

**DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION FOR CURRICULAR  
DIFFERENTIATION AND ACCESSIBILITY**

***GESTÃO DEMOCRÁTICA NA EDUCAÇÃO SUPERIOR PARA A DIFERENCIAÇÃO E  
ACESSIBILIDADE CURRICULAR***

***GESTIÓN DEMOCRÁTICA EN LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR PARA LA  
DIFERENCIACIÓN Y ACCESIBILIDAD CURRICULAR***

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**ABSTRACT:** Democratic Management in Higher Education, in addition to the management of human, financial, technological and material resources, provides for the interrelation of pedagogical management, access to curriculum, teaching action, results, spaces, conducts and cultural interactions. However, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have traditionally tended to subdivide and fragment their actions, distancing themselves from the perspective of accessibility, which encourages the cooperative interrelation of concrete and achievable inclusive elements and practices. Thus, the present research aimed to identify possibilities of democratic management practices in the perspective of accessibility in an HEI, based on the involvement of managers, teachers and students with and without disabilities. The results indicated that, initiatives for (de)construction on conceptions of disability and professional formation, raised the academic community to identify and question various barriers present in the academic context, basing the planning of actions that foster positive changes in this scenario.

**KEYWORDS:** Special education. Persons with disabilities. Curriculum. Cooperation. Professional formation.

**RESUMO:** *A Gestão Democrática na Educação Superior, para além da gestão de recursos humanos, financeiros, tecnológicos e materiais, prevê a interrelação da gestão pedagógica, do acesso ao currículo, da ação docente, dos resultados, dos espaços, das condutas e interações culturais. Contudo, as Instituições da Educação Superior (IES), tradicionalmente, tendem a subdividir e a fragmentar suas ações, distanciando-se da perspectiva da acessibilidade, a qual incita a interrelação cooperativa de elementos e práticas inclusivas concretas e alcançáveis. Assim, a presente pesquisa objetivou identificar possibilidades de práticas de gestão democrática na perspectiva da acessibilidade em uma IES, a partir do envolvimento de gestores, docentes e estudantes com e sem deficiência. Os resultados indicaram que, iniciativas para (des)construção sobre concepções de deficiência e de formação profissional, suscitaram a comunidade acadêmica a identificar e a questionar sobre diversas barreiras presentes no*

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*contexto acadêmico, baseando o planejamento de ações que fomentassem mudanças positivas nesse cenário.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Educação especial. Pessoas com deficiências. Currículo. Cooperação. Formação profissional.*

**RESUMEN:** *La gestión democrática en la educación superior, además de la gestión de recursos humanos, financieros, tecnológicos y materiales, proporciona la interrelación de la gestión pedagógica, el acceso al plan de estudios, la acción docente, los resultados, los espacios, las conductas y las interacciones culturales. Sin embargo, las Instituciones de Educación Superior (IES) han tendido tradicionalmente a subdividir y fragmentar sus acciones, distanciarse de la perspectiva de accesibilidad, lo que fomenta la interrelación cooperativa de elementos y prácticas inclusivos concretos y alcanzables. Por lo tanto, la presente investigación tuvo como objetivo identificar las posibilidades de las prácticas de gestión democrática en la perspectiva de accesibilidad en una IES, basada en la participación de gerentes, maestros y estudiantes con y sin discapacidad. Los resultados indicaron que, las iniciativas para la (des)construcción sobre las concepciones de la discapacidad y la capacitación profesional, plantearon a la comunidad académica para identificar y cuestionar diversas barreras presentes en el contexto académico, basando la planificación de acciones que fomentan cambios positivos en este escenario.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Educación especial. Personas con discapacidades. Plan de estudios. Cooperación. Formación profesional.*

## Introduction

In Brazil, the visibility of political and social minorities<sup>3</sup> has gradually managed to gain greater notoriety, albeit in a lengthy process of legitimizing their formal and substantial rights in different social contexts.

Particularly with regard to the democratization of access to educational spheres, this scenario has incited democratic discussions about the practices and theories that affect management in the perspective of orchestrating accessibility (KRAWCZYK, 1999; LIMA; CABRAL, 2018; EBERSOLD, 2020).

