Desafíos académicos y socioculturales para la absorción del concepto de educación inclusiva en Brasil

Soeterik, I. M.

Published in:
Innovación Educativa

Citation for published version (APA):
Abstract
This work searches for answers to the question what are the sociocultural obstacles for the absorption of the concept inclusive education in Brazil? To answer this question, the referred concept is discussed in relation to another concept: Equality. On basis of a theoretical study on the development of Brazilian society, it is argued that education, the way it exists at present, is characterized by educational institutions that reproduce social exclusion. The text concludes with the argument that profound reforms are necessary to make real inclusive education possible. The possibilities affirmative action policies could offer in relation hereto are discussed.

Key words
Education, inclusion, equal opportunities, social justice, affirmative action policies.

Desafíos académicos y socioculturales para la absorción del concepto educación inclusiva en Brasil

Resumen
Este trabajo busca respuestas a la pregunta ¿cuáles son los obstáculos académicos y socioculturales para la absorción del concepto educación inclusiva en Brasil? Para responder, es preciso manifestar que dicho concepto se discute y relaciona con otro: el de la igualdad. Basado en el estudio teórico del desarrollo de la sociedad brasileña, se argumenta que la educación hoy en día se caracteriza por tener instituciones que reproducen la exclusión social. El texto concluye argumentando que son necesarias profundas reformas para lograr una verdadera educación inclusiva, en función de las posibilidades que las políticas de acción afirmativa pueden ofrecer al respecto.

Palabras clave
Educación, inclusión, igualdad de oportunidades, justicia social, políticas de acción afirmativa.

Des défis académiques et socioculturels pour l’absorption du concept une éducation inclusive au Brésil

Résumé
Ce travail cherche des réponses à la question: lesquels sont les obstacles académiques et socioculturels pour l’absorption du concept une éducation inclusive au Brésil? Pour répondre, il est précis que le dit concept soit discuté et rattaché avec celui de l’égalité. Basé sur l’étude théorique du développement de la société brésilienne, il est soutenu que l’éducation de nous jours est caractérisée pour avoir des institutions qui reproduisent l’exclusion sociale. Le texte conclut par arguer qui sont réformes profondes nécessaires pour obtenir un vraie éducation inclusive, en fonction des possibilités que les politiques d’action affirmative peuvent offrir a ce sujet.

Mots-clefs
L’éducation, l’inclusion, l’égalité d’opportunités, justice sociale, politiques d’action affirmative.
This paper develops the concept of inclusive education and searches for answers to the questions: what is inclusion?; what does inclusive education mean?; what are the academic and socio-cultural barriers for its absorption? Through a study on the concept of equality and analysis of the emergence of rationalism in modernity different explanations of the concept of inclusion and different views on the role of education in such inclusion are examined. It is argued that the school, as it exists today, was built on rationalist principles imposed by modernity; principles and concepts that construct a reality characterized by educational institutions that reproduce social exclusion.

The main point of this article is that: it makes sense to talk about inclusive education and research and work towards it, considering its social, historical and political context. In order to achieve inclusive education indeed, it is necessary to rethink, reshape and reform today’s education system, for which a dialectical relationship with society as a whole is unavoidably required.

The conclusion is defending the position that affirmative action policies —when integrated into a whole the educational process and the context of educational institutions— could be a good starting point to include —in the course of rethinking, redesigning and reforming processes— groups that are now excluded. Through these actions we can begin to determine the parameters of social inclusion and inclusive education.

What is inclusion and inclusive education?

The end of the twentieth century and the entrance into a new millennium are, according to many theorists, related to a profound process of social change (Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1995, Berger and Luckmann, 2004). One of the most important phenomena in the current transformations in the world is the significant increase of social inequality (Tedesco, 2002), which is accompanied by an equally important increase of the theories aiming to explain such phenomenon.

To analyze the academic and sociocultural barriers to the absorption of the concept of inclusive education in Brazil, it is essential to understand their reality in terms of social exclusion. So, here it is pertinent to reflect on what is meant by inclusion and how to understand it in the Brazilian context.

