

## Reconfiguration of collective action and the functions of accessibility in Higher Education

*Reconfiguração do fazer coletivo e as funções da acessibilidade na Educação Superior*

*Redeconfiguración de la acción colectiva y las funciones de accesibilidad en la Enseñanza Superior*

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**Abstract:** In Brazil, the logic of accessibility in Higher Education has been mirrored in centralizing measures traditionally carried out in Elementary School. Regarding this scenario, the objective of this study is to reflect on whether this has been consistent regarding the recommendation of the current literature on accessibility in Higher Education. It is a theoretical essay that, from an international perspective, compiles information treated in three sections. The first one presents a brief contextualization on the democratization of access to Brazilian Higher Education and the conceptions of disabilities present at this level of education. Thus, the second one, presents ethical, political pedagogical and academic principles and morals of accessibility and alterity. Finally, emerging issues related to competences, skills and the legitimacy of training people with disabilities in Higher Education are problematized.

**Keywords:** Higher education. People with disability. Accessibility. Institutional policies.

**Resumo:** No Brasil, a lógica de acessibilidade na Educação Superior tem sido espelhada nas medidas centralizadoras tradicionalmente realizadas na Educação Básica. Sobre esse cenário, o objetivo do presente estudo é refletir se esse tem sido condizente com o que a literatura atual sobre acessibilidade na Educação Superior tem recomendado. Trata-se de um ensaio teórico que, em uma perspectiva internacional, compila informações tratadas em três seções. A primeira apresenta uma breve contextualização sobre a democratização do acesso na Educação Superior brasileira e às concepções de deficiências presentes nesse nível de ensino. A segunda, discorre princípios éticos-políticos, morais pedagógicos e econômicos da acessibilidade e da alteridade. Por fim, problematiza-se as questões emergentes relacionadas às competências, às habilidades e a legitimação da formação de pessoas com deficiências na Educação Superior.

**Palavras-chaves:** Educação Superior. Pessoa com Deficiência. Acessibilidade. Políticas Institucionais.

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**Resumen:** En Brasil, la lógica de la accesibilidad en la Educación Superior se ha reflejado en la centralización de medidas tradicionalmente realizadas en la Educación Básica. Ante este escenario, el objetivo de este estudio es reflexionar sobre si esto ha sido consistente con lo recomendado por la literatura actual sobre accesibilidad en la Educación Superior. Se trata de un ensayo teórico que, desde una perspectiva internacional, recopila información tratada en tres apartados. El primero presenta una breve contextualización sobre la democratización del acceso a la Educación Superior brasileña y las concepciones de discapacidad presentes en este nivel de enseñanza. El segundo discute los principios ético-políticos, morales, pedagógicos y económicos de la accesibilidad y la otredad. Finalmente, se problematizan cuestiones emergentes relacionadas con las competencias, habilidades y la legitimidad de la formación de personas con discapacidad en la Educación Superior.

**Palabras clave:** Educación universitaria. Persona con discapacidad. Accesibilidad. Políticas Institucionales.

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## Introduction

The purpose of this theoretical essay is to encourage debates with the scientific and academic communities in the individual and collective processes of revisiting and reconfiguration of accessibility policies and practices in the Institutions of Higher Education - IHE.

Specifically regarding to the people with disabilities, recent educational policies have supported the global imperative of implementing affirmative actions to promote accessibility in the admission, permanence, training and qualification of this population in the scope of Higher Education (ONU, 2015; UNESCO, 2017).

It is noteworthy, in this social, historical and cultural context, that “the university has also become a social institution inseparable from the idea of democracy and democratization of knowledge” (CHAUI, 2001, p. 185). Corroborating the importance of this scenario, recent data from the United Nations Development Program indicates that:

the global literacy rate for adults with disabilities is as low as 3 per cent, and only 1 per cent for women with disabilities. The 1 billion people with disabilities are the world’s largest minority, accounting for about 15 percent of the global population. Therefore, it is imperative that they are fully included in society, starting with having equal access to quality education. (ONU, 2020).

In view of this, this article is based on an analysis of documents, scientific reports and national and international articles on accessibility in Higher Education, and also on our empirical experiences of action in the educational, academic and political fields. It

should be noted that, although the data are focused on the Brazilian context, the reflections covered international discussions, since the plurality of authorship of the text on screen was considered.

It starts, then, with a brief contextualization on the democratization of access for people with disabilities in Brazilian Higher Education, added to the current conceptions of disabilities, social and cultural codifications in university contexts and contemporary practices in Higher Education. In a second moment, some of the ethical-political and moral principles of accessibility and otherness are presented, dialoguing with the economic scenario and the didactic-pedagogical possibilities in approaching accessibility at this level of education. Finally, emerging issues related to competencies, skills and the legitimacy of training people with disabilities in Higher Education are problematized.

### **People with disabilities in Brazilian Higher Education**

In the last decade, Brazilian IHE have used affirmative action policies in order to enhance the entry of bodies historically considered deviant, stigmatized, minorized and excluded (CABRAL, 2018). This process has taken place through policies based on economic, ethnic, racial, biopsychosocial aspects of the condition of disability, sexual and gender diversity (BRASIL, 2015; 2016).

