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Intellectual disability and Higher Education: access and accessibility in a Visual Arts teachers' training course

The Social model of disability in Brazilian research within sensu stricto graduate programs

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Abstract: The study is aimed to discuss the path of a student with intellectual disabilities undergoing an university degree in the Visual Arts, in order to identify the mechanisms that enabled his access, permanence and academic success in a federal university in northern Brazil. Methodologically, we adopted oral history to identify factors that impacted access and academic path. It also aimed to identify to what extent the understanding of disability as a condition of impairment and school failure was overcome, both from the student's and from the professionals' points of view. involved in his formative process. It is a qualitative study developed from the perspective of oral history as described by Alberti and understanding the aspects outlined in the field of memory by Bosi. Data come from semi-structured interview conducted in a virtual environment and written productions by the research participant regarding his academic process. In the analyzes we take as a reference the perspective of Thompson regarding the experience and historical-cultural references that lead us to seek to understand the development of people and policies as procedural, happening in a dialectical perspective. The results highlight the relevant role of public policies for access to university, in expanding the rights of people with disabilities, but also the path to be followed in removing barriers within these institutions. It was understood that the adoption of specific pedagogical procedures, suitable for dialogue through different symbolic tools as required due to the limitations in reading and writing of the research subject, favored his formative path as a student, in spite of the need of important reformulations to be carried out by the institutions for the effective accessibility of knowledge..

Keywords: Higher Education; Especial education; Intellectual Disability.

Introdução

School education of People with Disabilities (PWD) is a topic widely discussed in the context of Basic Education since the second half of the 20th century. The strengthening of Special Education policies from the perspective of the inclusion of all people, preferably in regular schools, consolidated as an

educational policy in the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988 and reaffirmed in the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education, has brought, over the last two decades, an expressive challenge to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs): how institutions, that are structured in the logic of meritocracy, will incorporate, in their academic staff those students with disabilities, who complete Basic Education and aim to continue their training at a higher level^{1,2?}

Analysis of data contained in the Statistical Synopses of School Censuses of the Institute for Educational Research Anísio Teixeira (Instituto de Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira - INEP) shows the presence of students with disabilities in higher education following a trajectory of systematic expansion in terms of enrolment volume. However, the analysis of the profile of students with disabilities who accessed this level of education, in data from 2019, shows us the prevalence of students with physical (33%) and sensorial (53.14%) disabilities. The volume of students considered as people with intellectual disabilities corresponds to less than 8.6% of the total of 48,520 PWD (Persons With Disabilities) students enrolled in higher education³.

The reduced presence of students with intellectual disabilities in higher education is directly inverse to the data contained in the censuses referring to students enrolled in basic education who, among the 1,090,805 target-audience students of Special Education identified in the data from the School Census of basic education, have 65% of students in this condition in Brazil while there are 59% in the Roraima state (RR)⁴.

An analysis of the 2015 Higher Education Census Statistical Synopsis shows that only one case of a student with Intellectual Disabilities is registered in higher education enrolment in a Federal Institution of Roraima, and it is this student that we deal with in this article. In that year, the total number of students with intellectual disabilities corresponded to 8.3% of the total of 20,158 PWD students enrolled in higher education⁵.

During the mid-2000s, the admission of students with disabilities to higher education was already underway through specific initiatives of the different institutions. This landscape was strengthened in 2005 with the occurrence of a “nudging measure”, a Call for Proposals from the Ministry of Education to implement the Include Program, which led to the implementation of Accessibility Centres in Federal Institutions of Higher Education (FIES)^{6,7}.

In 2016, the quota policy for access to higher education, which already supported vulnerable populations or specific ethnic groups, was extended, through Federal Law n. 13409/2016, for people

with disabilities, and, in May 2017, there was a Normative Ordinance of the Ministry of Education (MEC) that regulated the parameters, including the definition of the target audience, to be adopted by all HEIs. However, analysing the impact of these policies, we have that, in 2019, only 0.5% of the total higher education vacancies were occupied by PWDs, according to data from the technical summary of the Census of Higher Education, a number well below the numbers by the census, showing that around 6% of the Brazilian population had disabilities, even if the criteria and various variables that involve the definition of this population representation are questioned^{8,3}.

