Abstract

**Access to universities in Brazil: inclusion and integration of the whole person**

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The University has an important role in the dissemination and democratization of access to knowledge and changing social and political contexts, playing a socio-transforming role through the education of the people involved and building the social reality. For this reason, an important issue that has been laid for the Brazilian university is to provide more access to young people to this reality, especially those who come from difficult socio-economic realities.

Expanding access to higher education also refers to another compelling argument: we must think about the inclusion of young people who come from different realities and have different needs and difficulties. In order for this inclusion to be given in its entirety, it must also consider the whole process of integration of these young people to the new reality of study.

Thinking about the inclusion in higher education presupposes understanding that it is the inclusion and the role of the universities in the process of production of ideas and practices and, above all, it must understand the subject for which this inclusion is intended: the human person. Firstly, we must consider the inclusion of this young student regarding the access to higher education, but it is also important to observe the maintenance conditions in this new environment, which is why the integration process is an important step for the inclusion.

For this reason, we will discuss the role of universities, the inclusion and integration of young people in higher education based on the proposal for humanistic education.

Therefore, this article will try to discuss the meaning of inclusion in universities, as well as integration strategies, seeking to share experiences and discuss possibilities, with the Brazilian reality as a reference, within the theme of values as an internal space for democracy.

introduction

This article aims to reflect the role of Catholic universities in Brazil in the face of public policies for higher education. Therefore, we need to observe some aspects of this context: the role of the State in seeking to propose policies for providing young people with access to universities; universities that need and should match as partners of these policies; and young people who have the expectation of achieving, with higher education, opportunities for social inclusion and improving their life conditions.

**1. THE BRAZILIAN SCENARIO OF ACCESS TO UNIVERSITIES**

Universities have an important role in disseminating and democratizing access to knowledge and changing social and political contexts, playing a social transformative role by educating the individuals who participate in and build the social reality.

According to the National Sample Survey (PNAD), only 16% of Brazilians completed higher education in 2014. Even with the expansion achieved in 2014 - more than 7.8 million people enrolled in higher education[[1]](#footnote-1) - these numbers reflect only the possibility of access and not the permanence and completion of higher education, as only 53%[[2]](#footnote-2) of enrolled students were able to complete their studies.

Table 1 - Brazilian population according to educational level

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Educational level | Brazil |
| No educational level / no instruction | 4.8% |
| Complete elementary school | 10.8% |
| Incomplete elementary school | 25.6% |
| Complete high school | 31.1% |
| Incomplete high school | 6.3% |
| Complete higher education/ Graduated | **16.0%** |
| Incomplete higher education | **5.3%** |

Source: IBGE, Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicilios - PNAD, 2013

Current Brazilian inclusion policies for universities

The significant expansion in the access to universities in Brazil is mainly a group of educational public policies which has been adopted in recent years. Among them is the *Programa Universidade para Todos* (PROUNI[[3]](#footnote-3)), the quota policy on access to university[[4]](#footnote-4), the Educational Financing Policy Program (FIES[[5]](#footnote-5)), and the Program of Support to the Restructuring and Expansion of Federal (Public) Universities (REUNI[[6]](#footnote-6)).

We should recognize that these actions to expand the access of young people to universities also democratically seeks to expand access for populations that once had many difficulties for this access. As an example, we can mention young people from low income groups who studied at public schools, or young less favored races or ethnic groups, such as the black, mulatto, and Indian communities, or even people with some disabilities.

However, these inclusion policies in higher education do not consolidate the democratic access to university, as almost 47% of them cannot continue or complete the degree. Among the reasons for this high school dropout, we can highlight: the difficulty of many students to follow the university course because of deficient formation in basic and primary school; financial reasons of maintenance in the university life; or sometimes because the high school educational system still does not have an adequate and innovative didactic and pedagogical preparation to meet some special needs of these students.

In this sense, Brazilian universities are facing a challenging situation – working with demands that were created by problems of a precarious school education, which reflect the lack of prioritization of the quality of basic education by the Brazilian government, as well as facing historical experiences of social exclusion within the academic community.

In this scenario, one must reflect on the reasons and criteria because the results of public policies on higher education cannot be only for quantitatively increasing access to universities, proposing welfare actions that extend more dependency and exclusion for these students, or even an attitude of non-involvement with these problems leaving these students to their own devices regarding the challenges of the new reality of study. Instead, it is important that the university experience can positively impact the human experience of these young people. Universities should partake the social reality and be a subject of change, and thus efficiently play their social role.

