



## REFLECTIONS ON DISTANCE EDUCATION IN ARTS IN BRAZIL: DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION<sup>1</sup>

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***Resumo:** Este artigo enuncia o cenário da educação à distância no Brasil por meio da Internet, apontando o avanço e a instituição de cursos de graduação e pós-graduação na área de artes visuais nessa modalidade. Faz uma abordagem também de programas como a Universidade Aberta do Brasil e o Pró-licenciatura, desenvolvidos pelo governo federal. A metodologia qualitativa de cunho exploratório baseou-se na análise dos dados disponibilizados pelas instituições de ensino e pelo Ministério da Educação e Cultura – MEC. Acredita-se que esta investigação possa colaborar na ampliação de pesquisas na área, na inclusão e qualificação de profissionais no âmbito da educação, bem como na qualificação e no oferecimento de novas propostas. Entre os principais resultados podemos destacar o pioneirismo da Universidade Nacional de Brasília- UnB, que articula arte e tecnologia no âmbito da formação de professores de arte no contexto da formação inicial e na pós-graduação.*

***Palavras-chave:** Educação à distância. Internet. Inclusão.*

### CONTEXTUALIZING THE RESEARCH THEME

Progress in Distance Education in Brazil has made it mandatory for universities to establish new undergraduate courses featuring this teaching modality, whereas renowned tertiary education institutions introduced internal procedures for the structuring of new distance undergraduate courses. Strict protocols issued by the Brazilian Ministry of Education (MEC) have triggered detailed and cautious efforts by university authorities so that the courses would be officially approved. According to the MEC's definition, Distance Education is an educational modality through which the didactic and pedagogical mediation in the teaching-learning processes are undertaken by information and communication methods and technologies with students and teachers who develop educational activities separated by time and distance. The above definition

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is contained in the Decree 5622 of December 19, 2005 (which revokes Decree 2494 of 1998), regulated by Article 80 of The Basic Guidelines for Education Law 9394 of 1996 with regard to students' participation, according to Article 4, paragraph I and II of Decree 5622 of the 19th December 2005: Students' evaluation for promotion, conclusion of studies and provision of diplomas or certificates shall be conceded by I – fulfillment of activities in the course program; and II – personally sitting for the exams.

Although the unknown may frighten people, attention was focused on Distance Education by educators, administrators and entrepreneurs during the 1990s when the Internet became part and parcel of Distance Education programs.

The educational use of the Internet is actually a novel factor when compared to other technologies such as the radio, television and mail correspondence. Interest in the issue started when the world wide network became available in 1993 by which educational professionals became aware of its potential educational resources. From the very start web technology brought forth the promise of grand transformations which could be available when used for educational purposes. Consequently many institutions and organizations started to organize working groups to carry out the projects at hand. While virtual universities started to establish themselves within the context of Distance Education, industries, telephone and computer companies and software suppliers multiplied technical material and programs for this educational modality. Many authors, especially Niskier (1999), demonstrate that bold previsions were being made on the development of online education and on the use of digital technology in Education. A great challenge has been launched: the establishment of quality teaching mediated by the above-mentioned new technologies and pedagogical models.

In the wake of such new information, of the transition from an industrial society to a society of knowledge, of training requirements integrated to the new technologies, of the need to democratize teaching and make it accessible to people who live off the urban centers, one couldn't expect that traditional and formal education modalities remained the same and that Brazilian university left in the margin. Distance Education should be perceived as associated to the above-mentioned transition stance and as a quality and state-of-the-art education modality which embodies changes caused by social and technological development with drastic transformation in the classical concept of distance. Education's social and political problems in general seem to go underground when the theme is Distance Education. It may be stated that public policies try to minimize the social problems that capitalist society begets in the context of Education and supplies a questionable Distance Education. Distance Education is thus deployed as an instrument for the dissemination of knowledge with the same structural deficiency and funding as the general education system. However, owing to the fact that Distance Education targets great masses of people, the problems originating from bad administration and functioning bring about a greater social harm in the wake of an underrated project.

There is a physical distance between the student, teacher and the teaching institution in the Distance Education modality. It is highly important to investigate the students' profile, as proposing subjects, and the teachers' perception within the interaction mediatory process to understand the concept of a virtual approximation



between agents working within the teaching-learning process. In this case teachers will not act as their colleagues in the traditional school, or rather, as content transmitters. It rather envisages professionals who are capable of problematizing contents and provoking students towards an investigatory and reflective attitude as proper to the social and historical approach perspectives<sup>1</sup>.

