Academic and cultural challenges for the absorption of the concept of inclusive education in Brazil

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Abstract
In this work the author searches for answers to the question what are the academic and social-cultural costs of implementing the concept Inclusive Education? The concept of Inclusive Education is discussed in relation to the concept Equality. On basis of the study of theories about the development of Brazilian society, it is argued that education, the way it exists at present, is characterized by educational institutions that reproduce social exclusion. The paper concludes with the argument that profound reforms are necessary to make real Inclusive Education possible. Politics of affirmative action are discussed as a possibility.

Key words: Education, Inclusion, Equal Opportunities, Social Justice, Affirmative Action policies.

Resumen
En este trabajo la autora busca respuestas a la pregunta ¿cuáles son las dificultades académicas y socio-culturales para la absorción del concepto de Educación Inclusiva en Brasil? Para responder esa pregunta, el concepto de Educación Inclusiva es discutido en relación al concepto de Igualdad. Con base en el estudio teórico del desarrollo de la sociedad brasileña, se argumenta que la educación que existe hoy en día es caracterizada por instituciones educativas que reproducen la exclusión social. El texto concluye argumentando que serían necesarias profundas reformas para poder realizar una verdadera Educación Inclusiva y discutiendo las posibilidades que las políticas de acción afirmativa podrían ofrecer.

Palabras clave: Educación, Inclusión, Igualdad de Oportunidades, Justicia Social, Políticas de Acción Afirmativa.

Résumé
Dans ce document, nous chercher des réponses à la question quelles sont les difficultés scolaires et socio-culturelles pour l’absorption du concept d’éducation inclusive au Brésil? Pour répondre, le concept d’éducation intégratrice est discuté en relation avec la notion d’égalité. Basé sur l’étude théorique de développement de la société brésilienne, il est soutenu que l’éducation est aujourd’hui caractérisé par des établissements scolaires qui reproduisent l’exclusion sociale. Le texte conclut en affirmant que des réformes importantes seraient nécessaires pour faire de l’éducation intégratrice en une véritable et envisager les possibilités que les politiques de discrimination positive pourraient fournir des.

Mots-clefs
L’éducation, l’inclusion, l’égalité des chances, la justice sociale, les politiques d’action positive.
Introduction
This paper discusses the concept of inclusive education and searches for answers to the questions: what is inclusion?; what does inclusive education mean?; what are the academic and socio-cultural barriers for its absorption? Through a study on the concept of equality and analysis of the emergence of rationalism in modernity, different explanations of the concept of inclusion and different views on the role of education in inclusion are examined. It is argued that the school, as it exists today, was built on rationalist principles imposed by modernity; principles and concepts that construct a reality characterized by educational institutions that reproduce social exclusion.

The main point of this article is that it only makes sense to talk about inclusive education and research and work towards it when the social, historical and political context of education is considered. In order to achieve inclusive education, it is necessary to rethink, reshape and reform today’s education system, for which a dialectical relationship with society as a whole is unavoidably required.

The text concludes by defense of the idea that affirmative action policies —when integrated into the whole educational process and context of educational institutions— could be a good starting point to include —in the course of rethinking, redesigning and reforming processes— groups that are at present excluded. The effective functioning and the outcomes of these policies would be the starting point for determining the parameters of social inclusion and inclusive education.

What is inclusion and what is inclusive education?
The end of the twentieth century and the entrance into the new millennium are, according to many theorists, related to a profound process of social change (Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1995; Berger and Luckmann, 2004). One of the most important phenomena in the current transformations in the world is the significant increase of social inequality (Tedesco, 2002), which is accompanied by an equally important increase of the theories aiming to explain this phenomenon.

The concept inclusion implies the existence of exclusion, which in turn is related to inequality. On the other hand, inequality is linked to
equality. Then, to understand the concept of inclusion it is accurate to study the concept of equality. The principle of equality has been the basis for all democratic societies. Outhwaite and Bottomore (in Silvério, 2002) explain that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the ideal of equality related to the demand for equal rights and political participation. The authors state that in the twentieth century these types of equality were already true in many societies—in theory, not always in practice, though—and the attention then focused on a new demand: social equality. By social equality it is understood, according to these authors, that people should be treated as equals in all institutional spheres that affect their life chances, for example, in education and at work.

