



**SHORT COMMUNICATION**

## The challenge of university teaching practices

### El reto de las prácticas docentes universitarias

### O desafio das práticas de ensino universitário

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#### ABSTRACT

This article seeks to analyze how higher education institutions assume and incorporate inclusion into institutional discourse and how teachers incorporate it into their daily pedagogical practices, amid paradoxes and lack of knowledge of the elements needed to build an inclusive education. In this sense, this article aims to generate a reflection on inclusive processes in higher education, as well as to report on experiences that have enabled teachers at the Faculty of Education - to approach, understand and assume the inclusive phenomenon and recognize differences in professional training processes. The basis of this article is the research entitled “Characterization of teaching practices in the Faculty of Education”. This research experience is presented as a reflective practice of teachers, in which inclusion is an element that allows the transformation of the individual, teacher-student, in order to contribute to social transformation.

**Keywords:** Inclusion; Diversity; Inclusive Education; Teaching Practices; University Teaching; Praxeological Pedagogy.

#### RESUMEN

Este artículo busca analizar cómo las instituciones de educación superior asumen e incorporan la inclusión en el discurso institucional y cómo los docentes la incorporan en sus prácticas pedagógicas cotidianas, en medio de paradojas y desconocimiento de los elementos necesarios para construir una educación inclusiva. En este sentido, el presente artículo pretende generar una reflexión sobre los procesos inclusivos en la educación superior, así como dar cuenta de experiencias que han permitido a los docentes de la Facultad de Educación- acercarse, comprender y asumir el fenómeno inclusivo y reconocer las diferencias en los procesos de formación profesional. La base de este artículo es la investigación titulada “Caracterización de las prácticas docentes en la Facultad de Educación”. Esta experiencia investigativa se presenta como una práctica reflexiva de los docentes, en la cual la inclusión es un elemento que posibilita la transformación del individuo, docente-estudiante, para contribuir a la transformación social.

**Palabras clave:** Inclusión; Diversidad; Educación Inclusiva; Prácticas Docentes; Docencia Universitaria; Pedagogía Praxeológica.

#### RESUMO

Este artigo busca analisar como as instituições de ensino superior assumem e incorporam a inclusão no discurso institucional e como os professores a incorporam em suas práticas pedagógicas diárias, em meio a paradoxos e desconhecimento dos elementos necessários para construir uma educação inclusiva. Nesse sentido, este artigo pretende gerar uma reflexão sobre os processos inclusivos no ensino superior, bem como

relatar experiências que permitiram aos professores da Faculdade de Educação - abordar, compreender e assumir o fenômeno inclusivo e reconhecer as diferenças nos processos de formação profissional. A base deste artigo é a pesquisa denominada “Caracterização das práticas de ensino na Faculdade de Educação”. Essa experiência de pesquisa é apresentada como uma prática reflexiva dos professores, em que a inclusão é um elemento que permite a transformação do indivíduo, professor-aluno, a fim de contribuir para a transformação social.

**Palavras-chave:** Inclusão; Diversidade; Educação Inclusiva; Práticas de Ensino; Ensino Universitário; Pedagogia Praxeológica.

## INTRODUCTION

Inclusion is a reality that has received more attention and significance for the human race, especially in educational settings. Gradually, it is becoming more visible as a social need that demands more from the education system. This need becomes a reality for the actors in the education system, such as students, administrators, families, and teachers. Higher education is not divorced from this reality; on the contrary, it can be considered one of the educational levels most affected by the growing challenge of inclusion, which is demonstrated from at least two different perspectives. The first is related to the recognition of diversity and the uniqueness that each student represents; the second emphasizes the challenges that diversity poses for teachers when it comes to promoting appropriate and relevant learning experiences for the training of future professionals.<sup>(1)</sup>

In relation to the situation mentioned above, more and more higher education institutions are concerned and committed to inclusion, making it part of their institutional identity and recognizing it as a decisive basis for the process of training professionals. However, making inclusion visible in the institutional identity is only the beginning, as it is a challenging job to move from policies written in documents to everyday reality. In addition, all educational actors must be able to transform their actions into concrete actions to promote inclusion, especially teachers, who can give life or not to their teaching practice to an educational proposal that promotes reflection on how inclusion can be assumed and other aspects that characterize their teaching practices.<sup>(2,3)</sup>

In this sense, the Faculty of Education needs to observe, describe, analyze, and reflect on teachers' practices, as this makes it possible to characterize how teachers carry out their work in terms of disciplinary, communicative, axiological, institutional, evaluative and, especially for this article, inclusive dimensions. This characterization makes it possible to recognize and pave the way for a qualification process designed according to the particular needs of teachers.