Specifically in relation to the index of people with disabilities enrolled and working at institutions of this level of education, there has been a significant gradual increase in recent years. Currently, according to data from Inep (2022), 55,000 people with disabilities constitute these spaces, whether they are servants (administrative technicians, technicians in educational issues and teachers) or students.

However, such historical reparation strategies have undermined the insistent neoliberal purpose of the hegemonic design of Higher Education, revealing numerous questions regarding current settings and university cultures in relation to aspects such as: ethical and moral principles of human rights, accessibility, otherness and citizenship; conceptions related to the condition of disability; and possibilities for the cooperative reconfiguration of academic spaces, the curriculum and its regulations.

These important questions have encouraged academic communities to evoke symbolic ruptures of historically crystallized institutional aspects and, gradually, to materialize possible transformations in the different dimensions of each context. In this movement, a first point to be highlighted is the conceptions of disability that have permeated academic communities.

## Conceptions, social and cultural codifications in Higher Education contexts: who are students with disabilities?

Current scientific literature has revealed the predominance of three types of conceptions related to disability: a) Metaphysical conception; b) Biological Conception; c) Social Conception. In the context of Higher Education, specifically, Leite, Cabral and Lacerda (2023) observe that:

it is inevitable (or should be) that academic communities question their conceptions of disability, especially when they are encouraged to recognize the multiplicity and differences of people with disabilities to legitimize their rights. This is because, when the complex variables that constitute a conception are not well discussed and related to their micro and macro contexts, they can become discriminatory, arbitrary and exclusive elements, leaving certain social segments in more marginalized conditions than others (p. 4)

Within the scope of affirmative action policies for entering this level of education, people with disabilities are legally entitled, based on current Brazilian legislation: people with physical disabilities; person with visual impairment (blind, low vision or monocular vision); hearing-impaired or deaf person; deafblind person or person with deafblindness; person with intellectual disability; person with multiple disabilities; and person with autism spectrum disorder.

However, from a biopsychosocial perspective, it is important to call into question the ordinary and everyday notions and practices that, over the last few decades, have insisted on understanding disabilities as being solely due to biological limitations (OMOTE, 1979; MENDES, 1995; OMOTE, CABRAL, 2021).

It is necessary for this theme to gain more space in the arena of institutional political discussions, especially when authors such as Cabral and Melo (2017) find that, among the Brazilian IHE, there is a disagreement regarding the definition of the population to be served by the teams of their centers of accessibility. According to the authors, the population spectrum ranges from the restriction of this service to only “reported” students with disabilities, to its expansion to students with the most diverse educational needs (dyscalculia, dyslexia, etc.). Of the 54 institutions investigated by the authors:

it could be inferred that 39% of the institutions serve only people with disabilities; 37% people with disabilities, pervasive developmental disorders and/or with high abilities/giftedness; 20% people with disabilities and/or pervasive developmental disorders; 4% people with disabilities and/or people with high abilities/giftedness (p. 65).

In addition, the current tendency of affirmative action policies is to consider the intersectionality of social markers such as races, genders, sexualities, ethnicities, nationalities, housing conditions (riverside, settlements, communities, etc.) and socioeconomic conditions.

What does that mean? A person with a disability, a social marker that tends to a socially reductionist and capable stigma, can bring with it several other concomitant minority conditions: being indigenous or black or brown; have low income; compose the LGBT+ community; etc.

Therefore, decentering identities in these subjectivities has fundamental importance when considering the social, historical, cultural, economic and biopsychological perspectives of the subjects within the scope of affirmative action policies.

Contemporary Brazilian Higher Education, therefore, is configured as a context where social relations are manifested through the singular subjectivities and differences of students, administrative technicians, teachers and managers.

In this scenario, the IHE have as an ethical-political commitment the care to prevent situations of violation of human rights based on the discrimination of a subject due to disability, by action or omission, stigmatizing, segregating, excluding, harming, preventing or annulling him from the recognition or exercise of his rights and fundamental freedoms (BRASIL, 2015).

### **Contemporary Practices in Higher Education: nucleated and monocentric actions**

Since 2007, the *Programa Incluir* has been an important milestone in affirmative action policies for people with disabilities in Brazilian Higher Education. This program fostered the creation and consolidation of accessibility centers within the federal IHE (BRUNO, 2011). However, its purpose was born with a centralizing logic in which, until the present day, the segmented, sectorized, fragmented (and institutionally segregated?) of the Multifunctional Resource Classes historically provided in the scope of Basic Education (MALHEIRO; MENDES, 2017).

In this approach, such spaces have been one of the main spaces to encourage the permanence of students with disabilities, through the provision of practices, didactic and technological resources and “appropriate” pedagogical materials. Consequently, this functioning has weakened the legitimacy of the rights of people with disabilities in Higher Education:

facing a reality that is not very articulated with cultural, historical, socioeconomic and organizational contexts, configuring itself, still, in the light of a concept of monitoring that oscillates between assistance and provision of services to the detriment of a universal conception of the rights of access, full participation, professional training and carrying out individual life projects and within all spheres of society (CABRAL; MELO, 2017, p. 67).

Thus, the institutions tend to delegate the demands related to people with disabilities to the supposed specialists, making them invisible, taking responsibility for sectors and units dedicated to all people, in addition to discouraging the possibilities of elaborating concrete and democratic guidelines based on what happens in reality.

