# Lifelong education and learning: Adults and higher-level education

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## Abstract

This article relates the adult education to higher education from the perspective of lifelong learning. Understanding that the struggle for the right to education is part of a movement that encompasses political, ethical, moral, social, and economic issues, the text aims to discuss the reasons for adults to enter and remain at the University. The essay is based on Alheit and Dausien (2006, 2007, 2013, 2015), Beltran (2013, 2015), and Lahire (1995, 1997, 2008) studies as well as biographical narratives from adult students at the Federal University in Paraiba, Brazil, obtained by interviewing them.
**Keywords:** lifelong learning, adult education, higher education.

## Introduction

The relationship between education and personal, social and economic benefits, has been widely discussed in contemporary political/educational discourse, becoming an educational ideal, especially in adult education. Thus, ideally, it becomes an object of special attention from the international agenda, promoting the proliferation of educational offerings to favor the construction of new forming and transformative practices to these groups.

In developed and focused on production countries, with few problems of education, departure assumption was that adult education should be geared to employment and vocational training. In those less developed countries that retained high rates of illiteracy and functional illiteracy, the focus turned to the continuous education of these (Ireland, 2009).

In any case, the two proposals argue that education, cultural and social practices addressed to these individuals, now in lifelong perspective, be presented as a polarized action between social justice and economy (Hinzen, 2009: 2).

So, the educational concept, now associated with continuous and systematic training and learning processes within the discourse of international organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Economic Development (OECD), and the Council of Europe, includes among its benefits the economic and private benefits, as well as those that cause collective and 'non-monetary social' effects (Beltran, 2013: 115).

Indeed, based on these broad benefits began to emerge towards the end of 1990, political and educational proposals for adults so called 'second chance', defended as a process that begins in literacy up to higher education (UNESCO, 2010), in an attempt to expand opportunities for disadvantaged groups in need of new economic, social and cultural chances.

From here, soon educational initiatives designed to adults came out, and they were proclaimed as mechanisms for their economic and social emancipation, in 'risk contexts'. Some European countries, like Portugal, included this issue in their political agendas, giving these 'new audiences', hitherto absent from the national education system, special access to higher education. In other regions, as in the case of Brazil, perhaps due to the persistence of illiteracy, the government offer was restricted to enrollment policies and literacy programs and extension of schooling in primary and secondary courses.

In the case of policies for higher education, yet, despite its expansion framed in the 'lifelong' paradigm, no significant changes have been seeing in their pedagogical and curricular models, hindering the learning and retention of adults in academic courses. In addition, the society still maintains a representation and discriminatory social discourse against the education of these people by conditioning negatively the continuity of their education. There are many families still ashamed of their older illiterate or poorly educated, discriminating them in their own homes or preventing them to become literate. In research conducted by UNESCO/MEC/SECADI (2005), illiterate people, women mostly, commented that their teenagers were laughing at their disabilities to read and called them 'brainless', leaving them with a sense of low esteem and vulnerable to their family. Others have commented that their adult children hindered them or did not allow them to go to class because of embarrassment from their neighbors, they would know their status as illiterate (Prestes, 2005).

So persistence or 'cultural reproduction' (Bourdieu 1988; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) of these traditional social values, combined with factors related to social structure, make it often more difficult for adults or aged to enter or return to the educational system , regardless of their need to reconcile work and family with studies. There is even a popular in Brazil saying: 'You cannot teach new tricks to an old dog', referring negatively to the difficulties older people have to learn and change.

However, despite these representations, by June 2014, Brazilian society became aware of the history of Charmes Rolim, a ninety seven year old student that got a degree in Law. This person said that she realized her childhood dream after her widowhood and with the support of her family, considers education a 'tool of change' and 'life an everlasting learning'.

This case, while contemporary reflection of a complex that includes and excludes equally, forcefully reaffirms the argument of education as a possibility for autonomy and sovereignty of human beings, and as a means of rebuilding incessant sense of self (Beltran, 2014: 64), regardless of age, sex, social origin or ethnicity.

From the preceding, this text presents, in general, some elements to reflect on the potential benefits for adults to attend higher education schools emphasizing aspects of their motivations for enrolling and remaining in college and to overcome difficulties necessary to its completion, what is considered school success. The adult tend to overcome difficulties in their processes of higher education getting success, when they recognize the material and non-material benefits of education for their life projects.