This research aimed to characterize the teaching practices of the Faculty of Education in the context of a proposal for teacher training. It is hoped that this qualification will respond to the growing demands for teacher training, in which inclusion is a fundamental issue, as Colombia is more diverse and committed to recognizing the differences and uniqueness of its citizens.<sup>(4,5)</sup>

The first step in the qualification process is to identify, describe, and make visible teaching practices so that they are consistent with the inclusive perspective that recognizes difference and diversity. As a result, the following research question was established: ¿What are the characteristics of teaching practices in undergraduate and postgraduate programs at the Faculty of Education? The aim is to give teachers a voice through narratives in which they can tell, share, and reconstruct their experiences with colleagues and reflect on aspects of their teaching practices. These narratives are the starting point for a professional development process that recognizes teachers' training needs. In this way, massive and generalized training experiences can be avoided, as they ignore the uniqueness of each teacher.<sup>(6)</sup>

Based on the research above problem, the general objective is to characterize teaching practices in undergraduate and postgraduate courses at the Faculty of Education. To achieve this, three specific objectives were proposed:

- a) to describe teaching practices in undergraduate and postgraduate courses at the Faculty of Education;
- b) to recognize the characteristics and significance of emerging teaching practices in undergraduate and postgraduate courses at the Faculty of Education and
- c) to establish the relationship between the teaching practices of the Faculty of Education and the educational model in relation to praxeological pedagogy, which is the starting point for qualifying teaching practices.<sup>(7)</sup>

Taking the risk of achieving these objectives, the researchers carried out a thorough and conscious investigation into the theoretical elements that served as the basis for the research. The main categories

developed were Teaching practices, Teaching in higher education, and Dimensions of teaching practices in higher education.<sup>(8)</sup>

Teaching practice was developed from a holistic perspective, in which education, pedagogy, and Teaching are articulated; they are understood from their conceptual singularity, but they are linked to teachers. In a way, teaching practice is at the heart of the reflection on educational acts, which goes beyond a flat and mechanical reproduction of actions aimed at transmitting knowledge. For teaching practices to become a reflective action, self-criticism of their work must prevail. According to Juliao (2011),<sup>(9)</sup> "all practices become much more complex when they become praxis, which means that we must reflect on them and seek to transform reality with them."<sup>(9)</sup>

The above definition positions practices as a transformative intellectual.<sup>(10)</sup> From this perspective, teaching practice is an exercise in constant reflection that enables transformation, creativity, and inclusion<sup>(10)</sup> states.

Considering teachers as intellectuals, the critical idea that all human activity involves some form of thought can be clarified [...] to maintain that the use of the mind is a general component of all human activity; we highlight the human capacity to integrate thought and practice. In doing so, we present the essence of what makes a teacher a reflective teaching professional.<sup>(11)</sup>

Making inroads into university teaching from a position of reflective practice involved approaching higher education from Londoño's (2014) point of view. He states that it is "an institution charged with training citizens to improve society, with special emphasis on training students for their future professional development".<sup>(12)</sup> In this sense, Tünnermann (2011) defines the university as "the space where human intelligence, the free discussion of ideas, critical reflection and the training of citizens and professionals comprise a commitment to society and the human and sustainable development of a country".

Teaching practices respond to the social commitment aimed at training professionals who are dedicated to their training and the community. It is proposed that teachers' teaching practices be "a process of action and reflection that includes cooperative, inquiry, and experimentation, where the teacher learns to teach and teaches because he learns; he participates in facilitating, not to impose or replace".<sup>(13)</sup> Only in this way is it possible to train professionals who learn to learn with a self-reflective capacity aimed at constantly improving their personal and professional role, with a high level of commitment and social and environmental responsibility.