The inclusion implies the existence of exclusion, which in turn is related to inequality, and on the other hand, inequality is linked to equality. Then, to understand the concept of inclusion it is accurate to study the one of equality. Silvério (2002), explains that the principle of equality has been the basis for all democratic societies. Outhwaite and Botto more (quoted by Silvério, 2002), state that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the ideal of equality was expressed in the demand for equal rights in the eyes of the law and political participation. The authors state that in the twentieth century these types of equality were already true —in theory, not always in practice, though— in all advanced societies, and the attention was focused on a new demand: social equality. By social equality it is understood, according to these authors, that people should be treated as equals in all institutional spheres that affect their life chances, for example, in education and at work.

Other writers like Dubet (2003, 2004), Gomes (2003), Gonçalves e Silva (2003), Munanga (2003), Rancière (2004), Silvério (2002), Tedesco (2002), argue that historically the principle of equality instead of promoting a fairer society has been an obstacle to social changes aimed at developing a less unequal society.

Parijs (2004, p. 2), concludes that in the current educational system predominates a formal interpretation of justice as equality of opportunities —a formal interpretation of justice as equality of opportunities. According to the author, this point of view is supported by the assumption that eliminating discrimination would ensure such equality of opportunity; therefore, equal treatment for all individuals would be sufficient to consider an education system fair. Thus, the current skills and competencies would affect opportunities. Therefore it could be understood that the formal interpretation of justice as equality of opportunities goes hand in hand with an evaluation of individual merit.

1 Here the concept of inclusive education does not refer specifically to the inclusion of people with special needs in education as the term is used predominantly in Brazil, but the inclusion in education of socially excluded groups in general such as Afro-Brazilians.
However, this deduction is seen as problematic by several authors, including Parijs (2004). The criticism is that equal treatment to all individuals and recompensation to merit may justify infinite inequalities. In addition, it is often difficult to define exactly what individual merit is and what the current skills and competencies are, considering that their development can be influenced by different social, historical and contextual factors (European Group of Research on Equity of the Educational Systems, 2005). In the formal interpretation of justice as equality of opportunities, the social and historical situation of the individual is not evaluated and, consequently, it is not taken into account the influence of social, historical and contextual factors in the definition of skills and competencies.

The fact that in educational institutions individuals are considered separated from social roles and positions Apple (2005, p. 273), is called the depolitization of the educational context with the approach that the institutions and the educational processes are also considered independent, “neutral” and “objective”, separated from the social inequalities and power structures. The aforementioned author argues that in this context the individual is deprived of race, class and gender.

Dubet (2003), also refers to problems related to the formal interpretation of justice as equality of opportunities, and the centrality of merit. He states that nowadays school is in a paradoxical situation, after the massification of public education in recent decades: on the one hand, within its own principles and accompanying massification, school affirms the equality of all [...] all children have, a priori, the same value, while acknowledging that social conditions can affect the recognition of their qualities and their development [...] On the other hand, it could not be different, the school is meritocratic. It orders, ranks, classifies individuals based on their merits, postulating on the other side that these individuals are equal (Dubet, 2003, p. 40).

As a result of the educational situation indicates the individual’s responsibility for his own success or failure, while [...] it assumes each one is “sovereign”, his own master, responsible for a life that can no longer be completely reduced to a destination (Dubet, 2004, p. 40). This is problematic because the subjectivity of the students is [...] dominated by a contradiction of the system. Exclusion is not only an “objective” systemic phenomenon it is also a subjective experience of exclusion lived potentially as self-destructive, since each one is responsible for their own education, for their own adventure. In other words, excluded subjects are under the threat of being destroyed by their exclusion, which would be the sign of their own “nullity” (Dubet, 2004, p. 41).

In this sense, meritocratic school— which operates based on the equality of opportunities— legitimates and even strengthens the social injustice and exclusion. Because, as aforementioned, the different students’ profiles— socioeconomic, cultural and racial-ethnic— are not noticed as well as their different school experiences. Thus, the formal interpretation of the equality of opportunities dominated public policy in many societies and generated policies and practices based on universal ideas, building a taboo regarding the differences within the educational context and process.

