

# Challenges of multicultural curriculum in higher education for indigenous people

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## Abstract

This article assesses how the Brazilian university is facing curriculum challenges to meet the demands of indigenous students in the face of the recently institutionalized access of indigenous peoples to higher education. It presents the trajectory of indigenous school education up to university in the early 2000s, after the changes promoted by the Federal Constitution of 1988, which recognized the indigenous' right to alterity. The central question raised is: is the higher education curriculum in line with the multicultural perspective? The article shows a portrait of the Brazilian situation, based on documentary research done in governmental and nongovernmental sites, and news portals. With theoretical discussions about what the multicultural curriculum is, the paper stresses that, due to the problems reported, the practice of affirmative actions to promote indigenous access to higher education has been limited to remedial multiculturalism. The paper also brings the results of a survey with indigenous students in one of the most popular courses at the Federal University of Pará, which has revealed contradictions and resignation: interviewees indicate that there is curricular ethnocentrism, but they say the training is satisfactory for the exercise of their professions. We discuss the phenomenon in light of the similarity with North American curricular multiculturalism. Results indicate that equal access to education is not achieved simply by equal access to a hegemonic curriculum. We suggest thinking curricula that consider the multiple identities and differences in our society, as well as how they are constantly produced and reproduced through power relations.

## Keywords

Education – Indigenous people – Multicultural curriculum.

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# **Desafios do currículo multicultural na educação superior para indígenas**

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## **Resumo**

*O artigo avalia como a universidade brasileira está enfrentando os desafios curriculares para atender à demanda de alunos índios diante do recente acesso institucionalizado dos povos indígenas à educação superior. Apresenta-se a trajetória da educação escolar indígena até a universidade ocorrida nos primeiros anos da década de 2000, após as mudanças promovidas pela Constituição Federal de 1988, que reconheceu o direito indígena à alteridade. A questão central levantada é: o currículo da educação superior está em consonância com a perspectiva multicultural? Mostra-se um retrato da situação brasileira, desenhado a partir de pesquisa documental feita em sites governamentais e não governamentais, além de portais de notícia. Com discussões teóricas em torno do que é o currículo multicultural, destaca-se que, devido aos problemas relatados, a prática de ações afirmativas para promover o acesso de indígenas ao ensino superior tem-se limitado a um multiculturalismo reparador. Expõe-se também o resultado de pesquisa feita com discentes indígenas de um dos cursos mais procurados da Universidade Federal do Pará, que revelou contradições e resignação: os entrevistados apontam a existência de um etnocentrismo curricular, mas dizem que a formação é satisfatória para o exercício da profissão escolhida. Discute-se o fenômeno à luz da semelhança com o multiculturalismo curricular norte-americano. Os resultados indicam que a igualdade no acesso à educação não é obtida simplesmente pela igualdade de acesso a um currículo hegemônico. Sugere-se pensar currículos que considerem as múltiplas identidades e diferenças de nossa sociedade, bom como o modo como estas são produzidas e reproduzidas constantemente por meio das relações de poder.*

## **Palavras-chave**

*Educação superior – Indígenas – Currículo multicultural.*

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Brazil has currently a population of 896 thousand indigenous people, which represents 0.47% of the national population (IBGE, 2012a). According to the *School Census 2010*, the latest census that brings data on indigenous education, there are 246,000 Indians in basic education (from early childhood to secondary education), which corresponds to 0.5% of the total enrollment at this level of education in the country (INEP, 2011). This is a historic achievement of Brazilian indigenous populations, who are also entering universities.

According to data provided by the General Coordination of Indigenous School Education, Department of Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion (CGEEI / SECADI / MEC), there are 6336 indigenous students in higher education institutions, which corresponds to 0.1% of the 6.3 million enrollments in undergraduate programs in the country.

The rate of 0.1% is still small, considering that the percentage of Indians among the Brazilian people is nearly 0.5%, but the demand has increased gradually, as new generations advance in the grades of school education. 55,000 out of the 246,000 indigenous students are in the late grades of primary school and 27,000 are in secondary education.

