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Higher education inclusivity: when the disability enriches the university

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ABSTRACT
This article analyses the perspectives of faculty members on disability in higher education. Their testimonies give value to the attitudes and qualities of university students with disabilities and show how they influence their professional and personal development. We carried out a qualitative study, through interviews with 119 faculty members of different fields from 10 Spanish universities, who were nominated by students with disabilities for developing inclusive pedagogy. We conducted a progressive analysis of the data using a system of categories and codes. The results describe the motivations that drove the participants to respond to the needs of students with disabilities, the personal and professional impact posed by the challenge of adjusting the teaching and learning processes, and the perceptions of the faculty members toward the contributions of these students to the university. In the conclusions section, we delve into the need of universities to embrace inclusivity. The data provided by this study reveal that disability can be a valuable asset in a university context that dissociates from the deficit lens and acknowledges that all students are important and able to learn when the attitudes and conditions are appropriate.

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Introduction
Universities are essential to improving the quality of life of people, given their great relevance in the making of economic and social decisions, their capacity to increase employment opportunities and their contribution against social exclusion (Lipka, Forkosh-Baruch, & Meer, 2019). However, in the case of non-traditional groups, such as people with disabilities, in spite of the efforts that universities are making (creating regulations that guarantee the rights of students, disability support offices and teacher training in inclusive education), the literature shows that there is still much to achieve. This is reflected by the fact that, despite the commitment to ensure the access of students with disabilities, the dropout rate in this group is still high (Veitch, Strehlow, & Boyd, 2018). Several studies, such as that by Cotton, Nash, and Kneale (2017), have reported some differences between countries and institutions in this dropout rate. This suggests that...
differences in educational policies and practices can determine whether students will finish or drop out of their degrees, which, in turn, shows the need to implement measures that ensure the academic success of these students (Gibson, 2015).

Several sectors of society demand universities to become more accessible to students who have not been traditionally represented (Kendall, 2016). It cannot be ignored that developing an inclusive culture requires a series of values and attitudes that respect students as individuals that come from diverse contexts and who have different learning needs (McKay & Devlin, 2016). Some studies, such as that by Collins, Azmat, and Rentschler (2018), report on successful cases in the university context and identified certain protecting factors that contribute to social and educational inclusion. Some of these are based on family and social (friends and classmates) support, which facilitate their academic experiences. Other factors are related to university institutions, especially faculty members, as decisive support (O’Brien, Bonati, Gadow, & Slee, 2019; Strnadová, Hájková, & Květoňová, 2015). Students value their positive attitudes, pedagogical practices and willingness to provide reasonable adjustments (Gale, Mills, & Cross, 2017).

However, most of the studies published to date on this topic demonstrate the existence of excluding practices and conclude that students with disabilities must face a series of barriers that hinder their permanence at university (Love et al., 2015; Vlachou & Papananou, 2018). These students consider that they have to work harder than other students, as they have to manage both their disability and their studies (Seale, Geogerson, Mamas, & Swain, 2015). Likewise, faculty members have been identified as one of the main barriers (Love et al., 2015). Students with disabilities point out that, in some cases, faculty members either have a negative attitude or are not willing to make the necessary reasonable adjustments. This may be due to the fact that these professionals do not feel that they have the necessary training and information to respond to the educational needs of students with disabilities (Martins, Borges, & Gonçalves, 2018; Zhang, Rosen, Cheng, & Li, 2018).

In fact, most universities revolve around a deficit model, in which the student is identified as the focus of the problem and faculty members do not act preventively but only when the student encounters a difficulty (Wray & Houghton, 2019). On the other hand, an inclusive approach leads faculty members to act proactively, designing accessible curricula from the beginning, in which all students would have their place.

Although there is an increasing number of studies gathering the perceptions of students with disabilities, there are few researchers who focus on analyzing the perspectives of faculty members about supporting these students within an educational framework. In the context of higher education, the concept of inclusive pedagogy is starting to be used (Gale et al., 2017). Previously, in the context of compulsory education, Florian (2015) approached the perspective of teachers who develop an inclusive pedagogy. According to this author, inclusive pedagogy represents an educational approach that responds to human differences without depending predominantly on individualized approaches that involve offering students something additional or different, thus avoiding marginalization in the classroom.