This matter is still scarce in the academic literature, although there are numerous publications focused on the phenomenon of school failure and success of children and young people during their primary and secondary education, emphasizing, among others, Charlot (2000), Dubet (1994), Lahire (1995, 1997),

Coulon (2012), Nogueira (2013), Thomson (2013), Santos (2013), Brown and Lauder (2013), Boudon (1979.1997, 2000), Bourdieu (1972, 1998), and Soler (2014). Among those dealing with education and training and adult learning, taking into account the policy or lifelong guidance, it should be noted Alheit (2007, 2013), Beltran (2014) and Ferreira Alcoforado (2011), Ferreira (2011), and Pereira (2009), whose approaches and comments are raised in the context of human experience, responsibilities and political commitments of the institutions, individual survive requirements or productive systems and work organization. Here the interest resides in the motivation of adults to overcome barriers and difficulties in their processes of higher education.

### Adult education and lifelong learning higher education:
### Short contributions

The relationship between adult education and higher education is slightly an issue in education policies and academic literature, at least in Brazil. One thing to note is that, in the context of the knowledge society, lifelong learning, which began to excel in the big conferences sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the 1990s, came to be considered as an object of law, societal needs and economic investment target, encouraging the presence of adults in higher education.

These contemporary possibilities do not mean that interest on training adults rose just recently. According to Alconforado and Ferreira (2011, op. cit.) based on De Natale (2003: 48) and Hizen (2009, op. cit.), citing Wolfgang Seitter (2000), between 1890 and 1930, initiatives and educational experiences intended for adult and because of "the English university extension of the popular schools in Denmark and the US public libraries" emerged. These experiences served as a model for the high schools and the German public libraries (Hizen, 2009: 2), the experiences also provided the emergence of two great models of education that up to the present, provide guidance and approaches to adult policies.

The first model, from English matrix and adopted by the Central Europeans countries, emphasized the continuing education for technical and vocational training and social promotion. The second, inspired by the ideas of the Danish Bishop Grundrving, sought to link social and personal benefits of adult education in strengthening democracy and social organization (Alconforado y Ferreira, 2011).

It is not difficult to recognize that much of the guidance for schooling or qualification of these groups from 1950, closely follow these models, varying according to social conditions of the countries or regions, their interests or needs and can be seen in the regulations and standards at the local and state levels of European, Latin American and African regions. More specifically, it is seen in the content of the texts discussed at the International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA), governed by UNESCO, in the framework of Europe organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation, Development (OECD) and the Council of Europe, prioritize work training, and it was integrated with the economic development and social cohesion purposes. However, in Latin America, Central American and African countries with high rates of illiteracy or low educational level people, the emphasis is rather on literacy and education geared to the practice of citizenship.

From the eighties and nineties mainly in the framework of the recommendations on education now recognized as right and issued by The Conference on Edu-

cation for All (1990), the CONFINTEA V (1997), the World Conference on Higher Education (1998), and the Bologna Declaration (1999), the emphasis was put on policies of higher education from the perspective of adult , inspiring plans and actions of world governments (Pascueiro, 2009). Thereby policies or higher education proposals emerged or are renewed, introducing in many countries, alternative institutional mechanisms and formats able to contemplate a type of population and demands repressed or neglected (Prates, 2007: 4).

By the late 2000s, the CONFINTEA VI and the II World Conference on Higher Education, reinforced the ideal of lifelong learning education, fostering international policies and arrangements to all people access to higher education (Days , 2012), regardless of previous educational opportunities.

These guidelines, widely publicized, have been the subject of controversy in academic world. Authors like Canário (2003), Lima (2007) and Moraes (2006), cited by Ferreira (2013), understand that the conceptual and political of adult education perspective, framed in the concept of lifelong learning, is directly related to economic interests or responses to the challenges taking place globally, linking education with employability. Meanwhile, other authors, like Beltran (2014), without ignoring their economic or political implications, advocate the expansion of adult education covered by the lifelong learning concept, as a "constant learning exercise" in addition to "a valuable opportunity" for these groups to get out "of the dominant imaginary" and "find alternatives to other possible worlds", paying attention to "non-monetary benefits" (Beltran, 2014: 62-63).

In the perception of Alheit (2013), the meaning of lifelong learning implies a learning capacity, oscillating between two opposing poles, but interrelated while "instrumentalized" also "emancipated". So considered, while recognizing the economic nature that can condition the current concept of education and learning, it is possible to overcome this reductionist understanding that sees education along oriented only towards the end of legitimation or reproduction of life mercantilist interests. Rather, Alheit (*op. cit.*) argues, as major elements still lack of explanation of the theoretical understanding of this "new concept" –education and lifelong learning– can be understood "as an important social capital and Cultural for the development of civil society" (Alheit, 2013: 151).