### Meaning of equality of opportunities in the Brazilian circle

To discuss the meaning of the principle of equality and understand the reality of Brazilian inequality, we must consider how the concept of equality is used and explained in this Latin American country. In this regard, the study of Reis (2004), is very explicit, based on research he observes that the Brazilian elite when discussing the issue of social inequality give great importance to education and profusely uses the concept of equality of opportunities.

Through interviews and obtained data —Perception of Inequality Questionnaire— the author shows that most of the Brazilian elite who express themselves in terms of equal opportunities at the same time reject the concepts of equality of conditions and equality of results. Consistently with this fact, among the elite members there is an explicit rejection of policies that include affirmative action measures. According to Reis, the Brazilian elite

---

2 Reis stated that the term elite is understood as: representatives at the federal level, from business, political, technobureaucratic and union sectors[...] were also included intellectuals and opinion makers, religious members, the military, and representatives of the judicial branch and nongovernmental organizations [...] a definition of “institutional” elite was adopted, i.e., instead of assuming, for example, the criterion “reputational” to select representative individuals of this segment, the option was to interview people who occupy leadership roles in prominent national institutions (Reis, 2004, p. 43).

3 The Perception of Inequalities questionnaire was applied in the field of the Virtual Institute The Social State of the Nation created after an agreement between the IUPERJ and FAPERJ (Scalon, 2004).
understand education as a strategy that does not involve redistribution but a high instrumental value: [...] it [education] is predominantly seen as a training tool for the market, as a means of social mobility in employment. Differently from other national elites [4], ours does not emphasize the role of education as a mechanism of political awareness or empowerment, which would make excluded people more apt to claim their inclusion in the system [...] it is seen as a resource of individual mobility and training of human capital [...] all would benefit from the educational improvement of society: the poor would receive better wages and the rich would have better skilled workforce at their disposal (Reis, 2004, p. 48).

Reis’s work also shows that this elite explain inequality with the poverty existing in the country; poverty economically speaking and lack of (use) opportunities, and finishes saying that, contrary to the poverty that has greater visibility and is subject of specific measures, inequality in Brazil is not always perceived nor dimensioned as a problem. Poverty is often described as a situation that can be overcome through efforts and resources.

Although Reis (2004), indicates that the vision of the Brazilian elite is different from the ones of other countries that participated in the investigation Elite Perceptions of Poverty and Inequality, conceptions of these with respect to social inequality in countries such as Britain and the Netherlands have similar censuses —Beyer and Zeichner (1987), Campbell (1993), Clay and George (1993), Essed (1991), Siraj-Blatchford (1993a, and 1993b), Valk (1993), Verma (1993). These censuses are characterized by disregarding social inequality and equality in a political and social context; nor are they considered in the power relationships in those societies identified by judgments of superiority and inferiority among groups, litters or social classes (Silvério, 2002).

This interpretation of social inequalities of the dominant groups often, in practice, results in actions of assistance that, generally, do not change or affect the existing social structure of power relationships based on social inequality. Bearing in mind this reality, not a few national, international and multinational initiatives try to fight poverty and inequality, but without really arguing and fighting power structures and social and political reasons which constitute their foundation. So it is common that public policies try to overcome poverty but not inequality, and often include disputes relating to the role education should play in the context of those policies.

Reis, for example, indicates that the idea of social inequality that prevails in the Brazilian elite has among its splits normative positions related to education. The author points out that, for example, such elite: [...] argue that, with equal opportunities for education, all those who try hard will have opportunities to be better off (2004, p. 63). In other words: those who do not progress through the educational system and society do not try hard enough, therefore they are not entitled to complain. It is important to notice in this vision that education is considered a “neutral” institution, which offers all people the same opportunities for development. People who do not develop or participate are responsible for the situation of exclusion: they are excluded because they do not want to participate.