Within the scope of Brazilian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), affirmative action policies, especially in the last decade, have culminated in increasing the rate of admission of people with disabilities from public schools, whether or not they have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), or be black, brown or indigenous (CABRAL, 2018).

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<sup>3</sup> From an anthropological and political-social perspective, it refers "(...) to marginalized subgroups, that is, socially minimized in the national context, and may even constitute a majority in quantitative terms. Thus, in order to be the object of international protection, the minority must necessarily be characterized by the position of non-dominance that it occupies within the State in which it lives" (MORENO, 2009, p. 152, our translation).

These movements have challenged the scientific community, the different scenarios and their respective actors to identify and discuss possible ways to achieve democratic management that, even conceptually, presents consensus and dissent (LÜCK, 2007; AGUIAR, 2016; OLIVEIRA; VASQUES -MENEZES, 2018; MACHADO; CORTE, 2020).

Still, based on authors such as Bordignon and Gracindo (2000), Libâneo (2007), Araújo (2009) and Aguiar (2016) and Ebersold (2020), as well as in our empirical experiences in the scope of research, teaching and extension, we conceive our understanding of democratic management.

From the perspective of accessibility, biopsychosocial and interdisciplinary, democratic management can be understood as the orchestration of cooperative and multivectorial actions involving managers, teachers, technical and administrative servants and students, from the various institutional units, for the identification of possibilities that legitimize the citizen right to ingress, permanence, formation and transition to the labor market, recognizing the identities and differences of political and social minorities.

The premise, therefore, is to mainstream the collectivization of the processes of: a) elaboration and implementation of institutional policies; b) actions, conduct and needs of human resources; c) provision of infrastructure, financial, material and technological resources; d) socio-cultural interactions and construction of languages; e) action planning and development, using time and space management; f) procedural evaluation of the results, within the scope of the different formation curricula.

However, in practice, democratic management in Brazilian HEIs has faced several barriers, especially attitudinal barriers in the context of curricular contexts. It is common to identify attitudes of negative discrimination towards subjects undergoing formation and professionals with disabilities in different areas of knowledge. In the view of democratic management, however, they cannot be made invisible or absent from these discussions and reflections.

In this scenario, there was an urgent need to identify, describe and analyze elements that (de)compose democratic management in the process of curriculum differentiation and accessibility in Higher Education courses at a federal university in the state of São Paulo.

Motivated by these objectives, this article aimed to present the main results of an institutionally developed study within the scope of affirmative action policies and the triangulation of teaching, research and extension actions, in the perspective of democratic management and accessibility.

In addition to the search for the guarantee of human rights, as a social relevance, the study is justified by the purpose of contributing, academically and scientifically, with the encouragement of reflections on the conditions of entry, permanence, professional formation and transition to the labor market, in which the actors of the contexts of the HEIs and their respective territories are involved.

## Method

The present case study, of a descriptive and qualitative character, was configured as an exploratory, field research, which considered a context of investigation in which elements and variables constituting several episodes could contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon of this reality (GIL, 2008).

### *Context and Research Participants*

The field explored was one of the campuses of a public university located in a medium-sized city in the state of São Paulo, where 33 undergraduate courses (teaching and bachelor's degrees) are offered.

For this study, specifically, developed between the 1st semester of 2018 and the 1st semester of 2020, a single undergraduate course at the institution was selected because the following criteria were considered: a) courses in which students with disabilities were enrolled; b) students with disabilities at the beginning of their academic career (1st year); c) courses offering Curricular Practical Activities (CPA)<sup>4</sup> or Curricular Internships since the first semester of academic and professional formation; d) agreement of the course management to develop cooperative teaching, research and extension activities

Based on the identification of possible micro-contexts, according to the aforementioned criteria, the study was carried out respecting the ethical procedures of research with human beings, in accordance with resolutions 466/12 and 510/16 of the National Health Council (CNS).

Still, based on the premise of democratic management, the research was started after the proposal was presented, on the agenda of the department in which the course is linked, discussed, clarified, voted and approved. Based on the referrals, they agreed to participate directly in the research: four teachers; three managers (course coordinator, pro-dean of

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<sup>4</sup> Carmo, Prado and Barros (2018), define Curricular Practical Activities as actions that are done in laboratories, problem situations, simulating the student's real experience in a work environment.

graduation and coordinator of subjects related to affirmative actions); nine students (P1 to P8, plus the first student of the course self-declared as a person with physical disabilities, identified in the present study by Agenor<sup>5</sup>).

