

# EDUCATIONAL INCLUSION AS A SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION TOOL

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## Abstract

This article focuses on the research called social inclusion in education. It attempts to formulate a new perspective on the integration of students, specifically those with special educational needs.

Drawing on a project explored previously, which focused on the real social environment where the human remains immersed throughout life and in turn is supported within the educational context. It is also here that our first concepts are learned but also fears and difficulties are overcome, to prepare is a better word choice - propagate is used mainly with ideas the individual for the future.

Finally, the importance of adequate inclusive processes are highlighted within higher education. This creates a new approach in which these people can study in college without being branded as "weird / abnormal," or in the worst case, be excluded from the educational system.

**Keywords:** Educational inclusion, multiculturalism, functional diversity, higher education, United States of America and Colombia.

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## **Resumen**

Este artículo se orienta bajo la línea de investigación de la facultad de ciencias de la educación denominada educación desde género e inclusión social en educación, porque se intenta formular un nuevo punto de vista sobre la inclusión de las personas, específicamente con aquellas que tienen necesidades educativas especiales.

Tomando como referencia un proyecto trabajado con antelación que se orienta bajo un entorno social real porque es allí donde el ser humano permanece inmerso a lo largo de la vida y a su vez soportado dentro del contexto educativo, en donde se toman los primeros conceptos, además se logran superar los temores, dificultades y se orienta al individuo a prepararse para el futuro.

Finalmente, se resalta la importancia de un proceso inclusivo adecuado dentro de la educación superior, generando un nuevo enfoque en el cual estas personas, puedan estudiar en la universidad sin ser catalogados como “extraños/anormales” o en el peor de los casos ser excluidos del sistema educativo.

**Palabras Claves:** Inclusión educativa, multiculturalidad, diversidad funcional, educación superior, Estados Unidos y Colombia.

## **Resumo**

Este artigo centra-se na linha de pesquisa chamada de gênero e inclusão social na educação, porque ele tenta formular uma nova perspectiva sobre a integração das pessoas, especialmente aquelas que têm necessidades educativas especiais.

Baseando-se em um projeto trabalhado com antecedência que se concentra em um ambiente social real, porque é onde o ser humano permanece imerso durante toda a vida e por sua vez apoiado no contexto educacional, onde os primeiros conceitos são tomados, ainda capaz de superar medos, dificuldades e orienta o indivíduo para se preparar para o futuro.

Por fim, a importância do processo de inclusão adequada no ensino superior é realçada, criando uma nova abordagem em que essas pessoas podem estudar na faculdade sem ser marcado como "estranho / anormal" ou, no pior caso, ser excluída o sistema de ensino.

**Palavras-chave:** inclusão educacional, o multiculturalismo, a diversidade funcional, de ensino superior, Estados Unidos e Colômbia.

## Introduction



**Image 1** central ideas about inclusion created by the author

The purpose of this article is to reflect upon on the practices and policies of educational inclusion in higher education and how these processes are carried out at several universities. First of all, a brief overview of the topic of inclusion is needed. The given information is based on the processes at Universidad La Gran Colombia and Missouri State University.

Over time, Educational inclusion has had a number of changes in terms that it has generated social and cultural change not only in academia but also in cultural paradigm. Inclusive education at the beginning had the name of “diverse school” in which it was said that the school has the obligation to accept people with disabilities.

Years later, UNESCO (2008) started talking about a school that integrates people with disabilities in the classroom. This school enacted a new term called integration in education, which meant people seek linking into the regular classroom.

During the process of integration of people with disabilities, it became evident that the lack of regulations would result in a quality education for these students. Most teachers were unaware of how to teach in this city, which was one of the main problems in the application of this model with the previous model; it started a new plan which sought the inclusion of people with special educational needs and exceptional talents in the regular classrooms of the public's school of Bogota.

According to Ministry of Education in Colombia (2007) nowadays, the number of people with disabilities in college is not relevant because many of them can finish their basic schooling. The few students who manage to complete their basic studies fail to enter university because of high costs. Another of the biggest barriers for these students is the lack of support from institutions of higher education.