**INCLUSION AND INTEGRATION: AN IMPORTANT DISCUSSION FOR UNIVERSITIES**

The democratization of access to universities is much larger than the increase of the enrollments in higher education. The reflection about real access must consider the circumstances that generate school failure and dropout of students with disadvantaged situations. It is necessary to generate action to overcome these exclusions that are applied to these young people.

Failure affects all social classes, although young people from disadvantaged backgrounds suffer the consequences in a special way. There are multiple forms: successive repetitions, abandonment during the studies, marginalization for courses that offer no real prospects and, in the end, dropping out of school without qualifications or recognized skills. Failure at school is, in any case, a deeply disturbing taint of the moral, human and social levels; it oftentimes generates exclusion situations which affect young people for all their lives. (DELORS, 1998:146).

Another important factor regarding access to universities concerns students who have a disability, whether physical or cognitive. The number of people with disabilities who seek to start university courses in Brazil has grown. Their presence draws our attention to the fact that the reality requires different teaching materials or adapted strategies, even to rethink the spaces and access to the university spaces. Pagliuca et al (2007) argue *“that the implementation and maintenance of accessible environments pervade the real awareness of significance of an accessible environment. And this goes beyond the architectural barriers, it depends on the inclusive attitude”*.

In Brazil, in 2013, 33,377[[7]](#footnote-7) students with a disability enrolled in higher education. Of these, 19,654 are studying in private educational institutions. For this reason, Brazilian universities must make an effort to include and integrate these students, especially those less fortunate or who have difficulty in keeping up in school. This inclusion and integration demand to think of accessibility to knowledge, teaching tools and physical spaces. Accessibility should be universal because it expresses the inclusion of all people in a democratic way.

Aquino Junior (2008) explains that the notion of accessibility needs to be universal because the concept of universality is based on the totality, with a proposition that is opposed to particularity. For this reason, for this author, universal accessibility requires resources and an accessible environment for all people. Then, the concept of universal access provides recommendations for the construction of projects considering that everyone should use them, defending the universality of products, services and environments, so that anyone can enjoy the benefits, regardless of any physical disability or knowledge.

It is possible to treat the inclusion in the point of view of access to university education, and refer it to groups that are in vulnerable situations: disabled[[8]](#footnote-8), dyslexic, low-income youth, black, Indian communities, etc. The inclusive approach of disabled people or the inclusive approaches of disadvantaged minorities are socially important and relevant to be addressed, but they do not exhaust the understanding of the extent of inclusion and its possibilities.

Thinking about the inclusion in higher education presupposes understanding what education is, what inclusion is and what the role of the university is in these ideas and practical production process. Above all, it is necessary to understand the intended subject for this inclusion: the human person. Firstly, we must consider the person not as a number, or as what, but as *one*, and that conceptually makes a difference (ARAUJO, 2009:54).

To include, *Includere* in Latin, initially means putting, closing or ending a thing within another, but as an adjective it also means put between, among, closed. To integrate, whose Latin root *Integrare* means complete, learn, gather in all their essentials parts, can also mean part of. Access to a university may translate into a real democracy as these young people become partakers of university life, subjects of action and decision.

When a human community considers as full of meaning and necessary, not only the institutions that are designed to ensure the existence of men and meet “the necessities of life” (which also include, without any doubt, specialized educational organizations, technical, training and education), but also the “college” in its full sense, truly directed to the ideal of building a place of training to operate as education of what is properly human; to that extent, this community will consider necessary an institution that has expressly and methodically as a project the confrontation of the man with the real whole. This institution is exactly the university! What makes the university a university is not science, but ... But what? But the resolute orientation of thought to the *universum*, for the unity of the actual assembly; the determined and persistent effort of openness to all, which has always been known and understood as philosophizing (PIEPER, 1986:24-25).

Therefore, in addition to the legal aspects of public education policies that enable these people “to be placed into”, the inclusion experience cannot be only limited to granting access, but it must also ensure the permanence and participation of these students as producers of knowledge and culture, i.e. the integration of the person in the university reality.

**4. THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF HUMANISTIC EDUCATION FOR THE INCLUSION EXPERIENCE**

The vocation of universities, and especially of the Catholic university, is devoted to the pursuit of truth, knowledge, through research, education and training of their students. Therefore, research, education and all students’ training opportunities should consider the reality in its entirety: from materials, political to the cultural, moral and spiritual aspects.