Now, understanding university teaching practices from a holistic and complex perspective implies delving into the dimensions that form part of them, which does not mean segregating and simplifying Teaching. Different authors develop teaching practices from different dimensions; for example, Fierro, Fortoul, and Rosas (1999) propose that teaching practices are made up of five dimensions "personal, interpersonal, social, institutional, didactic and values"<sup>(14)</sup>, while Bain (2007) emphasizes four "actors (students, teachers and knowledge), scenarios (society, profession, university and classroom), plot (groups and relationships) and the curriculum".<sup>(15)</sup>

Taking into account the authors' definitions and the characteristics of the context of the Faculty of Education, this research project recognized six dimensions: curricular, communicative, axiological, institutional, assessment, and inclusive. The inclusive dimension is the main interest of this article; it is part of a research experience and an opportunity to contribute to the academic debate focused on inclusion as an element of higher education.<sup>(16)</sup>

The research design was based on narrative research<sup>(17)</sup>, as it favors analysis and reflection on inclusion in higher education in the context of the teacher training experience, and took a hermeneutic approach from a qualitative perspective. This research design is presented as a dynamic scenario fully articulated to the research problem, which, far from being a mechanical and rigid diagram, is considered the way forward to analyze and interpret autobiographies<sup>(18)</sup>, focus groups, documentary analysis that reveal the main characteristics of university teaching practices in relation to inclusion.

## DEVELOPMENT

### Perspectives on inclusion and educational inclusión

Addressing the concept of inclusion involves addressing diversity in advance, bearing in mind that both concepts are intertwined in the contexts of contemporary societies. Consequently, they give rise to new dynamics of interaction that pose new challenges for coexistence. In this regard, Tourraine (1997) points out that recognizing diversity is the cornerstone of a democratic society. This means that it is essential to recognize that everyone is different and adopts different principles of life and habits; as a result, it may be feasible to apply a universal principle that allows respect for diversity and favors people's interaction.

In order to achieve this integration, the role of education as one of the settings in which the project for society is built and put into practice is vital. In this sense, vocational training must contribute to meeting the challenges of equality and equity that societies are promoting and be based on a pluralist and integrative conception of knowledge and education. From this perspective, Tourraine (1997) considers that one of the main objectives of education today is to promote equality and plurality: this means creating learning experiences

that benefit the development of all human dimensions: human, scientific, ethical, communicative, political, critical, artistic, and intercultural.

It is precisely because of this call for plural and comprehensive education that inclusion was brought to the academic event. The concept of integration was studied in the field of special education in the 1980s in countries such as the United States and France. Lately, the concept of inclusion has become more robust and an issue of interest for education in the United States and Europe.<sup>(19)</sup>

In general terms, inclusion is defined as an exercise in which different social actors converge, with the aim of guaranteeing equal opportunities and breaking down barriers that divide and exclude certain people and groups. More precisely, UNESCO has defined educational inclusion as a process that includes a diversity of interests, abilities, learning styles of students, and socio-cultural environments to minimize exclusion and segregation. Of course, this definition includes the existence of policies and practices that promote the participation of all students in pedagogical and learning experiences. In this sense, UNESCO recognized in 2005 that quality education is a right that cannot be limited to social class, gender, ethnic group, or special cognitive abilities.<sup>(20)</sup>

In this sense, inclusion should not be situated in the field of special education or necessarily linked to disability; on the contrary, it should be conceived as an essential dimension of education at any level and in any field. In this way, educational inclusion is a process that promotes progress in education, as it subjects the curriculum to a review that assesses its capacity to deal with the diversity of knowledge and contexts, makes learning experiences more flexible at different levels, and develops methodological and didactic resources that contribute to a diverse and comprehensive education.

In relation to the above statements, projects aimed at educational inclusion have training structures that help recognize the uniqueness of each person, their talents and abilities, the points that need to be improved, and the weak points in all fields of development. This helps each student to recognize and value their differences and strengthen their self-esteem and respect for themselves and others. It is worth noting that talents and limitations do not mean intensifying the system of rewards and penalties of traditional education; the aim is to create new dynamics of interaction that promote support networks in which students are members of a true learning community.

Finally, it is essential to recognize that diversity is a component of society that comes before the recognition of the modern world. In fact, each of the spaces in which people live or the relationships they establish are in the midst of difference; therefore, it is urgent to recognize diversity as a characteristic that is part of the social dynamic. In this sense, it is necessary to understand that inclusion cannot be reduced to strategies, tools, or actions implemented at school; inclusion, even more so educational inclusion, must be a training principle, or, as Sánchez (1996) puts it, "an attitude, a system of values and beliefs [...] once a school adopts inclusion, it must condition people to take decisions and actions" (p.4).<sup>(19)</sup>