Here Dubet (2004), is remembered, when she says that one result of the educational context —distinguished by the formal interpretation of equality of opportunities— is precisely that the individual is responsible for their own success or failure. This observation supports the explanation of Tedesco (2002), to whom while in the traditional capitalist model poverty or wage-earning condition can be perceived as consequences of an unfair social order in the new capitalism, social inequality tends to be associated with the nature of things and personal responsibility.

It has been ascertained that this way of thinking about social inequality, or rather, non-recognition of social inequalities as a matter of power, touches the main focus of this work: to conceive inclusive education it is essential that society —and especially those groups representing the political, cultural and academic power— acknowledge and understand inequality within the social structure as a matter of power.

**Context of inclusive education in Brazil**

To understand the current state of education in Brazil linked to inequality and social exclusion it must be considered within the historical frame of the formation of society. Senna,

---

4 With other national elites the author refers to the countries of SouthAfrica, Bangladesh, Haiti and India, who participated in the comparative research *Elite Perceptions of Poverty and Inequality* (Reis, 2004, p. 43).
This research was carried out by professors from the UERJ and UNIMEP for the World Bank in the year 2003.

For these authors, the modern culture influenced—and still influences—the formation of Brazilian society, educational practices and conceptions of education and inclusion. They indicate that the concepts of modern culture, the naturalistic model of man and the image of the Cartesian subject imposed by modernity created concepts of education and citizenship still valid in Brazil. Over the centuries, a Brazil full of Brazilians aligned with modern culture, legitimate subjects of school education, and Brazilians non aligned with modern culture would be set up—with or without schooling—constrained by the paradoxical feeling of inferiority in front of others and by pride because they do not relate with them and their apparent difficulty to be happy in the Brazilian social daily life. Encouraged by his own singular nature of modern man and at the same time, ratified by the fraction self-recognized as inferior, Brazilian modernity would draw up around itself the boundaries of national citizenship, leaving most of the country in exile. Access to writing—and, more recently, access to basic schooling—would take in the Brazil of Modernity the place of nationality, the place of the restoring of the link between the obvious public similarity of all Brazilian people and social legitimacy (Senna, Glatt and Mattos, 2005, p. 8).

From the aforementioned, it is concluded that the educational institutions which emerged with modern culture involve social exclusion. The objective of such institutions is to “single out”, “normalize” to exclude individuals who did not conform to such naturalistic model of man. The aforementioned authors state that in this way, for example, through the concept of school failure—that arose along with the educational system imposed by modernity which still predominates in discussions about education and exclusion from educational and academic-scientific institutes—many Brazilians are denied the right to education and social inclusion (Senna, Glatt and Mattos, 2005).

Through this analysis it is understood the increase of social inequalities, the actual context of Brazilian education and discussions about inclusive education. Throughout history, education became an institute of assimilation and standardization; an institute that represents the abandonment of the nature and development of reason. In the history of the modernization of Brazilian education became the cure for social or mental weakness. Going to school is considered, still, the way to acquire citizenship and legitimate participation in society; for many people it is the only path to be someone in life; a someone who can be reflected in the modern Cartesian subject (Senna, 2005).

Based on the aforesaid, the reality of the educational system implies exclusion: the philosophical, social and political foundations of this system involve another one which excludes. This is indicated by the findings of an investigation whose purpose was to draw up the profile of the dynamics of inclusive education in Brazil (Senna, Glatt and Mattos, 2005, p. 17)\(^5\), and according to those findings school inclusion has not managed to overcome the level of simple integration into the institutional space of the school. The researchers believe that these results are related to the absence of instruments for the inclusion of students and training of teachers as agents of inclusion. It is not enough to just include new pupils in school classes, as it is already done in Brazil in a pioneering way. Today we must go further: it is necessary to make the included ones real social subjects, legitimately recognized as such, or there is a risk of giving school a merely existentialist nature (Senna, Glatt and Mattos, 2005, p. 69).