Colombia, several universities have inclusion processes, such as the *Universidad Pedagogica Nacional*, *Universidad Nacional de Colombia*, and the *Universidad del Rosario*. These universities have supported their students by creating specialized programs for people with learning disabilities. There are other universities, like La Gran Colombia, which is starting this process with the integration of several students and faculty members with disabilities in the classroom.

## **First Steps for Inclusion in Colombia**

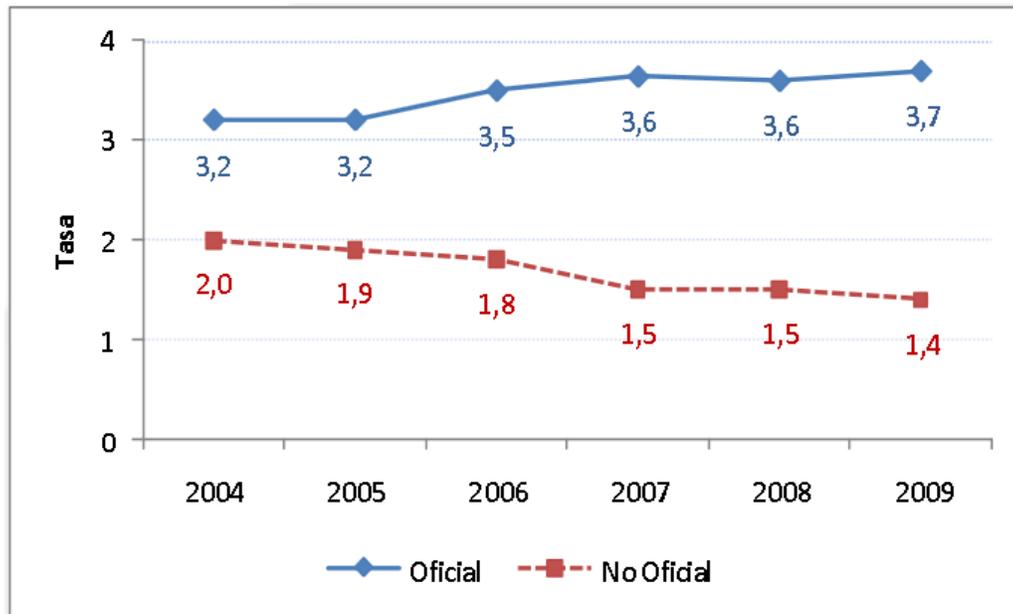
It is widely agreed that, the deliberate choice of action in the school system is one of the central pillars of the inclusive approach. There is a very similar approach to the negative aspects of inclusion and exclusion. For true educational inclusion, it is necessary to improve the population's access to education, and to provide equality for all citizens of the country.

Inclusion is a theoretical concept of pedagogy, which refers to how the school should respond to diversity. It is a term that emerged in the 1990s and intended to replace integration, time long director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Dr. Adam Ouance, has contributed greatly to the field of diversity in education. According to Dr. Ouane, (2008) the basic assumption of inclusion is that people have to change the school system to respond the needs of all students, instead of having students who must adapt to the system.

Educational systems around the world face the challenge of providing children and youth with a quality education. In the case of the economically poorer countries there are approximately 72 million children without access to education at school ( Ainscow. M & Miles. S, 2009). Many children in Latin America are not strangers to these searing inequalities according to Regional Office for Education (IBE-UNESCO, 2008)

According to UNESCO and OREACL (2007) in wealthier countries, many young people leave school without meaningful skills. Others are directed toward different alternatives that deprive them of the experience of formal education. Some simply decide to

leave school believing that education is irrelevant in their lives, the following shows the dropout rates during the last years in the city of Bogota.