The first indigenous demand for higher education began to be met in 2001, with the indigenous undergraduate licensure courses designed to train indigenous Indian teachers working in schools in their villages. The second demand arose from the progress in the education of this population: indigenous youth who complete secondary school and pursue professional training in various areas, especially those connected to their struggles, such as Law, Medicine and Earth Sciences. This clientele's demand began to be met in 2003 through the quota system or additional spots offered in exclusive university entrance exams.

Given the recently institutionalized access of indigenous to Brazilian universities – the records prior to the 2000s were isolated cases –, some issues need to be evaluated: what

curriculum challenges are higher education institutions facing in Brazil to meet this new specific demand? Is the higher education curriculum in line with the principles of multiculturalism? Do indigenous students understand what a multicultural curriculum is and feel respected for their Indianness?

In search of data to support this reflection, we did a study in websites of governmental and non-governmental learning and research institutions. Because the indigenous presence in higher education is still recent and there are few published studies, we also used information from news portals. By way of illustration, we also present the result of a semi-directive interview with indigenous students of one of the most popular courses at the Federal University of Pará (UFPA), which has offered two additional spots for indigenous students in each of its courses since 2010.

Before proceeding, however, it is opportune to review the trajectory of indigenous school education to help understand the current scenario.

## **From the first letters to higher education**

The contact of our first inhabitants with formal education took place in the first century of the history of the country, when the Jesuits arrived in Brazil in 1549. But not until the establishment of the Indian Protection Service (SPI), in 1910, did it appear a system of schools to teach them the *first letters* and some trade. Under the management of the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), the body that replaced the SPI in 1967, this system became a system of bilingual schools, with some Indian teachers teaching classes of indigenous language and traditions (SOUZA LIMA; BAROSO-HOFFMAN, 2007).

Since then, decades of protectionist and above all integrationist policies resulted in the imposition of values alien to the Indian's culture and way of living as well as the denial of their languages and identity. However, thanks to pressure from indigenous movements, NGOs,

universities and intellectuals, the Brazilian indigenous societies won a historic victory in the 1988 Federal Constitution: guarantees that every Brazilian citizen is entitled to the use of their lands and their languages, to their cultural diversity – with the differential of the respect for their way of being, living and socially organizing themselves. In short, the right to alterity.

This achievement impacted on various aspects of indigenous life, but especially on the school education of these traditional peoples. Changes happened slowly, always thanks to the demands of organized movements. In 1991 arose the first legal framework: Presidential Decree No. 26/91, which gave the Ministry of Education the power to integrate indigenous school education to the regular education systems, to coordinate actions at all levels and in all teaching modalities, and delegate powers to the states and municipalities, which took over the schools previously managed by FUNAI.

In 1996, the country's law magna of education, the *Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education* (LDB), guaranteed the indians' right to specific, differentiated and bilingual school education, which respects their ways of producing and transmitting knowledge, with objectives, curricula and school calendars defined by each indigenous society. In 1998, the *National Curriculum Reference for Indigenous Schools* was established. In the following year, Resolution No. 03/99 of the Chamber of Basic Education of the National Council of Education (CEB / CNE), based on Opinion No. 14/99 of CNE, ruled that teachers of indigenous schools would be primarily indigenous members of their own communities.

This was a longstanding demand because many Indians taught classes from 1st to 4th grades although they did not have the training required by the laws governing the Brazilian regular education system which they should now be subject to. CEB had relaxed the degree requirement for these teachers to be hired, but set deadlines for them to be trained. Since the mid-1990s, efforts had been made to complete their

training at primary education level. Following came the need for training at secondary level. At the end of 1999, CEB authorized the operation of secondary courses of indigenous teacher education, intervallic courses during the vacation periods of indigenous schools. The first demand for higher education consisted of students completing secondary courses of indigenous teacher education in the early 2000s.

In July 2001, the University of Mato Grosso (UNEMAT) implemented the country's first indigenous licensure in an intervallic way. In December of the same year, the Federal University of Roraima (UFRR) established the Insikiran Center, which also implemented specific courses to train Indian teachers.

Under the now called Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), the first actions took place thanks to *University Diversity Program*, created in late 2002 with funding from the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB), to develop and implement public policies aimed at the access of African descent and indigenous populations to higher education. Performed by Lula government since 2003, the program initially supported several projects submitted by NGOs, indigenous entities and university centers, including preparatory courses for university entrance exams which did not have much success.