Now, even in the 1990s, much of the guidance relating to adult lifelong learning came to Brazil. The country, according to these international standards for the expansion of education, regardless of age, gender, social, or ethnic, implements changes in its education system. In 2001, the National Education Plan (PNE 2001-2010, approved by Law No. 10,172 / 2001) directed the expansion of higher education in order to promote the democratization of education and reduce social inequalities. Soon after, in 2007, it launched the Program to Support Restructuring and Expansion Plans for the Federal Universities (REUNI). This, one of the shares of the Development Plan of Education (PDE) of the Federal Government, aimed democratization, higher education expansion and improvement, with substantial changes in the proposed student profile. With this, the federal government offered to universities best operating conditions and expanding access. Many adult considered "non-traditional" public, hitherto excluded from tertiary education, entered or returned to the higher education institution to be accredited, rework their careers and build new routes. To ensure the greatest number of admissions in this type of education, the government established accredited private institutions,

providing scholarships to poor students, greatly to the evening hours classes, where the largest contingent of adult students and workers is concentrated.

In 2014, the University for All Program (ProUni) or Financing Estudantil (Fies) benefited about 40% of students enrolled in private higher education between 1,232 faculdades. The programs, intended for low-income students had distributed more than a million scholarships, according to the Brazilian MEC (http://ultimosegundo.ig.com.br/educacao/2014-12-02/40-dos-estudantes-de-ensino-superior-usam-prouni-ou-fies.html).

With these measures, the number of students enrolled in public and private higher education increased, benefiting a population older than 24 years old, obviously the largest contingent of students in the universe of Brazilian university students. Taken together, these new government measures as educational opportunities emerged to be able to reframe stories of life and overcoming inequalities (Prestes, 2011, 2013). As an illustration, in 2012, about 54.5 million people, almost half of the Brazilian 25 years old population or older (49.25%), had not completed secondary education; the number of seniors was 16 million (14.65%) and only 11.26% of these groups had higher level education (IBGE Census, 2010).

This means there is a repressed demand for adults who surely seek higher education to the extent that they succeed in completing their secondary education. Therefore, the substantial increase cohort of students over 24 years old in college means an extension of the individuals' vital opportunities in the context of lifelong learning.

After then, the implementation of policies to encourage completion of secondary education in recent years, allied to policies of expansion of higher education made it possible to cover 7 million students in higher education, an increase of 81% between 2003 and 2012. From all, only 15% were between 18 and 24 years old, noting that approximately 85% belonged to adult segment (Census/IBGE, 2010).

This finding emphasized in the document "Challenges and prospects of higher education for the next decade", organized in 2012 by UNESCO/MEC/CNE (Dias, 2012) underlines the existence of higher education students with new sociological profiles, especially in evening classes, highlighting black people, low social class, low income, workers in industries, and businesses. Thus, this document states:

> The trend is that we shall go through next decade with most students with this profile. So one of the challenges of higher education institutions will be to understand the newly admitted students' features, their profile and the impacts that this could represent for their institutional development plan and for each course pedagogical project (Dias, 2012: 159).

Cope with the guidelines that include the organization of new formats and learning environments, higher education institutions need to rethink and create scenarios able to facilitate the promised benefits of education to these groups with less training. In this sense, it contrasts the fact that the promises remain highlighted in the words, but despising the actions, producing dropouts and stories of abandonment and school failure, which now reproduce and take place within higher education. Thus, data from the Ministry of Education (MEC) shows that, in 2011, out of 100 students, only 39 completed higher education, mainly in those courses that have lower demands such as teacher training or pedagogy (Dias, 2012: 41). They are

effectively in the careers where most adults are concentrated, given their social economics characteristics and previous schooling since it is considered less diffi-cult than other technical careers. When they leave their higher level education courses, the possibility of returning to study is more difficult, expanding the si-tuations of exclusion and social inequality (Thomson, 2013: 347-350), which now extend to working conditions and survival requirements.

Many of the school failure situations at the University are the same as ones present in the lower educational levels, by conditioning decisions to continuing studies, as shown by some researches on educational story of adults (Alheit & Dausien, 2006; Diniz, 2010). These constraints also commit extremely heteroge-neous REUNI goals that gravitate (or gravitated) around the average completion rate of 90% in regular classroom degree courses, creating or accentuating contro-versy over providing higher education to the most disadvantaged social sectors. Often adverse positions against democratization of higher education arise, hel-ping to justify the persistence or reproduction of ignorance and impoverishment of these groups (Beltran, 2013).

If cultural patterns and social structures influence the permanence of those groups at the university, there are people who in turn have different behaviors "that would be sociologically most anticipated" composing educational biographies and stories out of the patterns socially "typical or predominant "(Nogueira, 2013: 10).