The formative path of the higher education student whose trajectory we analyse in this article takes place in this effervescent context of structuring public policies for the entry and permanence of students in higher education. The entrance to the Degree in Visual Arts, which trains teachers to work in Basic Education, took place in 2015, and the completion of the course, in 2019. quota policy carried out by the Federal Institution where the students pursued their training.

The purpose of this article is to present our understanding of the mechanisms that impacted (positively or negatively) the access, permanence and academic success of this student with Intellectual Disabilities at the university, which we investigated through the methodology of Oral History, as conceptualized by Bosi and Alberti. We conducted a semi-structured interview with the graduate and also analysed elements contained in his Course Completion Work, which was precisely about his own life story, focusing on his school career as well as an article produced by him in 2019-2021.

In a first stage we present information about the personal profile and school trajectory of the student in basic education and at the university and we focus on the analysis of aspects that favoured and/or hindered the training process of today's Visual Arts teacher. We indicate, in our final considerations, elements that emerge from the data of this research, as a subsidy to the improvement of the performance of federal institutions in the construction of conditions of accessibility in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to PWDs, focusing on aspects demanded by the person with intellectual disabilities.

Method

The research that gives rise to this article is part of the Macroproject "Education and disability in the voice of those who lived this story: life trajectories of people with disabilities who completed higher

education”, which has been in progress since 2009, mobilizing an expressive set of researchers from different Brazilian universities and whose execution is authorized by Opinion n. 528/2009 of the Federal University of São Carlos (university where the project originated).

The research project has as its objectives: to know the life trajectories of people with disabilities who have completed higher education; to study the factors that promoted school performance in the schooling process of people with disabilities – from basic education to higher education and to reflect on the daily fabric that made it possible to overcome disability as a factor of incapacity and failure.

Methodologically, it is a qualitative research supported by the perspective that the constitution of each person is the result not only of the “synthesis of existing relationships, but also of the history of these relationships”^{9:40} and that the dynamics experienced by the subjects in their development, in their life stories, are strongly impacted by the objective conditions of reality, but they also interfere directly in this same reality, and can become a source of transformation of the real.

We used as a basis the approach of Oral History, according to Alberti's studies, without, however, failing to consider other elements that lead to access to the life history of the participant of this study in particular, aware of the limits and conditions of the memory processes that Bosi alerts us to consider^{10,11}.

An additional theoretical foundation that guides our work is the perspective of history seen from below, as pointed out by E. P. Thompson, which values the understanding of the experiences of “silenced” population groups, a position to which people with disabilities are traditionally relegated and, in this case, a person with an intellectual disability¹².

The central procedure of the research developed here is the semi-structured interview carried out with a professor of Visual Arts whose formative path we follow throughout the undergraduate course, but we also bring elements developed by him in his course conclusion work, which presents elements of his experience as a university student with an intellectual disability.

Results

As a way of presenting our results, we tried to describe the school trajectory, identifying which of the specific services that responded to the peculiar needs of the student were provided and, in the end, we

focused on the trajectory experienced in higher education, emphasizing the way in which this service was experienced by those involved.

School pathway

Fabiano Ferreira Lucena, 06/18/1985, born in Imperatriz do Maranhão, holds a degree in Visual Arts from the Federal University of Roraima – UFRR (2019). He has lived with his mother since his childhood in the city of Boa Vista - RR, with a diagnosis of chronic encephalopathy, which makes him categorized as a Person with Disabilities (PWD). In his case, he has difficulties in learning, reading and speaking.

The process of arriving at Higher Education and subsequent academic success of the research subject is an important report, regarding the academic success stories of PWDs at the university level. However, in addition to demonstrating how the encounter with Art and inclusive public policies were crucial for achieving this success in university education, it is first necessary to resume the way he was labelled and the assistance that the research subject reports, from his childhood to his entry into Higher Education.

To understand the research subject's schooling process, we selected records that were part of the Course Completion Work (2019), in which he presents his story in a video documentary and in a semi-structured interview of the project in which this work is inserted. Some data are imprecise in terms of date, considering the interviewee's failure to remember and the fact that official documents were not found in his elementary school^{13,14}.

