

**EDITORIAL**

## Dilemmas and challenges posed to Graduate Studies in Brazil

Nothing is more appropriate than opening the debate on Graduate Studies in the field of Social Work in a especially critical context of Brazilian education, as a result of an economic crisis - which is an integral part of the movement of capital (BEHRING, 2010) - augmented by a deep and prolonged political and ethics crisis in our country.

The various papers that comprise this issue of *Revista Katálysis* offer important and fruitful analyses about the dilemmas posed to higher education in Brazil, with the purpose of unveiling the challenges inherent in graduate education and, more specifically, in the field of Social Work.

As a public policy, education is subject to a profound contradiction that arises between the interests of capital and those of workers as regards the access, creation and socialization of knowledge (IAMAMOTO, 2014). Graduate Studies in Brazil have been formalized for little more than 50 years, through Technical Opinion MEC/CFE No 977/1965 (known as Technical Opinion *Sucupira*). Such formalization can be considered to be recent when compared with other countries, in North America and Europe, which actually inspired the Brazilian model of higher education.

Graduate education in Brazil has been considered as a successful story internationally. Particularly, the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), as far as assessment is concerned, and the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), as regards support to research, play a major role in such success.

The National Education Plan 2014-2024, which is defined as a planning tool of our democratic state of law, is a guideline for the implementation and improvement of public policies in education. Goal 14 of the Plan is to gradually increase the number of enrollments in *stricto sensu* graduate programs, and one of its strategies is to increase the amount of funding to programs and students. However, in order for this and other goals to be achieved, there are many challenges that arise for graduate studies in Brazil; two of them are especially relevant. The first one is social inequalities, a harmful element which has existed since the remote origins of our country and hampered the inclusion of our young people in higher education, especially those from working class and ethnic/racial groups such as blacks and indigenous peoples. The second challenge is the policies which express societal projects that compete for the design, expansion and access to quality education for everyone.

Research, the cornerstone of graduate education, needs investments. Research funding is another factor that directly influences the quality of education and training and the results therefrom. Research studies whose outcome is knowledge that may be meaningful to society require autonomy of universities and researchers. What must be the duty of science in a country such as ours, in which so many social, economic and ethical ills stem from competition for different social projects, expressed by projects of classes for society?

The commodification of higher education is a reality that has been expanding rapidly. The evil debate about privatization of public higher education has been gaining space and begins by discussing *lato sensu* graduate programs and then moves on to undergraduate and *stricto sensu* graduate programs. These are the trends of reconfiguration of higher education, which has already begun in other levels of Brazilian education and seems more and more distant from the social and ethical-political demands of the sector.

There are many socioeconomic limits to the expansion of both private and public higher education. An article by Amaral (2016) about higher education in Brazil, based on official statistics, shows indications that the population is reaching a limit that prevents families from affording the costs of higher education in both public and private educational institutions. The reason is that students need more than the mere access to higher education in order not to drop out; there are high costs of transportation, meals, instructional materials, etc. Public policies are going against the grain of such reality.

Thus, how can we achieve the much-vaunted quality in the training and education of professionals, teachers, researchers and scientists in our country? How can we ensure the increase of access, provide enough vacancies and meet the demand for quality? How can we fund research, especially in the areas of humanities, considering that, without funding, there will be no higher education institutions that can possibly offer quality education to our master's and doctoral students? The consolidation of graduate studies depends on systematic research activity of faculty, quality publications of research findings and quality of the education and training offered to students. Also, internationalization, multidisciplinary and social impact of the programs are indispensable dimensions. The dilemmas are numerous and reflect much larger national and international scenarios.

Readers who wish to gain and deepen knowledge of Graduate Studies in Social Work - an area of knowledge that has been growing and consolidating based on its ethical-political project, constructed collectively by our professional category - will find a quite thorough overview in the documents of the area published on the website of CAPES and in various publications by professors and researchers, including articles that comprise the present issue of this prestigious journal.

My last remark, as a professor and researcher who has dedicated several decades of work in Brazilian Higher Education, concludes this editorial. What is expected of this level of graduate education? What is expected of our universities and of the social commitments that new generations of researchers and scientists pursue in our academic-scientific work?

If the act of researching is a absolute act of freedom and the fight for freedom is a symbol in the history of mankind, in a permanent quest for emancipation, as claimed by the authors of one of the articles published in the present issue, then creative autonomy, while committed to the ethics of researchers' intellectual curiosity, becomes indispensable. The complexity of reality and the gloom of contemporary times increasingly require new knowledge built on the relationships that are established between professors, researchers and students who attend our universities, i.e., young people with intellectual curiosity, worries and anxieties, motivated by the act of learning, who drink from the fountain of knowledge.

In the context of Social Work, there is an explicit social direction taken collectively. As stated by Yamamoto (2017, p. 18), Brazilian Social Work took emancipatory ideals, succeeding the history of workers' struggle worldwide, based on a major policy and values which dignify the human race. Our project is founded on the values of freedom, equality, democratic radicality, citizenship, absence of prejudice, respect for human rights, quality of services provided [our translation].

Theoretical tensions and disputes exist and will always exist; the richness of knowledge construction in this field is present in the debate and the interlocution with the movement of society. The field is growing and consolidating its entry into the field of social sciences, and higher education is a fundamental subject in this scenario!

Happy reading!

Mariangela Belfiore Wanderley, April 2017.

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