Gale et al. (2017), focusing on the university context, identified three dimensions of inclusive pedagogy: beliefs, design and actions. According to them, it is important to consider the idea that all students give value to the learning environment; that is, faculty members must value the differences of their students and the actions that work with them before imposing default and homogenous actions for everyone. Faculty members
who carry out inclusive pedagogy are characterized as being very sensitive to diversity and eager to deal with the barriers that may hinder the participation and learning of students. They are professionals who practise different methodological strategies when they realize that their usual methods do not reach all students (Byra, 2006).

Some studies conclude that there are faculty members who have positive attitudes toward these students and make additional efforts to satisfy their needs, although they do not always know how to do so (Becker & Palladino, 2016; Fossey et al., 2017). Although these professionals are aware of their own need for training and resources to attend to their students, they have an open perception toward differences, in this case toward disability, and they are willing to develop new approaches to apply an inclusive pedagogy (Moriña & Carballo, 2017).

This pedagogical approach, barely used in higher education, promotes the learning potential of students with disabilities and encourages faculty members to give opportunities to every one of them, benefiting all students, with or without disabilities (Bunbury, 2018; Veitch et al., 2018). This is especially relevant, since different studies have concluded that higher education offers opportunities for students to experience processes of educational and social inclusion. Universities, in the case of people with disabilities, can be considered as a vehicle to improve their quality of life, posing an important experience of empowerment (Järkestig Berggren, Rowan, Bergbäck, & Blomberg, 2016).

Although these studies have approached the enrichment that universities offer to students, the contribution of students with disabilities to universities, in general, and to faculty members, in particular, has not yet been analyzed. Therefore, the aim of this study is to fill this gap in the academic literature, since we intend to explore the following aspects from the opinions of faculty members who carry out inclusive pedagogy: (1) What were their motivations to satisfy the needs of students with disabilities? (2) What professional and personal implications derived from their experiences with students with disabilities? (3) What was the contribution of students with disabilities to the university?

**Method**

**Participants**

The results of this study are part of a larger research project (‘Inclusive education at university: faculty members’ narratives’) that is focused on analyzing three aspects of faculty members who engage in inclusive pedagogy – what they do, how they do it and why they do it. In order to guarantee the adequacy of the sample, the participants were exclusively nominated by their students with disabilities. We used two strategies to contact them. First, the support services of the ten universities that participated in this study provided the information about the project to students with disabilities of all branches of knowledge and requested their voluntary participation to nominate the faculty members who, in their opinion, were carrying out inclusive pedagogy. Our second strategy was to use the snowball technique (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). To this end, we asked students with disabilities who were known by the research team members for participating in previous projects, as well as colleagues who knew students with disabilities.

Once the students were identified, the support services or the researchers contacted them via email, explaining the project to them and asking for their participation.
Specifically, they were asked to recommend or nominate any faculty member who made them feel included in the classroom during their time at the university. We indicated some characteristics that could help to identify this type of professional: he/she believes in the possibilities of all students; facilitates the learning processes; his/her teaching is active, with different methodological strategies; cares about the learning of the students; is flexible, eager to help; motivates the students; builds close relationships; favours interactions between students; and makes students feel important and part of the group.

A total of 186 faculty members were contacted, 5 of whom declined to participate as they either had no experience or spare time, or they were on sick leave, and 39 of them did not reply to the emails and phone calls. A total of 119 faculty members from 10 Spanish universities participated in the study. Twenty-four of them were from Art and Humanities (20.16%), 14 from STEM (11.76%), 16 from Health Sciences (13.44%), 25 from Social Sciences and Law (21.01%), and 40 from Education Science (33.61%). Regarding gender, 58.33% were males and 41.66% were females. With respect to age, most of the participants were between 36 and 60 years old, 7 of them were under 35 years (7.78%) and 4 were over 60 years (4.42%). Regarding teaching experience, most of the faculty members had over 10 years (68.35%), only 6 had less than 5 years (6.25%) and 24 had between 5 and 10 years (25.4%). All faculty members had experience attending to the needs derived from disabilities. Sensory disabilities (visual or hearing impairment) were the most frequent (40.97%), followed by physical (23.68%), mental (18.79%) and poor-health conditions (10.52%), and learning difficulties (6.01%).