Those behaviors considered sociologically "atypical", i.e., different from those hitherto prevailed among college students (Nogueira, 2013: 10), are challenging the current sociological explanations, becoming therefore an issue that is beco-ming increasingly a central position in recent academic studies related to adult education.

**Experiences of adult group school success: Explanatory Approaches**
As already mentioned in the previous section, the (re)integration and (no) con-tinuity of adults in higher education is not reduced to a single, well-defined so-ciological explanation. There are individuals who throughout their lives are faced with a series of guidelines and socialization processes some of them outside of expected patterns sociologically, including skills as motivators to generate patterns of resistance to failure. These motivations, capable of operating as mechanisms of educational decisions in different adverse social context, make possible that some individuals live "social contradictions" actively "in the framework of their life stories" (Alheit & Dausien, 2015: 332, and apud Hernàndez Villar, *op.cit*), i.e., exceeding previous situations of failure or truancy and exclusions stories derived from their social conditions.

This is still what happens when adults, with different school stories from the ones from 'privileged' schools, obtain school success. Here success is considered enrolling and staying in college career, or so says Lahire (1997; 1999) "unlikely paths of school success." This reaffirms the necessity of reinforcing theoretical studies and to conti-nue providing empirical evidence on this phenomenon in higher education.

Some provisional contributions, in the light of the theories adopted by the sociology of education, still serve as explanatory factors. So, those supported in theoretical matrices of Durkheim or "more broadly structuralist" (Nogueira, 2013: 14) inspired, they understand that the attitudes of individuals are socially condi-tioned by their social group and context. Others, like Weber, conceive that these

behaviors are not conditioned or determined a priori by the structures, because if on the one hand they are influenced by the macro structural conditions on the other they are also capable of causing breaks or variations in situations sociologically considered predictable (Nogueira, 2013: 14).

This situation from the perspective of Lahire (1998, 1999) tends to be explained by the socialization of individuals and their influences throughout his life. In turn, the focus on the biographies of individuals approach emphasizes the procedural and constructive nature of life stories, combined with identity models, theoretical features, and space of belonging. This trend by Alheit and Dausien, and other theorists who rely on the tradition of social constructivism defended, explain the construction of the action of these people as an opportunity to "lifelong learning", or as processes in buildings ranging from insight of the individual to the outside. From the biographical perspective, the individual, within certain limits, is able to write or rewrite his story by changing its "relationship between the self and the world" (Alheit & Dausien, 2015, apud Hernàndez and Villar, *op. cit.*).

The ability to understand school success stories of these groups, according to Lahire (2005), should consider their socialization experiences, as discussed. Based on the sociological profiles of students and their families configurations, Lahire (op.cit), without denying the influence of the structure, contrasts certain concepts "bourdieusiens" such as cultural capital, educational capital, social capital and economic capital, to understand and explain why certain people, even when inserted in situations of social inequality, or facing various difficulties obtain school success in their school careers. The reasons that serve as elements of explanation, some of subjective nature, as the "willingness" to learn for the pleasure of knowing, are added to the objective nature of guidance relating to work and economic needs or family issues and identity.

Therefore, according to studies and commentaries of those authors, overcoming strategies used by different individuals difficulties are not determined a priori by a rigid structure, but are produced by multiple-and contradictory socialization experiences lived by them in different social spaces at different times. Adults school success stories in higher education, particularly those who enter public universities, tend to be explained by the motivations they produce, forms of family support, the configuration of educational policies serving as their guidance, as well as the set of formal, non-formal and informal learning acquired in their lifelong socialization processes.

Also it turns out that for certain individuals, higher education means the realization of their intellectual ideals, a social benefit and a human imperative need, according to Dubet (1994) and Beltran (2014). From this perspective it is conceivable that for adults, lifelong higher education perspective works as a possibility of personal, social and economic development and an action in terms of resistance to the structural and institutional conditions to which they are subjected by an unequal system.

These brief theoretical approaches with differences and specificities tend to intertwine the structural and institutional terms with the existence of phenomena related to unique stories and individuals subjectivities, the approaches work a priori as explanatory frameworks of different reactions between the difficulties they face to remain in college versus accomplishing academic success.

Herein below, as empirical way of illustration, excerpts from adult students stories on their motivation to remain in higher education courses, despite the difficulties they face.

As mentioned earlier, the age cut of 30 years old considered regular schooling range for higher education (18/24 years old) and also the definitions of adult by The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), as well as defined by programs for adults of Brazilian Ministry of Education (MEC), which means the individual with more than 29 years old (Teixeira, 2011a).

