular in its sense, insofar as each subject fills it with their experiences

and affections. De Martins and Bal (2022), in their Learning Lab Methodology for expansive learning and inclusive education during the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil, demonstrate how collaborative, agentive learning environments can transform systemic contradictions into opportunities for expansive learning. Miguel's singular act of bringing Ben 10 into the task can be seen as a microgenetic manifestation of expansive learning: he did not merely reproduce the story; he expanded the task's meaning to include his own cultural repertoire.

In the context of special/inclusive education, the notion of singularity is particularly relevant, as it prevents us from reducing the student with autism to their diagnosis, demanding that we understand them in their historicity and their developmental possibilities. Pedagogical work, in this perspective, does not consist of “normalizing” the student, but of creating conditions for them to singularise themselves, that is, to appropriate culture in a unique way and create their own meanings for their existence. Camargo and Tada (2023), analysing the hiring of caregivers in Rondônia and the precariousness of inclusive education in Brazil, show how structural deficiencies often reduce the support available to students with disabilities, forcing teachers to rely on improvised strategies. In Miguel's classroom, the presence of the trainee Esther and the teacher-researcher created a fragile support network that, despite its limitations, allowed moments of singularisation to emerge. This precariousness is a systemic contradiction that cannot be ignored: Miguel's freedom to draw Ben 10 occurred within a context that often constrained his agency.

This movement, understood by the author as dramatic and dialectical (contradiction), is also an act of freedom, which constitutes, as we understand, singular subjects. This volitional act, even though it manifests from what the child desires, is part of their participation in the social world, in such a way that it configures itself as a higher psychological function. With the conquest of his right/freedom of speech, Miguel subverts what would be the pathological characteristics of autism: speaking to oneself, non-social use of language and impossibility of acting in the sym-

bolic world (Padilha, 2021). In this sense, Miguel, upon acting as a “double” of himself, inserting Ben 10 as a personal element in the context of the collective task, expresses the drama of the Vygotsky' homoduplex, constituting himself simultaneously as a social and singular subject.

Finally, the broader implications of this episode for inclusive education are echoed in Mpolomoka and Muvombo's (2026) scoping review on students with learning disabilities in higher learning institutions. Although their focus is on higher education, their call for systemic changes that recognise learner diversity across the educational continuum applies equally to early childhood and primary education. Smyrli and Megari (2025), discussing neuropsychological development and assessment from infancy to adolescence, caution against reducing children to neuropsychological profiles. Miguel's case exemplifies this caution: his act of drawing Ben 10 cannot be reduced to a diagnostic trait; it must be understood as a meaningful, agentive expression of his singular personality within the school context. Together, these studies underscore that inclusive education must be grounded in a cultural-historical understanding of the human person — one that welcomes the unexpected, the creative, and the singular as constitutive of development itself.

Results

Episode 5 — “Who is listening to me clap once”: Miguel in Physical Education.

Contextualisation: Physical Education is the first class of the day, the students talk and shout among themselves, teacher Quezia, trainee Esther and the teacher-researcher stand next to each other, leaning on the board waiting for the Physical Education teacher (Maria). Miguel is agitated, gets up, asks if he can turn on the fan, sits down, gets up, jumps a little and claps. There, teacher Maria asks them to sit on the bleachers to take attendance, but the children don't stop talking, they talk louder than the teacher and cover her voice, so Maria says:

T. 1: Teacher Maria: who is listening to me clap once

The students clap once, Miguel too

T. 2: Teacher Maria: silence! Who is listening to me clap twice

Again the students clap, twice. Miguel claps twice too and laughs. The teacher takes attendance and explains that the activity is “running in pairs”, on the court, with the distance from one goal to the other, approximately 20 metres. Each student chooses their pair, except Miguel. The teacher directs Tais, a taller classmate, to be his pair, and she performs the tasks following what is asked, but makes a pair with Miguel. Tais questions “why me?”, Maria explains that she will serve as an example for him. Miguel and Tais start the activity, Miguel walks, Tais holds his hand and they continue walking.

T. 3: Teacher Maria: Tais, it's not for you to imitate Miguel, you have to be the example for him.

Tais starts running, Miguel runs along and says smiling:

T. 4: Miguel: I'm going to win!

T. 5: Teacher Maria: it's not a competition!

Miguel and Tais stop running, Maria gets up and goes to them.

T. 6: Teacher Maria: look how he runs, and starts running from one goal to the other

While the teacher runs, Tais and Miguel are together. Maria stops, calls Miguel and signals with her hand for him to run in her direction. In the impulse to run, Tais pulls Miguel's arm, who is projected forward and almost falls.