**Figure1** statistics on school dropout in the city of Bogota compared to national statistics in the last years (S.E.D, 2011)

As a result of UNESCO's discussion in 2008 discussion, there is a worldwide growth in interest for the idea of "inclusive education". This was proved by UNESCO's 48th International Conference on the same theme of inclusion, which sponsored by the Organization for Education, Science and Culture of the United Nations (UNESCO, 2008). However, the meaning of "inclusive education" or "educational inclusion" remains unclear. In some countries, people think about inclusion as a treatment modality for children with disabilities in general education settings. Internationally, the term is seen more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity among all students (UNESCO, 2005).

Inclusive education can be conceived as a process to address and respond to the diverse needs of all learners through increased participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and outside the educational system. This involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and based on a common vision which covers school children of all ages and the conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children in the system. . (UNESCO, 2005, p. 14).

Colombia has been developing the process of inclusion through the Ministry of Education by training some teachers. However, training some teachers is not the best answer. Most importantly the population needs to be educated so that they will not put barriers up, allowing for true inclusion.

In 2004, the Bogota District Secretary of Education (SED Bogota), began the process of inclusion of students with special educational needs permanently within regular classrooms from different schools in the district. During this process, a number of problems in the process of inclusion of these students were observed. For example, they were often excluded within the classroom (S.E.D, 2004)

For this reason the Mayor of Bogota, in conjunction with the Secretary of Education, implemented a policy called District Public Disability issued in Decree 470 of 2007 (Secretaría General de la Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá D.C., 2007). The policy should be amended to take into account the duties undertaken by the Colombian government to signed the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

Further provisions are made in the article Ministry of National Education - (MEN, 1996) and the Public Policy Disability - Decree 470, 2007; SED provides care to students with disabilities and exceptional talents as an integral part of public education services, by promoting programs aimed at the academic and social inclusion of these experiences.

Likewise, the SED based on Article 44 of the Political Constitution of Colombia regards education as one of the fundamental rights for children. Similarly, section 67, states that education is a right of the person as a public service. As a social function the state, society, and family are required to be responsible for education, which is compulsory from five to fifteen years of age. This education is free in the state institutions. (SED, 2010)

However, even today many colleges and universities do not have inclusion processes, making it even more difficult for academic development of some demographics in Colombian society. Nowadays, some population groups should be included in colleges and universities, such as:

- The demographics of African descent or Afro-Colombian: According to Law 70 of 1993 the Black communities are defined as the set of families of Afro-Colombian descent who have their own culture, shared history and have their own traditions and customs in the relationship field - village, which demonstrate and maintain awareness of identity distinguish them from other ethnic groups (Congreso de la Republica, 1993).

- Inhabitants of the border: The population living in individual departments and regions along the border with characteristics of social vulnerability and low economic conditions that establish the need to promote educational activities consistent with their specificity (M.E.N, 2007).
- Gypsy populations: According to *Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística in Colombia* (DANE), 94% of the Roma population living in the departments of Atlántico, Bolívar, Valle del Cauca, Norte de Santander, Santander , Nariño and Bogotá, those are also the departments in which the cities where the main gypsy communities belong to: those communities are located in Barranquilla, Cartagena, Cali, Cucuta, Girón and Ipiales .(U. Rosario, 2010).
- Demographics in situations of displacement by war: The displaced are victims of violence. They are average people, involved in a conflict but not participating as actors. This is one of the consequences of irrational and irregular war within Colombia. Nearly three million people have been forced to leave their homes, leaving behind their dreams and life plans (Coomeva, 2006).
- Demobilized paramilitary groups: This is a group of people who leave their weapons to return to civilian life, ceasing to belong to a revolutionary group (Presidencia de la República Oficina Alto Comisionado para la Paz, 2007).

All in all, universities have the challenge to generate a process of cultural and artistic sensibility and to include these demographics in all social fields. Educational inclusion is important so that students are taught at school in order to interact with different people and understand the culture of educational inclusion.

This issue is very important for the development of a more comprehensive, more humane and more cohesive society; it creates a more genuine inclusion of all social, political, and public spheres that are generated in the city and in each country.