**Context of the Spanish universities**

The participants of this study were faculty members from 10 Spanish universities. In Spain, the current legislation that governs the higher education system aims to harmonize the national system with those within the European Higher Education Area. Consequently, official university degree courses are divided into three stages: undergraduate, postgraduate and doctorate. Virtual learning platforms (Blackboard or Moodle) are used as resources to support teaching and learning processes in on-site Spanish universities, in addition to face-to-face education. The professional development training of faculty members in Spain is voluntary and free. To this end, universities offer, through training centres, courses about different topics. However, training on inclusive education and disabilities is not frequent. Lastly, all universities have student support services, including attention to students with disabilities. Universities are required by law to provide these services, in addition to making the reasonable adjustments for such students.

**Instruments**

The research team designed a semi-structured interview script. The following were some of the questions included in the script: What led you to care for students with disabilities? What did you like the most about having students with disabilities in your subject? What do you think students with disabilities can contribute to the university? How did it influence you to have students with disabilities in your classroom, at the personal and professional level?
We discussed and tested the script with 15 faculty members who did not participate in the study. All 15 of them had previous experience at teaching students with disabilities and came from the different branches of knowledge considered in this study. All the necessary modifications were made according to the pilot participants’ suggestions and recommendations. The average duration of each interview was one hour and thirty minutes. The data-gathering process was slow, since we had to postpone the interviews, up to six months in some cases, to adapt to the schedule of the participants.

Most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face ($n = 89$). However, 18 faculty members did the interview via skype and 12 over the phone, since they could not do it otherwise. All the interviews were recorded in audio and the participants gave their written consent to the recording and to the use of their data for the purposes of the research.

**Data analysis**

All the information was transcribed and analyzed through a progressive qualitative data analysis. We carried out a progressive coding, proposed by Huber (2004). First, a broad and generic category system (e.g., motivations, contributions to the university, experience, or impact) was created. In a subsequent coding phase, new subcodes appeared about the fundamental topics. Each of these codes was analyzed for potential itemization or merging with other codes, which allowed organizing and interpreting the data gathered with the category system. Thus, for example, the motivation code, which was referred to what led the faculty members to care about students with disabilities, included 11 subcodes: teaching responsibility, interest for all students, passion for teaching, helpful attitude, sensitivity, challenge, enrichment, capacities and attitudes of the students, previous professional experience at the university, professional experience outside of the university, and personal reasons.

All the transcribed interviews were analyzed at least by two researchers, leaving those unclear data fragments for the consensus of the research team members. In the analysis process, the MaxQDA14 software was used to manage the large amount of information gathered.

**Ethical issues**

Regarding the ethical issues of this research, by having the participants sign an informed consent, it was guaranteed that the information would be treated confidentially and anonymously. In addition, the participants were informed that if they did not wish to continue participating in the study, their data would be discarded and deleted. The names of the participants were replaced with numbers. An official translator translated the participants’ quotes from Spanish to English. The authors of this article verified and assured the accuracy of the translation.

**Results**

In this study, all the faculty members shared their commitment to offering an inclusive educational response to students with disabilities. Many of the participants did not
know that they were carrying out inclusive pedagogy and, in many cases, they implemented practices to include students, since they considered that it was their duty as faculty members; others believed that it was a matter of humanity and sensitivity toward the difficulties of students.

Motivations that guided the actions of the faculty members toward inclusivity

The main motivation, shared by all participants, was that they cared about every student, and not only about those with disabilities. According to them, all students were equal and understood that they were not doing anything extraordinary, since it was normal to care, empathize and give a humane treatment. They considered that students with disabilities were equal to the other students and that they needed special attention only sometimes. In this sense, they offered their help whenever they needed it.

Participant (P) 45: I think that it is the involvement I have with all my students. They are just like any other student; they just require a little bit more of my help. I care about the whole group equally.

They admitted that, although they were students who, sometimes, required special support, their role as faculty members was to avoid inequality or any type of discrimination. They all stated that students had to find a safe and friendly place where they can participate actively and feel welcome, accompanied and as part of the group.