T. 7: Teacher Maria: stop, stop! You can go back. Leave him, Tais, he knows how to do it.

Tais leaves her classmate and goes to the bleachers to sit next to the teacher-researcher. Tais is serious and says she doesn't want to participate in the class anymore. Maria walks in her direction and says she doesn't need to do the pair anymore, Tais gets animated. Miguel continues running on the court from one goal to the other. While the students perform the activity, the teacher tells the teacher-researcher that Miguel has a lot of difficulty and that, without trainee Esther, she finds it very difficult, as in the situation that had just occurred.

T. 8: Teacher Maria: it's very difficult, because you have Miguel and you have the other children, and it's not always that Esther comes,

today you saw, but on most days I'm alone. I think that Miguel has a very great motor impairment, because, the other day I asked them to play football, I had to stay with him the whole time, he didn't move.

The teacher-researcher listens, mentions that in the other classes Miguel participates and that sometimes he also needs help, but that other students also needed help.

T. 9: Teacher-researcher: teacher, wouldn't there be a strategy for him to participate? Today he had difficulty, but he performed the activity

T. 10: Teacher Maria: yes, but alone I can't, I need trainee Esther to be in all classes.

T. 11: Teacher-researcher: I understand, I'll see with teacher Quezia how it works, since Esther is there every day in the first period.

Discussion

In Episode 5, situated in a Physical Education class, our focus shifts from specific disciplinary training to the human tensions between the student's constitution and the teachers' pedagogical knowledge. The episode begins with the teacher issuing routine commands for silence (“clap once”, “clap twice”). As Yoo and Bal (2026) demonstrate, such unexamined artefacts perpetuate behavioural control over genuine participation. These commands embody historical regularities that prioritise compliance, revealing a sharp contradiction between the teacher's need for order and the student's legitimate need for movement (Kumador, Muthivhi, 2026).

Scientifically, this microgenetic analysis overcomes traditional educational approaches that rely exclusively on diagnostic criteria by shifting the analytical unit from individual deficits to the social situation of development. Clinical paradigms often reduce children with autism to observable behaviours or neuropsychological profiles, pathologising contextual excitement as “stereotypies” (Smyrli, Megari, 2025). However, as Lubovsky (2024) argues, this betrays Vygotsky's project. Miguel's agitation is not a behavioural deficit; it is an active, situated response to a sensory-rich environment that demands interaction (Effegen, 2021; Lim, Thaver, 2025). If pedagogical structures were attuned to

the child's spontaneous expressions, as Nell, De Villiers, and Griessel (2022) suggest, the class could foster genuine bodily agency rather than pathologising movement.

This tension escalates when the teacher pairs Miguel with a taller classmate based on perceived skills rather than affinities. When Miguel subverts the cooperative goal by asserting, "I'm going to win!" (T. 4), he reframes the task. This act is a microgenetic manifestation of expansive learning (De Martins, Bal, 2022), illustrating that contradictions between pedagogical objectives and the child's subjective meaning-making are the very engine of development (Vygotsky, 2000). Yet, the diagnosis often serves to justify low pedagogical expectations (Gonçalves, 2021). When the teacher states she cannot manage without the trainee's constant presence (T. 10), she exposes the structural precariousness of Brazilian inclusive education (Camargo, Tada, 2023), where participation hinges on a fragile support network.

Furthermore, the teacher justifies Miguel's difficulties by labelling him with a "very great motor impairment" (T. 8). By centralising the diagnosis, the question of what to do pedagogically is left in suspense (Vasques, 2015). This deficit-oriented perspective persists across the educational continuum (Mpolomoka, Muvombo, 2026). Scientifically, our data demonstrates that this "impairment" is not a fixed, innate trait, but a relational phenomenon emerging from a mechanical teaching system that privileges few (Padilha, 2021). In this context, the pedagogical knowledge acquired in teacher training (Freire, 2020; Saviani, 2021) becomes subordinated to traditional, pathologising clinical knowledge (Tardif, 2002).

Ultimately, this research scientifically substantiates that overcoming diagnostic determinism requires abandoning the medical-nosological model in favour of understanding human development in its historicity. The resolution demands a collective, expansive, and culturally situated effort, as advocated by Yoo and Bal (2026), De Martins and Bal (2022), and Kumador and Muthivhi (2026), to transform activity systems so they recognise the singular child's movements, words, and desires not as

pathologies to be managed, but as fundamental resources for collective humanisation.

Conclusions

The study's central question was: how does pedagogical knowledge impact the constitution of the child with autism, based on the notion of constitutive singularity? The analysis of the two episodes allows us to formulate a precise answer. Pedagogical knowledge influences the development of the child with autism in two fundamental ways, corresponding to two distinct modalities observed in the research context.