Education was created in accordance with the principles of modern man, personified mainly by European colonizers and later by the nationalized State itself and the elite which represents the power in society (Senna, Glatt and Mattos, 2005). These modern human rationalist principles are nowadays expressed in at least two ideas concerning the role of education: education as a process that differentiates people to join the labor market and education as a vehicle for social and cultural homogeneity (Senna, 2005). In solidarity with educational concepts still in vogue, there is the idea of an ideal society imposed by modern man; a society in which some know—the man of reason—and others reproduce—the biological man—(Senna, 2005). Scalon (2004), proved in his research Imagens da Desigualdade that the Brazilian elite applies such principle to analyze today’s society.

In this context: what are the academic and socio-cultural barriers to the absorption of the concept of inclusive education? The study of the work presented in this article shows

---

\(^5\) This research was carried out by professors from the UERJ and UNIMEP for the World Bank in the year 2003.
that the human rationalist thought, universalist policies based on ideas of merit, equality of opportunities and a certain conception of equality made education a universal process, unique, normal and exclusive (Silvério 2002). In parallel with these modern ideas and concepts relating to equality, there is a perception that school is neutral because that’s where people can grow out of social exclusion; growth in the neutral context of education enables individuals to have equal opportunities to get rid of such exclusion.

However, as already reflected when approaching the concept of equality, education, school and educational processes cannot be considered neutral because they are built on certain social concepts —power-shearing and labor. Therefore, to achieve inclusive education, the education system should undergo a process of profound reforms, reconsider the concepts of equality and inclusion, as well as educational goals. It would be necessary to leave behind the concepts imposed by modernity.

**For the fair equality of opportunities**

Based on the theoretical exposition on the concept of equality and in the Brazilian reality it can be concluded that, to understand equality as a similar or equivalent mood is not sufficient to guarantee or to achieve equitable treatment in education. On the contrary, the Brazilian reality shows that this interpretation could (re)produce and legitimize inequalities. Principles of equality in education, based on a strictly egalitarian understanding, seem to be too simple to account for the complex social reality in which educational processes are developed. In this regard, the European Group of Research on Equity of the Educational Systems (2005, p. 13), states that: *a strictly egalitarian vision, which aims to give everyone the same treatment, while ignoring the features already present in every individual or even the results in terms of reproduction of the original inequality, would force us to question ourselves about its real foundations, precisely for reasons of equality since, in this case, a strict equality in dealing with people would ignore other forms of inequality.*

To work for educational equality it is important not to lose sight of a multiplicity of concepts of justice, and to investigate the political-philosophical normative debate in relation to social justice as well as to analyze the sociological studies that attempt to explain the causes of inequalities and visible changes in space and time as, for example, the classic works of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), and Bernstein (1990). It is then necessary to identify which inequalities are considered “unequal” and which are not, and under which criteria. Different perspectives on these points would result in different explanations of the existing inequalities and in different ideas about how certain inequalities can be confronted and fought.

Without any space in this paper to present a comprehensive reflection on the political-philosophical debates involved in when addressing the relationship between social justice and education, the author considers relevant to emphasize that often in the justification of a policy, references to various principles of justice can be found at the same time. In the same approach, going over the political-philosophical discussions relevant to consider the relationship between social justice and education, it is observed that not all inequalities in education are always considered unequal: to achieve social justice in education and improve participation, permanence and results of certain groups of society in the education system, sometimes you may opt for measures aimed at promoting equality and that from a strictly egalitarian point of view they would seem rather unequal or unfair.

To clarify this point, the author finds it interesting to refer to the work of the political philosopher John Rawls and his concept of *fair equality of opportunities* associated with his *difference principle* (Rawls, 1971 and 2001). This author developed the principle of difference, based on a critique to the strictly egalitarian principle of distributive justice, which allows a distribution that does not follow the principles of strict equality. Inequalities and unequal measures are supported when they have the effect of leading the most excluded ones of society to be in a better material situation from the one they would be in without such measure of distribution. It is important to note that the difference principle is prior to other principles of justice which the author discusses, even before the principle of equality of opportunities. This means that, to achieve social justice, for example in education, it

---

6 An interesting source to be considered is the literature developed on the construction of indicators of equity in education (e.g. European Group of Research on Equity of the Educational Systems, 2005; Louzano, 2001; Parijs, 2004).
Academic and Cultural Challenges for the Absorption of the Concept of Inclusive Education in Brazil | Inti Maya Soeterik

takes more than meritocracy, the concept of fair equality of opportunities requires not only that the opportunities, vacancies and positions are distributed according to the principle of merit, but firstly all individuals should have opportunities to acquire the skills with which the merit is pondered.

