

# MENDIVE

REVISTA DE EDUCACIÓN

*Translated from the original in Spanish*

## Let's build a more inclusive "new reality" in universities

### Construyamos una "nueva realidad" más inclusiva en las universidades

### Construamos uma "nova realidade" mais inclusiva nas universidades

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The pandemic of COVID-19 globally has accentuated many inequalities and generated new ones. At present, although we have identified the immediate impacts, effects on equity and quality are important and will come to light in the medium and long term (IESALC-UNESCO, 2020).

If before the pandemic many people in the world had problems of access to education and others did not receive

inclusive education and quality, either by significant limitations in the coverage of the service or non-compliance with standards of dignity, justice and equity, committed in the conventions signed by the States themselves (UNESCO, 2019), its effect has caused that about fifteen hundred million students enrolled in the different educational levels in 191 countries of the world are affected by the temporary cessation of face-to-face teaching activities, a fact that significantly includes universities (IESALC-UNESCO, 2020).

In this way, the home confinement assumed by different countries, although necessary, complicates the global panorama of education in general and raises the challenges of Higher Education, whose innovation processes are part of the social responsibility that should characterize its functioning. To achieve this end, the Agenda 2030 remains a beacon that projects the achievement of objectives and goals in pursuit of higher quality, equality and equity.

With such purposes of achieving greater results in the formation of the new generations, the way to follow must avoid exclusion, disparities, and inequalities in access and in participation. To do this, it must be necessary to adjust the university processes to the characteristics of each participant in a sustainable way.

The way is to continue the path outlined, but assuming the learning that COVID-19 leaves. Regarding the editorial by Rivera de Parada (2020, p. 727), with its call to "...imagine to create a new reality with more relevance and humanism, in which educational systems respond to current and future needs "it has motivated an analysis of some of the lessons to take into account in shaping" a new reality "more inclusive.

We are under the aegis of the dialectical contradiction that is established between apparently exclusive aspects with

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inclusive education, such as social isolation and distance education; every time a triad that deserves urgency in university practices participates: possibility-equity-accessibility.

Social isolation has been the basic containment measure to try to reduce the spread of COVID-19; until very recently, the only immunization capable of preventing it. Even with the implementation of the first vaccines in the world, social isolation, along with other hygiene measures are the safe safeguard available to most. However, the support experiences are multiple and the battle against social - emotional damages to the multitude of changes that generates isolation, has found in science and the arts, in reciprocal interaction, an effective palliative treatment and reminded humanity the value of support networks, of family and of the "other".

The Technologies of Information and Communications (ICT), as protagonists of this process, have become mediators of our social interaction, leisure, therapies, tele working, and access to services, among others. In educational settings, as displayed a long time ago its importance and necessity, ICT assumed responsibility abruptly to continue the professional training process at the University.

Be it the blended or hybrid mode or distance education, ICTs constituted the main support of the academic, labor-research and extension training of the universities. Derived from this, it obviously becomes fissure showing a face of attention to the diversity little explored but, undoubtedly, makes the downside lights and sometimes exclusion: the gaps of access, use and competition (García- Peñalvo, 2020). This reality of social type widespread of universities constitutes an obstacle to overcome for a Didactic of Higher Education that is called to

"reinvent itself" to optimize the quality of the teaching-learning process in the new scenarios.

From this perspective other differences which can be demographic, economic, personal, functional, etc emerge, which challenge the assurance of inclusive education; however, they are content with the pillars that support it. The *Index for Inclusion* is based on one of the education institutions can "... be more accountable to the diversity of their students, either because their backgrounds, interests, experiences, knowledge, abilities or any other" (Booth and Ainscow, 2011, p. 13).

In the current moments, in most cases, inclusive education is a theoretical and normative achievement, but still the practices of a curriculum for all and an orchestrated learning for diversity, are a challenge to make a reality that all students have opportunities to learn, according to their characteristics and contexts.

An alternative emerges on the basis of the Universal design for learning (DUA) , which proposes a vision of educational intervention for all to have a place in the processes of education, planning and development, through flexible curriculum designs that take diversity into account.