Based on this, circulating through the discourse of educational institutions is the paradox that inclusion goes through. At the same time, inclusion becomes invisible because teaching practices are resistant to change. The autobiographies written by teachers at the Faculty of Education show the tension in higher education and how they face the dilemmas that inclusion poses for training and coexistence. The following lines will analyze the tension that the teachers expressed in their autobiographies.<sup>(21)</sup>

### **Inclusion: between institutional discourse and classroom experiences**

After 20 years of reflection on the educational model, we have understood how to propose an educational model that allows us to recognize the individual dynamics of the people we want to manage and train. They make it possible to understand flexibility beyond theory and find a new way of approaching realities in practice; it means understanding that the construction of an educational community is feasible in the interwoven dialogues that allow us to see in a different way and not in individuality. The disappointments and challenges between the institution and the school community have contributed to making an organization that promotes processes of social transformation in areas with difficult access conditions.

The disappointments and challenges that arose during this research refer to what Robertson (2003) called glocal. This refers to how particular rules and conditions, which in this case are the possibilities of students and teachers, affect and transform the general rules and structure of the institution. This develops new configurations for other people, leaving aside the conception of one and reconsidering uniduality. In addition, institutional guidelines argue with people's distinctive characteristics, enabling new dynamics and changes in specific rules and revealing new forms of communication.<sup>(22)</sup>

Thus, it is not understood as an institution with a rigid structure in which the academic community is under a priori assumptions, with the aim of "making normal those who are strangers." On the contrary, education is identified as a living organism that recognizes the importance of singularities in self-produced learning processes.<sup>(23)</sup>

In relation to the information mentioned above, the educational proposal is committed to "quality education for all"; to this end, the institution takes action to attend to, guide, and accompany the academic community

with special needs. To this end, the missionary work policy aims for integral formation in an inclusive perspective that goes beyond understanding inclusion as "including" students in the institutional setting, integrating people with diverse abilities or from different groups and regions, among others. On the contrary, the policy aims to recognize the skills and abilities that everyone has to develop in the context in which they live.<sup>(2)</sup>

To achieve this policy, it has created a number of departments in charge of identifying, monitoring, and promoting strategies to reduce the gap between people. In this way, learning processes can be more personalized, as everyone learns differently, and teachers cannot teach the same way to everyone. From this perspective, the individual is considered to be an essential part of the learning process rather than an object that merely receives knowledge that does not contribute to the transformation into more favorable living conditions.

On the other hand, the proposals immersed in the departments that the institution creates to respond to the multiple conditions of life are more concrete in practice than in theory since the effort that teachers make to promote processes of training automation allows them to deal with this type of person.

The trends among the teachers emerged because there are no causal relationships, which means going directly to the simultaneities that appear in teaching practices and the qualitative changes that are the result of the interaction that takes place in the classroom. In this respect, Assmann (2002) invites us to think of a world with many worlds; this is the opposite of what is happening in institutions where inclusion is being discussed, as it seems that the academic community is preoccupied with making worlds, fragmenting and specializing more in each disability or in how to connect with others. As a result, the horizon of uncertainty is lost, and the idea of knowing everything in order to deal with everything is dismantled, which is why it is necessary to have the ability to interact and create networks of dialogue in order to promote the learning that each individual requires rather than knowing everything.

The training processes or courses taught in sign language are autonomous exercises that teachers carry out to get closer to the specific language of these worlds. These exercises seek to create networks between the teacher and the deaf students and put conditions of equity into practice, as they go beyond equality that ignores the individual and their peculiarities in order to follow the imposed system.<sup>(24)</sup> On the contrary, in cohabitation, the individual tries to take the place of people with disabilities in order to learn together because the most important thing is to recognize the other and not the hierarchy of who knows and who does not know.

With this in mind, the professors from the Faculty of Education tell us about the different situations and experiences they have had in their teaching practices when faced with the challenge of inclusion. They have the opportunity to share their achievements and shortcomings with other colleagues to try to learn how to deal with inclusion. For example, Ramírez, a professor in the Bachelor of Physical Education and Sports program, understands inclusion as.

It is a challenge that goes in two directions: firstly, how can students with special needs be included? In this sense, I had experiences with a blind student and a deaf student. They contributed to my thinking about how to use tools to support their learning and made their classmates aware of how to work with people with special needs. Secondly, how should trainee teachers be trained so that they can develop a pedagogy of inclusion? To this end, the bachelor's program created a course called adapted physical education; in addition, teaching practice scenarios were offered to trainee teachers so that they could have experiences and develop strategies for working with different types of people.<sup>(24)</sup>

Another example is that of Rey, a professor in the Department of Pedagogy, who consolidated experiences and theories that allowed her to recognize the places of enunciation; she exemplifies: "The result of this work was the article 'trainer of trainers facing the challenges of inclusive education'; there, I understood that inclusion is not just about obtaining information, it is about training and living."