Given the preliminary results and the hiring by the Department of Higher Education (SESU) of a consultancy via UNESCO, the *Diversity Program* gained new directions. The emphasis was on improving primary and secondary education through the training of indigenous teachers. It was created the *Program for Support of Indigenous Higher Education and Licensure Degrees* (PROLIND), with funding for indigenous intercultural licensure degrees. In this context, the organization chart of MEC underwent a major change, favoring new policies with the establishment of the Department of Continuing Education, Literacy and Diversity (SECAD)<sup>1</sup> in 2004. In its organization chart was

<sup>1</sup>- Now SECADI, Department of Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion, after the new MEC restructuring in May 2011.

the General Coordination of Indigenous School Education (CGEEI), among others.

It is also worth noting the realization of the *Seminar Challenges for Higher Education for Indigenous Peoples in Brazil* in August 2004, a milestone in this trajectory of indigenous inclusion in the university. The seminar brought together the main actors involved with the issue at that moment. The meeting was promoted by the *Trails of knowledge: Indigenous Higher Education in Brazil*, a project conducted between 2004 and 2007 by the Laboratory for Research on Ethnicity, Culture and Development (LACED), the National Museum/UFRJ, with resources from the fund *Pathways to Higher Education Initiative*, Ford Foundation. The discussions in the meeting were organized in a publication that is now a reference on the subject (SOUZA LIMA; BAROSO-HOFFMAN, 2007) and is one of sources for this article.

The first notice of PROLIND was issued in 2005, in a SESU-SECAD joint action with the participation of eight universities offering indigenous intercultural licensure degrees in Languages, Literature and Arts, Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Social Sciences and Humanities. According to data from CGEEI,<sup>2</sup> in 2012, there were 2938 student teachers in indigenous courses from twenty higher education institutions of fifteen Brazilian states. Institutions are responsible for implementing and maintaining the courses and the federal government bears the costs of lodging and meals of the Indians in the periods of school attendance.

A study based on data of the school census 2008 (INEP, 2009) reports that 21% of the approximately 11 000 indigenous teachers in the country had a college degree and most completed secondary education (61%), 33% of them with traditional teaching and 10% with indigenous teaching. The remainder (18%) completed only primary education. Despite the lag – statistics on indigenous education in the country do not follow the pace of the

**2-** Supplied in September 2012 via e-mail, in response to the query made by the authors.

statistics on the other modalities, with data often reviewed by CGEEI –, the figures show that there is much to be done.

The other indigenous demand for higher education, consisting of young people completing secondary school and attempting to enter university, grows every year. The claims for ethnic quotas, which occurred mainly during the celebrations of 500 years of Brazil, were led by organizations of African Brazilians, but the Indians followed the movement. Controversial discussions began in 1999, when the University of Brasilia (UNB) presented its project. The proposal only came into effect in 2004, allocating 20% of its spots to Afro-descent students and twenty spots per year to indigenous students.

After eight years of legal debates, on April 26, 2012, the Federal Supreme Court ruled that UNB's quota system is constitutional, a decision establishing jurisprudence. The rapporteur minister stressed that affirmative actions aim to overcome social distortions historically consolidated and do not injure the rights of other citizens, because the means employed and the aims pursued are marked by proportionality and reasonableness, and because the policies are transient.

It is noteworthy that the State University of Mato Grosso do Sul (UEMS) was the pioneer in the implementation of quotas for blacks and Indians in Brazil. In the selection process in 2003, it allocated 20% of spots for blacks and 10% for Indians, also implementing a program to sensitize the academic community to support the new freshmen (CATANANTE, [2008]).

Survey concerning 2007 reports that 20% of the 213 public higher education institutions, based on the autonomy granted to universities by the Brazilian constitution, had already some form of affirmative action for indigenous differentiated access to its student body, including systems of quotas, reservation or supplementation of spots. The Northern Region led in the number of intercultural licensure courses offered by the universities of Roraima, Amazonas, Amapá and Acre, but was the second

one in terms of supply of spots in affirmative actions, despite having the largest indigenous population in the country (CAJUEIRO, 2008).