### **Universities and Policy**

Universities have begun this process in order to meet disabled demographics living in today's society. They have tried to be more inclusive for all college students in the country since 1994, when universities first spoke out for students regardless of their skin color, religion or disabilities (UNESCO, 1994)..

There was a paradigm shift from the form of functional disability diversity to the inclusion of functional disability diversity, which has generated a number of changes in the thinking of the school and society. This has generated a phrase called "men and women with functional diversity", and this is considered to be an inclusive term, including two demographics without any discrimination. For all of these reasons, it is vital that education is a catalyst for one to educate including these demographics with equal rights (UNESCO, 2005).

These days, the university is facing a great challenge in the same way as schools. They face the height of the need for inclusion of people with special educational needs. In 2007, the process of integrating students with special needs into the regular classroom began (Cuervo. J & Valencia. L, 2008). During this period, some teachers were not proficient to cope with this situation. It is important to take this experience not as a failure but rather to generate it as a genuine process of inclusion in today's universities.

To continue entering into the theme of inclusion, we must answer this question: What is disability? If we look at the word, disability as a general term refers to a lack, or a negative state, or concept. We refer to people who have some sort of deficiency as disabled, and therefore they are called imperfect. For this reason in this text, we will discuss the different themes and positions of the terms educational inclusion and functional diversity (Rodriguez. S & Ferreira. M, 2010).

### **Inclusion in higher education**

The university as a school is required to provide the service of education, which is enshrined in the constitution of Colombia (1991), Article 27. Hence, the state has an obligation to provide protection to people with disabilities. (Asamblea Nacional Constituyente, 1991)

The right to education for people with some kind of disability or functional diversity can also be found enshrined in the constitution of Colombia in the Education law 30 of 1994 (MEN, 1994).

Researchers, as well as the whole community, can see other legal frameworks which have granted rights in regards to the theme of educational inclusion. For example, the law 361 of 1997 in which mechanisms of inclusion for people with disabilities are set in all human fields (Congreso de la Republica, 1997).

Law 324 of 1996 (Congreso Nacional, 1996), explains how the standards for the deaf population are created. Decree 2082 of 1996 (MEN, 1996) also regulates the education of people with disabilities.

Universities in Colombia have initiated some plans for inclusion. For example, the *Universidad del Rosario* had a department of inclusion a couple of years ago. The department worked but had no students with disabilities. Therefore, this department was closed according to Professor Colmenares who has a disability (Colmenares, 2014).

Another great example of the inclusion process is at *Universidad Nacional* in Colombia, which has developed a series of interventions with blind students studying in college. The promotion of inclusion and the implementation of specialized laboratories, has helped this population involving the condition of functional diversity (Universidad Nacional, 2010)

Besides these, there are other projects such as the one being developed at *Universidad Pedagogica Nacional* in Colombia. This project is being developed by the students in the Special Education degree program. Those also exist who are promoting inclusive practices within the same university. Since this program was implemented, the

functionally diverse population has increased in both the college and in the B.A. Special Education program. (UPN, 2011)

From the previous examples, we can reflect on the processes of inclusion in college, which allow one to see the policies and regulatory mechanisms for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the classroom of the universities.

Apart from these initiatives of universities, the inclusion of persons with disability status in the classroom should also be promoted. For this to happen, first a change should be made in the paradigm for the people living in functional diversity. They should believe that they can study at any university they choose. These universities in turn should be prepared to have functionally diverse students in their classrooms (Colmenares, 2014).

According to Molina (2012), the *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional* (UPN) is one of the most recognized in the theme of inclusion. For several years it has had a process of inclusion in the B.A. Special Education program. In this program students have a semester which is called "period zero".

Period zero is for the students to have an induction before the beginning of their careers, where there are consolidated the concepts and different steps to be followed during the process of inclusion. The steps also apply to the system of handling support that should be offered during a career.