The research that led to the organization of this text assumed two approaches: one regarding their purposes and the other as to the means. As for their purpose, the investigation was configured as an exploratory study because there are few accumulated and systematized knowledge on the specificity of the matter from the perspective of adult learners motivation to pursue a path of higher education. It is also descriptive in as far as it preliminary proposes some sociological explanations on the path of higher education of these adult groups.

The methodological process started with literature and document review, allowing the organization of a script of interviews considering sex and age and three dimensions suggested by Durand (In Cury, s/d): i) students opinion about the importance of higher education in their life project; ii) the problems and difficulties of objective and subjective nature caused by internal and external to the school factors (Bourdieu, 1992, 1998; LAHIRE, 2008); iii) the factors/reasons that helped overcome barriers in their schooling process. Its application guidelines considered Alheit y Dausien (2007), Cardinal (2006) and Diniz (2009), with emphasis in social construction of biographies.

The ten interviews were conducted with students from Exact, Humanities and Health Science Fields and they were transcribed and transformed into Corpus of Analysis, following the techniques of content analysis suggested by Bardin (1977). The narrative repeated situations excelled and were transformed into categories of representations of speeches. Those categories allowed organizing details, demonstrations and descriptions that illustrated theoretical and explanatory approaches in the investigated matter. In this text interviews what seemed most significant in their narratives were considered.

## Adult Students in UFPB: Permanence and motivations

The implementation of the UFPB REUNI, conceived as a political model that redefines the University of Elitist Nature, foresaw an expansion of enrollment of almost 70% over the existing one, created new courses, expanded its Faculty, and created political measures to promote access and social inclusion of students.

In those years, students of higher education in Paraiba and attending public and private institutions, were composed mostly by people over 24 years old (about 90%), many of those working part-time or full-time and studying at night. Without any conditions to attend their courses, they abandoned their studies, which seemed to reproduce, now in higher education, the tales of failure that happened in previous levels with primary and secondary education.

UFPB documents placed emphasis in existing high rates of absenteeism in the institution, highlighting the courses in the areas of Exact and Technological Sciences. Those areas of Biological Sciences and Health had a 10% lower abandonment and human and social approached 35%, similar to the overall rates of the institution (UFPB, 2007). That, according Fialho (2014), happened because of the "poor" choice of course, by low socioeconomic conditions and mainly by a deficiency in training at the undergraduate level, especially the one processed by public

schools. Against that, REUNI leaders defended the need for preventive measures and studies that are able to deepen causes, emphasizing those related to didactic and pedagogical issues (UFPB, 2007).

In practice, there were no significant changes. In 2013, a quota of 38,000 students enrolled at the institution in the previous year, there was an average of 2,557 dropouts (Fialho, 2014: 75). It is understood both access and permanence in higher education are intertwined phenomena, determined by factors related to sociodemographic conditions of students, financial solvency, educational background and cultural and social expectations regarding the success of the studies. Another essential factor for admission and permanence of the student is his own interests to overcome the difficulties facing adverse situations. School success is related to persistence and discipline, resilience and motivation aptitude. The person needs to be motivated to credit the benefits of education. According to Charlot (1997 apud Giolo, 2009), the reasons that contribute to students to enroll and stay in school, are related to a number of factors he termed "mobilization", that is an inner attitude of the individual, based in their own expectations and desires (*Idem*, p. 21).

The adult students in higher education processes have their own characteristics, which are represented by their family, social and cultural, or educational experiences. Adult students are the protagonists of stories concretized in life experiences. These people bring beliefs and values culturally and socially constituted. Therefore, their motivation to remain in the University remains on specific desire and on their own expectations. Therefore, the motivation/mobilization of students to overcome difficulties present themselves as a determining factor for academic/school accomplishment.

From this perspective, it can be said that happens in UFPB as well as in other Brazilian institutions and in any other country in the world. About that, an overview on permanence or absence of students in higher education was presented by Ferreira (2011), citing the ALPINE study (Adults Learning and Participating in higher education) 2004. It was concluded that the integration or disengagement of adult students in European universities tends to be influenced by four variables: a) personal, related to low self-esteem, previous negative experiences or lack of study habits; b) situational, related to the conditions of existence of the subject as the remoteness of the institution, lack of money, lack of time; c) institutional, related to the process of school teaching and learning; d) Informative, nature barriers or those that cause difficulties for communication and information from them. In addition, other factor such as socialization process with the younger group is also able to reveal barrier to provoke absenteeism (Ferreira, 2011: 205).

Diniz (2010) and Soler's (2014) argument based on the possibilities of action taken or not taken by the individual, argue that throughout life in general and in school life, in particular, dilemmas or tradeoffs are presented to individual that may affect their decisions, including leaving or staying in their studies.