### **Higher education for indigenous people in Pará State**

Pará has the third largest indigenous population of the Northern Region and the eighth most numerous in Brazil, consisting of 39 000 individuals (IBGE, 2012a). According to data from the State Department of Education<sup>3</sup> regarding enrollment, in 2010 there were 11,634 students in primary schools, 930 in secondary schools in modular system and 220 students in the project Munduruku Integrated Secondary Education, in partnership with FUNAI and Pariripy Association, which offers courses in Agroecology, Nursing and Indigenous Teaching. There were also 372 Indian teachers doing the Indigenous Teaching course in seven centers in different regions of the state.

Concerning training in higher education, the first intercultural licensure course in the state began in July 2012, and it was offered by Pará State University to teachers of the Hawk, Tembé and Suruí peoples, according to data of the institution. Of the hundred spots made available, 91 were filled (UEPA, 2012).

The delay of at least a decade in comparison to other Brazilian states may have several causes, such as the delay in indigenous teaching courses of the State Department of Education and little mobilization of local indigenous movements, considering that the conflicts to regularize their land, health care problems and other issues have occupied their agenda of struggle and demands.

As for affirmative actions, in 2010, UFPA began offering two additional spots in each of its courses, after demands of indigenous movements. In the two first selection processes in 2010 and 2011, 933 candidates registered, resulting in the enrollment of 112 indigenous

in five campi in the capital and countryside. The most popular courses were in the health area (Medicine and Nursing), Law, Education, Environmental and Earth Sciences (UFPA, 2011), while for others there was no demand.

Only 34% of the students who registered were able to enroll. Candidates had to submit documents proving the completion of secondary education and their belonging to an indigenous community. As the registrations were made only on the internet, many forms were incomplete or contained errors, and some seemed to be prejudicial jokes (BELTRÃO; CUNHA, 2011). The next steps consisted of an essay in Portuguese, with minimum grade 4, and an interview with the candidate.

The demand in 2012 selection process was surprisingly low: only 64 candidates registered. In the end, 28 were accepted in eighteen different courses (UFPA, 2012). There was no official statement from the university about the phenomenon. But information provided by Beltran and Cunha (2011, p.34) indicates some of the problems faced by the indigenous students of the institution.

UFPA has a Retention Scholarship Program which aims to help students who are economically at risk of dropping graduation, but such scholarship is still very inefficient. Although the Indians might be granted the Retention Scholarship, it is necessary to rethink the program urgently and adapt it to the new subjects who enter the university, who bring demands arising from cultural particularities and discrimination. UFPA certainly cannot ignore the topic because it is aware that only the right of entry is not enough, one must be able to stay!

In response to our request, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies reported that UFPA does not have a specific academic program to monitor the performance of indigenous students in their courses yet, but the university

**3-** Provided in April 2012 by the Coordination of Indigenous School Education, Board of Education for Diversity, Inclusion and Citizenship.

has already approved the establishment of the Center for Social Inclusion and has appointed a committee to study its formatting. Initially students academic situation will be studied and then there will be a meeting with the leaders of the courses in order to establish lines of work and specific actions.

### **National scenario**

UFPA's case is not an isolated case, even though it has its peculiarities. Similar problems are commonly reported in the meetings on higher education for Indians. One challenge has to do with their difficulties to remain in the courses, especially to pay for housing, transportation and educational materials. There are scholarship programs from FUNAI and other sources, but they are insufficient and not available for all students. On average, the age of entry has been over 25 years. In most cases, students are married and move with their entire family, which increases difficulties and probability of dropout (SOUZA LIMA; BARROSO-HOFFMANN, 2007).

On this aspect, Garlet, Guimarães and Bellini (2010) emphasize that no policy of indigenous access to higher education will be successful if it is not designed from the perspective of intersectionality and intertwined with assistance, housing and employment policies, among others. Otherwise, instead of promoting concrete changes in the reality of indigenous communities, they will have an illusionary character.

The difficulty of proving membership of an indigenous community occurs nationwide. According to Souza Lima and Barroso-Hoffmann (2007), the requirement of a letter confirming the link makes some Indians who do not live in a village anymore depend politically on the leaders of their village of origin. On the other hand, universities have to guard against an unusual growth in the self-identified indigenous population: from 1991 to 2000, it increased from 440 000 to 733 000, which is a 150% growth, and amounted to 817

000 in 2010 (IBGE, 2012b). The achievements promoted by the Constitution and government assistance programs made many urban Indians come out of invisibility. According to Baniwa (2006), Brazilian Indians are experiencing a phenomenon of strong self-esteem recovery, seeking to consolidate a dignified space in the country's history and multicultural life.