According to Alves (1998), Distance Education, which originated in and first spread throughout Europe (France, Spain, United Kingdom), established educational models which were diffused to other places by the Centre National de Enseignement à Distance, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia and the Open University. It has proved to be an excellent alternative for continuous training worldwide. Growth of Distance Education has been rather exceptional in 2007, with two million enrolled students according to the Brazilian Association for Distance Education. “It is an essential growth for a country which still has a big task ahead in the educational field” (BIELSCHOWSKY, 2008, p.11).

In Distance Education, space is blurred and horizons are widened through the formation of new perspectives and virtual culture<sup>2</sup>. As a rule, educational institutions aim at providing education to the largest number of students and giving educational opportunities to those with difficulties in integrating themselves to the conventional system (regular or special university regime). Among the many personal reasons of students, this occurs either because of a limited number of vacancies or because of difficulties in commuting to great university centers due to distance or time available to attend traditional classes

According to Litto:

The educational course with the highest growth rate worldwide is Distance Education. Albeit an old idea, it is actually receiving a new impetus through the arrival of new communication technologies with their destabilizing stance and with their new requirements in human capacitation within a society of knowledge (LITTO, 2003, p.2).

Distance Education Arts Courses in Brazil started in 2004 through a pilot project which originated from a research for a Master’s degree in the post-graduate program of IdA/UnB. The Specialization Course called “Arteeduca: Arte Educação e Tecnologias Contemporâneas” [ArtEducation: Arts Education and Contemporary Technologies], initially aimed at developing a process for the establishment of Distance Education at the Arts Institute of the University of Brasília. This fact reveals the novelty in Arts within the context of Distance Education and the relevance of research which are tied to the development of these activities. Currently (2009) the course has already been administered five times.

Teaching of Arts through the Internet will surely have an important role in distinct areas (even within the democratic aspect), which are currently interrelated, corroborating Santaella’s argument (2005) on the convergence of communication and

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<sup>1</sup> See Vygotsky (1998) on this theme.

<sup>2</sup> Fonseca da Silva (2004) deals with the theme of virtual culture in the training of Arts teachers.



the Arts<sup>1</sup> Although the Web has simultaneous dynamic characteristics for the teaching and learning process, this space may have its limits as an educational tool. On this issue Santos shows this fact in the context of pedagogical training:

As an activity Educational Art is a differentiated issue since it essentially employs audiovisual resources and, in this field, all participating members, either graduated teachers or students in Visual Arts, should be stimulated by active methods to use with intensity their reflections and the digital audiovisual production. The analysis of a course model supplied by the institutions is a must (SANTOS, 2007, p.258).

It should be remarked that the virtual reproduction of traditional pedagogical resources in the instructional design for most of Distance Education courses is a fact. The Arts area should, in these circumstances, contribute towards the use of other interactive tools, even though present in contemporary artistic production used in technologies. It is necessary that an approximation between contemporary art, which employs technological methods in Arts teaching, and Distance Education may promote an interactive dialogue.

## RESEARCH PATHWAYS

Research methodology tried to make feasible the research problem: “How was the teaching of Arts established in Brazilian Distance Education?” The guidelines of Visual Arts courses through the Internet had to be analyzed so that a diagnosis could be undertaken. A qualitative research was deployed since it made possible a more precise interpretation of the specific items in the cases under analysis and of the contextualized situation in teachers’ training in Distance Education within the Brazilian environment.

Data collection was carried out through documental technique since it permits access to documents in real time and within the original context. Since data from Internet sites may be accessed during periods at the researchers’ convenience, which makes possible their dedication during data collection, expenses with transport and transcription are nil. According to Creswell (2007), data collection may bring some risks to the researcher, such as difficulties in accessing sites, as is the case with restricted or historical documents; the need for optic reading; lack of authenticity or even imprecision. In the case of virtual documents available in institutional sites, they are reliable, trustworthy and belong to the public domain.

The strategy of virtual search comprises the construction of a map of Visual Arts teaching within the Distance Education mode, based on the sites of the Brazilian Ministry of Education (MEC), Distance Education Secretariat (SEED), Brazilian Statistical Yearbook in Open and Distance Education (AbraEAD) and the Open University of Brazil (OUB). Specific search sites were browsed to supplement study data on the courses available on the Web by means of keywords such as “Arts teaching in Distance Education” and applied to links and sites of private, public and cooperative

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<sup>1</sup> With regard to this theme, see Santaella (2005).