The idea of fair equality of opportunities is derived from the view that, even if the merit existed and were possible to assess—for example, through the talents and abilities—nobody could be accused, as nobody could be blamed for the very natural, social or historical situation in which they were born. With this idea Rawls rejects all equality considerations based merely on meritocratic principles and states that inequalities can be justified when somehow they contribute to the welfare and prosperity of the people who are in less favorable conditions in society.

In this sense, educational inequalities should be evaluated in terms of effects of this situation for groups/individuals who are in conditions of greater disadvantage. In this view, education can be considered fair when the position of groups/individuals that are in unfavorable conditions cannot be improved more than it has, either by the reduction of inequalities, or by increasing inequalities. Thus, the principle of difference avoids the probable absurd consequences of pursuing equality for the sake of equality; based on this principle all the inequalities need to be justified taking into account the situation of the most vulnerable group.
The principle of difference and other theories that add the item *fair* directly to the concept of equal opportunities\(^7\), offer an alternative to the formal interpretation of equality of opportunities as it has already been seen. This explains why Rawls’s theory as well as being one of the most important ones, is frequently used to try to evaluate equality in the educational systems (European Group of Research on Equity of the Educational Systems, 2005; Hutmacher, Cochrane and Bottani, 2001; Louzano, 2001; Parijs, 2004).

Without claiming to have given a complete review on the theories of social justice in education, and with the observation that by doing so it would mean explore the theoretical literature produced outside Europe and the United States, the authors expects to have managed to clarify two basic arguments: firstly, to make clear the concept of inclusive education it is required to go beyond the formal interpretation of equality of opportunities, and, secondly, in order to fight inequalities in education certain assets are required to be equally, while others proportionally distributed.

It is right to emphasize that the movement to reconsider ideas about equality, inclusion and what is expected of education cannot be developed solely on political, economic, cultural and academic elites. It is essential that this movement involves individuals and groups who have been excluded from these debates and from the major social, political, academic and economic institutions. If this involvement does not happen, there will always be a semi-inclusion formed by the language of the elite, an inclusion that in advance builds new exclusions for those who cannot or will not speak that language. That is, the true inclusion cannot be imposed by the elites, cannot be imposed by anyone, it is exactly found in the democratic processes of knowledge formation.

Academic and cultural barriers are in this change: it is convenient then that the elites who hold power in educational institutions recognize that today’s education is not neutral, and they should take a position on social inequalities, listening to those excluded and enabling the necessary reforms. This integration means that you are willing to get rid of certain fixed conceptions and ready to divide the power.

**Affirmative action policies in education to create inclusive education**

There are several initiatives that are based on the vision of non-neutrality of education, which try to fight the structural exclusion of certain groups in educational institutions. Affirmative action policies are an example. In the same vein, such policies are considered positive practices that can provide opportunities in the reformation of educational institutions and in the promotion of inclusive educational process. These actions could offer alternatives to Universalist policies based on ideas of merit and equality of opportunities. The following positions on the possibilities offered by affirmative action policies, mention some Brazilian scholars who study the issue and focus on them to Afro-Brazilians on education.

What exactly are affirmative actions? According to Gomes (2003), affirmative actions can be understood as a set of policies, actions and public or private guidance, with a compulsive, optional or voluntary nature, aiming to correct inequalities historically imposed on certain social and/or ethnic-racial groups with strong proven discrimination and exclusion. These actions have an emerging and transitional nature, and carry an explicit intention of transformation in social relationships involving a change of position, design and strategy. Gomes also makes clear that by applying affirmative action policies means leaving the neutrality of education: \textit{it is a transformation of a political, cultural and educational nature [...] By implementing them in the state, the field of education and the actors of public policies abandon the supposed neutrality in the implementation of social policies and move on to consider the importance of factors such as gender, race and color in the selection criteria in society} (Gomes, 2003, p. 222).