Other writers like Dubet (2003, 2004), Gomes (2003), Gonçalves e Silva (2003), Munanga (2003), Parijs (2004), Silvério (2002) and Tedesco (2002), argue that historically the principle of equality instead of promoting a fairer society actually has been an obstacle to social changes aimed at developing a less unequal society. Parijs (2004, p. 2), concludes that in the current educational system predominates a formal interpretation of justice as equality of opportunities. According to the author, this point of view is supported by the assumption that eliminating discrimination would ensure such equality of opportunity; therefore (as, in this view, only current skills and competencies would affect opportunities) equal treatment of all individuals would be sufficient to consider an education system fair. This formal interpretation of justice as equality of opportunities in this sense goes hand in hand with an evaluation of individual merit. It is important to notice here that this perspective is also characterized by the idea that education is a “neutral” institution which offers all people the same opportunities for development.

This interpretation is seen as problematic by several authors, including Parijs (2004). The criticisms all reflect the idea that equal treatment to all individuals and recompensation to merit may justify infinite inequalities. It is argued that it is often difficult to define exactly what individual merit is and what the current skills and competencies are, considering that their development is influenced by different social, historical and contextual factors. In sum the formal interpretation of justice as equality of opportunities, the social and historical situation of
the individual and the influence these factors may have in the definition of skills and competencies is not taken into account.

The fact that in educational institutions individuals are considered not linked to social roles and positions Apple (2005, p. 273) calls the *depolitization of the educational context*. Depolitization implies a perspective wherein educational institutions and processes are considered independent, neutral and objective, separated from the societal inequalities and power structures. The aforementioned author argues that it is through this perspective that often guides contemporary policy making, that the individual is deprived of race, class and gender.

Dubet (2003), also refers to problems related to the formal interpretation of justice as equality of opportunities, and the centrality of merit. He states that nowadays, with the massification of public education in recent decades, the school as an institutions finds itself in a paradoxical situation as: *on the one hand, within its own principles and accompanying massification, school affirms the equality of all [...] all children have, a priori, the same value, while acknowledging that social conditions can affect the recognition of their qualities and their development [...] On the other hand, it could not be different, the school is meritocratic. It orders, ranks, classifies individuals based on their merits, postulating on the other side that these individuals are equal* (Dubet, 2003, p. 40). This situation results in the fact that, in the end, individuals are made responsible for their own success or failure. *The subjectivity of the students is [...] dominated by a contradiction of the system. Exclusion is not only an “objective” systemic phenomenon, it is also a subjective experience of exclusion lived potentially as self-destructive, since each one is responsible for his or her own education, for his or her own adventure. In other words, excluded subjects are under the threat of being destroyed by their exclusion, which would be the sign of their own “nullity”* (Dubet, 2004, p. 41). In this sense, the meritocratic school —operating based on the concept of equality of opportunities, legitimates and even strengthens social injustice and exclusion. The formal interpretation of equality of opportunities dominates public policy making in many societies and generates policies and practices based on universal ideas, building a taboo
regarding diversity/difference and the consideration of inequality within educational contexts and process.

The meaning of equal opportunities in the Brazilian context

In order to better understand the reality of inequality in Brazil, it is interesting to take into consideration the study of Reis (2004) on perceptions of inequality in Brazil. Based on research the author observes that, when discussing the issue related to (overcoming) social inequality, the Brazilian elite², gives great importance to education and profusely uses the concept of equality of opportunities. Through interviews and data obtained through a survey, the author shows that most members of the Brazilian elite who express themselves in terms of equal opportunities at the same time reject the concepts of equality of conditions and equality of results. Consistently with this fact, among the elite members there is an explicit rejection of policies that include affirmative action measures. According to Reis, the Brazilian elite understands education as a strategy that does not involve redistribution. On the contrary they attribute a high instrumental value to education: [...] it [education] is predominantly seen as a training tool for the market, as a means of social mobility in employment. Differently from other national elites³, our [elite] does not emphasize the role of education as a mechanism of political awareness or empowerment, which would make excluded people more apt to claim their inclusion in the system [...] it is seen as a resource of individual mobility and training of human capital [...] everyone would benefit from the educational improvement of society: the poor would receive better wages and the rich would have better skilled workforce at their disposal (Reis, 2004, p. 48).