Higher Education Institutions. Theoretical support from Fonseca da Silva (2005), Fonseca da Silva (2008), Sancho (2006), Pimentel (2002) in the context of Arts teaching and teachers' training in Distance Education was also taken into account.

There were Higher Education Institutions which administered isolated disciplines or course modules that might be offered either as Distance Education or in the presencial mode<sup>1</sup>. Current analysis pinpointed projects of the Brazilian Government such as the Pro-Graduation Program<sup>2</sup> and the Open University of Brazil<sup>3</sup> (OUB) as great encouragers in Distance Education in Brazil, and also of other institutions responsible for the spreading of Arts courses to the most remote regions of the country.

Creswell (2007) suggests that the researchers organize and prepare their data for analysis so that data interpretation could be qualified. The author also proposes an attentive reading of the material for an all-encompassing meaning or a general idea of the collected data. A third step consists of a detailed analysis of data coupled to a de-codification process. The author enhances the fact that codification is the organization of materials in groups for detailed analysis.

It should be emphasized within the methodological context that current investigation was produced as a strategy for the visualization of data related to the courses that train teachers in Arts from data available in institutional sites found on the Internet. The study will also be useful for a broad analysis in the wake of studies focused on the development of the theme of teachers' training in Distance Education.

## RESEARCH DATA

There is no doubt that, with regard to teachers' training, the opportunities for Distance Education courses increased. This may be surmised from the 2006 Higher Education Census undertaken by the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (Inep/MEC), published in December. Between 2003 and 2006 there was a 571% increase in the number of courses in Distance Education and a 315% increase in the number of enrolled students. During the same period there was an increase of 34.3% in enrolment for technological courses and an increase of 8.3% and 5% respectively in number and in enrolment in undergraduate courses. The number of undergraduate students in 2008 amounted to 760,599, a 91% increase when compared to that in 2007. During the last four years, between 2004 and 2008, there was leap 1,175%. Although Distance Education courses account for merely one sixth of students in

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<sup>1</sup> The Regional University of Blumenau (FURB), which offers disciplines or modules that may be undertaken within the Distance Education mode or which in the presencial one, is typical.

<sup>2</sup> An educational program of the Brazilian Federal Government through the Ministry of Education, established prior to the Open University of Brazil as a joint ventures with federal, state and communitarian universities. It was later incorporated to the Open University of Brazil according to decrees published in 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Program of the Ministry of Education and the Federal Government as a joint venture with federal, state and public technological institutions to spread tertiary courses to the remotest region of Brazil through distance Education.



presencial courses, the former are progressing with a greater speed than that of presencial courses.

The most recent data (2007) of the Brazilian Ministry of Education on presencial courses refer to 4.8 million students in Brazil. When compared to the previous year, there was a 4.4% increase. During the 2004-2008 period, presencial enrolments increased by only 17%. “Distance Education democratizes admittance to higher education”, states Carlos Bielschowsky (2008, p.11), the secretary of Distance Education of the Ministry of Education.

Current research indicates the National University of Brasília as a reference college in Arts and Technology, with its research featuring significant studies within the post-graduate program. The UnB has developed projects that relate Art and Technology with teachers’ training. In 2006 the University of Brasilia presented projects for the establishment of undergraduate courses in Visual Arts for the OUB and Pro-Graduation programs. The latter was established with four government universities.

According to the site of the Open University, thirteen public institutions currently offer courses in Visual Arts at the undergraduate and post-graduate (specialization) levels in seven out of the 25 states in Brazil. These institutions account for several presencial educational hubs, mostly within the state.

Undergraduate Courses in Visual Arts as a joint venture with OUB and Pro-graduation Program.