According to Gomes, the only way against racism is effectively reverse the discrimination that relegated groups suffer. This reversing happens repositioning such disadvantaged

---

\(^7\) Other political-philosophical concepts that advocate similar ideas—that all individuals should have opportunities not only to participate in meritocratic competition to acquire vacant positions but also to acquire the skills based on merit and evaluation—were developed in recent decades. An example is the concept of substantive equality in counterpoint to the concept of formal equality, used especially in the theories worked in the field of inequality and gender, whose main argument is that when the formal equality provides everyone with opportunities to participate in the same competition, the substantive approach would aim to provide enough opportunities to develop the qualities needed for a successful competition.
groups, and thus enabling them to social advancement. This idea is attached to the comment already made with the position that, to strengthen inclusive education, deep reforms in the educational institutions are unavoidable.

With reference to the issue of affirmative action policies for Afro-descendants in Brazil, Munanga (2003, p. 119), stated that the historical lack: in a country where prejudice and racial discrimination have not been overcome [...] the so called universal policies [...] would not bring the major changes expected for the black population. [...] The political modernism accustomed us to treat equally unequal beings, instead of treating them unequally. Therefore, the need for a preferential policy, in the sense of positive discrimination, especially when it is a measure of compensation or reparation for losses of 400 years of phase lag in the development process between whites and blacks. It is in this context that we place the importance of implementing affirmative action policies.

With these expressions it is shown that political modernism influences in the way of thinking about education and equality, focusing on the fact that the whole world needs to be treated the same way; it is a theory that involves the denial of the difference and a neutral educational process. Munanga himself clarifies that this thought prevents the development of a truly inclusive education.

The works the authors presented show why affirmative action policies are vital to include the Afro-Brazilians in the educational system. It is also clear why these actions might be at the same time, very useful for reforming educational institutions and current processes. Based on the principles of democratization of educational processes, appraisal of differences and democratic building of knowledge the parameters for a real inclusive education can be defined. Imagining the incorporation of the people of Brazil in the literary culture—from an inclusive and broad enough perspective to contemplate the whole complex Brazilian subjectivity, with its innumerable subjects— requires assuming previously the making of a context in which different reasons are said interpreted. Let’s not talk about a country where cultures simply coexist. We are talking about Brazil, a country in which cultures are mutually being reinvented, adding and multiplying Reasons and Possible Worlds (Senna, Glat, Mattos, 2005, p. 69).

Senna, Glat and Mattos (2005), indicate, the real-inclusive education —the continuous reform in educational institutions—means “dialogue of different reasons”. Gonçalves e Silva (2003, p. 48), mentions knowledge building processes when he means to go beyond the inclusion of new subjects, and clarifies that for true inclusion —recognizing the diversity and keep places for members of structurally excluded groups in society— it is important to submit to discussion the knowledge that is offered in educational institutions. The inclusion, according to this author, leads to the questioning of the ideologies, theories and methodologies that support and lead the production of knowledge and, consequently, the academic and scientific activities resized. It also states that institutions willing to implement affirmative action policies cannot address it as a protection to vulnerable, but [...] it is necessary that a plan with such goals encourages the understanding of the values of social, cultural, racial diversity and in these values, seek support to guide their educational activities, training of professionals and people responsible for the progress of science [...] In this sense, the goal is to decolonize the sciences, taking up again visions of the world, contents and methodologies that were appropriated, accumulated, by Western science and from which they created their own, failing to mention those ones (Gonçalves e Silva, 2003, pp. 48-49).

The aforementioned author states that the differences in racial and cultural diversity cannot be regarded as an end itself, they should be understood as a way of taking on responsibility for educating new racial and social relationships, producing knowledge distant from a single vision of the world, of science, as a political bargaining process that projects a fair society (Gonçalves e Silva, 2003, p. 50).