Reis explains that this view on education is related to the fact that the Brazilian elite understands inequality as only related to poverty—and in that sense: socio economic differences-. Poverty is thereby often thought of as a situation that can be overcome through individual effort and resources. Underlying and related unequal political, social and historical contexts and processes are then rarely considered and (power) structures hardly ever problematized⁴.
This interpretation of social inequalities of the dominant groups often, in practice, results in actions of assistance that sometimes do offer a certain ‘relief’ in an excluded situation, but, generally, not change or affect the existing social structure of power relations that lie at the basis of the inequalities. Many (education) policy initiatives can be understood in this line: they envision to combat poverty and inequality without really discussing/combating the power structures and the social and political reasoning that exist on the basis of the situation. Often public (education) policies envision to overcome poverty but not explicitly question or envision to combat inequality.

Reis, for example, indicates that the idea of social inequality that prevails amid the Brazilian elite has among its centre normative positions related to education. The author points out that, for example, the elites: [...] argue that, with equal opportunities for education, all those who try hard will have opportunities to be better off (2004, p. 63). In other words: those who do not progress through the educational system and society ‘do not try hard enough’, therefore they are not entitled to complain. Here Dubet (2004), is remembered, when he says that one result of the educational context—characterised by the formal interpretation of equality of opportunities—is precisely that the individual is responsible for his or her own success or failure. This observation supports the explanation of Tedesco (2002), who argues that, while in the traditional capitalist model poverty or wage-earning condition was perceived as consequences of an unfair social order, in the context of new capitalism, social inequality tends to be associated with the nature of things and personal responsibility.

This way of thinking about social inequality; the non-recognition of social inequalities as a matter of power, touches the main focus of this work: to conceive inclusive education it is essential that society—and especially those groups representing the political, cultural and academic elite—first of all understand inequality within societal structure as a matter of power.
The context of inclusive education in Brazil

In order to understand the current state of education in Brazil linked to inequality and social exclusion it must be considered within the historical frame of the formation of that society. Senna, Glatt and Mattos (2005), show that one can only understand the complexity of the country and the concepts and feelings about the meaning and practices of social inclusion, when taking into account the different periods of integration of society in a historical perspective. For these authors, the modern culture influenced—and still influences—the formation of Brazilian society, educational practices and conceptions of education and inclusion. They indicate that the concepts of modern culture, the naturalistic model of man and the image of the Cartesian subject imposed by modernity created concepts of education and citizenship still valid in Brazil: Over the centuries, a Brazil was created with on the one hand Brazilians aligned with modern culture - legitimate beings shaped through school education- and, on the other hand, Brazilians not aligned with modern culture —with or without schooling— constrained by the paradoxical feeling of inferiority in front of others [   ] Brazilian modernity would draw up boundaries of national citizenship around itself, leaving most of the population of the country in exile. Access to writing —and, more recently, access to basic schooling— would take in the Brazil of Modernity the place of nationality (Senna, Glatt and Mattos, 2005, p. 8).

In this sense, in Brazil the educational institutions which emerged with modern culture also play a role in the creation of social exclusion. The objective of these institutions is to “single out”, “normalize” to exclude individuals who do not conform to the naturalistic model of man. The aforementioned authors state that in this way, for example, through the concept of school failure (fracasso escolar) — a concept that arose along with the growing educational system imposed by modernity and still predominates in discussions about exclusion from educational and academic and in educational processes — many Brazilians are denied the right to education (Senna, Glatt and Mattos, 2005).