However, defining who is and who is not Indian is an important legal factor to guarantee their rights. Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation, to which Brazil became a signatory in July 2002 and which came into force a year later, advocates self-determination. However, some argue that such interpretation should not be simplistic because of the great Brazilian miscegenation. Therefore, it has also been used the criterium of testing the bond with an indigenous people, considered by Convention 169 as the one that descends from populations which inhabited the country or a geographical region of the country at the time of the conquest, colonization or the establishment of the present state boundaries, and that retains all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, or part of them. The challenge is to make this selection without further exclusions, which requires time-consuming, sensitive and careful analyzes.

The selection processes also indicate a barrier arising from the education of these candidates in primary and secondary schools. In ENEM tests, indigenous schools that participate voluntarily have had the lowest rates, which shows that they are not preparing students for college and that they are focused on the preservation of the culture, language and traditions of their people (CASADO; OLIVEIRA, 2010). This is a controversial point, because the LDB stimulates restoring indigenous values and knowledge, but also emphasizes interculturality. Here we see the risk of cultural ghettoization of which Canen (2010) speaks, with curriculum proposals guided exclusively by the cultural patterns of the social group in question, preventing the dialogue between plural cultural patterns.

Another aspect is the cultural and linguistic shock experienced by indigenous students. To address the problem, the Federal University of Tocantins (UFT), for example, implemented a program of institutional indigenous tutoring, with fellows oriented to support new colleagues with difficulties. When not tackled, barriers to adapt to the academic world just reinforce prejudices and the thought that they should never have left their villages.

Indigenous leader Azelene Kaingang draws attention to the contradiction of a state that is to be multicultural, but actually suppresses differences. “We are not the only ones that should prepare to enter university; the university must prepare to receive us and understand us too.” Azelene emphasizes that diversity needs to be present at university because, being a space of knowledge production, it “is the right space to start changing people’s minds” (SOUZA LIMA; BARROSO-HOFFMANN, 2007, p. 50).

## **Discussions on the multicultural curriculum**

Since a curriculum proposal encompasses the political and philosophical aspects involved in the formal education of new generations, including the definition of the desired social benefits and the profile of the professionals one wants to train – or identities that will be produced – opening the university to the Brazilian ethnocultural diversity also implies the need for openness to think and build multicultural curricula.

We believe, along with Silva (2003, 2008), that equal access to education cannot be achieved simply through equal access to the existing hegemonic curriculum. Real equality depends on a substantial modification of the curriculum, especially when one considers that the curricular actions and their training dynamics subtly seek to homogenize and pasteurize cultures not aligned with the dominant political centers, as highlighted by Macedo (2007). For both authors, despite the

current sensitivity of official documents in support of an education indexed to culture as a plural manifestation, the truth is that the *habitus* to achieve educational efficiency still involves strong homogenization of knowledge and intelligence. This feeds perspectives in which the difference is a difficulty to be eliminated in the name of the bureaucratic efficiency of curricula and their ideological obediences.

Multiculturalism, in turn, preaches the enriching coexistence of different views and attitudes from different cultural heritages. “Its concept assumes an open and flexible position, based on respect for this diversity and the rejection of all prejudice or hierarchy” (MACHADO, 2002, p. 37). In other words, multiculturalism, or pluralism, entails the dialogue between different social and cultural groups, the recognition of the *other*, including their knowledge and values.

