

Accessibility for high-skilled/gifted people in higher education: challenges and commitments

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Abstract

The present article seeks, through literature review, to discuss the accessibility in higher education of high-skilled/gifted people. The education of high-skilled/gifted people presupposes an interaction between those involved in the educational process, aiming at totality, in a global perspective that regards all students in their individual needs; this requires a curricular proposal articulated to reality resulting in significant learning, for the formation of an aware citizen able to exercise citizenship. Thus, working with high-skilled/gifted people implies accepting heterogeneity of groups and individuals; it also implies knowing particularities, as well as the contact and the dialogic among subjects. There is also the suggestion of knowing existing jobs and building, in a collective process, forms of work based on new methodologies, which meet all their individual differences, providing them with growth.

Keywords: Giftedness. Higher Education. Accessibility.

1. Introduction

Although the inclusion in Higher Education of people with special needs is quite discussed today, the great difficulties these individuals find in their own integration are well known, not only by an incidence of “pre-concepts”, but also because society, although evolving, always takes in “these different people” doubting

their capacity, or frightened by a unwanted responsibility.

The inclusion of people with special needs in universities raises the responsibility and awareness about every aspect that must, necessarily, be interconnected between university and community, because coexistence and cooperation provide the high-skilled/gifted person the development of a healthy social life. Mittler (2003, p. 140) complements this provision saying that “inclusion and exclusion begin in the classroom. No matter how committed a government can be in relation to inclusion”.

Therefore, this article firstly presents challenges of including high-skilled/gifted people in Higher Education. Most universities are still not prepared for inclusion, requiring adaptation to receive better the high-skilled/gifted student. Reflections on issues relating to high-skilled/gifted people are still not very common in the university environment. Therefore, in a second moment, the article proposes the creation of educational spaces that stimulate learning and the development of these people, as well as the implementation of research spaces in this area, while a commitment with the emancipatory and inclusive education.

2. Challenges of the inclusion of high-skilled/gifted people in higher education

The inclusion of high-skilled/gifted people involves changing the curriculum, evaluations, teaching and the grouping types within our universities. It is also based on the diversity based on race, gender, nationality and social level of each one. According to Mantoan (1998, p. 2):

The inclusion resulting from a quality education for all students causes and demands, from school and teachers, new positions and is a reason for modernizing education and for teachers to improve their practices. It is an innovation that implies an effort of upgrading and restructuring the current conditions of most of our schools.

We believe rethinking beliefs, ideas and values assigned to high-skilled/gifted students is significant in teachers/professors' training. In the same way, the training and constant improvement of these professionals are necessary, providing conditions to take up the challenge to assist high-skilled/gifted students in relation to learning and the achievement of citizenship and their space in the community.

According to Carvalho (2004, p. 53), “in the case high-skilled/gifted people, the hegemony of normality also ‘acts’ generating questions about the ‘superiority’ they present, whether intellectual, artistic or of another nature”.

Ainscow (1999, p. 218) understands the challenge of inclusion as an overcoming of barriers, in which

The trend is still thinking in “inclusion policies” or inclusive education as stating about students with disabilities and other characterized as having “special educational needs”. Furthermore, the inclusion is often seen only as involving the movement of students of special schools for the contexts of regular schools, with the implication that they are “included”, since they are part of that context.

Therefore, as expressed in the Federal Constitution (BRAZIL, 1988), education is a guarantee for every person, which means it is for everyone, without exception, experienced in an egalitarian environment, aiming at achieving full human development and citizenship. For high-skilled/gifted people to exercise this right, the university needs to adapt to the inclusion process as a whole.

Therefore, the aim is an inclusive university and society, which provide access to every person and respect

the limits and differences of each one, providing space to all people so that they can grow and transform their lives, breaking with many of the barriers imposed on them.

When higher education institutions receive a person with special needs, they face a great challenge that starts with the classroom and goes through the support structures and resources necessary for this demand. A point to be discussed in the universities, for the inclusive process, is diversification and flexibility of the teaching and learning methodology, including, in this context, organization and functioning of the university as a whole.