In this regard, Ciantelli and Leite (2016, p.426) warn that the current accessibility centers leave “the surroundings of the university space” and can “configure themselves as a real part of the administrative sphere, acting in the decision-making spaces” of their respective institutions. Added to this scenario is the urgent need to review the organizational structure, accessibility conditions, budgetary units, professional teams, in addition to promoting initiatives that permeate the institutional culture to overcome the social invisibility of this population.

### **Ethical-political and moral principles of accessibility and alterity**

In a biopsychosocial approach to citizenship, it is necessary to consider the exercise of the ethics of otherness in the light of the assumptions of Disability Studies, in which Higher Education subjects recognize, in an intersubjective dialectic, the otherness of the other distinct from themselves, be it a person with or without disability (PICCOLO, 2015; KÖCHE, 2017)

It is important, therefore, to give vent to the possibilities of deconstructing crystallized practices of institutional indifference, through humanization, recognition and reciprocal affirmation of oneself and the historically biologized, objectified, exoticized and “enabled” other.

The rescue of the principles of alterity, as well as the compendia of institutional analysis as a set of perspectives, interests and plural precepts, must be carried out in order to contribute to the contemporary debate of human rights. This movement must understand undergraduate courses and graduate programs as institutional and real spaces for the democratic management of diversity for the formation of projects and integrated life experiences, in which each one combines strategies with the lived world (BAREMBLIT, 2002).



Thus, in addition to the biopsychosocial perspective of alterity and institutional analysis, we must consider the socio-anthropological distinctions defended by Ebersold (2021) as ethics and morality of accessibility in terms of the significance of accessibility, specifically represented in relation to the following terms, for example:

- Access (accessible): Is information about how interested people can enter undergraduate courses and *stricto sensu* postgraduate programs available? If yes, where?
- Accessibilty (accessible): Is information about how interested people can enter undergraduate courses and *stricto sensu* postgraduate programs available? If yes, where?
- Accessibilization (appropriable): in addition to the fact that information on how to enter undergraduate courses and/or *stricto sensu* postgraduate programs is accessible and available in accessible formats, it is available in language that will allow its understanding, elaboration and appropriation for the engagement of the subjects?

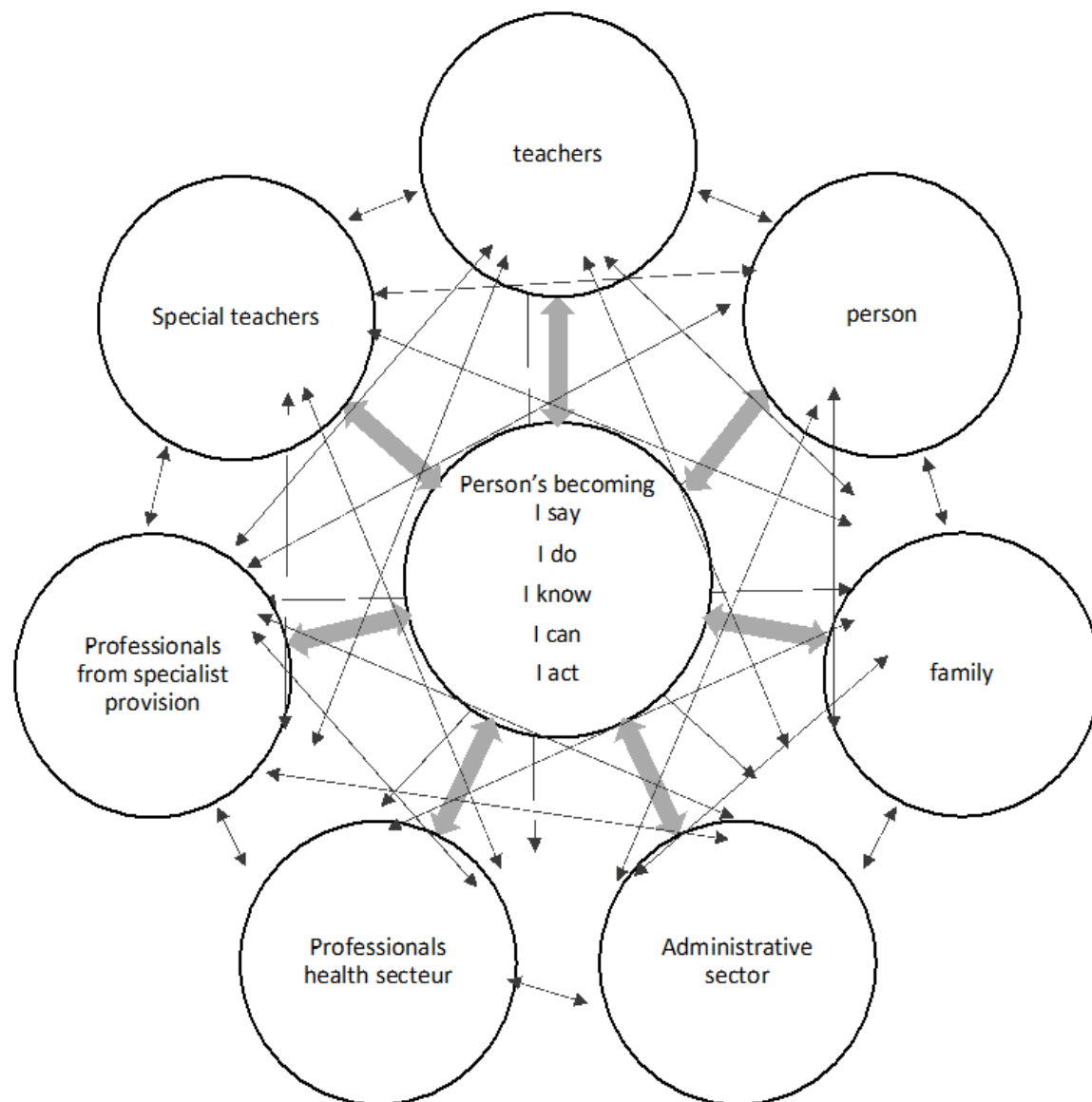
The same questions can be asked for the countless situations of permanence, title and transition to the labor market, in which the promotion of equity and attitudinal accessibility is imperative: a) in the constituent elements of the academic context; b) in the curriculum; c) in didactics; d) in interpersonal relationships; e) in the institutional culture; f) in the elaboration and execution of norms and guidelines; g) in the management of community dialogues; h) in administrative referrals; among other factors.