Fabiano studied basic education fully in public schools. He started in early childhood education in a common class and, on the way to elementary school, was enrolled in a Special Class, where he remained for six years – common practice at the time (mid-1990s). In approximately 1998, he started to attend regular classes at the same school, in a trajectory without failure. It is interesting to observe how this process happened, following the enactment of the Federal Law LDB n. 9394/1996, which determined that the target audience of special education students would be “preferably” enrolled in regular classes of common education².

Once in high school, he was enrolled in a school considered large (over 1000 students), where the family faced resistance to let him study during the day shift, since Fabiano was outside the age range of his class.

With the conclusion of high school, he began to seek admission, via entrance examination, to the University, which he only managed after four attempts. In the period from 2015 to 2019, he took the Degree in Visual Arts, within the time allotted for completion of the course and without a record of failure or withdrawal from any discipline.

Specific services

In childhood, in terms of specialized care, there is only the record of attendance at the neurologist to “see the thing in my head”¹⁴ and of a period in which he attended what he will call “first special series”, described by him as a class with only one teacher who:

She taught Portuguese, mathematics, everything, she just understood that the class is special, there were only 6 students, every student was all different from one another and there was only one teacher to take care of these six. Then we, and then she, did activities according to the [disability] of each one, you know. She wrote on the board and we wrote in the notebook, so after a while, we passed, it seems like it was 6 years in the first grade, then she went on and she saw that I could move on to the normal first grade, then I went to the first normal grade, but they don't have this record in the school, because I went after this document and they don't have it to show how long I spent in the first special grade^{14:17}.

This record is consistent with the perspective of integration that guided public policies in education at the time, in which the enrolment of people with disabilities or disorders was carried out within schools, but in different classes. In the following years, after moving to regular classes with the other students, Fabiano points out that he did not have any specialized care, only what he will call “reinforcement classes” after school hours. Asked how he felt about this process of not having had more specific care, he declared that he felt that “something was missing”, that “there was a lack of people prepared to receive a person [with a disability]” and that “it was difficult” to be together with the whole class^{14:8}.

His mentions to the “reinforcement class” in after-hours, probably refer to the notion of Specialized Educational Assistance in a Resource Room regime, prevalent in the early 2000s and/or Multifunctional Resource Rooms-sem, which proliferated from 2004. This service, which was already considered insufficient in Elementary School, completely ceased to exist in High School, leaving only the support of colleagues who had accompanied him since Elementary School. In his assessment, if he had not continued with the same class, he could have had greater difficulties at this level of education.

The dynamics of relationships included studies at colleagues' homes, without having considered requesting a support professional for their follow-up¹⁴.

The subject's academic success story, in the logic of common sense, could have ended here, after all, for a person with an intellectual disability, with the existing social barriers, completing Basic Education could have been seen as sufficient, but the meeting with art and with the dream of teaching led him to try the entrance exam: "Since my basic education, I have always had an affinity with regard to Art, although very limited, in my years as a student during Elementary School. When I went to high school, I decided that I wanted to be a teacher, that's when I decided that I would study Visual Arts"^{13:26}.

The pathway during higher education

Fabiano's access to higher education was only made possible because the University already had a specific service structure for the entrance exam. In this case, a professional performed the reading activities and transcribed the answers, with the possibility of using a specific vacancy for quota students. There were four attempts; in one of them, the words of a test supervisor left a painful mark in Fabiano: "the University is not prepared to receive a student like you"¹⁵. And it is on this notion of "preparation", which here seems to us to be inserted in the concept of accessibility, that we will develop our reflections.

Accessibility is defined by Cantorani et al.^{16:3}, reporting to Cantorani and Polatti¹⁷, as:

a concept linked to the background of promoting inclusion. In its breadth, and given the social evolution, it consists of a multiplicity of dimensions, such as attitudinal accessibility, architectural accessibility, methodological accessibility, programmatic accessibility, instrumental accessibility, accessibility in transport, accessibility in communications, digital accessibility.

This broad configuration of the concept of accessibility is what we intend to present here, understanding that it is not enough to ensure access to higher education, but it is essential that, after admission, full participation and successful permanence are ensured, which are reflected in the construction of skills and knowledge of the field in which you are qualifying.