In addition to this one at the *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional*, also a process of inclusion has been generated for four deaf students in the Technological Institute that is called INPAHU, which has supported these students with resources so that they could be present for classes and manage to study without any problem (Molina. R, 2012)

At Gran Colombia University, a series of progress has been generated, as stated in article “Inclusion in the Superior Education: A Glance from the Process of the Functional Diversity” (Nielsen.J ,Moya.A & Meraz.J, 2014). In this article, evidence is given as La Gran Colombia University has begun the process of inclusion. In the school of education, there is a student with low vision who participates in the B.A. English program. Another major advance of inclusion is the integration of a deaf student in law school and there was a blind teacher in the faculty of economics.

Since 2013, Universidad La Gran Colombia has begun the research seedlings with some groups of students, which have been working on the issue of inclusion in the science faculties of education and law. Moreover, the seed has been promoted in the science faculty of education building through materials such as Braille, and the sign language of Colombia has been included in the programs of this faculty (Moya A, 2014).

Universidad La Gran Colombia has also made several changes in terms of accessibility of the website which was amended in 2014 to be more innovative and accessible. One problem is for the blind in that it does not provide good access to this page with *jaws* software, which is a screen reader. It is a program that handles reading for the blind. In order to know the option that the user is selecting, the actions are to be carried to continue. It is one of the most complete programs, as it gives support in Spanish in various Windows applications. To optimize their use, it is recommended to reduce the items that appear in different visual environments that are used to eliminate extra elements and reduce the execution time (Discapacidad y Discapacitados, 2010). Due to this problem, the university has changed the website and is working to make this page also generate processes of educational inclusion (Orozco, 2014). They are also working to make this

page more accessible with others programs such as Orca, a free and open source software that has a screen reader and magnifier which helps provide access to applications and tools within the Linux environment (Zappalá. D, 2011).



Image 2. Universidad La Gran Colombia Website

Inclusion in Universidad la Gran Colombia has also been generated through various forums and chat rooms that have been conducted within the university. These have been promoted by the seed and the research department of the university.

These first steps have allowed the university to move forward on the issue of inclusive education. They have also shown the increased population of students with disabilities in the Universidad la Gran Colombia, which helps to strengthen the process of inclusion and further improve in looking after this population.

## Processes of inclusion in the Missouri State University



**Image 3** Logo of the Division for Diversity & Inclusion Missouri State University

Missouri State University started a Division for Inclusion & Diversity in October 2011. This division began to change the form of thought of Missouri State University, which gave rise to the issue of inclusion and diversity within the campus. Consequently, new programs were created that would serve various population groups.

Not only did the creation of this division change the environment of the university, but also it generated new thinking in the community of Springfield upon seeing and supporting the processes of inclusion generated within the university.

The first campus-warming activity was a university-wide faculty mentoring program with a record number of visits to campus by underrepresented students and families over a single weekend. “Our presence in the community has also been well documented. Hundreds of Missourians took part in the race relations exhibit, and the

inaugural Collaborative Diversity Conference sold out – attracting more than 300 people from around the state” (Division for Diversity and Inclusion, 2013). All this information is known by the visit in the summer of 2014