According to these faculty members, it was very important to use strategies and mechanisms available to them with the aim of helping their students and contribute to their inclusion in the context of the classroom. They had a clear rule of conduct by which the actions that they carried out had to be aimed at removing the possible barriers and working in favour of inclusivity, students’ rights and social justice.

In this sense, some participants, aware of their importance as role models, stated that the way they addressed and connected with students with disabilities aimed to contribute to their social inclusion. They reported that, sometimes, some of the classmates were insecure in the way they interacted with them. Therefore, the actions of faculty members could be an example of the importance of natural interaction.

On the other hand, some of the participants acknowledged that having previous professional experiences with vulnerable groups, or experiences related to education in other stages prior to the university level, provided them with a privileged perspective, since they had information and knowledge about the educational response to disabilities in other non-segregated contexts.

P15: I think that my experience as a teacher in secondary education is what drove me to gain special interest, since in my high school this matter is tackled in a very personalized manner and at all levels.

All participants stated that their concern appeared for the first time when they found a student with a disability in the classroom and had to search for strategies to attend to his/her needs. They thought that, given the reality of the classroom, the best approach was to naturalize the presence of these students and give them the support they needed.

This belief was also justified by the idea that it was their duty as faculty members. A common characteristic among the participants was that they did not think of their
actions as being especially admirable, since they considered that including students with disabilities was normal and expected from them as faculty members. They stated that their duty was to make sure that all students were motivated and learned, regardless of their circumstances and skills. They understood that they were responsible for ensuring that their students participated, and they felt that they had to facilitate this by being good professionals.

Lastly, some of the faculty members said that the sensitivity they had toward students with disabilities came from personal motivations, linked to living with disability or having close relatives or friends with disabilities. This fact made them more sensitive and drove them to be involved with their students.

P39: I have a four-year younger brother who became paraplegic as a result of a car accident when he was 23 years old. This made me get deeply involved.

Thus, the profile of these faculty members was that of a sensitive and empathic professional, eager to improve professionally and with great vocation and passion for teaching.

P73: I simply do it because I love teaching.

Professional and personal implications for faculty members in their experiences with students with disabilities

Most of the participants agreed that students with disabilities had had a great professional and personal impact on them, which had posed a challenge in some cases. They recalled this experience positively, since it had contributed to improving their professional development. Consequently, they stated that this was an enriching experience through which they had learned about disabilities. Thus, most of these faculty members showed great satisfaction, not only when they saw their students advance, but also due to the fact that they had progressed with them along the way. Moreover, it made them feel fulfilled to know that their actions helped their students to achieve the learning objectives of their academic subjects.

P108: I also learn, which makes me reconsider the way I work and become aware of certain things that, otherwise, I would have never integrated as a faculty member.

The faculty members agreed that students with disabilities made them improve their teaching, leading them to reconsider different teaching perspectives. They thought that the presence of these students posed teaching challenges that required the faculty members to improve relevant aspects, such as the organization of the groups, the methodology or activities proposed, and alternative evaluation methods. They commented that, in many cases, these aspects were equally beneficial for the rest of the classmates. Thus, these changes in the teaching perspectives of the faculty members were caused by the impact of students with disabilities in aspects related to teaching reflection, the acquisition of knowledge, strategies and the increased motivation promoted by these students.

Furthermore, the participants stated that their experience was very rewarding, as it taught them not only knowledge about disability, but also teaching strategies that they
did not know before. In addition, some of them mentioned that this knowledge and the strategies were very useful to all students in general, not only to those with disabilities.

In this sense, some of the participants said that they would like to continue teaching students with disabilities in the future, since the experience allowed them to learn, question their teaching methods and propose changes that contributed to improving their teaching practices.

P94: From the professional viewpoint, I found it very enriching, as I have learned a lot from them. In fact, I would like to have more students with disabilities, because I totally believe that a student with a disability offers training and learning for faculty members to keep improving.

A large majority of the participants described students with disabilities as very sensitive and grateful people toward everyone who cared for them. The human component was essential for learning and bonding in the context of the classroom, beyond the academic content. Thus, the faculty members added that the feedback obtained from these students and their thankful comments helped them to improve as educators and feel fulfilled with their job.