According to reports from the research participant as well as from the teaching professionals and administrative technicians with whom the student interacted, there was no communication to the course coordinators, on the part of those responsible for the selection process, about the student's

disability condition after his admission. This created difficulties to adapt to the first year of studies, being the moment when the student realized that the course was not only focused on artistic practice and that it would also require him, as student, to have a greater mastery of the skills in which he has greater difficulty: reading and writing.

As far as we know, the first institutional communication for the coordination of the course, in relation to the student's disability, took place almost a semester after the beginning of classes, in electronic communication by the social worker from the "Núcleo Construir de Acessibilidade" a core group of the University, a structure created to from the nudging policies of the Ministry of Education⁷ "Include Program":

[...] student Fabiano Ferreira Lucena has chronic encephalopathy, which causes difficulties in learning, reading and speaking. I tried to talk over the phone, but I couldn't. I would like to schedule a time to talk about all the students with disabilities who are in the visual arts course. I am a social worker at UFRR and I work in the reduction of university dropout [...]¹⁸.

The research subject himself, before delving into the issues of his access and permanence in the course, already brought with him a concern about how the University proceeded after his approval in the entrance exam: "I realized that there were many things that should improve receiving a student like me. I believe that it is not enough to offer a place and physical space to this student if there are no stimuli and a professional glance that accompanies the development of the students' skills"^{13:12}.

The existence of more effective communication between sectors would anticipate the intellectual didactic strategies. The research subject felt personally embarrassed to expose his difficulties, because, at the beginning, the class had forty-five freshmen students. In this regard, he reported some difficulties in integrating with colleagues, for example, during seminars.

At times, there was academic monitoring by Núcleo Construir de Acessibilidade, in various formats: tele monitoring of social workers; scale of scholarship holders for monitoring in the classroom in some semesters and, at another time, the hiring of "tutors", a mechanism that was obtained after the tele filed a lawsuit requiring a support professional. This tutoring followed up before, during and after classes, in order to assist in carrying out tasks and discussions about the study materials proposed by the course professors. This support, however, was irregular, with discontinuities and moments in which the total absence of specific assistance was the keynote, and it was up to the technicians and professors of the course to implement strategies of their own.

Even in the absence of a more consistent structure, the student remained active in the course, had an excellent dialogue with professors and colleagues, not only from the Visual Arts course, but also from several other courses; he got good grades and dedicated himself to supervised internship activities, voluntary and paid monitoring, that were the experiences that the course provides to students. Many of these challenging experiences, due to their level of complexity, ended up not even being carried out by students without disabilities, but he was willing to actively assume them. The combination of the subject's interest, the teaching practices appropriate to their conditions by the faculty and the search for the creation of strategies for permanence in everyday life were key for reaching the end, even with failures in the specific follow-up.

Recognition for his efforts in the course was even reflected in the designation of a physical space in the course building at the University: as the subject came to the institution before classes to study, do their tasks and go to the Nucleo Construir de Acessibilidade, the coordination of the course, together with the direction of the academic unit where the course is based, provided a study room where it was possible for the student to receive fellows and colleagues who helped him in his tasks - these were also important support for his development. We also emphasize the involvement of the technical-administrative staff, who have always been willing to support the research subject's needs.

It is worth mentioning that, as the research subject had been developing through an audiovisual production, the Collegiate - formed by the set of professors and with student representation - understood that the student could use this language to support the classes and, also, to produce his final paper.

In the same direction, adaptations were made in teaching, providing the availability of equipment such as recorders and cameras not only for recording classes, but also during assessments. In addition, scholarships/monitoring, provided by the coordination of the course/institution, were essential. Regarding the human aspect, the involvement of teachers, professionals from Núcleo Construir de Acessibilidade, as well as the research subject's mother, his classmates, technicians and tutors were all essential to guarantee the construction of the possibility of becoming an Art educator, to a person with an intellectual disability.

Discussion

It is not new that Federal Universities have made places available to people with disabilities; therefore, it is natural to expect a better reception for these students. In the case described here, we understand that, if the coordination and teachers had been properly informed that they would receive a student from inclusive education policies, many annoying circumstances could have been avoided¹⁵.