#### *Data collection, treatment and analysis procedures*

Data collection was performed through: a) observations in full immersion, whose context was represented by theoretical and practical activities of the course; b) interviews with all participants; and c) documentary analysis (regulations, pedagogical political projects, legislation and electronic correspondence).

The data obtained by field diaries, films and recordings were transcribed and organized from the perspective of content analysis, through a protocol developed specifically for the study and video analysis cards, adapted from Menegon (2013). The analysis indicators, presented below, were discussed and validated in a research group made up of people with disabilities and without disabilities, be they teachers, researchers or undergraduate and graduate students.

### **Results and discussions**

The results and discussions touched, from the perspective of democratic management, actions of: planning for resources and strategies; use and development; management; evaluation; curricular differentiation and accessibility.

From a socio-historical-cultural perspective, within the scope of these actions, it was possible to identify and discuss some aspects of human, material, technological and financial resources; adjustments; times and spaces; pedagogical strategies; student skills; curricular guidelines (disciplines, regulations, diploma and professional perspectives); good accessibility practices; and (de)construction on concepts of disability and professional formation.

#### *Planning*

In the planning process, the data indicated that cooperation between students, teachers, course managers and sectors of the institution is fundamental, extrapolating the university culture of fragmentation of times and spaces, of resources, goals and practices, present in an institutional ethics that, for decades, has been predominantly crystallized (BAREMBLIT, 2002; BUTT, 2009; GAMA; FIGUEIREDO, 2009; GALLEGO; SILVA, 2012).

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<sup>5</sup> Agenor, 21, has hemiparesis, which is the paralysis of one half of the body. It is, therefore, the sequel to a pathology that may be located in one or some areas of the central nervous system..

Among the various aspects to be considered in this process, it is the use of strategies that identify the conceptions of disability. This is because, according to Agenor, some negatively discriminatory attitudes towards disability, veiled or explicit, through narratives and/or negative actions, especially at the beginning of the course, were noticeable.

Based on these data, individual and collective dialogues, in class and out-of-class, were planned and promoted on concepts of disability and professional formation/performance. Gradually, these initiatives made it possible for students with disabilities, their peers, teachers and managers, not only to identify negative attitudes, but to materialize respectful behaviors accompanied by recognition of the potential of professionals with disabilities in formation.

Concomitantly with this process, the actors involved looked, in a cooperative perspective, at the planning for Curricular Differentiation and Accessibility (CAD). Among the various elements discussed, the theme related to the competencies necessary for the course's students to be considered able to exercise their function as a professional was highlighted. As a result of these initiatives, the actors involved highlighted some of these competencies:

**Table 01** – Competences listed as fundamental for a professional of the course, according to the participants of this study

Theoretical dimension	Practical dimension	Dimension of Conviviality
cognitive understanding; commitment to studies; written and narrative expression of knowledge; composition of academic notions.	execution ability; technique; fine psychomotricity.	understandable communication; empathy; ethics; proactivity; positive attitudes; emotional intelligence.

Source: Devised by the authors

In the light of these notes and the context of execution of the Pedagogical Project of the Course (PPC), it is clear that even if Agenor presents a large part of the competencies as necessary, the need to identify methods, strategies, equipment, orthoses, instruments, ergonomics and other accessibility resources aimed at equalizing opportunities was unquestionable (BRASIL, 2015).

It is in this sense that the identification of students' characteristics and contexts, in a biopsychosocial perspective, is carried out since the beginning of the academic semesters and in their respective transitions. It is understood that this process has a potential influence, in the short, medium and long term, on the planning, development and use of resources within the scope of Curricular Differentiation and Accessibility (CAD).

### *Development and Use*

The development and use of resources, foreseen in the planning, require a continuous management of times and spaces, by managers, teachers and students throughout the entire teaching-learning and professional formation course (MORAIS, 2020).

In this dimension, the data of the present research reveal that the different actors involved in the studied scenario recognize Agenor as a fundamental (but not central) part of the cooperation orchestration movements, from the perspective of accessibility, for the performance of CAD.