The inclusive education, understood in terms of identifying and eliminating or reducing the barriers that does not allow the participation of all, is "... It supposes a change of approach to accommodate the flexibility required by the difference" (Clavijo, and Bautista-Cerro, 2020, p.114). Directing learning by providing multiple forms of involvement, representation, action and expression, are ideas that contribute to addressing the variability of students, enriching educational projects and the curriculum (Pastor, 2018). Hence, collaborative work, equity, the identification and reduction of distinctive barriers of inclusive

education, are elements to be taken into account in the universal design for learning, with special attention if it is committed to distance education.

As education implies a communicative act, the design must be functional enough to adapt to the certain forms of interaction. As stated by Fernández (2019, p.4), "... during the process different human capacities intervene: sensory ones, such as vision, hearing and touch; cognitive, such as attention, memory, learning, language ... and motor skills, such as mobility, range, precision", among others; somehow, the way of manifesting will need the product to be accessible.

The existing gaps in the interaction with ICT are not the only barriers to blended or distance learning; the lack of accessibility features of operating systems, applications and configuration according to the diversity of needs, alternative pathways for the interaction of deaf people (the use of sign language, the graphic design information, the use of subtitles ...), blind people or people with low vision (access to screen readers, magnifiers, alternative texts in the images and the socialization of the content under the most open criteria of document accessibility) are other obstacles that affect many members of the university, whose elimination or reduction is in the support products.

Even when they are referred to people with hearing or visual disabilities, there are others such as those in situations of physical and motor disabilities with a stable or transitory character, which brings us to the wide range of functional diversity that could benefit with the help of the evaluation and implementation of the aforementioned support products. The universe expands before changes in the operation of the elderly, very active and increasing their presence in university classrooms and place the analysis of inclusion more focused in the diversity.

In this way, disability, variability in development, functional diversity, is terms that require a position in university policies that, together with culture and inclusive practices, allow a "new reality" with greater equity. To achieve this, it is necessary to offer a differentiated response to everything that is unequal in its genesis, in order to achieve greater equality among human beings.

As an alternative, it is recognized that the Model of Distance Education in Cuban Higher Education, including the design of learning as a process of inquiry, reflection and decision-making on components didactic: objective, content, methods, means and evaluation, both of the process and of the results of the learning (National Center for Distance Education, 2016). A more in-depth analysis deserves other didactic components such as the problem, the forms of organization and interpersonal relationships within the framework of the process, given the difference of the new scenarios.

It is up to decision makers, researchers in Education Sciences, teachers and students to succeed in the commitment to universal design, which ensures sustainability and access for all audiences.

The evaluation of participation is part of the diagnosis proposed by the Cuban Model, taking into account the scenario with connectivity, with partial or limited connectivity and even without connectivity. The call is that in its implementation, good practices are socialized, which allow enriching the organization of the pedagogical process and mitigating the stress generated by the novelty for many, the speed of learning for others and the longing for a point that connects the time before of COVID-19 with the possibilities of building together and on the basis of collaborative work, a "new reality" that is more inclusive for all.

Without intending to cover them all, only with the intention of an individual or collective reflection that implies participation, some lessons left by COVID-19 and learned so far are identified:

- Within universities, attention to diversity continues to be a priority.
- The digitization of university processes must continue, but it entails a transformation in their conception.
- Social isolation does not necessarily have to be antagonistic to inclusive education; a support system is required that guarantees universal design for learning.
- Distance education constitutes a valuable modality that requires a transformation in the pedagogical and didactic task of its implementation.
- To guarantee the success of education "for all", greater accessibility is needed, not only for participation, but as an indispensable requirement for learning with equity.
- Design should not be understood for a majority, but for the variability of all, which guarantees the response, with accessibility, to permanent and temporary situations, in a sustainable way.

In this "new reality", possibility, equity and accessibility distinguish inclusive education in universities. The 2030 Agenda, with the new learning from COVID-19, continues to mark the change in pursuit of "... transforming the current development paradigm into one that takes us on the path of sustainable and inclusive development with a long-term vision" (United Nations, 2016, p.7).

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