Taking the case of UFPA as illustration, we found that practice is closer to the reality of homogenizing curricula. Semi-directive interviews with indigenous students in one of the most popular courses of the institution – a course offered at Belém campus which, for ethical reasons, we prefer not to identify – reveal that they consider the course curriculum ethnocentric, conservative and inflexible. On the positive side, respondents pointed interdisciplinarity, believing that some professors manage to develop lessons linked with other disciplines of the course.<sup>4</sup>

Although the answers to the closed and open questions in this field research indicate that respondents understood the concepts investigated, when asked to respond directly about what they perceive as differentiated, multicultural, interdisciplinary, flexible

**4-** Answer given to a closed question on how each student sees the current curriculum of the course. Answer choices were grouped into two columns: on one side, *conservative, ethnocentric, with isolated disciplines, inflexible*; on the other side, *differentiated, multicultural, interdisciplinary, flexible*. The only answer other than what has been mentioned here was given by a respondent that chose *differentiated* instead of *conservative*. The remaining three gave identical responses. Before the questions were answered, the meanings ascribed to the terms in the questionnaire were explained.



curriculum, they showed difficulties: only one respondent answered correctly, highlighting it is the one that suits different cultures, with interconnected disciplines and which allows changes; the other conceives the multicultural curriculum as the one that suits the reality of the indigenous peoples; another respondent sees the curriculum as a life, work and training trajectory; and one respondent said that he did not have a concept of the subject. The data show that there is an understanding that probably arises from common sense. However, such understanding lacks theoretical construction and problematization of the subject curriculum.

At the time of the interviews – August and December 2011 – the course had four indigenous students, two who entered in 2010 and two in 2011. Besides being one of the most popular UFPA courses, the course was chosen for reasons of student accessibility, because two of them are former students of one of the authors of this article, who worked for sixteen years in indigenous education in the State, having worked as a teacher and lived in the land where the students come from.

The profile of the students in this course resembles the portrait of indigenous college students nationwide: three were male, two were aged 30 to 35 years, one was 26 and another was 23 years, and therefore there was a gap between their age and the average age of their classmates; two are married and have young children at school age, only two received assistance scholarship and the other two were supported in Belém with resources of the community or of their parents; all of them attended secondary education in an urban public school near their indigenous land.

Pointing the main problems faced, they stressed that the university does not know the reality of each people and needs to know the potential and the difficulties of indigenous students in order to create opportunities for professors to adapt to this new reality. One of their suggestions is to create a group of peer tutors of their own class to help them with their

difficulties. Another suggestion was to increase the number of hours of classes to support them in some disciplines, or to reduce such number. In both cases, the students' difficulty to keep pace with the classes is implicit.

As for respect for their ethnic values, most students said they were respected, albeit with some caveats: one student considered him or herself respected, but at the same time excluded; two said they felt respected and included; and one said he feels both disrespected and excluded. In this regard, there is a contradictory discourse: if, on the one hand, most of them claim to feel respected in their Indianness, on the other hand, all are unanimous in saying that the curriculum is ethnocentric. We believe that the respondents understood *respect* in the sense of elegance of human relationships – no avowed prejudice, for example – and not in the sense of the university's institutional position. This is because the study also revealed that all are of the opinion that the course curriculum does not meet the specificities of indigenous societies.

With the account given so far, we found that the opening of educational institutions for multicultural reality presents some risks that may have the opposite effect, just perpetuating inequalities and prejudices that one wants to fight, as highlighted by Canen (2010). The first one is *remedial* multiculturalism, reduced to affirmative actions: it provides the access of marginalized groups to educational spaces, but does not advance to seek actual curriculum changes. Normally this danger comes with another, folklorism: diversity is celebrated in its folkloric and *exotic* aspects, mainly on festive dates, such as the Indian Day and Black Consciousness Week, but veiled discrimination and unequal relations remain hidden.

Also real is the danger of identity reductionism, with the freezing of identities based on stereotypes. The concept of Indian, for example, is homogeneous, while the indigenous diversity in Brazil is considered one of the largest in the world: 305 ethnic groups and 274 languages counted in the latest national

census (IBGE, 2012b). Although there is an increasing trend to see Indians as citizens, most often they are seen either in an idealized way, as the protectors of the forest, or in a prejudiced way, as lazy or violent. Permeated by social evolutionism, in general the Brazilian society continues to consider indigenous peoples as cultures at lower stages, whose only prospect is assimilation to global culture (BANIWA, 2006).

### **Contradictory multiculturalism and pedagogical strategies**

One aspect revealed in the research with indigenous students in a course of UFPA inspires another specific discussion. Evaluating the curriculum of the course, in questions with elective answers, three respondents believe that it is satisfactory as it meets the training needs of indigenous or non-indigenous professionals, and declared they were satisfied with this proposal. One said that the curriculum is indifferent to multiethnic realities, but does not compromise his or her training.