In this sense, specifically with regard to the right of access, accessibility and accessibilization in undergraduate courses and postgraduate programs, one of the ethical and moral commitments of the academic and scientific communities must be to elucidate elements that may be being veiled in the process of legitimizing the rights of people with disabilities and training high-level human resources.

Among these aspects is the importance of promoting the conditions for interdisciplinary, intersectoral and polycentric cooperation as a fundamental aspect of accessibility in the institutional culture. Based on the “anthropology of participation”, the individual and collective subjectivities of this engagement can be reconducted, therefore, as long as they are carried out in a cooperative approach (GÉNARD, 2013).

This foundation contributes to the denotation of the understanding of accessibility, that is, the materialization of management practices, recognition of differences, guarantee of citizen rights, promotion of autonomy and the possibilities of academic and scientific transformations in an interdependent polycentric perspective (EBERSOLD, 2020; 2021).

Figure 1 - Approach to the Polycentric Interdependence of Resources



Fonte: Ebersold (2020)

In other words: if, on the one hand, the inclusive perspective has been widely diffused in a predominantly connotative order, on the other hand, the foundation of accessibility denotes the materialization of the fundamental political, historical, economic, cultural, relational and pedagogical conditions for participatory autonomy individual and collective within a society under construction.

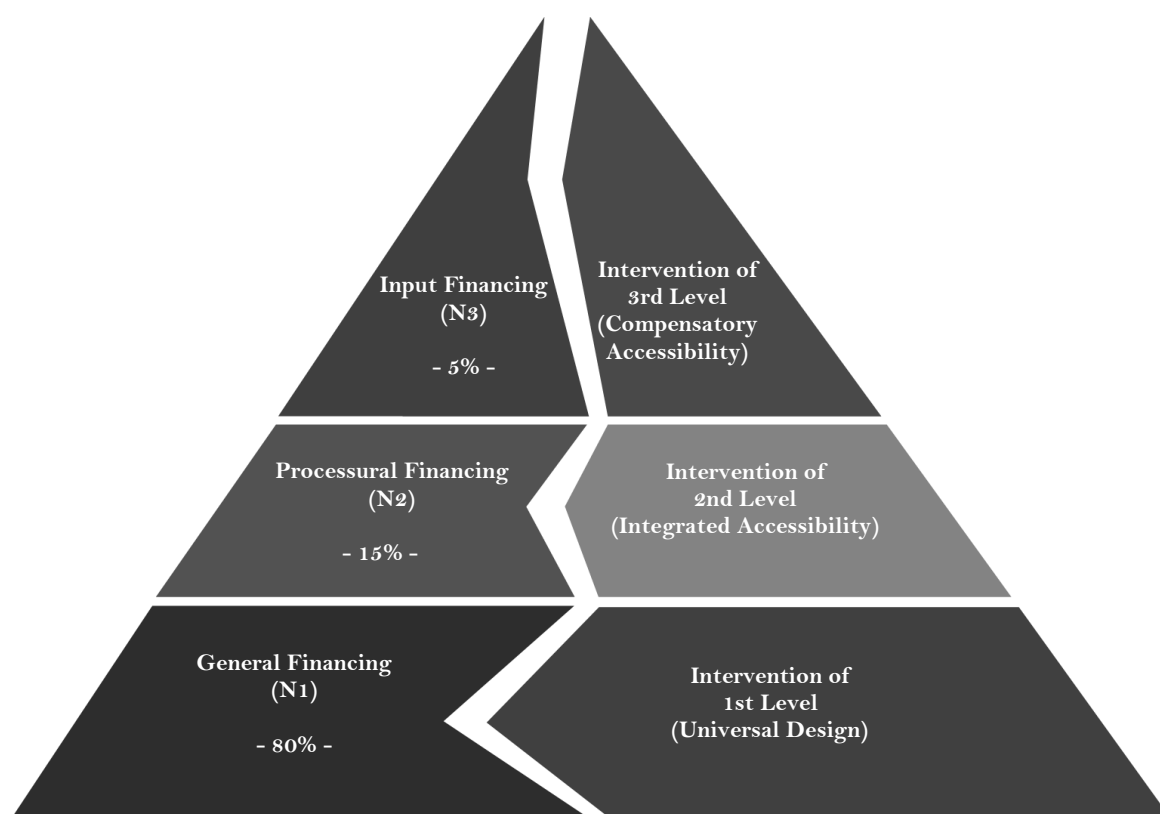
In this sense, it is worth highlighting the relationship between the conceptions of disabilities, the understanding of the grammar of accessibility, the Approach to the Polycentric Interdependence of Resources, and also funding for accessibility in Higher Education.