On the basis of this analysis the increase of social inequalities in the actual context of Brazilian education and discussions about inclusive education could be understood. Throughout history, education in Brazil
became an institute of assimilation and standardization; an institute that represents the abandonment of nature and the development of reason. With the modernization of Brazil education became the cure for social or mental weakness; Going to school is nowadays considered the way to acquire citizenship and legitimate participation in society; it is 'the only path to be someone in life’ (Senna, 2005).

Based on this historical analysis and collected data, the same authors (Senna, Glatt and Mattos, 2005, p. 17) state that in Brazil school inclusion has not managed to overcome the level of simple integration into the institutional space of the school. The researchers believe that these results are related to the absence of instruments for the inclusion of students and training of teachers as agents of inclusion. They argue that it is not enough to just include new pupils in school classes, as is already done in Brazil in a pioneering way. Today we must go further: it is necessary to make the included individuals real social subjects, legitimately recognized as such, or there is a risk of giving school a merely existentialist nature (Senna, Glatt and Mattos, 2005, p. 69).

In this context: what are the academic and socio-cultural barriers to the absorption of the concept of inclusive education? The discussion of the work presented until here shows that human rationalist thought, universalist policies based on ideas of merit, equality of opportunities and a certain conception of equality made education a universal process that singularizes, normalizes and excludes. One of the main challenges that lie at the basis of the absorption of the concept of inclusive education is then a profound revision of the concepts of equality and inclusion that lie at the basis of education policy making. It would be necessary to leave behind the concepts imposed by modernity. The concepts of equality and inclusion, as well as educational goals should be reconsidered and redefined.

**Fair equality of opportunities**

Based on the theoretical exposition on the concept of equality in the first paragraph and a discussion of this concept in Brazilian context in the second and third paragraph, it can be concluded that, an egalitarian understanding of equality is not sufficient for achieving equality that goes
further then universal access and equal treatment in educational contexts. On the contrary, the Brazilian reality shows that this interpretation could (re)produce and legitimize inequalities. Principles of equality in education, based on a strictly egalitarian understanding, seem to be too simple to account for the complex social reality in which educational processes are developed. In this regard, the European Group of Research on Equity of the Educational Systems (2005, p. 13), states that: a strictly egalitarian vision, which aims to give everyone the same treatment, while ignoring the features already present in every individual or even the results in terms of reproduction of the original inequality, would force us to question ourselves about its real foundations, precisely for reasons of equality since, in this case, a strict equality in dealing with people would ignore other forms of inequality.

To work for educational equality it is important not to lose sight of a multiplicity of concepts of justice, and to investigate both the political-philosophical normative debate in relation to social justice, as well as to take into account the sociological studies that attempt to explain the causes of inequalities and visible changes of these in space and time. On the basis of these studies it should be decided which inequalities (under what criteria) are considered “unequal” and which are not. Explanations for the existing inequalities should be worked on and ideas about how certain inequalities could be confronted and combated should be developed.

Without any space in this paper to present a comprehensive reflection on all the political-philosophical debates related to the discussion of social justice and education, it is relevant to emphasize here that different political-philosophical approaches that could fundament policies do not all consider all inequalities in education unequal: to achieve social justice in education and improve participation, permanence and results of certain groups of society in the education system, some approaches may defend measures that from a strictly egalitarian point of view would seem rather ‘unequal’ or ‘unfair’.

To clarify this point, it is interesting to consider the work of the political philosopher John Rawls and his concept of fair equality of opportunities associated with his difference principle (Rawls, 1971 and
This author developed the principle of difference, which allows a distribution that does not follow the principles of strict equality, based on a critique to the strictly egalitarian principle of distributive justice. He argues that inequalities and unequal measures are allowed only when they have the effect of leading the most excluded groups in society to be in a better situation than the one they would be in without such a measure of distribution. In other words: inequalities can be justified only when somehow they contribute to the welfare and prosperity of the people who are in less favorable conditions in society. This implies that the principle of difference avoids the absurd consequences of pursuing equality for the sake of equality. Educational inequalities, for example, should then always be evaluated in terms of effects the situation of inequality has on groups and individuals who are in conditions of greater disadvantage.