In these expressions, we note that for the Indian student it is much more important to have completed the training even in the traditional way, based on an arbitrary, homogenizing and universal standardization, than to question the status quo. They realize that the current training does not meet their cultural specificities and does not value their traditional knowledge, yet they consider it good to enter the labor market, to practice their chosen profession.

This phenomenon is parallel to the cradle of curricular multiculturalism. It started in the U.S. and other countries of the North in the last decades of the twentieth century, and it was not given as a gift, but the result of decades of struggle of blacks against the power of whites, also with certain radicalism. Still, Apple (2006) makes an observation that serves as a warning. Despite the great struggles, much of the multiculturalism established in American schools is the kind that he calls *safe*, because it sees the power of the whites as *common* and it considers their schools

as a reference and even as a model. In other words, in practice, cultural domination has not been interrupted, but is embedded in the logic of the movements which oppose them. The author calls this contradictory multiculturalism.

In the case of Brazil's indigenous population, there are examples of communities that prefer to adopt the traditional school model of the white, against the right to the differentiated and multicultural training guaranteed by LDB – the indigenous peoples have the prerogative of choice. Another example is the idea of some leaders of having a privatized school in the village, because *if that is the best school for the whites, it is good for us too*.

Returning to the U.S. example, McLaren (2000) confirms that, while on the one hand the black movement for multiculturalist schools contributed to the democratic ideals, on the other hand, it has sustained and strengthened the logic of capitalism, offering dissimilar types of knowledge and rewarding on the basis of class, gender and race. The ideology of the hegemonic class is unconsciously reproduced. Schools perpetuate or reproduce social relations, pedagogical practices, cultural backgrounds and attitudes; in short, they reproduce the *habitus* that sustains the patterns of inequality in society.

Canadian living in the United States, McLaren was largely responsible for assigning a revolutionary function to multiculturalism as a movement of resistance to the domination of the establishment. In an interview in Brazil, he said a phrase that is emblematic of that: "capitalism precedes racism" (McLAREN, 1999, s / w).

Drawing a parallel between what happens in the United States and Brazil, McLaren says that, in order to seek a position at the top of the social pyramid, people have to resign themselves, decreasing the demands of organized movements. He mentions the case of parents of black students in the United States who "do not want to talk of revolution", showing more concern with seeing their children progress up the economic ladder than demand changes to promote multiethnic social equality.

Enthusiast and disseminator of the pedagogy of Paulo Freire, McLaren highlights the need for a liberatory education: "Educators have a role to play in student's awareness." The author does not criticize the fact that parents of black Americans demand much more progress than ideological changes: "Of course we have to help them be successful, while on the other hand we empower them to be willing to change. [...] Consciousness is essential to revolutionary practice". He adds that any structural change must come from the oppressed class. "I cannot speak for them, but I can talk with them. This is very important: speaking sympathetically with the oppressed and not speaking for them" (McLAREN, 1999, s / w).

Apple (2006) also talks of resignation, stating that many African descendants would rather resign themselves than disturb the *order*, because they believe in the myth of the booming economy. There are no relevant questionings and conflict is avoided. He believes that, due to the way science is presented in primary and secondary education, students learn about conflict from an unreal and conservative perspective. Knowledge is hardly ever seriously considered as a construction of human beings. Instead it is taken as ready and finished.

Indigenous school education has not escaped this stigma. According to Paes (2003), the school process that the indigenous students came to know is based on the belief in a supposed superiority of a truly scientific and reliable knowledge. Such belief is also reproduced in our schools and even in the academy.

As highlighted by Hage (2006), we also understand that, by disseminating knowledge, values, behaviors, attitudes, norms and cultural patterns, giving them an official character and taking them as a natural fact, the curriculum gives legitimacy to the social project of the most powerful groups in society. Thus, it ends up standardizing the ideal man, woman, teacher, student, among other roles in society, including that of the Indian.

Thus, one of the important points to consider in building a multicultural curriculum,

according to Silva (2008), is that diversity should be more than tolerated or respected: it should be constantly in question and be problematized. The author suggests that one must add to the debate the theory of identity and difference, considering that these, although taken as given or natural facts of social life, are not preexisting entities which have always or from a point in time been around, but rather have constantly been produced and reproduced through power relations. He points out that this discussion has been left out.