Facing absenteeism rates recorded in UFPB, those who graduate gain relevance at institutions, those who finish their courses, so called by the MEC/Brazil as school success. This phenomenon, as school failure, still lacks studies and explanations about their conditioning factors, as pointed out above.

It is true that there are numerous studies linking the success of students with socioeconomic status, especially when it comes to education of children and youth in primary and secondary educational levels. In higher education, the exis-

ting studies tend to explain this phenomenon with the assignment of the student social status to which life trajectories and schooling are added, social, family and work pressures, and individual biographical own options (their motivations, expectations and life scenario).

This situation is compounded by the fear of unemployment caused by the global economic crisis or the crisis in their own country. The factors assortment interrelated with each other can make envision a profit in educational short/medium term due to increased education regarding the (re) employment (Diniz, 2010). Despite this set of approaches, which affect individual educational decisions, there seems to be no rational explanation of the phenomenon of school success for adult students in higher education, especially when they face barriers and difficulties in their schooling process. What reasons make them face and overcome difficulties of various characteristics? What are the conditions that enable them to respond to adversity that emerged in their educational processes?

One could admit that some possible answers to these questions lie in the field of decisions related to desires, with rational choices and individual identities. It is a "training process of will and determination with political and social character," according to Dausien (2015: 71, apud Villar Hernández, *op. cit.*).

In the context of lifelong learning as a reference to transform and emancipate individuals and groups, the decision made by adults to remain in higher secondary education also suggests the possibility that they acquire greater capacity for action and welfare in contexts of risk and exclusion.

Certainly when every adult succeed in reaching the University bring with them a greater background of learning experiences lived and other "unlived" marked by educational stories of "dropouts and interruptions" (Diniz, *op. cit*.), which does weigh benefits that result in their decision to continue (or not) their educational journey reworking other experiences and structuring future action. It must be also considered that the decision to return to school in a stage of life when the individual is everyday needs family provider, on one hand it tends to justify the ability of certain people to overcome difficulties; on the other it also could be used to block or justify decisions to leave school when family interests overlap to individual interests.

In José's case, one of the students at UFPB, whose trajectories in higher education are here illustrated, his educational interests or his decision to live a new superior training itinerary highlights issues related to his work improvement and family essence. Aged between 51 and 60, he entered the University to study electrical engineering, through the quota program implemented by UFPB and intended to employees of the institution. José came from public school and works as boiler operator at the institution where he studies. To attend this advanced course means "a dream comes true to move up work and improve living conditions." However, for him it is very difficult to tackle subjects that require calculus and he confesses that he would have abandoned the course if it were not for family's encouragement. Not to "disappoint his family" even with learning difficulties, he claims to be able to overcome these obstacles "with dedication and personal effort" (Interview No. 1, held in 20.07.2012).

In some cases, the adult decision to enroll and remain in higher education is not directly associated with monetary benefits or employment opportunity, but it is revealed as a satisfactory response to family expectations. Studies by Lahire (1997) tell stories of well-succeeded school careers of students from families with

no scholarity and it is explained as a way to meet the expectations of parents. According to Lahire in these cases the children know they please parents when they go well in school (Lahire 1997 *op. cit*. 169).

Other studies by Piotto (2008), Vianna (1998), Portes (2000) Silva (1999), and Barbosa (2004) evidence family action or expectation on school careers and higher education. Piotto research, for example, shows that for many families, the enrollment of children in college, besides pride and joy, produced changes in their way of life. There are also cases where families have not invested in their higher education in their own time when they were younger but act differently to the education of their children (Lahire 1997, *op. cit*.). In other cases, the children, many of them graduated, encourage parents to return to their studies allowing them to have better training (Teixeira 2011a, 2011b; Beltran, 2013; Prestes & Silva 2014).

Celeste's narrative fits into this situation. Little businesswoman, aged between 41 Y 50 and student of Psychology at UFPB. She said that dropped out of secondary school because she had many difficulties in different matters. Her previous schooling career was marked by negative experiences because of her few years of basic education and did not completed high school at the right age. Recently, she, encouraged by her son who attends the University, completed those high school exams for adults and was admitted to higher education. Without educational basics to keep up with the course, she faced difficulties and almost dropped out deciding to stay because her effective exposure at the institution would favor new friends, and other sociability spaces. As a result of her decision to confront difficulties, she sensed that those new learning extended her knowledge and because of dedication and effort, "she was able to gradually overcome the obstacles encountered in learning process." Now, she confesses, "she feels accomplished and advances in studies." Due to her business she does not know how the diploma will help at work; she recognizes, however, "that it is changing" (Interview No. 2 on 18.04.2012).