The idea of fair equality of opportunities is derived from the view that, even if merit existed and it was possible to assess it—if it was possible to in one way or another ‘measure’ talents and abilities—nobody could be accused, as nobody could be blamed for the very natural, social or historical situation in which they were born. With this idea Rawls rejects all equality considerations based merely on meritocratic principles.

The principle of difference and other theories that add the item *fair* to the concept of equal opportunities, offer an alternative to the formal interpretation of equality of opportunities as, when formal equality provides everyone with opportunities to participate in the same competition, these approaches aim to provide enough opportunities to develop the qualities needed for a successful competition. In this view then, to achieve social justice in education takes more than meritocracy: the concept of fair equality of opportunities requires that before distributing opportunities, vacancies and positions according to the principle of merit, first all individuals should have opportunities to acquire the skills with which merit is pondered.

Without claiming to have given a complete overview on the theories of social justice in education, and with the observation that by doing so it would mean exploring as well the theoretical literature produced outside Europe and the United States, I expect to have clarified two basic arguments: firstly, in order to work towards inclusive education we should
go beyond the formal interpretation of equality of opportunities, and, secondly, in order to fight inequalities in education certain assets should be distributed equally, while others should be distributed proportionally.

Also, reconsidering ideas about equality and inclusion and reflect on what should be expected from education, should not solely happen in political, economic, cultural and academic elites. It is essential that this movement involves individuals and groups who have been excluded from these debates and from the major social, political, academic and economic institutions. If this involvement does not happen, there will always be a semi-inclusion formed by the language of the elite, an inclusion that in advance builds new exclusions for those who cannot or will not speak that language. That is: true inclusion cannot be imposed, for example by the elites, it should be found in the democratic processes of knowledge formation.

The challenge in the creation of real inclusion in education would lie then in the recognition that today’s education is not neutral, and that it is necessary to take position against social inequalities, listening to those excluded and enabling the necessary reforms. This integration means that all should be willing to get rid of fixed conceptions and be ready to divide power, as the academic and cultural barriers for inclusion lie exactly in the convenience of holding power.

Towards inclusive education through affirmative action policies

There are several initiatives that are based on the vision of non-neutrality of education, which try to fight the structural exclusion of certain groups in educational institutions. Affirmative action policies are an example. Such policies are considered positive practices that can provide opportunities in the reformation of educational institutions and in the promotion of inclusive educational processes. These actions could offer alternatives to universalist policies based on ideas of merit and equality of opportunities.

What exactly are affirmative actions? According to Gomes (2003), affirmative actions can be understood as a set of policies, actions and public or private orientations, with a compulsive, optional or voluntary nature, aiming to correct historically imposed inequalities on certain social
and/or ethnic-racial groups with strong proven discrimination and exclusion. These actions have an emergency and transitional nature, and are characterized by an explicit intention of transformation in social relationships involving a change of attitudes, conceptualization and strategy. Gomes also makes clear that applying affirmative action policies means leaving the idea of the neutrality of education behind: *it is a transformation of political, cultural and educational character* [...] *By implementing them, the state, the education arena and public policy makers abandon the supposed neutrality in the implementation of social policies and move on to consider the importance of factors such as gender, race and color in the selection criteria in society* (Gomes, 2003, p. 222).

According to Gomes, as such the only way to unmake structures and processes of exclusion such as those for example created through racism, is effectively reverse the discrimination that relegated groups suffer. This reversing happens repositioning such disadvantaged groups, and thus enabling them to social advancement.