Silva (2008, p. 73) also says that in practice multiculturalism rests on a "vague and benevolent appeal for tolerance" and the position socially accepted is that of respect for diversity and difference. He classifies this position as *liberal* among the pedagogical strategies. Another strategy presented is the *therapeutical* one, which considers the rejection of difference and the other as a disorder to be treated psychologically. An intermediate position between the two is possibly the most often adopted pedagogical strategy: the one that presents a superficial and distant view of the different cultures, in which the other falls under the rubric of exotic and curious, so as not to present any risk of confrontation or dissonance.

An alternative approach suggested by the author deals with identity and difference as political issues, with emphasis on questioning how they are produced. One should consider that both difference and identity exist not by themselves, but in function of one another: there are Brazilians only because there are Italians; there are homosexuals only because there are heterosexuals; there are Indians only because there are non-Indians.

## **Final Thoughts**

Given the scenario presented, it seems that the Brazilian higher education institutions have missed the timing: with some exceptions they did little to prepare to meet the demand of the indigenous youth, because this demand

could have been foreseen in the 1990s due to the changes in the primary and secondary education of these traditional peoples. Even with delays, such demand has arrived and demanded its rights. Did our universities believe that the Indians would or should content themselves with secondary education and settle in their villages?

The role of the university to promote the access of indigenous students as well as other ethnic and social groups under unequal conditions to higher education needs to go beyond the mechanisms that provide spots. If, on the one hand, affirmative actions are advantageous because they represent an opportunity that the Indians, for example, would otherwise not have, on the other hand, they are insufficient and restricted to remedial multiculturalism.

It is essential to consider that equal access to education is not achieved simply through equal access to a hegemonic curriculum. The curriculum should be oriented to building equality policies articulated with identity policies.

The challenge for the university is to train professionals and citizens – be they Indians or non-Indians – who, more than respect differences, let the other be the other. The challenge also applies to the continuing education of professors, aiming to build a curriculum that is really multicultural and that meets the specificities of the different ethnic and cultural groups, including the aspirations of the indigenous peoples for a differentiated and quality higher education.

A differentiated education not because it provides differentiated treatment for indigenous and non-indigenous students, but because it transcends prejudice, ethnocentrism, the epistemological obstacles of Western science and the power ideologies of hegemonic society. Differentiated because it trains professionals with a more critical view of natural, political, economic and social phenomena, so that they can question and intervene in their reality with skill and competence, as active and reflective protagonists.

When the university proposes to open its doors to the education of indigenous

professionals, citizens of a pluralistic society, it needs to change the lenses with which it sees its role of promoting teaching, research and extension. According to Paulo Freire (1988), we only find strange what seems normal if we wear lenses other than those we are used to. And only the other can provide us with these different lenses.

Indians come to higher education bringing in cultural values and life histories, codes and symbols of their peoples. The exchange between cultures could contribute, on the one hand, to renovate the university curriculum and, on the other hand, to enable indigenous students to appropriate the science codes produced by Western society so as to resignify them and build the *new*, promoting understanding of the world, of oneself and the relationships with others. However, the indigenous college students have gradually realized that most of the subject content is still uncoupled from their reality and the reality of where their institution is located.

Do we have an incarcerated university? This is an intriguing and timely question, considering how the multiethnic and multicultural reality is being addressed in most of our higher education institutions. These are still attached to the paradigms of a science that deals with knowledge in a compartmentalized and standardized way. The point is not just to change the existing order as to access but to create new curriculum perspectives aimed at the realization of the democratic ideals of freedom and respect, and not only of tolerance of the other.

We believe that important steps have been taken. However, the road is long and the demand tends to grow over the years. It is time for the university to transcend the stage of understanding the phenomenon, and enter the stage of practical intervention in order to promote studies and debates needed to redesign its curriculum policies. For example, how can the university deliver a multicultural curriculum in courses that have only one or two indigenous students? Or would it be the

case of thinking about curricula not designed to include this or that group but which have the flexibility and ability to be in constant questioning and construction, accompanying

the dynamics that characterizes the multiple identities and differences in our society?

These are questions we consider relevant and worthy of further in-depth investigations.

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