Universities must have the proposition of open curricula and varied curricular proposals in the Pedagogical Political Projects of undergraduate and post-graduate courses. We must also review the flexibilization of pedagogical criteria and procedures, thus favoring the differentiation in teaching methodology, didactic procedures, in temporality to achieve certain goals and in the evaluation of high-skilled/gifted students. The adopted methodology must be consistent with curricular objectives and contents.

Structuring an appropriate educational intervention for a favorable performance for these people at all levels, from personal to social, will only be possible when universities have inclusive molds, adapted to the needs of people with special needs, respecting differences and observing students' diversity,.

People with special needs are increasingly reaching higher education, once, according to the School Census/MEC/INEP (BRAZIL, 2008), the enrolment of students with special needs in higher education records that the number of pupils increased from 5,078 to 11,999 students. In relation to the high-skilled/gifted students, the census reveals a number of 3,257 enrollments in the year 2008. This indicator, despite the increased enrolment, reflects the educational and social exclusion, especially of high-skilled/gifted people, stressing the need to promote the inclusion and the strengthening of policies of accessibility in higher education institutions.

Some definitions of percentage of high-skilled people include between 1 and 2% and others, above 15-20%, have high skills/giftedness. The World Health Organization (WHO), which calculates its estimate based on scores obtained in IQ tests, defines that from 3.5 to 5% of any population would be high-skilled/gifted people, according to Freitas and Perez (2010), being around approximately 8 million people in total.

Concretizing this concept of inclusive university, which provides education for all, becomes a great challenge for those responsible for the construction of school environments. The models found in Brazilian education institutions, in their majority, disregard, in many respects, the real needs of students and attendees of these establishments, as well as professionals in the area.

It is possible and feasible to adopt some special/space solutions for environments of educational institutions to meet the needs of people with special needs. However, only this is not enough to determine a change in the attitude of those who operate this process (educators, staff and the students themselves).

3. Educational alternatives in higher education for high-skilled/gifted students

There are some educational alternatives in higher education high-skilled/gifted students and we propose to discuss some of them in this moment, which are: acceleration, curricular enrichment, skill groups, teaching internship, tutorships, tutorial education program.

The acceleration is one of the most widely used educational alternatives for high-skilled/gifted students. It consists of finishing studies faster, in early joining university and in advancing a semester to another when the student already has all the necessary knowledge in that semester.

According to Sabatella (2008), acceleration can understand the flexibilization of the curriculum, complete steps faster, do activities during the vacation and in other times.

Some authors are against and others, in favor of acceleration, but Clark, according to Alencar and Fleith (2001, p. 130) describes the following advantages:

1. This method can be used in any school.
2. Intellectually gifted students tend to choose older partners, and acceleration favors this contact.
3. Acceleration allows gifted students to begin their professional life earlier, which results in greater productivity.
4. Since their time at school is smaller, the costs also decrease.
5. Students feel less bored and dissatisfied when they are able to accelerate their studies, experiencing a less tedious and more stimulating program.
6. Students who participate in acceleration programs have been showing higher social and emotional adjustment.
7. Acceleration allows demanding more productivity from students according to their abilities.
8. If an unusually bright student stays with colleagues of the same age, he/she will likely find the tasks proposed by professor very easy and will develop inappropriate study habits.
9. The opportunity to interact and participate in academic activities tends to favor a more responsible attitude from the student and the establishment of new purposes and objectives.

With this, we observe that acceleration has much to offer to our students, if pedagogical political projects of universities and courses contemplate this feature. If acceleration is not described in the pedagogical political project, it will hardly be effected with success.

Our legislation provides for the acceleration, as laid down in Art. 24 of LDB/1996 “V - verification of academic performance shall observe the following criteria: (...) c) possibility of advancement in courses and in grades by assessing the learning and also in Art. 59 “Educational systems shall provide for learners with special needs: (...) II [...] and acceleration to finish faster the school program for gifted students.”