Referring to the issue of affirmative action policies for Afro-descendants in Brazil, Munanga (2003, p. 119) also points to the historical, social and political context that makes affirmative action policies for afro-Brazilians necessary: *in a country where prejudice and racial discrimination have not been overcome* [...] *the so called universal policies* [...] *would not bring the major changes expected for the black population*. [...] *The political modernism accustomed us to treat equally unequal beings, instead of treating them unequally. Therefore, the need for a preferential policy, in the sense of positive discrimination, especially when it is a measure of compensation or reparation for losses of 400 years of phase lag in the development process between whites and blacks. It is in this context that we place the importance of implementing affirmative action policies.*

The work of these two authors discussed in this section shows why affirmative action policies are vital to include the Afro-Brazilians in the educational system. It is also clear why these actions might be, at the same time, very useful for reforming educational institutions and current processes. Based on the principles of democratization of educational
processes, appraisal of differences and democratic knowledge construction the parameters for real inclusive education could be defined.

Gonçalves e Silva (2003, p. 48), mentions knowledge building processes when she refers to ‘go beyond the inclusion of new school subjects’, and clarifies that for true inclusion —besides recognizing diversity and implementing quota policies for members of structurally excluded groups in society— it is important to debate on knowledge offered in educational institutions. Inclusion, according to this author, should lead to the questioning of ideologies, theories and methodologies that support and lead the process of the production of knowledge and, consequently, the reshaping of academic and scientific activities. She also states that institutions willing to implement affirmative action policies should not address it as a protection to vulnerable, but [...] it is necessary that a plan with such goals encourages the understanding of the values of social, cultural, racial diversity and based on these values, seeks support for guidance of educational activities, training of professionals and people responsible for the progress of science [...] In this sense, the goal is to decolonize the sciences, revise world visions, contents and methodologies that were appropriated and accumulated by Western science (Gonçalves e Silva, 2003, pp. 48-49).

The aforementioned author states that, affirming race issues and cultural plurality diversity cannot be regarded as an end itself; it should be understood as a way of taking on responsibility with regard to educating for new race and social relations, producing knowledge distant from a single vision of the world, of science, as a political bargaining process that projects a fair society (Gonçalves e Silva, 2003, p. 50).

Conclusions
The reflections presented here show that affirmative action policies may offer a form of social change for direct inclusion; i.e. they are actions that through practices and institutional structures would also stimulate changes at other levels. By virtue of it, the idea is defined that we cannot wait for discrimination, prejudice and racism —that come with the still dominant concept of ‘modern man’— to disappear and social structures to change to allow participation of the for so long excluded groups. Since
every inequality is based on a conception of superiority (Silvério, 2002) it may never really disappear without a direct intervention that enables changes in the judgments that underlie it.

However, and despite what is suggested by several academic debates and media in Brazil, affirmative action policies are not limited to quota policies for university access of certain groups of society like afro-Brazilians. Inclusion is not just about equality of opportunities and access, but it is about issues of power and radical changes in the curriculum content and changes in attitudes and relations among individuals from different ethnic and racial groups. Basically, it is about the development of processes of democratization and power-sharing. Affirmative actions involve a process of inclusion where diversity should be appreciated and taken advantage of. The emergence of a discussion about power, real participation, reform and reformulation parallel to the implementation of these actions is necessary.

In addition to the discussion on implementation of affirmative action policies, it should be stated that, to achieve success with the implementation of these policies, it is also required that actors in educational settings and school environments in which these would be applied, are involved in these processes of change. The success of affirmative action policies also depends on changes in the context wherein these are implemented. In this sense, for example, the implementation of affirmative actions in a school context also implies a change in school culture, in the sense of strengthening a culture that recognizes differences and inequalities of different kinds and also takes a stand in relation to the inequalities. Differences must be recognized and used in a positive way. At the same time, it is necessary that the dialectical relation between the school and its social political context is recognized. Then, answering the question which opened this paper —what are the academic and socio-cultural barriers for the absorption of the concept of inclusive education in Brazil?— brings us to a discussion of the concept of equality and an analysis of affirmative action policies as a possibility of educational reform.