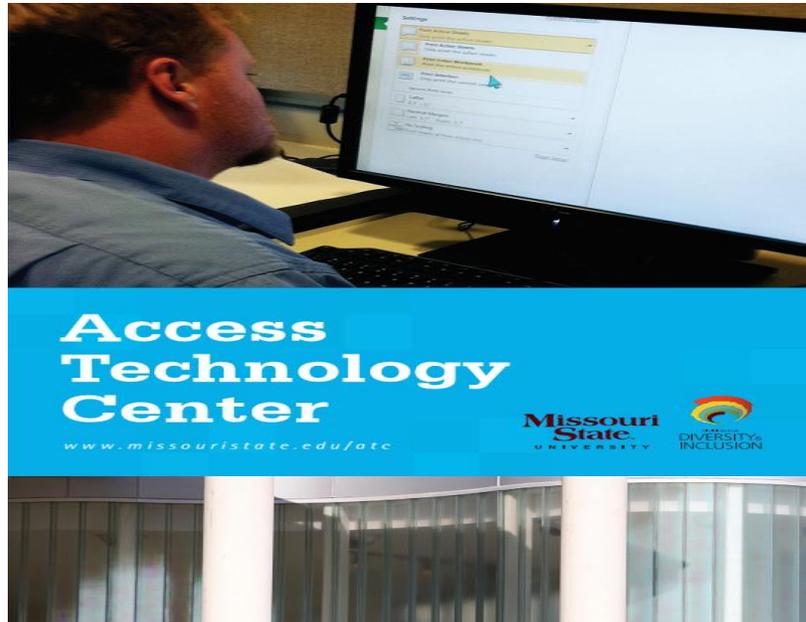


**Image 4** this pictures is in the offices of division for Diversity & Inclusion at Missouri State University persons appearing in this picture from left to right are Dr. Jaddy Brigette Nelsen Niño professor Universidad La Gran Colombia, the assistant Vice President of inclusion the Missouri State University Dr. Juan Meraz and student Jaime Alberto Moya B.A in English Universidad La Gran Colombia

Missouri State University also has an Access Technology Center (ATC), a vital part of the disability resource center, open to faculty, staff and students with disabilities, as well as to its faculty and staff who design its programs. Through the use of technology, the ATC strives to collaborate with others to proactively design its courses and programs to be as inclusive as possible. The ATC provides more inclusive learning environments through:

- Reviewing the equipment and technology available for those with disabilities to use.
- Informing students with disabilities how to use assistive technology.
- Providing resources and information reading technology so that students can explore what they may want to utilize.
- Researching the least technology to enhance learning environments, making them more inclusive and usable for all.

People can find the special classroom located in MSU's Meyer library 201B- 201G, and it includes five workstations. The ATC has different elements, so lab stations provide access to close-circuit televisions, PC or Mac, mouse and keyboard alternatives scanner, speech recognition, and screen reading (Missouri State University, 2014). Missouri State University has the resource center that facilitates learning for people with some kind of functional diversity such as deaf students, blind students, and mute students.



**Image 6** picture about the Access Technology Centre Missouri State University. This center is located in the Meyer Carillon, Jane A.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, inclusive education is a process that is impacting the university. It is not only the process of the basic institutions, but this process has been present in college and every day is observed with the increasing population of functional diversity within universities in the country, especially in La Gran Colombia University.

According to Vladimir, a student of the school of law in college, Gran Colombia has begun to take the step towards the inclusion of people with disabilities, but still needs

the support of the staff because they are only starting a process of integration, not educational inclusion within classrooms (Claros.V, 2014).

Inclusive education develops in the schools and universities where there are people with functional diversity as blind, deaf or mute. And social inclusion is related to the ways in which the processes of inclusion are developed within communities. For instance, people with diverse functions, LGBTI, street people displaced, and demobilized members of illegal groups are all included. All this helps us understand the term of functional diversity and inclusion as a process in which all participate.

Taking into account La Universidad La Gran Colombia, this article suggests the creation of a diversity and inclusion department that can help students with disabilities and people who are Afro-Colombian, indigenous, and people from other places around the world who wish to study at La Gran Colombia University.

Most universities internationally such as Missouri State University in Springfield, and the Roosevelt and National Louis University in Chicago, among other universities, have begun to include people with disabilities in their classrooms and have developed accessible pages and programs for people with some kind of disabilities through the use of ICT. This generates a genuine process of inclusion along with the use of virtual environments for learning new educational themes. It also strengthens the creation and implementation of new software for the learning of people with disabilities.

The use of ICT in the processes of inclusions are very important tools in the educational field because it provides the way to teach and transmit knowledge. It is also important for teachers interested in learning some strategies for people with special

educational needs. Since many of the teachers at the school and university level have some knowledge about strategy, they should strive to achieve inclusion in the classroom as well.

Finally, it is important to conclude with Darwin's quoted (cited by Leon.C 1963) "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change..."

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