As a result, faced with the reality of so many young people seeking their courses, not only is the Catholic university concerned with the educational reality of the country, responding assertively to government policies for access to higher education, but it also seeks to achieve its objective to serve the society and the human person facing the great problems of the society and culture with institutional commitment.

The university is not restricted to the place of doing science, in a disconnected neutrality of social reality. Above all, it is a place for the person’s education and training as a whole regarding their human potential, i.e. it should mainly consider the centrality of the person who is learning and introduce them in the totality of reality[[9]](#footnote-9).

The school and the university further strive to provide students with training to enable them to be inserted into the market place and social life with appropriate skills. But, despite being necessary, this is not enough. A good school and a good university are also evaluated by their ability to promote, through education, careful learning in developing more general skills and higher levels. Learning is not only assimilation of content, but the opportunity for self-education, commitment in view of their own progress and the common good, creativity development, desire for continuous learning, openness to others (CONGREGAÇÃO PARA A EDUCAÇÃO CATÓLICA, 2014, 16).

In the philosophy of education of St. Thomas, the central thesis of his anthropology *anima forma corpori*s expresses “profound unity in the man between spirit and matter: the soul is substantially in intrinsic union with the matter” (LAUAND, 2007:235). Inclusive education carries beauty, justice and self-consciousness, in addition to bringing to the university not only the embodiment of that person, but also the inclusion of this person in what corresponds to their real requirements. In this perspective, the person is welcomed and supported, rather than abandoned to their fate or limitation of knowledge. And at this point, it is considered that this welcome should not be for the neediest, for those with training deficiencies, but it should be a welcome for all, regardless of their economic status, education, race or ethnicity. These young people come to college but they are unaware of the dynamics and demands of this new reality. They may feel disoriented and needy – therefore the inclusion and integration into the university life should be made by all the academic community, jointly and severally, as a company on this route.

Here lies the crucial question for this reflection: is it possible to develop inclusion and integration from strategic actions[[10]](#footnote-10)? Several institutions have carried out successful experiments with respect to performance in university studies. Study groups, tutoring and beginner courses to study reinforcement workshops of certain contents (which may be for mathematics, physics, chemistry or Portuguese) are some strategies that can be adopted to minimize the arising needs of a poor primary education and that can be a barrier for the student to keep up with the college.

However, another possibility is to propose inclusion and integration experiences as shared values that create culture that give meaning to actions and that manifest themselves in internal and external relationships of the university, as an expression of its identity. The academic community must be involved in the same *telos* in order to make this inclusion happen. These young people need to be accompanied on this journey by a living presence which helps them make a serious experience of study, research, vocational training, aware of their difficulties and possibilities. They must become a subject valuing their human qualities.

The method for a living presence should be soft because it does not impose anything, it needs to invite, offer, and allow freedom from each one whether to join or not, the time of each one, but it is there, it is present, it does not omit.

On this model, a democratic decision is normatively legitimate only if all those affected by it are included in the process of discussion and decision-making. This simple formulation opens many questions about the way in which they are affected, and how strongly they are to it; it might be an absurd to say that everyone affected by decisions in any trivial way ought to be party to them. To somehow limit this question, we can say that “affected” here means at least that decisions and policies significantly condition a person’s options for action. As an ideal inclusion embodies a norm of moral respect (YOUNG, 2002:23).

Understanding the role of the university in the person’s inclusion process means deepening the university’s relationship as a human community that welcomes people, welcomes the diversity of their identities, histories and experiences; it is an experience of inclusion of singularities. This means that, sometimes, the homogenization of methods, the pursuit of spatial equality is not enough to guarantee inclusion, and the inclusion must consider the integrity of the person and their reality, body and spirit, history, profession and ontological experience.

Aiming at the integral formation of the person, not restricting the educational task only to technical or professional aspects, but understanding them as a subject, as the protagonist, as a citizen, is one of the major educational premises that identifies the Catholic university. The training will indeed be full if it takes into account all aspects of the person, without neglecting their affective, moral, social and spiritual dimensions. These issues, in a Catholic university, must be faced in the Christian humanism perspective. Such intent, far from being understood as a mere addendum to the training of students, is a decisive contribution to academic excellence and to the fulfillment of the institutional mission.