Although educational interests related to the formative processes seem headed for individual decisions and actions, these elections, according to Lahire (2008), receive both the influence of the social milieu as influences from family relationships, though they will not function mechanical or deterministic in manner. In other words, social institutions or institutions like family, church or school, which influence (and tend to condition) individual actions also work in their decisions and educational styles and in the consequences of their decisions. Of course, not all individuals follow these constraints and for those who follow, there are variations in their patterns and behaviors (Nogueira, *op. cit*.: 19). In any case, in the context, a region with conservative and paternalistic features, family, even transformed continues to hold many meanings for individual members in their decision-making.

The narratives of these people presenting their stories of education and their versions about the reasons and decisions to remain and complete the college career, express this influence, requiring yet empirical studies to incorporate in an expanded form, information and explanations on adult decisions regarding their training routes and circumstances that facilitate or enable their implementation. So far, recognizes Dausien: "There are rather few studies that follow the track to the genesis of an individual habitus" (Alheity Dausien, *op. cit*.: 78), related to the motivations of adults with their training, incorporating their social relations macro and micro. Dausien accords with Nogueira's concerns when he tries to explain individual behavior incorporating both influences subjective dimensions as those of the macro structure (Nogueira, *op. cit*.: 20).

Other than that, it is also true that contemporary life and its demands for more training and education function as a vector of motivation for the adult to return to study, which does not prevent these decisions to face countless challenges, including 'discrimination'. It is not always easy for senior adults in regular courses that get together with young people to be considered a "different person." This 'discrimination' plus other situations penalizing family financial, employment or learning difficulties, tend to influence their decisions to remain in the educational system. Carlos, for example, aged between 51 and 60 years old, studying Occupational Therapy has a previous degree in theology, he says that he returned to university in search of higher rated area to change careers. This decision forced him to be absent from his family residing in another town. Aware that the realization of "this dream" has brought difficulties from problems "related to loneliness and access to housing, food" to those related "to the coexistence in the classroom because of his age and sex." In a predominantly female and young group, "he felt invisible and excluded, disturbing his learning and participation in collective work when required". About that he says that sometimes had to "recourse to teachers and psychologists."

For Carlos, the challenge to remain at the University assumes dimensions related problems not only financial or learning, but with other components. Thus, little hostile and not so friendly environments also function as adverse elements, to the extent that cause psychological and objective difficulties. These barriers do not arise from objective or social contingencies, as Bourdieu suggests, but also lie in the field of sociability or culture, and operate as additional costs, internalized, are transmuted into forces capable of strengthening or weakening the decisions of individuals to stay in school.

All these stories so far commented came as stories about the decision to attend college, difficulties on remaining in college and studying, reasons that enabled them to overcome the difficulties. They are all related to the needs of work or daily life with new learning opportunities. In all of them, too, all adults recognized themselves as individuals with learning deficits producing educational paths marked by abandonment and school failure, while demonstrate the low institutional recognition of their specific condition as an adult and elder individual.

The following case is different. Paulo, a retired engineer 55 years old, entered the medical course, one of the most elitist and with higher demand in college, at the first attempt, he said, "because of his experience in life and the previous practice". His parents were both doctors, he attended private school unlike the other narrators, "there is no new learning difficulty, he felt quite integrated and included in the group." He just said being critic, that excess tasks carried home "prevent him from enjoying the other offers/apprenticeships offered by the university." As an elderly, retired without financial or family problems this allows him fully pursue in his studies without concerns, "something impossible if I had small children or were in need of money." His decision to pursue a second career (similar to that of his parents) does not include financial objectives as the main goal. His plans lie in "to be hospital resident and work up to 70 years old, without any financial priority" (Interview No. 4, on 15.08.2012).

This case demonstrates the influence of status as facilitator element of permanence, while showing that, in some situations, especially for elderly it is not always work that takes on centrality in their motivations to study. Here come those other

variables related to "non-material" (Beltran, 2014), or in terms of Alheit (2007), the variables of education in "temporality" of life, or benefits in lifelong learning. According to the latter author (Alheit, 2007, apud Diniz, 2010: 210), beyond their functional and strategic aspect, the fact that people return to the cycles of formal education has also a personal significance in individual biographies. It is not only the instrumental value of education oriented to the labor market, but a compensation of deficits experienced in lifelong learning or, if preferred, a compensation on unfulfilled aspirations in education.

## CONCLUSION

The course of this essay was enlarged with the processes of schooling and adult learning in higher education level and framed in lifelong learning paradigm. It has led to reflect on this issue from empirical and explanatory approaches on access and retention of these groups in the university area.