Name	Institution	Region	State	Modality	UAB
1 VISUAL ARTS	UFES	South-Eastern Region	ES	UNDERGARDUATE	UAB I
2 VISUAL ARTS	UFG	Central-Western Region	GO	UNDERGARDUATE	UAB I
3 VISUAL ARTS	UnB	Central-Western Region	DF	UNDERGARDUATE	UAB II
4 VISUAL ARTS	UNIMONTES	South-Eastern Region	MG	UNDERGARDUATE	UAB II
5 VISUAL ARTS PROLIC II	UnB	Central-Western Region	DF	UNDERGARDUATE	PROLIC II
6 VISUAL ARTS PROLIC II	UCS	Southern Region	MA	UNDERGARDUATE	PROLIC II
7 VISUAL ARTS PROLIC II	UFG	Central-Western Region	GO	UNDERGARDUATE	PROLIC II
8 VISUAL ARTS PROLIC II	UFMA	North-Eastern Region	MA	UNDERGARDUATE	PROLIC II
9 VISUAL ARTS PROLIC II	UFRGS	Southern Region	RS	UNDERGARDUATE	PROLIC II
10 VISUAL ARTS PROLIC II	UFSM	Southern Region	RS	UNDERGARDUATE	PROLIC II
11 VISUAL ARTS PROLIC II	UNIR	Northern Region	RO	UNDERGARDUATE	PROLIC II
12 VISUAL ARTS PROLIC II	UNIMONTES	South-Eastern Region	MG	UNDERGARDUATE	PROLIC II
13 TEACHING OF VISUAL ARTS	UFMG	South-Eastern Region	MG	SPECIALIZATION	UAB II

We would like to enhance the programs of the Open University of Brazil and the Pro-Graduation of the Federal Government which are implementing activities within the training of Arts teachers in Distance Education.

## PRO-GRADUATION PROGRAM

Pushing ahead real changes for an improvement in fundamental education, in 1996 the Brazilian Ministry of Education (MEC) launched The Initial Training Program



for Teachers working in Fundamental and Secondary Education, also known as Pro-Graduation Program. The project was a joint venture with government universities to reach teachers effectively working in the upper junior and secondary schools but who lacked a university degree. The program was a stage in a continuous training process in Distance Education mixing presencial exchanges and interactivities with a great amount of tasks, undertaken individually or collectively, at the regional educational hubs as at the school in which the teacher was working, and even within an individual and virtual environment.

### THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF BRAZIL

The Open University of Brazil (OUB), established in 2005, is not supposed to be a new institution of higher education but a coordination of already existing public institutions. Its role is to spread quality higher education to Brazilian municipalities which do not have any faculty courses or whose university courses are insufficient to cover the demand. The OUB offers distance undergraduate courses in Visual Arts with the help of presencial educational hubs within the same state of the institution. The OUB project determines the vacancies for these courses, or rather, 50% for acting teachers from the government schools and 50% from the general candidates. A search at specific Internet sites revealed six private or cooperative Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) which offer courses in Visual Arts within the Distance Education mode.

### THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF BRAZIL

Course	Type	HEI	Contact
VISUAL ARTS	UNDERGRADUTE	AVANTIS – SC	<a href="http://www.avantis.edu.br">http://www.avantis.edu.br</a>
VISUAL ARTS	UNDERGRADUATE	UNIVERSIDADE METROPOLITADA DE SANTOS UNIMES	<a href="http://www.unimesvirtual.com.br/">http://www.unimesvirtual.com.br/</a>
VISUAL ARTS	SPECIALIZATION	SENAC NACIONAL	<a href="http://www.senac.br">http://www.senac.br</a>
ARTS	SPECIALIZATION	INSTITUTO DE GESTAO EDUCACIONAL SIGNORELLI	<a href="http://www.signorelli.srv.br">http://www.signorelli.srv.br</a>
ARTS AND EDUCATION	SPECIALIZATION	CENTRO UNIVERSITARIO CLARETIANO	<a href="http://www.claretiano.edu.br/ead-pos-graduacao/arte-e-educacao/">http://www.claretiano.edu.br/ead-pos-graduacao/arte-e-educacao/</a>

Different nomenclatures were used for Visual Arts Courses in Distance Education, as data collection showed: Undergraduate Course in Arts, Visual Arts, Plastic Arts, Specialization Courses in History, Arts and Culture, although their main aim is not teachers' training. The University of Brasilia provides Specialization Courses and gives a discount to teachers who work in the classroom.

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## FINAL ANALYSES

One of the most important things is that the teaching of Visual Arts is in its heyday, with new teaching possibilities and methodologies. One of the research's results is that new courses and theoretical production on the theme are constantly being provided. Due to the popularization of interactive technologies, Distance Education has become a possible modality for the teaching of Visual Arts in undergraduate and post-graduate courses. The phenomenon with presencial courses, indicated through the diversity of course titles which prepare Arts teachers, also exists in Distance Education courses.