## Financing of Higher Education to promote accessibility

Establishing a parallel with Basic Education, when analyzing some international indicators, it is possible to suggest that the profile of students with disabilities is the result of existing financing mechanisms within the scope of inclusive education. According to Ebersold (2018), these can be classified into one of three levels of intervention or support intensity aimed at preventing situations of failure in university contexts (Figure 02):

Figure 2 - Resource allocation mechanisms to support students with disabilities



Caption: **N1**: Resources allocated to universities to provide common education to all students. 1st Level Intervention (Universal Design): flexible teaching and learning opportunities in regular classrooms. **N2**: Resources allocated to universities with groups of students at risk of failure who may need additional support. 2nd Level Intervention (Compensatory Accessibility): adequacy of teaching and intensified support provided based on identified needs, according to academic level. **N3**: Resources allocated to students who need additional intensive support. 3rd Level Intervention: specialized teaching and learning and individualized, most often linked to an individual long-term plan and/or external support.

Source: Adapted from European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2016) and Ebersold (2018; 2020).

- 1st Level (N1) - General Financing (80% of cases): the first level of resources includes expenses dedicated to the education of all students, those who do not need support or those universities that consider themselves capable of acting in an inclusive manner, without any extra support for academic activities.
- 2nd Level (N2) – Processual Financing (15% of cases): the second level of resources includes extra funding, which allows IHE to offer intensified support to students who have difficulties in dealing with school demands and who are at risk of failure. In this financing model, also called supply-side approach or supply-side approach, it is foreseen the offer of intensified support services at the university to those students who face difficulties in meeting the educational demands, without the requirement of official labeling of the student body. by institutional interdisciplinary teams. In this model, the identification of needs and the support provided to students are the responsibility of the IHE, envisioning the same learning opportunities and achievement of results as their colleagues.
- 3rd Level (N3) – Entry Financing (5% of cases): the third level of resources is directed at students who need more intensive support, as they face long-term challenges in meeting their educational demands. In this scenario, universities may face difficulties in adequately responding to the educational needs of these students through intensified second-level support in classrooms, having the option of requiring additional means and/or external supports. It is important to highlight that, at this level, based on mandatory formal identification/labeling carried out by an interdisciplinary team that includes members from inside and outside the university, resources can be allocated to these students and associated with funding based on their own demand, thus configuring an entry financing model, also called a demand-side approach or demand-side approach. In turn, the necessary resources are described in an individualized plan, which will allow for procedural educational assessments, evaluations, formal and regular reviews and, concomitantly, the description of supports which the student is eligible to officially enjoy.

If we consider digital accessibility, for example, the figure suggests that, depending on the needs and potential of the subjects, different levels of accessibility must be established which, according to Ebersold (2020), are distinguished from each other based on the following principles:

- Universal Design (1st Level) – for 80% of cases: aims, from the planning of any resource or strategy, to provide functionalities that meet most of the specificities of most subjects and that do not demand additional integrative or compensatory support.

- Integrative Accessibility (2nd Level) – for 15% of cases: aims to provide more effective usability to subjects with sensory impairments (hearing impairment or visual impairment), physical disability, moderate intellectual disability and/or with ASD, through complementary software to the existing operating system and/or through hardware (drivers, eye mice, among others);
- Compensatory Accessibility (3rd Level) – for 5% of cases: directed at individuals with disabilities with severe impairments in the context of intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, deafblindness and ASD and who may need support from other people so that the subject can be able to perform some activity.

While compensatory accessibility needs to be thought, planned, executed, managed and evaluated for a maximum of 5% of the population with disabilities and integrative accessibility for a maximum of around 15%, it is possible to infer that universal design is aimed at about 80% of the population with a disability, assuming that it should be accessible to all other citizens, including children and the elderly.

### **Didactic-pedagogical possibilities on the accessibility approach**

In Higher Education, unfortunately, more assessments are practiced than analyses, replicating behaviors resulting from the abuse of exams that we face in our lives. It is therefore important to break with this logic and understand the act of analysis as an opportunity for investigation, to understand, describe and qualify the preconditions of the context to support the necessary interventions.

The act of planning in advance and choosing the thematic contents needs to foresee their adjustment in class, as this is where the encounter with subjectivities and differences takes place. For this, the actors involved need to be willing to make personal interrelationships and accept reality, also making use of the theoretical body and instruments with which data collection, analysis and evaluation operate.

### **Cooperation, curricular accessibility and differentiated teaching in Higher Education**

The most important characteristic of the teacher's professional activity is the mediation between the student and society, considering the student's background, conditions and means of teaching (knowledge, methods, organization of teaching) and their social destination in society.