Universities can make the acceleration of academics by verifying their abilities in disciplines in advance and not making them attend unnecessary credits, in which they already have the basic knowledge. Thus, the academic feel more motivated, goes beyond his/her knowledge, further researches, and shows more interest.

Teaching internship is another educational alternative for high-skilled/gifted students and can be used in the university to encourage them with specific knowledge to deepen their knowledge with a professor and, thus, help their colleagues. This alternative has also been employed for a long in the educational institutions across and outside the country, and has increasingly allowed students to exchange ideas, knowledge and deepen their interests by specific themes.

Tutorship is an educational alternative for high-skilled/gifted students, in which a professor who dominates a content or theme of the area of interest of the high-skilled/gifted student offers to guide and work with

this academic according to their interests, in combined shifts and schedules. Since universities have a large field of knowledge and information areas, this space would provide the existence and permanence of tutorships according to individual research interests, or also from groups with high skills/giftedness.

According to Freitas and Pérez (2010, p. 67), teaching internships “very similar to tutorships, usually performed by specialists in a particular area (usually outside the school) who work with the student in researches or specific projects which require knowledge that, sometimes, the classroom professor had no time to build”.

Thus, in universities, there are many specialists, masters and doctors in specific areas, so that we could have several students assisted by teaching internship programs according to the specialty of the academic. Another form of education for high-skilled/gifted students are skill groups, which, according to Sabatella (2008), consist of separating academics by intellectual level, or also by performance in any specific area within the university to work the skill groups with specific areas of interest. According to Sabatella (2008, p. 186), this educational alternative requires:

- recognizing the broad individual differences and the heterogeneity of the group, always including some individualized instruction;
- avoiding complete segregation, giving students the opportunity to live together with others with different abilities;
- selecting well-qualified professors who must be constantly updated regarding research, evaluation forms and specific curricular proposals for these students;
- encouraging the development in various areas, in addition to the intellectual;
- the constant contact and communication between professors and professor and parents.

This alternative is also known in the literature as segregation and its goal is to separate students with a greater potential from other students, during certain time, and, after these students develop their activities in another room, these students return to the classroom.

Some authors are favorable to skill groups and others, against them. Favorable because they increasingly develop specific potentials and talents of each student and contrary because they can also leave this same student with snobbish and proud attitudes, according to Alencar and Fleith (2001).

The curricular enrichment for high-skilled/gifted students provides a theoretical deepening in the student’s subjects of interest. It must include issues that motivate, encourage, instigate and challenge this student. According to Sabatella (2008, p. 182),

enrichment is basically done in three aspects: within the curricular contents, with adaptations or extensions of their subjects, according to the student’s interests; within certain learning context, with flexibility or diversification of the curriculum; and independent projects (individual or small group) such as workshops, competitions, guidance with experts and mentors, extracurricular activities, programs or courses for personal development in specific areas.

Renzulli (2004) propõe um modelo de enriquecimento curricular, abrangendo: enriquecimento do tipo I, II e III. O enriquecimento tipo I propõe expor ao estudante uma diversidade de atividades extracurriculares através de oficinas, excursões, filmes, programas de televisão, minicursos e palestras. Assim, estas atividades irão despertar o interesse por diversas áreas nos alunos com altas habilidades/superdotação e

também em sua área específica. No enriquecimento do tipo II, de acordo com Alencar e Fleith (2001, p. 135)

Renzulli (2004) proposes a curricular enrichment model, covering: type I, II and III enrichment. Type I enrichment proposes exposing students to various extracurricular activities through workshops, excursions, films, TV programs, mini-courses and lectures. Thus, these activities will awaken the interest in several areas in high-skilled/gifted students and in their specific area. Type II enrichment II, according to Alencar and Fleith (2001, p. 135)

use methods, materials and instrumental techniques that contribute to the development of higher levels of thought processes (analyze, synthesize and evaluate), and creative and critical abilities, in the research skills [...] in the search for bibliographic references and processes related to personal and social development.

In type III enrichment, students try to solve problems raised in the activities of the type II. Here, they deepen their interest in certain area and develop authentic, original products.