First, on one hand highlights the implementation of democratization and expansionist policies in higher education with emphasis in lifelong education, a prolongation of the temporal and spatial dimensions of learning. This is increasingly valued in the current context and it is subjected to rapid change, insecurity and unpredictability. An educational concept that promotes conditions for the development of life projects capable of expanding contexts of freedom and individual and social responsibility.

It also showed how those expansionist and globalized dimension policies have been expanding the presence of adults in the universities and so as Beltran said, referring to European reality: "We would be no longer surprised to see on campus and in classrooms elderly among younger students" (Beltran, 2014: 62), breaking with static or discriminatory conceptions present in such sayings as "you cannot teach new tricks to old dogs".

Second, it is suggested that in complex networks that enable (or not) the lengthening of the higher educational dimensions, there is a direct relationship between motivation, success and failure. Therefore, motivation in higher education level operates both as a phenomenon that is related to the permanence or success or conversely, the abandonment (meaninglessness) and school failure. That is because adults are different from children and adolescents when they decide to enter or return to higher education, they create expectations about the chances of their studies that allow them to obtain "private and social" benefits and can change their existential conditions their personal and social world in a near future.

In the current context of "risk and exclusion," it is believed that higher education may work individual's professional and social development. Therefore, these adults must be motivated with their superior career and able to overcome difficulties and extend their emancipatory possibilities (social and economic). Those who give up, from the perspective of the current requirements in schooling, concur to reproduce situations of inequality and exclusion that reflect immediate in their life and work conditions.

Third, as a contribution to the theoretical discussion about the educational choices of adults and their school success, it has been suggested with real cases, that the logic of these decisions, whether related to absenteeism or success school intersect in complex ways micro and macro levels and subjective. This allows the

circumscribed individuals to similar social conditions, assume different behaviors, as seen in theoretical and analytical perspectives developed by Alheit and Dausien (Alheit and Dausien, 2000 in Alheit, 2013, *op. cit*.: 147-150) and Diniz (2010), and in interviews with adults students and discussed here. It should not be forgotten that motivations are also related to the individual identities, multiple realities reflex, life trajectories and future prospects.

Recognizing this fact, here conceptualized in the field of educational decisions that lead to academic success can also be thought of as something that strengthens the purposes of conceptions and philosophical learning principles in lifelong education. All this together with political expansions to higher education reaffirms the exercise of citizenship at the expense of possible adverse situations.

In a context which the expansion of educational facilities has skillfully combined the crisis of work and employment, with widespread insecurity, it is believed that adult education is capable of give meaning and answers to the motivational and experiential way for these groups, despite the uncertainties and unpredictability of the present. As Beltran & Iñigo-Low & Mata-Segreda, commented, "Given the complexity of the world, present and future challenges, higher education has the social responsibility to advance toward understanding problems from social, economic, scientific and cultural dimensions and the capacity to address them" (UNESCO, 2009, in Beltran & Iñigo-Low & Mata-Segreda, 2013, p.145).

Faced with all that, new research challenging issues arise: What changes occur in the lives of those people after completing their college careers? Did expectations that gave meaning to their motivations to remain in higher education level materialize? What worldview scenario related to education and learning do they envision? Did they become different individuals? In what way? Given these questions still unanswered, the need for further research following these adults in higher education is reaffirmed. The questions should address the devices or the motivations that now they use to meet the everyday struggles overcome difficulties and succeed in their new lifestyles and new learning paths. These new perspectives should be able to potentialize participation and social intervention.

Last, according to Beltran on the social benefits of education for adult, it is considered that: lifelong education "can create chances invaluable to evaluate and change our own biographies, our identities, our commitments and responsibilities as actors guided by the horizon of full citizenship. This education "can move our frames of meaning, and look at the world differently and count them differently" (Beltran, 2014: 69).

Finally, if lifelong education considered as "a new educational contract" –aims to provide the individual preparation and condition for facing new social challenges, a sense of full citizenship; this claim has to be converted into a firm commitment by all to the lack of educational policy and educational procedures aimed to this purpose. As mere rhetoric to legitimize social and economic mechanisms, higher education policies implanted will tend to reproduce inequalities and social disconnection; histories of academic failure at school.

As a conclusion, if it is conceivable that lifelong education is an essential life force for creativity and the achievement of "happiness", it is necessary to continue to persevere. Regardless the financial achievements, education expands the possibilities of citizenship, i.e., "supports the construction of successful responses to meet the challenges of promoting integral human development" (Guillen, 2012,

in Beltran & Iñigo-Low & Mata-Segreda, 2013, p.145). This is, in fact, what it is expected from education.

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