Reform then implies that those groups that hold power in the institutions of society —for example, the academic elite— are willing to
divide power, listen to the ‘other’ and are aware of the dimensions of exclusion its meaning. These groups should also reflect on their own (possible) role in the dynamics of exclusion and inclusion. In the words of Frantz Fanon (cited in Brasil 2005 p. 14): the descendants of slave traders, of the ‘sirs’ from yesterday, do not need nowadays, to feel guilty for the inhumanities provoked by their ancestors. However, they have the moral and political responsibility to fight racism, discrimination and to construct together with those who where marginalized, the afro-descendants, healthy racial and social relations, wherein all grow and realize themselves as human beings and citizens.

Educational inclusion implies a constant re-formulation of the educational processes through which old standards need to be abandoned. In the real inclusion the educational processes are defined in an inclusive process.

In the field of scientific research, the challenge is to formulate principles which allow education to have an academic orientation with proper and adequate methodological basis for a consistent and democratic dialogue with school reality. Similarly, Senna, Glatt and Mattos (2005), indicate that action-research could offer new possibilities for democratic research aimed to directly transform power relationships, content, practices and educational processes, mainly because whoever sets equality as a goal to be reached, departing from inequality, in fact postpones it to infinity. Equality never comes later, as a result to be achieved. It should always be placed before. [...] [that is] the paradoxical nature of equality (Rancière, 2004, p. 11).

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1 Here the concept of inclusive education refers to the inclusion in education of socially excluded groups in general (not specifically to the inclusion of people with special needs in education, as the term is used predominantly in Brazil). Thereby the text focuses specifically on Afro-Brazilians, one of the excluded ethnic/ racial groups in Brazil.

2 Reis states that the term elite is understood as: representatives at the federal level, from business, political, techno-bureaucratic and union sectors [...] intellectuals and opinion makers, religious members, the military, and representatives of the judicial branch and nongovernmental organizations [...] a definition of “institutional” elite was adopted, i.e., instead of assuming, for example, the criterion “reputational” to select representative individuals of this segment, the option was to interview people who occupy leadership roles in prominent national institutions (Reis, 2004, p. 43).

3 The author refers here to elites from SouthAfrica, Bangladesh, Haiti and India, countries that also who participated in the comparative research Elite Perceptions of Poverty and Inequality (Reis, 2004, p. 43).

4 Although Reis (2004), indicates that the vision of the Brazilian elite is different from the ones of other countries that participated in the investigation Elite Perceptions of Poverty and Inequality, conceptions with respect to social inequality in countries such as Britain and the Netherlands have similar characteristics (See for example: Beyer and Zeichner (1987), Campbell (1993), Clay and George (1993), Essed (1991), Siraij-Blatchford (1993a, and 1993b), Valk (1993), Verma (1993). These conceptions are characterized by not considering social inequality in a political and social context and related to power relations in society.

5 This research was carried out by professors from the UERJ and UNIMEP for the World Bank in the year 2003.

6 For example, the classic works of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), and Bernstein (1990).
An interesting source to be considered is the literature developed on the construction of indicators of equity in education (e.g. European Group of Research on Equity of the Educational Systems, 2005; Louzano, 2001; Parijs, 2004).

Other political-philosophical concepts that advocate similar ideas—that all individuals should have opportunities not only to participate in meritocratic competition to acquire vacant positions but also to acquire the skills on which merit and evaluation are based—were developed in recent decades. An example is the concept of substantive equality, used especially in works on gender inequality.

Rawls’s theory is then frequently used to try to evaluate equality in the educational systems (European Group of Research on Equity of the Educational Systems, 2005; Hutmacher, Cochrane and Bottani, 2001; Louzano, 2001; Parijs, 2004).

For example, Law 10 639, adopted in 2003 by the Brazilian government, states that education on Afro-Brazilian and African culture and history, and race relationships in all primary and high schools in Brazil become mandatory.

Interesting example of action-research is the project *Geography education and law 10 639*, coordinated by Professor Renato Emerson dos Santos from State University of Rio de Janeiro/FFP, in which the author of this article is involved. In this project, a group of academics and geography teachers work together to discuss and review contents of the aforementioned subject in the sense of including the topics considered by law 10 639.