According to Alencar and Fleith (2001, p. 136), the type III enrichment enables the student to develop metacognitive skills, such as planning, resource management, decision making and evaluation, as well as characteristics of affective nature as independence of thought and action, motivation, self-confidence and interpersonal skills.

Another educational alternative in higher education for high-skilled/gifted academics are tutorial education programs. The Tutorial Education Program (PET - *Programa de Educação Tutorial* in Portuguese) was established by Federal Law 11.180/2005 and regulated by Decrees 3.385/2005, 1.632/2006 and 1.046/2007. In 2010 was published Decree 976, which brought news to the structure of the Tutorial Education Program. The objectives of PET, according to Decree 976/2010, in its art. 2:

- I - to develop academic activities in quality standards of excellence, through tutorial learning groups of a collective and interdisciplinary nature;
- II - to contribute to the improvement of the quality of undergraduate students' academic training;
- III - to stimulate the formation of professionals and professors of high technical, scientific, technological and academic qualification;
- IV - to formulate new strategies for the development and modernization of higher education in the country; and
- V - to stimulate the critical spirit, as well as the professional activity guided by citizenship and the social function of higher education.

With this, our universities can contribute to continued training of academics, and seek new paths for higher education in our country. The Tutorial Education Program must be organized from formations of graduations, with the formation of groups of students under the guidance of a tutoring professor, thus enabling the academic training of students involving them in teaching, research and extension.

The selected students will receive scholarships, as well as tutoring professors. The PET should contribute to the implementation of public and development policies in their work area, considering this contribution in periodic evaluations.

According to the decree 976/2010, Art. 17, the undergraduate student that wants to receive PET

group scholarship must meet the following requirements:

- I - regularly enrolled as an undergraduate student;
- II - not receiving a scholarship of any other program;
- III - present a good academic performance according to parameters set by the HEI's highest collegiate; and
- IV - be willing to dedicate twenty hours a week to the program activities.

Single paragraph. The announcement of the student selection process to compound PET groups shall be officially disclosed, within the scope of undergraduate and extension pro-deanships, or equivalent, at least eight days in advance, including information on date, place, schedule, selection criteria and procedures.

We observed, in public universities that many students participate in tutorial education programs. Currently, the tutorial education program has 779 groups distributed among 114 Higher Education Institutions in different areas of knowledge and in various geographical regions of the country, according to the site of the Ministry of Education (MEC, 2013).

Also according to Decree 976/2010, Art. 18, the student who receives the the program scholarship shall have the following duties:

- I - ensure the academic quality of PET;
- II - participate in all activities programmed by the tutoring professor;
- III - participate during his/her stay in PET in teaching, research and extension activities;
- IV - maintain good performance in the undergraduate course;
- V - contribute to the training process of his/her HEI colleagues, not necessarily in the same area of training, especially in the year of admission to the institution;
- VI - publish or present in scientific event an annual academic work, individually or in groups;
- VII - mention his/her PET scholar status in publications and papers presented.

Therefore, we realize that high-skilled/gifted higher education students have several educational alternatives, such as: acceleration, curricular enrichment, skill groups, teaching internships, tutorships and tutorial education program, but the professional who works with this student is responsible for referring him/her to the appropriate service and providing him/her all the help necessary for his/her good performance in university.

4. Conclusion

Universities have been concerned about people with disabilities and pervasive developmental disorders. Nevertheless, actions and policies for high-skilled/gifted people have been often put aside this concern, and appropriate specific programs have not been performed. Furthermore, most actions also focus on the level of education for children and adolescents, excluding adults, who also require specific actions.

The university intends to be this space of formation, with different and relevant themes. In this perspective, this article proposes to discuss the high skills/giftedness in adults, committed to an inclusive and changing education, in order to promote and encourage the search for the development of quality education, as developed countries.

When considering a developing country, we must ensure that our actions and policies include all populations, so that we can really have quality education. This involves since professors' training up to qualification at all education levels and modalities.

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