We can certainly see in this a differential of education offered in the confessional and especially in Catholic institutions. The humanistic formation underlies it in the formation of man watching his integral development and not only according to aspects of financial and economic utility or to respond to market demands or social problems, despite being attentive to these. The humanistic formation aims to respond to the human needs of the development, the social reality in which it operates and acts. In this sense, cooperation, solidarity among people and peoples, the dialogue between different cultures and the desire to build peace propose the opposite of a hedonistic individualism, inhuman competitiveness.

By offering students this education, the university aims to add value to the student’s curriculum and life, awakening their interest to learn, inquire and compare all presented with their experience, to mature in them the ability to judge and act and to dialogue with his colleagues, to welcome and participate in the inclusion and integration of their classmates. In this regard, small solidarity networks are established.

Pieper opens the understanding of this situation when he states that, *“in this sense, it is very significant that precisely the institutional form of ‘higher education’, the ‘higher teaching’, what we call the university, is one of those achievements in which great and fundamental human experiences are ‘crystallized’”* (1986: 21).

Then, this form of education helps to create culture, to include everyone in all their potential, to strengthen human bonds. Starting, therefore, from the formation of the person in all its potential, with the objective of always being the protagonist.

It is believed that the education received at the university has an impact on the economic, social and technological development of society, not only in skilled labor training, but in the education of people and professionals able to assess situations and make decisions focusing on the maintenance of individual benefits and the realization of the Common Good, and this Common Good includes every human person.

**FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In addition to the discussion of technical or inclusive structures, the academic community must be able to place itself in front of the reasons to experience the student reality with hope. Having clear reasons for the inclusion of the person is important and necessary.

The premise, therefore, is the inclusion of the whole person, not only in their disability, social class or ethnic group, but in their desire for happiness and fulfillment of their potential, in the position of *“Become who you are”* by Píndaro. Based on that, the process of inclusion in universities implies a change in culture, structure, educational and evaluation processes, as well as in the possibilities of access.

Understanding the role of the university in the person’s inclusion process means deepening the university’s relationship as a human community that welcomes people. Therefore, the premise that governs the integration of young people in the university does not start from criteria of success, but it is moral. It is not limited to strategies to solve their educational problems, patch the holes left by their basic training, the cultural gap, because of its economic limitations, but it takes care of their wounds, welcomes their reality, and promotes all their human dignity.

Therefore, this is a route that carries a great good to all – not only those that need to be included but also their classmates, their teachers, the entire academic community that is open to dialogue and the Common Good.

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1. According to the Census of Higher Education, in 2013, 7,828,013 students enrolled in undergraduate courses in higher education institutions of Brazil. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Census of Higher Education, Brasil, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Public Program *University for All* seeks to enable the inclusion of students who come from the public education system to the higher private education system in Brazil through a policy that establishes the provision of partial or full scholarships in private universities in exchange for the exemption of certain taxes and contributions. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Quotas Law. 12.711 of 29/08/2012 establishes the reservation of 50% of places in universities, institutes and federal/public centers for candidates who attended, and were approved, in the three high school series in public schools. Half of this total is intended for students from families with income per capita below the 1.5 minimum wage, and the other half for students with income greater than 1.5 minimum wage. The law also establishes the reservation of enrollments for the black, mulatto, and Indian communities that meet the above criteria. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. FIES is a resource provided by the federal government to finance the college education for students who do not have conditions to afford the costs of their education in private institutions. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. REUNI is a federal program that seeks the restructuring and expansion of Federal Universities in Brazil. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Data from INEP, Synopsis of Higher Education, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Among the shortcomings, we can find: blindness, low vision, deafness, hearing impairment, deafblindness, disability, multiple disabilities, intellectual disabilities, childhood autism, Asperger syndrome, Rett syndrome, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder and intellectual giftedness. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Congress Education today and tomorrow. A passion that is renewed. Rome, November 18-21, 2015. Congregation for Catholic Education. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Highlight the experiences reported in the following articles: GALLEGOS, Miriam. La inclusión educativa en la Universidad Politécnica Salesiana. Alteridad, Revista de Educación,6(2) 2011: 118–126; [ANDRADE, Francisco Jatobá de](http://www.teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8132/tde-09112012-122850/?&lang=pt-br). Classe, raça e ação afirmativa: a política de inclusão social numa universidade pública de Pernambuco. Universidade de São Paulo, 2012. Thesis; BORGES, Maria Aparecida. A inclusão de alunos com deficiência em cursos presenciais de graduação da Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora. Universidade Estadual Paulista "Júlio De Mesquita Filho" Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia, 2011. PhD Thesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)