With regard to the teaching of the Visual Arts, research pinpointed the National University of Brasilia as a reference in Arts and Technology. Back in 2004 it was pioneering when it provided an Arts specialization course within the Distance Education modality. In 2006 the UnB provided a project on the establishment of undergraduate courses in Visual Arts for the OUB and Pro-Graduation Programs. The latter was a joint venture with four government universities (UFG, UFMA, UNIR and Unimontes). The Pro-Graduation Program in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul provides an undergraduate course in Visual Arts through the Gaucha Network of Distance Education (REGESD). In the state of São Paulo, the Metropolitan University of Santos (UNIMES) and the Claretiano Educational Center offer undergraduate courses in Visual Arts in Distance Education, whereas the Avantis Faculty in the state of Santa Catarina provides a semi-presencial course and the Signorelli Educational Institute in the state of Rio de Janeiro has educational presencial hubs in all the regions of Brazil. Cooperative Institutions such as the National Service in Commercial Learning (SENAC) also provide undergraduate and post-graduate course in Distance Education in Arts in the states of São Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul, Goiânia, Rio de Janeiro and Santa Catarina. These Institutions establish educational hubs for the presencial support of the courses.

The Institutions that already provide presencial courses as joint ventures with the Federal Government have increased the number of courses and consequently the number of students. Distance Education, coupled to information and communication





technologies, are of paramount importance in teachers' training. The appropriation of the social media and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Distance Education forwards a new meaning to the concept of knowledge. Time and space are not a problem anymore. Since it does not depend on time and distance, Distance Education forwards the educational system's role not only within the formation of citizens who belong to such a space but to an inclusive formation space within a society teeming with differences.

The historical contextualization of Distance Education reveals that certain experiences, such as the ARTEDUCA: Art Education and Contemporary Technologies of the UnB, instituted in 2004, are already well established. Other had to be closed since they did not attend to the government's mandatory orientation.

Research has also shown that OUB and the Pro-Graduation Programs have greatly contributed towards the diffusion of quality Distance Education courses in Arts. In fact, thirteen federal institutions, as joint ventures with these programs, provide Distance Education courses in Arts within the northern, central-western, south-eastern and southern regions of Brazil. It is thus highly important to reflect on the positive potentialities of virtual space directed towards pedagogical work of teaching-learning in Visual Arts. In fact, they facilitate important means of cognition for human relationships through the collective reach of several interactive communication resources. Nevertheless, recent data also reveal the fragility of such a research in which data are still highly unexplored. Our aim is to continue current research to deepen the individualized study of the pedagogical model of the institutions and to focus on the quality of the work which is being developed. Other research work may be developed from our analysis within the context of specific programs in teachers' training, their relationships with presencial education and their insertion in the labor market. The relationship between distance teachers' training in the Arts and teaching in schools may also be focused. Basic didactic materials and bibliographical references employed in teachers' training in Distance Education may also trigger other investigations that broaden the quality of Arts courses.

Another less visible result in the data given and which has been inferred through the specific literature is that the training of Arts teachers through the educational technologies of Distance Education prepare professionals with a high perception for the use of technologies in the teaching of the Arts. When these professionals occupy their space within the new technologies, they will surely maintain a close dialogue with contemporary art. Since Technology and Art currently occupy convergent spaces in the artistic milieu and in the communication mass media, a trend exists in which these new perspectives may consolidate themselves within the training of Arts teachers' in Distance Education.

Two important aspects should be enhanced: the first concerns the involvement of highly qualified government universities in the offering of courses for the training of Arts teachers. The second focuses on social insertion and justifies the social function of the public universities in their attendance to the public school's demands of quality and gratuity.

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**Abstract:** *Internet-based Distance Education in Brazil, featuring the institution and progress of undergraduate and post-graduate courses in Visual Arts is provided. Current article focuses on the Open University of Brazil and the Pro-Graduation Programs developed by the Brazilian federal government. Exploratory qualitative methodology is foregrounded on data produced by teaching institutions and by the Brazilian Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC). Current investigation will be an asset within the broadening of research in the educational area, inclusion and qualification of professionals in Education, and in the supply of new proposals and suggestions. Main results comprise the pioneering stance of the University of Brasília (UnB) which articulates arts and technology in the training of Arts teachers from the initial courses in Education up to post-graduate ones.*

**Keywords:** *Distance Education. Internet. Inclusion.*