This perspective is in line with the “nothing about us without us” movement, in the democratic management process, in which the teaching action is geared, administratively and pedagogically, in the practical and theoretical spheres (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 1977; GAVÉRIO, 2017).

In this process, it was observed that the student with disabilities cooperated with the accessibility orchestration, as part of it, in the biopsychosocial perspective. When barriers were identified in the context of performance, for example, in relation to a soap dish, which is very necessary in his activities, Agenor reports: “the point is that, to wash your hands, you have a correct technique [...]. Since I can't move this hand, [it] makes it difficult for me to wash the other. But I ‘kind of’ adapted a technique for myself and I was able to wash it” (our translation).

In addition to these individual orientations, the study indicated interesting displacements of teachers and students with and without disabilities, represented by positive attitudes that gradually brought theories and practices into the process of professional formation of individuals, namely: a) care with communication accessibility in pedagogical practices; b) diversification of teaching strategies and techniques of practical procedures; c) feedbacks and positive reinforcement throughout the activities; d) building collective dialogues between all actors; e) short, medium and long term procedural assessment strategies.

The data suggest, therefore, a gradual overcoming of attitudinal barriers among the actors involved and, as Freire (1996) said, where there is life, there is unfinished work and, therefore, the subjects need to be open to changes and to re-signify themselves before new elements.

However, it should be noted that, as in Basic Education, there is a need for opportunities to discuss specificities of disabilities and themes related to identities and differences both in the initial formation of students, as well as in the continuing training of teachers, managers, technical staff and administrative (MENDES; CIA; CABRAL, 2015).

### *Management*

In the light of the identified data, we understand that the actors of the course moved cooperatively and interdisciplinarily, promoting partnerships between other areas of knowledge that, in this research, the interrelation between Special Education, Psychology, Physical Education, Occupational Therapy and Production Engineering predominated.

In addition to the management of the planned curriculum, the results of procedural evaluations encouraged possibilities for the development of technological and ergonomic resources, both in a consultative and a deliberative manner, with the direct and constant participation of the course manager himself and, often, of the students themselves, with and without disabilities.

Concomitantly with these processes, fundamental elements of management were identified in the context of dialogues, inquiries, (de)construction of conceptions of disability(s) and collective mobilization for the knowledge of the legislation that deals with identified citizens with disabilities. This represented a participatory character in the elaboration of necessary referrals for the equalization of opportunities (VIEIRA, 2007; GELATTI; MARQUEZAN, 2013).

### *Evaluation*

Regarding the evaluation processes, within the scope of the DAC, both the manager, the teachers and classmates agreed with the possibility of evaluative adequacy, especially when identified possibilities of negative consequences in their performance, due to the absence or insufficiency of the adjustments.

This is because, in the case in question, considering manual, motor, psychomotor and execution skills in the evaluation process, without considering that the student is a person with disabilities, it would be configured as negligence and omission (for not adapting teaching strategies and assessment) and negative discrimination based on disability, crimes typified by the Statute of People with Disabilities (BRASIL, 2015).

On the other hand, the process of adapting the assessment culminated in questions from the course actors about the diploma of students with disabilities. What should be differentiated: the diploma or the curriculum?

In order to understand the participants' conception in relation to this issue, we present their narratives (Table 02).



**Table 02** – Facts and Opinions against and in favor of a differentiation in the diploma\*

Diploma Differentiation Facts	Opinions against differentiation in the diploma	Opinions in favor of a differentiation in the diploma
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The specific diploma attests that Agenor has the capacity to act professionally and work in certain fields, but not in others;</li> <li>- The common diploma is a right of all citizens;</li> <li>- Differentiation in the diploma is discriminatory and unethical.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "(...) he passed the course of [name of course] and went through the same stages of evaluation as me, perhaps adapted, but he went through the same stages of evaluation as me" (P5);</li> <li>- No, you do not have to. If you need any statement, it should be done separately;</li> <li>- A differentiated diploma would stigmatize;</li> <li>- In the labor market, this differentiation can become a mechanism to spread prejudice;</li> <li>- It is not because he (Agenor) is qualified to do [specific course procedure], in the job market, that he will necessarily do it;</li> <li>- Barriers can be resolved in the labor market itself;</li> <li>- Not all the skills that the course requires for a degree will be required in the job market.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- With the differentiation in the diploma already foreseen, people with disability(s) could follow the area they want, exempt themselves from some areas and specialize and others;</li> <li>- If it is not even possible for Agenor to do, for example, [a procedure], yes, I am in favor of the diploma being differentiated.</li> </ul>