Conclusions

The reflections presented in this paper determine that affirmative action policies may offer a form of social change for the direct inclusion; i.e. they are actions that through practices and institutional structures would result in processes of change at other levels. By virtue of it, the idea of not expecting that discrimination, prejudice and racism —imposed by modern man— disappear and social structures change to allow participation of the for so long excluded groups is defended.
Every inequality is configured from a superiority trial (Silvério, 2002), and may never really disappear without a direct intervention that enables changes in the judgments that underlie it, as exclusion, discrimination, prejudice and racism are intrinsically involved in social structures.

However, and despite what is suggested by several academic debates and media, affirmative action policies are not limited to the reservation of quotas for certain groups of society entering universities. Inclusion is not just equality of opportunities and access, but issues of power, radical changes in the curriculum^ content and changes in the relationships among individuals from different ethnic and racial groups. Basically, this is the development of processes of democratization, power-sharing. The discussion and policies must go beyond the quotas since affirmative actions involve a process of inclusion where diversity should be appreciated and taken advantage of. It is necessary for the emergence of a discussion about power, real participation, reform and reformulation parallel to the implementation of these actions.

In addition to implementing affirmative action policies, to achieve their success it is required that both actors in educational settings and school environments in which these would be applied, are involved in these processes of change, for example: changing school culture with the intention to strengthen it so it can recognize and take a stand in relation to social, economic, ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic, gender, sexual orientation differences, among others. These differences must be recognized and used in a positive way. At the same time, it is valid to recognize that school culture has a dialectical relationship with the social and political context where it is permanently re-formulated. From this perspective, society as a whole must also be prepared to change and take on the dialectical relationship it has with education.

Then, answering the question which started this paper —what are the academic and socio-cultural barriers for the absorption of the concept of inclusive education in Brazil?— implies a discussion of the concept of equality and an analysis of affirmative action policies as a possibility of educational reform.

Reform within those groups that hold the power in the institutions of society—for example, the academic elite—aimed at dividing power, listening to each other and being aware of what exclusion is and what it means. These groups should also reflect on their own role in the processes of exclusion and inclusion. In the words of Gonçalves e Silva (2003, p. 49): it is necessary to decolonize Brazilian education. Old standards need to be abandoned. Educational inclusion means a constant re-formulation of the educational processes because in this they are defined inclusive.

In the field of scientific research, the challenge is to formulate principles which allow education to have an academic orientation with proper and adequate methodological basis for a consistent and democratic dialogue with school reality. Similarly, Senna, Glatt and Mattos (2005), indicate that action-research could offer new possibilities for democratic research aimed to directly transform power relationships, content, practices and educational processes^, mainly because whoever sets equality as a goal to be reached, from inequality, in fact postpones it to infinity. Equality never comes later, as a result to be achieved. It should always be placed before. [...] [that is] the paradoxical nature of equality (Rancière, 2004, p. 11).

Received January 2010
Accepted March 2010

8 For example, Law 10 639, adopted in 2003 by the Brazilian government, states that education on Afro-Brazilian and African culture and history, and race relationships in all primary and high schools in Brazil become mandatory.

9 Interesting example of action-research is the project Geography education and law 10 639, coordinated by Professor Renato Emerson dos Santos from State University of Rio de Janeiro/FPP, in which the author of this article is involved. In this project, a group of academics and geography teachers work together to discuss and review contents of the aforementioned subject in the sense of including the topics considered by law 10 639.
Bibliography


Louzano, P., *Developing Educational Equity Indicators in Latin America*, Chile, 2001, UNESCO.


Details about the authors

Inti Maya Soeterik. Master in science education from the University of Rio de Janeiro State, Brazil, and the University of Amsterdam, Holland. She has been researcher at the Hogeschool Utrecht and the Hogeschool Utrecht & Rijks Universiteit Groningen in projects on inclusion and exclusion, and multiculturalism, respectively, and social educator as well in the social inclusion project Cybersoek in Holland and in several non-governmental initiatives in Chile and Brazil. She has published books, articles and lectured on hier specialty, Brazil. E-mail: i.m.soeterik@uva.nl