This is our understanding of formative trajectory, that is, curriculum (from the Latin, *Currit*). It is possible to understand it as the sum of academic requirements, based on the experiences that support the construction of the bridge between theory and action, that is, it is the configuration of practice.

It is necessary to explain that curriculum definitions are transformed in the scenarios of different societies, taking into account political, economic and social aspects. In the Brazilian context, the current educational guidelines are close to this conception and, added to it, provide for the possibility of adopting curricular adequacy, adaptation, flexibility and acceleration practices (BRASIL, 2013).

However, in the process of operationalizing the curriculum, the following questions are important in relation to the criteria for analyzing this learning: what is our conception of education? What do we want with our educational practice? What conception of student do we have? Who is he, how will he be looked at, how will his psychological process, his sociocultural background, his way of relating and his possibilities be taken into account? What are the needs to be met? What is the purpose of teaching? Is it theoretical? Is it theoretical-practical, is it just practical? What is the desired performance? Will it be conducted with mental operations or with information only? What content is needed and selected? At what level will these contents be treated? What is the performance requirement level of the selected content?

In this sense, the Curricular Differentiation and Accessibility processes - CDA are necessary in the dimensions of planning, development and use of resources, adoption of strategies, management of times, spaces and relationships and analysis (SACRISTÁN, 2017; CABRAL, 2021).

In Higher Education, CDA needs to consider academic and non-academic skills, in addition to personal skills (communication, politics, persuasion), critical and self-critical authorship, cooperation / collaboration in the challenge of the collective game, and in the achievement of interactive challenges, communication and audiovisual. It is also worth highlighting the ability to reconstruct available information, in addition to new literacy skills: media, civil, discourse, personal, community, visual, listening, evaluative, pedagogical and technological fluency. In addition to these aspects, cooperation in the implementation of the curriculum at the university level should form part of the educator's ethical pacts, at least in the practice of learning planning and assessment of learning.

On this theme, in order to contribute with some possibilities, we consider indicating some theoretical and practical possibilities:

- a) Curriculum Differentiation and Accessibility - CDA: understood as the materialization of the dynamic cooperative, polycentric and intervectoral dialogue between three or more social dimensions, each consisting of managers, teachers, multidisciplinary teams, employers, students with disabilities who have or do not have high skills, giftedness and/or ASD, their peers or family members. The actors articulated for the CDA have as their fundamental scope to cooperatively agree on the implementation of the processes of planning, identification and development of resources, teaching and evaluation strategies, committing to manage, throughout the school, academic and professional training trajectories, possible barriers and/or facilitators that appear in times and spaces.
- b) Universal Design for Learning - The UDL consists of a theoretical framework that contributes to the planning of classes based on three principles: engagement, representation of action and expression. To meet the principle of engagement, teachers need to recruit students' interest, sustain effort and perseverance, and provide opportunities for self-regulation. Meeting the principle of representation implies taking care of perceptual processes, languages and symbols, and understanding. When thinking about how students will demonstrate how they learned, teachers should provide options for physical action, provide possibilities for different forms of action and expression (CENTER FOR APPLIED SPECIAL TECHNOLOGY, 2018; FORNAUF; ERICKSON, 2020)
- c) Differentiated Teaching: This is another theoretical framework that contributes to improving the quality of teaching to respond to student diversity. It is a process that aims to help teachers adjust lessons to respond to individual interests, needs and strengths, giving students choice and flexibility in how they learn. From evaluation processes of learning styles, interests and levels of readiness of all students, teachers can better plan classes allowing differentiation of content, process, product and learning environment (TOMLINSON; THIGHE, 2006; SMALE-JACOBSE et al., 2019).

As in the context of Basic Education, some provocations matter: could co-teaching in Higher Education, for example, where two teachers work together, be designed as a possibility, from an interdisciplinary perspective? Would two professors be able to deterritorialize themselves and build relationships with other types of knowledge?

## **The power of University Extension Programs and Curriculum Internships for professional training**

Understanding that teaching is not just the transmission of knowledge and not just the development and exercise of skills and abilities, it is important to combine active assimilation by students, based on the knowledge learned and experiences.

In this sense, over the years the concept of extension, which came to be understood as communication, which permeates the questioning of how knowledge arises in practice. Thus, it begins with a vision of an incomplete human being, who does not master all knowledge, but does not completely ignore it. In the "extension of culture" - it enters, invades the place of the other - and the concept of "communication about culture" - dealing with relationships, transforming encounters with the other, promoting awareness from these places (FREIRE, 1977) .

Added to this, an intrinsic characteristic of Brazilian Higher Education: the inseparability between Research, Teaching and Extension Programs, which was and always will be a great challenge.

This is because, when researching our own uncertainties, we have the opportunity to understand that, when the teacher investigates what he teaches, this process enables discovery, recognition of the importance of scientific knowledge. Furthermore, this process allows us to investigate our pedagogical practice, generating questions and new discoveries, in interdisciplinary and intersectoral partnerships, with the direct involvement of administrative technicians and managers. As Ducatti-Silva and Zanon (2014, p. 11) indicates:

The research allows reflection from the results that indicate actions to be incorporated. In this way, continuing education ceases to be "recycling" or "training" and becomes a space for the production of knowledge. The teacher recognizes himself as a "student" to be the subject of his pedagogical practice.