\* Our translation of the table

Source: Devised by the authors from the participants statements

The lack of clarity on this aspect, among the actors in the context, gave Agenor the feeling that he could be struggling without concrete purposes, unlike all his classmates. The impact of these disagreements on his motivation to stay on the course was evident, causing intrapersonal concerns about his personal planning, life project and professional formation (CABRAL, 2013). The debate was so intense and complex, that Agenor emphasized: "before any curricular adaptation, I want to know if, at the very least, I had the right to be a graduate" (our translation).

Realizing this process and understanding that CAD would need to be planned within the institution, the coordination of the course involved researchers, the undergraduate dean and the sector responsible for the institution's human rights issues, with a view to achieving democratic management. from the perspective of accessibility.

### *Building Curriculum Differentiation and Accessibility in Higher Education*

The scenario presented previously culminated in institutional actions to ensure that the trajectories of academic and professional formation for students with disabilities were not permeated by attitudes of negative discrimination, neglect and omission.

In this sense, an official consultation was sent to the institution's Federal Attorney's Office, with the objective of obtaining guidelines based on Brazilian legislation that would support not only the entry of students with disabilities, but their respective academic trajectories, participation, learning, professional formation/qualification, diploma, transition to the job market and orientation to their life projects.

After careful analysis, the undergraduate dean sent the course management an opinion from the Federal Prosecutor's Office, which acknowledged that any proposals intended to adapt the curriculum of students with disabilities in Higher Education are legal.

The orientation was that the CAD proposal was built by the Structuring Teaching Nucleus (NDE) of the course, according to the demands presented by its teachers and students. Subsequently, the proposal should be approved by the Course Council and forwarded to the Division of Pedagogical Development of the Undergraduate Dean of the explored institution, for analysis from the point of view of legislation and internal regulations. Finally, the proposal should be referred to the Council of graduation. All of these procedures were carried out.

This decision and referrals, fruits of the present research and the cooperation of all the actors involved, are in direct dialogue with the Statute of People with Disabilities. In this perspective, it is understood that these displacements contributed to the breaking of an institutional crystallization, bringing subsidies to the exercise of citizens' rights and fundamental freedoms of this population, particularly in the spheres of education, health, professionalization, habilitation, self-advocacy, entrepreneurship and work.

Curricular Differentiation and Accessibility, if adopted from the perspective of democratic management, cooperation and accessibility, may foster the development of the potential, talents, skills and physical, cognitive, sensory, psychosocial, attitudinal, professional and artistic skills of the subjects involved. With regard to individuals with disabilities, in particular, it has the potential to contribute to the achievement of their autonomy and social participation, according to their characteristics, interests and learning needs, in the context of Higher Education (BRASIL, 2015).

## **Final considerations**

The orchestration between the actors for the development and implementation of Curricular Differentiation and Accessibility in Higher Education, from the perspective of Democratic Management, can contribute to institutional guidelines that promote conditions of equal opportunities for university students with disabilities, overcoming negative discrimination attitudes. and negligence, by action or inaction.

The study also suggests that professional formation involves recognizing the identities and differences presented by students with and without disabilities, in all HEI courses. It is necessary, therefore, to envision the potential of everyday experiences culminating in pedagogical, scientific and technological advances, in intersectoral articulation in the implementation, including of public, institutional and departmental policies.

In the light of democratic management, the legal support resulting from the present cooperative research and its analyzed data, set a historical precedent that can subsidize Brazilian HEIs that pay attention to the legitimation of the right of students with disabilities to professionally graduate and carry out their respective life projects.

However, it is necessary to question and resist the latent threats currently represented by decisions of the legislative, executive and judicial branches. The democracy of our country and the autonomy of Brazilian HEIs, their respective sectors and actors have been put at risk, as well as the very implementation of the principle of democratic management orchestrated from the perspective of accessibility.

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