Another experience was written by Velez, a lecturer on the bachelor's degree course in Computer Information Systems, who expressed that inclusion became vital because this program admitted students with special needs. As a result, she has reconsidered the importance of subject topics and specific didactics to ensure that students with special needs learn.<sup>(25)</sup>

Well, I have seen a significant change in relation to the students admitted because some of them have some physical disability, mainly. For example, when you have students with low vision in a class, and they have to use a computer, you have to make an effort to offer them what they need to keep up with their classmates.

This shows how the effect on the learning process is recognized by this teacher when she is faced with an experience that forces her to change and redirect her interests toward pedagogical mediations. In this regard, Vélez adds.

My closest experience was when I was teaching at university. There, I came into contact with visually impaired students [...] I felt pretty confused, so I went to the Department of Social Welfare and asked: What can I do? They are in favor of inclusion, and so am I [...] I asked myself: How can I make a blind student read a PDF format, or how can I give him access to the document I propose in my classes? On the other hand, it is convenient that the university has installed markers in different places so that they can know where they are and where they are going, and this has been positive.

The transformations it has undergone in terms of infrastructure, policies, and so on are essential for teachers.

I worked at the Soacha campus, and there needs to be a more significant gap in terms of meeting the needs of the special needs population. There, you can see girls as young as six or seven walking with crutches or using wheelchairs in the classrooms. We are looking for inclusion strategies, such as ramps so that they can get around quickly. I do not know if you know the Soacha campus, but there are no ramps or toilets for them. However, there is a Welfare Department that supports and prepares us. So when you see a person with a disability, you have to include them, and this has marked inclusion; the citizens and the Secretary of Education tell us that we have many people with special needs [...], and that does not mean that we should feel sorry for them, because in the classroom a student in a wheelchair goes to the whiteboard and does their exercises usually; they have high self-esteem and the same enthusiasm as the others. In this sense, I feel that you are making a great effort to promote inclusion.<sup>(26)</sup>

This teacher emphasizes why it is essential to understand inclusion from multiple perspectives and not reduce it to a narrow system of disabilities; in this regard, she goes on to write:

I want to say one thing: On the one hand, I refer to inclusion as a person with a disability, but it is not always like that; I mean, it can refer to someone who is in average condition but suddenly loses their job and cannot pay their university fees, then we talk about social inclusion. We should create a system of scholarships on all university campuses to help students to be included. On the other hand, there are other cases of inclusion that we do not mention because we always refer to inclusion as disability. However, other forms of inclusion should be reported.

For Morales, a professor in the Department of Pedagogy, many elements have been worked on, such as policies, practical actions, and initiatives that come from state and private institutions, students, and teachers.

Inclusion is becoming evident in public policies, but universities have been working on it for a long time, and that is what makes it different. This institution has given a lot to society, and I agree with some of its postulates; although I know that the project needs to be worked on, some efforts have been made. For example, I have had students attend class with an interpreter, and that gives me peace of mind, but when there is not an interpreter, I organize groups to help students with special needs. This has been good and interesting, and I do not see any problem with it.<sup>(27)</sup>

### **Interpreting inclusion in the educational context -Conclusions-**

The reflections made in the research show how inclusion is understood and experienced by teachers in their daily teaching practices. An approach to the general results shows that teachers recognize the inclusive nature of higher education institutions. However, when they have to face inclusion in their teaching practices, they feel they do not need more training to face the challenges set.

In addition, some teachers request more training to be experts in sign language and Braille; however, teachers can only be experts in some things, as they are students who only contribute to the student's learning. This means that teachers do not need to know sign language; they need to develop skills to favor learning according to the peculiarities of each individual.

From a research point of view, the possible answers to the inclusion challenges faced by higher education institutions emerge from the interactions and dialogues established between teachers and students in a specific context. To think that the answers come from outside the institutions, which are unaware of the relationships and dynamics, seems unrealistic, as it is necessary to create processes to recognize the participants and their contexts. Furthermore, it is essential to generate qualification scenarios according to the needs and opportunities of each individual; this means that the voices of the participants echo and create possibilities for solving such problems.

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