Thus, activities and extension programs, as well as internships, are essential to enhance investigation, understanding and intervention in reality; developing and expanding awareness of socio-cultural content in student education.

We are training students as subjects, subject-citizens, structuring relationships with the self, the self and the other, the self and ethics. From this perspective, it is clear that extension activities and programs, as well as internship practices, are still significantly disjointed.

Added to this, the lack of conviviality in Higher Education institutions, the fragmentation of knowledge and professional activity has directly impacted on the powers of active learning from an interdisciplinary perspective (ILLICH, 1976, BAREMBLITT, 2002).

When considering these ethical-political and moral principles of accessibility and alterity, which dimensions do we need to problematize competences, skills and specialties in Higher Education. This is because it is necessary to suppress the belief that there is a specific way of evaluating when teaching is done by “competences”.

The planning and execution of an action form the basis of the evaluation. Thus, to evaluate by competence it is necessary to plan and teach by competence. The question is: do we teach everyone by competence? If so, why do we need differentiated certification?

### **Skills, abilities and the risks of “specialism” in Higher Education**

Considering that Higher Education prepares professionals for all areas of knowledge, including some considerations regarding skills and abilities, in order to understand the fabric in which this level of education is constituted.

According to Chauí (2014), the development of a competence, a complex quality, requires the gathering of a set of simple skills. In this sense, skills and abilities are ways of doing something through resources (cognitive, affective, motor, communication, etc.) and procedural (methodological) resources that imply an action.

Thus, the configuration of the desired competence will guide educators and students in the tasks of teaching and learning content configured in the curriculum. From the point of view of educators, teaching what and how; from the students' point of view, learn what and how.

Exposing this first approximation about competences and abilities, from planning to analysis, what possibilities do we have when dealing with university students with disabilities? A starting point can be the understanding that without planned pedagogical actions, there is no evaluation of teaching, no analysis of learning, and no verification of initial and continuing education either.

The ideology<sup>4</sup> of competence, however, is somewhat dangerous these days. According to Chauí (2014), Higher Education resumes an organization according to the Fordist model, directed by competent administrators and controlled to execute the

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<sup>4</sup> According to Chauí (2014), ideology has a prescriptive, normative, regulatory character. The function of ideology is to hide the social division of classes, economic exploitation, political domination and cultural exclusion, offering society members a feeling of social identity, based on identifying references, such as Humanity, Freedom, Justice, Equality, the Nation.



guidelines of cultural and economic production. In this approach, the ideology of competence focuses on the analysis of two specific institutions: Higher Education and the cultural industry, based on social fragmentation and liquid society (CHAUÍ, 2014; BAUMAN, 2015).

Unfortunately, the current logic is still to demarcate who has the knowledge of the actions to be carried out, and who are the competent people to carry them out. In this perspective, the organization is the competent one, while the students are the incompetent ones, social objects conducted, directed and manipulated by the organization.

That is, are we training incompetent people (executors) and evaluating them with competent criteria (managers)? Where are the analytical-critical subjects in the process of construction and participation in the curriculum so that they can break the curriculum grids? In the non-cooperative logic, university work has still made the separation between those who are competent to direct and the incompetent, who only know how to execute.

Thus, according to Chauí (2014) “the ideology of competence achieves domination through the enormous prestige and power of scientific-technological knowledge” (p. 174). This is what happens with the perspective of professionals in the area of Special Education or who work in sectors dedicated to promoting accessibility: there is a tendency to delegate to these sectors an issue that is inherent to the university community. The Fordist logic, therefore, is still more present than we realize.

These paths have a direct impact on strengthening empowering perspectives, particularly when considering people with disabilities. After invalidating individuals and social classes as subjects of action, this mechanism seeks to revalidate them.

However, this is done by taking them as private persons or individuals. This is what we will call privatized competence. From this perspective, to the extent that we are invalidated as competent beings, everything needs to be taught to us “scientifically”.

This competent discourse demands that we internalize its rules and values absorbed by the cultural industry and advertising, which begin to sell signs and images, including the “model” professional. So, in an institution that standardizes incompetent people, where would the production of disability be in the evaluation processes? Are we not looking for a curriculum ideology? Marilena Chauí says:

we are not producers of culture just because we are economically “dependent” or because technocracy has devoured humanism, or because we do not have enough funds to transmit knowledge, but because Higher Education is structured to “make known so that one cannot think. Acquire and reproduce not create. Consume, instead of doing the work of reflection. We know not to think, everything that crosses the doors

of the university only has the right to enter and stay if it is reduced to knowledge, that is, to a controlled and intellectually manipulated representation. It is necessary that the real becomes a dead thing to acquire university citizenship (CHAUI, 2014, p. 76)

Thus, we are in a scenario where the professional training process does not form reflective subjects, capable of exercising their freedom of thought and action, but a qualified workforce through the assimilation of technical knowledge to be offered in the labor market. Thus, Higher Education is now administered to train competent professionals and a reserve army of supposedly incompetent people fighting for the “recognition” of their skills.

Under the “society of knowledge”, which would expand the freedom of thought of individuals and strengthen the processes of democratization at the national and international levels, the contemporary cultural industry establishes a process of national and international control of professionals in training and graduates who, fascinated with the curricular “grid”, they fight for their servitude as if they were fighting for their freedom.