Professors and course coordinators expressed an understanding that, if the student had received the help of a tutor throughout the course, he would have developed even more, would have had a better use of the subjects and, at various times throughout the course, would not have relying only on the support of the faculty and classmates¹⁹.

We question whether, if this tutoring structure had been implemented, colleagues, teachers and technicians would have the involvement and responsibility that everyone collectively had when they were challenged to find, within their own group, strategies to adapt practices, built on the sharing of support. human beings, not having the “comfort” of being able to appoint or delegate to a third party the construction of teaching means.

We observed that, although the student did not have mobility difficulties, it was necessary to adapt the architectural space to ensure a place for collective study and shared by other colleagues who helped him in the process of debates and other requirements that his learning condition – highlighting orality – occurred.

A factor that we highlight in the trajectory of the research subject is this encounter with Art and how this empowered Fabiano both in the academic and personal spheres:

Art helped me to give myself body and soul to the study of works and creation processes. Through them, I forgot about the problems and difficulties, when I entered the laboratories, there was a lot of giving myself up, and in that way I ended up forgetting the problems of life, I only remembered later^{13:21}.

The research subject stated that, during these laboratories, he noticed that some of his colleagues did not work hard enough and ended up not completing their productions. According to him: “Even though I was a PWD, I always turned in the work on time, other students who did not have the same difficulties as me left the work aside and did not turn in on time”^{13:20}. The creation laboratory classes, where most of the tools were not required to read the written code, were his great motivators

for not being discouraged from the course, in addition to the great affinity with the creative processes, which gave rise to several works in various modalities of the Visual Arts.

Regarding the academic trajectory of the research subject, in addition to the grade 10 in his course conclusion work, he graduated as a laureate student at the end of the first semester of 2019; even with all the difficulties he faced in his four years at UFRR, he completed his course without failing and at the ideal time, something that we rarely see happen in the academic trajectories of students in this course¹⁵.

The research subject, even after completing his undergraduate studies, has been dedicated to the participation in scientific events, in addition to seeking to insert himself as a teacher in private schools. He is currently studying for a public contest and is engaged in pursuing his studies in the area of inclusion in the Masters.

In the master's degree I want to study my area more, to help more. It is because I want to study more in this area [of inclusive education] of how to receive a student that is a person with special needs, because I see that the teachers are not ready to receive [disabled students] and I want to help prepare the school to enter this line, I have not yet discarded [the idea] because [inclusive education] is a very wide range, I want to help receiving the students, give support, you know, things like that...¹⁴.

The academic trajectory described here shows that the quota policies that have ensured the entry of students with disabilities into higher education need to be effectively understood as an achievement of different groups that face a historical condition of exclusion and that are not, as Thompson¹² warns us, a concession from the dominant structures of society. Its effectiveness must now be accompanied by the strengthening of the active participation of these students in the discussion and formulation of pedagogical and administrative strategies that facilitate their success and insertion also in the actions of knowledge construction and scientific dissemination that occur within university structures: research and community reach out activities²⁰.

Putting into practice the discursive perspective of “nothing about us without us” is a challenge still under construction, demanding from all those involved the commitment to building a culture of valuing differences as an element of enrichment of humanity, and not a factor of hierarchy. of people²¹.

Final considerations

Contrary to what was expressed by an occupant of the Ministry of Education of Brazil recently, we understand that the university should be the right of all Brazilians who wish to enter it. Our understanding is that the premise that “access to the highest levels of teaching, research and artistic creation, according to the capacity of each one”, as expressed in the Law of Directives and Bases of national education, must be gradually achieved, allowing us to count on the creative and existential force of different Brazilians within academic spaces.

The condition of disability as one of the ways of being in the world needs to be intensely and fully present in our universities, giving us the opportunity, through the shared experience of the different experiences in the challenge of existing, to build art, science and technique that bring together the forms of expression and action of all those who make up the human BEING.

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Authors' contribution

Both authors participated in the design of the research and are members of the research group in which the project was conceived. The collection of data, its analysis and interpretation were shared, as well as the elaboration of the text, review and final approval of the version that we present here for publication.

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