First, when pedagogical knowledge is subordinated to traditional clinical knowledge, it tends to reduce the child to their diagnosis and to organise pedagogical work around behavioural control. In Episode 5, the Physical Education teacher's commands ("clap once", "clap twice") and her interpretation of Miguel's movements as "motor impairment" exemplify this modality. Here, pedagogical knowledge operates as a technology of normalisation: it silences the child's speech, pathologises their movements, and limits their participation to predetermined forms. The child's singularity is not recognised but suppressed; the drama of development becomes a behavioural problem to be managed.

Second, when pedagogical knowledge is grounded in a cultural-historical, critical-emancipatory perspective, it creates conditions for the child to singularise themselves — that is, to appropriate culture in a unique way and to produce their own meanings for existence. In Episode 1, Teacher Quezia's willingness to ask Miguel why he drew Ben 10 (T. 10-14), even after initially correcting him, opened a space for dialogue. Miguel's response ("because I like it!") was not a refusal of the task but an affirmation of his will and personal repertoire. This movement expresses the drama of the human social personhood as a struggle for existence: the child, upon inserting personal elements into the school task, not only executes a pedagogical activity but constitutes himself as a singular subject.

Singularity concerns the (dialectical, historical, cultural and dramatic) mode in which subjects appropriate the environment in which they

are and, from this appropriation, construct the meanings of their experiences in relation with others (people and things that touch them). When rewriting the story, Miguel does not base himself exclusively on the teacher's speech; either he did not pay attention to the fable's tale, or he chose to attribute a new meaning to the tale, when (re)writing. This movement expresses the drama of the human social personality, as understood by Vygotsky and by Gramsci in the Prison Notebooks: the struggle for existence that takes place in the field of culture, language and social relations.

What we brought in our study was also in the search to understand how the other's word, life stories, temporal location, gestures, tastes, feelings and will, over the course of life, become singularised in the subject, constituting them. With our study, we affirm that students with autism participate in the social practices present throughout the school context and, in doing so, transform nature and transform themselves. This process of (trans)formation of the human through schooling is what we term, in dialogue with the Vygotsky' legacy, as drama, freedom and singularity. Beyond the specific contributions of this study, we would like to highlight the timeliness and potency of the Vygotsky' text "Fascism in Psychoneurology" for reflection on special/inclusive education. Vygotsky teaches us that psychology (and, by extension, education) cannot be neutral: either it serves human emancipation, or it serves oppression. The reduction of the subject to biological categories — whether the "race" of the Nazis, or the "diagnosis" of certain contemporary clinical approaches — operates as a device of exclusion, which limits developmental possibilities and justifies segregation.

The defence of a pedagogy grounded in Cultural-Historical theory, therefore, is not merely a theoretical option, but an ethical-political position: the affirmation of the potentiality of all subjects, regardless of their organic conditions, and the struggle for a school that is truly inclusive, not only in access, but in the promotion of human development. This is, perhaps, the deepest contribution of the Vygotsky' legacy to Brazilian

special/inclusive education: the understanding that disability is not a destiny, but a condition that, in the relation with the other and with culture, can be transformed into potentiality.

Future research perspectives. The findings of this intervention-research, although situated and qualitative, open several avenues for further investigation. First, longitudinal studies are needed to follow processes of singularisation and (trans)formation over longer periods, across different school years and educational transitions. Second, comparative and collaborative research in diverse Brazilian contexts — urban and rural, public and private, with different support arrangements — could illuminate how pedagogical knowledge and institutional conditions mediate the development of children with autism and other disabilities. Third, future studies should examine teacher education and continuing professional development, particularly how critical-emancipatory cultural-historical knowledge can be incorporated into initial and in-service training to counteract clinical-pathologising perspectives. Fourth, research using cultural-historical activity theory and formative interventions, such as Learning Labs, could investigate how activity systems in schools can be expanded to include the singular expressions, words, and desires of students with disabilities. Finally, studies that listen to children, families, and teachers as co-authors of knowledge are necessary to deepen an ethical-political understanding of inclusive education as humanisation.

Practical implications. The knowledge produced here has direct implications for school practice. It suggests that pedagogical work with children with autism should begin from their interests, gestures, words, and modes of participation, rather than from diagnostic labels. Teachers, coordinators, and support professionals can create spaces in which personal elements brought by children — such as Miguel's Ben 10 — are not treated as deviations but as starting points for dialogue, mediation, and curriculum reinvention. This requires strengthening support networks, ensuring the presence of trained collaborators, and resisting the reduction of inclusion to mere physical access. In teacher

education, the episode analysis can be used as formative material to develop sensitive observation, microgenetic listening, and the planning of tasks that foster volition, imagination, and singularity. In policy and school management, the study reinforces the need for adequate working conditions, collaborative planning time, and per-

manent teacher training so that inclusive education becomes a collective and ethically committed practice. Ultimately, the Vygotsky' legacy invites us to use knowledge not to classify or normalise, but to create conditions for every child to singularise themselves and to participate fully in cultural life.

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