Rubem Alves once said: “The curriculum imprisons!”. Consequently, the mind shaped by the curriculum grid expresses a body shaped by elements that make up the ideology of competence with mere techniques sold in Higher Education and assimilated by the subjects' bodies as if they were their indispensable organs, denoting and connoting the transformation of students into cyborgs.

How to overcome it? The conviviality in constructions and reformulations, perhaps? The interrelation of the actors needs to be in the entire “assembly line” of the curricular program. To free ourselves from this dangerous dogmatic slumber, we need to work out a new critique, a new phenomenology of perception. We even need to revisit the so-called “accessibility centers” of the Brazilian IHE.

On this theme, if we rescue the competent discourse of the organization and the specialists, we will see that they are built to ensure two aspects that are now inseparable in the mode of production: the organization's discourse states that rationality only exists in the laws of the market (some relationship with the Curriculum Guidelines ?); the specialist's speech affirms that there is only happiness in competition and in the success of those who win (any relation in what we are trying to do with these instruments such as Specific Terminality or Differentiated Certification?).

## **Between standardization and legitimation of skills and abilities of people with disabilities in Higher Education**

The IHE have been inclined to make use of instruments and strategies for the “diplomation” of students with disabilities, such as the Differentiated Certification; Differentiated temporality; Intermediate Certification and Specific Terminality.

However, these directions have supported, in various educational microcontexts, the proposition of curricula that tend to move away from the biopsychosocial perspective.

In Higher Education, in addition to these strategies, some IFES have discussed (and often implemented) possibilities of structuring a differentiated diploma, that is: instead of the institution providing curricular differentiation from the perspective of accessibility, throughout the person's formative trajectory with disabilities, has indicated in that document the curricular elements that were completed by her with “success”.

However, this path is based on inequality between those who have and those who do not have technical-scientific knowledge, making it the preferred place for competition between individuals and for the success of some of them against others. Thus, students with some specificities tend to be marginalized or even excluded from fundamental processes. Simultaneously, teachers, students, managers, family members and multidisciplinary teams can, individually or collectively, enhance stereotypes and situations of negative discrimination and vulnerability.

This has worried the scientific and academic communities, particularly when considering the training processes of people with disabilities at this level of education and their transition to the job market: what has made institutional actors limit their perspectives and practices to such instruments? Would it be the very conception of disability? In our pedagogical practice and institutional management, do we still tend to distance disability from competence and skills? Is there a cultural selection of the curriculum?

Such questions are manifested not only in the current search for a university degree at any cost, but also in the new form assumed by the university as an organization destined not only to provide diplomas, but also to carry out its research according to the requirements and demands of business organizations, that is, of the capital. In this way, the university feeds the ideology of competence and strips itself of its own activities: critical education and research.

We are facing structural capacitism, historically constituted by everyday attitudes incited by negatively discriminating conceptions and representations, which potentiate the social participatory delegitimization of people with disabilities by distinguishing “capable” bodies from “not capable” bodies. The foundations of this historical, anthropological and

sociological structure have been strongly constituted by metaphysical and biologizing conceptions of disability, to the detriment of the biopsychosocial perspective. These conceptions, transposed in societies whose neoliberal logics are permeated by the constant definition of standards of normality and the imposing identification of deviant bodies, have fostered criteria of social and economic control. This has also occurred based on other intersecting social markers such as race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, education, profession and/or social class.

In this way, structural capacitism has been presented as a founding instrument of necropolitics, beyond the attitudes of segregation, infantilization, welfare, normalization and violence. From this perspective, as with racism, ableism is not just a moral, legal or economic issue, but has constituted the foundation of all institutions and societies. How much are we imprisoned by limiting and mistaken ideas about disability and how does this impact on concrete actions in society?

### **Final considerations**

A Higher Education institution can, if it seeks to, ensure a management and administration organization with democratic participation of all elements involved in the decision-making process, and in the articulation between university, territory, families, system administration bodies.

The presented theoretical essay suggests that the provision of accessibility is guaranteed in the entrance exams, in the didactic planning, in the pedagogical strategies, in the adequacy of the infrastructure, in the management of times and spaces. In addition, considering the levels of accessibility and financing, it is important that the management of human and material resources is carefully carried out, both in terms of hiring, as well as in the composition and management of teams, in addition to the acquisition of resources for the promotion of accessibility.

Pervading these practices, the study contributes to the problematization related to the conceptions of disabilities and the legitimation of rights, through the recognition of identity, subjective, social and historical factors of people with disabilities.

In the meantime, it is important to highlight the fundamental consideration of promoting contextual conditions so that the disabled person can participate in decisions and actions. In order to legitimize the guarantee of the rights of people with disabilities at undergraduate and postgraduate level, it is important not to place them at the center, but to enable them to be part of a cooperative network, with polycentric, dynamic, intervectoral and

propositional relationships. After all, just as the motto of Disability Studies already proclaims: “Nothing about us, without us”.

Finally, these considerations justify the need for solid professional preparation in the face of the demands posed by teaching work and show the importance of initial and continuing education and the challenges for competitions and selective hiring processes: conceptions of didactics, curriculum, disability, sexual and gender diversity, ethnic-racial identities and issues, among other political-social minorities.

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