

Inclusive Dialogues: Lessons for a More Accessible University

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Universities have made significant progress in recognizing educational inclusion as a central component of their mission. The incorporation of regulatory frameworks, the development of institutional policies, and the creation of mechanisms to ensure accessibility constitute concrete expressions of a paradigm shift that acknowledges the right of all individuals to participate fully in university life. However, when we take a closer look at the challenges facing contemporary higher education, a question emerges that deserves an increasingly prominent place on the academic agenda: **Are we preparing faculty members to teach and support learning in increasingly diverse contexts?**¹

The article by Figari et al., published in this issue, offers a valuable opportunity to reflect on this question. Drawing on their experience with the Inclusive Dialogue Spaces, the authors describe an institutional mechanism for managing support measures and reasonable accommodations through the collective development of agreements among students, faculty members, and university authorities. The results demonstrate tangible progress in strengthening educational trajectories, developing guidance materials, and progressively incorporating accessibility into various educational settings.²

For many years, inclusion was conceived as an issue related to specific groups of students. From this perspective, attention focused primarily on identifying particular needs and designing targeted responses. Today, we know that this view is insufficient. Inclusion challenges institutions as a whole because it requires examining the conditions that facilitate or hinder individuals' participation in educational environments. Barriers do not reside solely within individuals; they are often embedded in practices, organizational cultures, and ways of conceiving education.³

In this regard, the article highlights the transformative potential of dialogue as a tool for institutional change. The Inclusive Dialogue Spaces emerge not merely as a mechanism for addressing specific situations. More fundamentally, they provide an opportunity for the educational community to reflect on its own assumptions, question established certainties, and develop new ways of understanding diversity.

Perhaps for this reason, one of the most interesting findings of the study is the identification of the tensions that emerge when institutions attempt to move toward more inclusive models. Expressions such as "academic advantages," concerns about maintaining academic standards, or questions regarding the scope of reasonable accommodations reflect genuine concerns present in many university settings. Rather than interpreting them solely as forms of resistance, I believe they can also be understood as indicators of a training need that has not yet been adequately addressed.

This need becomes particularly relevant at a time when universities are welcoming increasingly heterogeneous student populations. Discontinuous educational trajectories, diverse sociocultural backgrounds, work and caregiving responsibilities, different ways of learning, and multiple conditions affecting participation are all part of the everyday reality of higher education. Yet many of our practices continue to be organized around models designed for idealized students rather than for real academic communities.

In recent years, we have devoted considerable effort to strengthening training for university faculty. We have made progress in developing competencies related to curriculum design, assessment, the use of educational technologies, clinical simulation, educational research, and pedagogical innovation. However, accessibility and inclusion continue to occupy a relatively marginal place in many faculty development programs.

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The experience presented by the authors reminds us that teaching and supporting learning in diverse contexts requires specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions. It involves recognizing barriers to learning, understanding the scope of reasonable accommodations, designing accessible educational strategies, managing the heterogeneity of educational trajectories, and upholding a notion of equity that does not equate equality with homogeneity. These competencies do not arise spontaneously, nor do they depend solely on the individual sensitivity of faculty members. Like any other professional competency, they must be systematically developed, supported, and strengthened by institutions. Several authors have emphasized the need to expand faculty training in accessibility, inclusion, and inclusive assessment as essential components of contemporary higher education.⁴⁻⁶

This challenge is particularly relevant in the health sciences, where institutions responsible for training healthcare professionals bear a dual responsibility. On the one hand, they must ensure inclusive educational experiences for their students; on the other, they must prepare graduates capable of providing care that respects human diversity and is committed to equity. The way a university approaches inclusion is, in itself, a powerful educational experience. Students learn not only from curricular content but also from the values that institutions express through their everyday practices.⁷

From this perspective, inclusion ceases to be solely a matter of accessibility and becomes a fundamental component of educational quality. It is not a question of choosing between academic excellence and inclusion, as if they were competing objectives. On the contrary, the highest-quality institutions are precisely those capable of providing meaningful learning opportunities to diverse populations without compromising their educational standards. The real tension lies not between quality and inclusion, but between educational models designed for idealized students and the complex realities of the communities that now inhabit our universities.⁸

One of the most valuable contributions of the work by Figari et al. is its demonstration that accessibility cannot be reduced to the implementation of specific support

measures. When built through dialogue, it becomes an opportunity for institutions to learn about themselves. Inclusion not only transforms students' educational trajectories; it also transforms the institutions that commit to it. Inclusion is neither a destination to be reached nor a task that can be delegated to specialized offices; rather, it is an ongoing process of collective construction that requires leadership, dialogue, training, and a willingness to question what is often taken for granted.

Perhaps the deepest value of experiences such as the one presented in this issue lies not only in the answers they provide, but also in the questions they help reformulate. When universities are willing to listen to diversity, they not only create better conditions for their students, but also learn how to transform themselves.

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