Regarding professional development, some of the participants highlighted that these students had given them a greater teaching incentive, since it was a professional challenge that brought changes both in their teaching methods and in the way in which they interacted with their students. This reality had led them to train themselves with the aim of being able to attend to their students, and they felt more prepared for this challenge.

Furthermore, students with disabilities also had a positive influence on the personal aspect of the faculty members. In this sense, the participants pointed out that these students taught them to value their effort, to change their values scale and to enrich their reality, as they empathized with the life experiences of these students. They said that they made them look at life from a different perspective, providing greater tolerance and respect, thus reinforcing values such as empathy and sensitivity toward diversity.

P97: I believe it is a wake-up call. It seems to me that it transforms our perspective, even the fact of being present. Seeing a student walk around the university with a walking stick changes your perspective. It makes disability present.

Most of the faculty members agreed that the main characteristics they found and liked the most in students with disabilities was their desire to excel, their capacity for resilience and their strong will. In fact, some of the participants stated that students with disabilities had made them become better people, since they contributed to removing stereotypes and prejudices they used to have. These statements show the extraordinary impact that these students had on their faculty members to adopt an inclusive educational approach, in which the eradication of prejudices constituted an initial step.

P22: It made me become a better person. Every day I feel like a better person and a better professional, and I believe that my colleagues feel the same.

**Contributions of students with disabilities to the university**

The participants agreed that the fact that these students were part of the university was truly beneficial in many aspects, since this made diversity become naturalized and
present in society, and they claimed that the university had to be a reflection of this. Although some of these contributions have been previously mentioned, we thought it would be convenient to organize this section with those proposals that we consider most relevant and contribute to the enrichment of the university: peer support environment, teaching methodology, example of self-improvement, removal of physical barriers, humanity and evidence of social progress.

Peer support environment
Some participants mentioned the team environment that was generated when diversity was valued by the classmates and peer support predominated. These were essential aspects for inclusive education to become a reality.

P35: What I liked most, on the one hand, was the attitude of these students and, on the other hand, the attitude of their classmates. I have not seen one case in which the classmates did not integrate them. On the contrary, their classmates are always helpful.

Change in the teaching methodology
The participants stated that the presence of students with disabilities posed teaching challenges that involved the faculty members to improve relevant aspects, such as the organization of subjects, methodology and, specifically, the proposed activities, which, in many cases, were equally beneficial for the rest of the classmates. The changes included the following: presenting the information, adjustments in the activities, organizing the groups, and different types of evaluation. These changes influenced all students, that is, with and without disabilities.

P28: Well, this can also enrich the university, since, thanks to them, we can see other points of view and develop different methodologies, which can be very fruitful for other students.

Example of self-improvement and hardwork
Likewise, the faculty members pointed out that the contributions of these students did not derive from their condition of being disabled, but from their own individuality, and that they could contribute exactly as much as any other student. However, the participants highlighted that, in many cases, these students had common life experiences of self-improvement, which imbued society with a way of being and behaving that differed from that of the rest of the students. They explained that the histories of these students were valuable examples of self-improvement for the rest of their classmates. This strong will and desire to excel was also reflected by their desire to learn and their greater interest and motivation with respect to the rest of the students, which led them to tackle all their university tasks with a positive attitude.

P18: I saw that the effort they put on participation, cooperation and doing things well was greater than the effort that their classmates usually put on these aspects.

Removing architectural barriers
The participants mentioned the removal of architectural barriers as another type of contribution to the university. The presence of students with disabilities promoted physical
modifications in their environment that turned out to be beneficial to the whole university community.

P26: A simple ramp for instance. When a ramp is installed, you can see many people using it, especially older people. Why? Because this way we avoid using the stairs, which causes knee pain for us. That is a modification for people in a wheelchair, but it is also useful for others. I think everything is enriching.

**Humanity**

In general terms, the participants considered that their experiences with students with disabilities had provided them with humanity and had given a meaning to the university, which was receptive of and open to human diversity.

P19: It can transform us into what we must be, a university that teaches all sorts of people for an informed and educated society with all sorts of people.

**Social progress**

Lastly, regarding social advance, some faculty members considered that, in some university programmes, having students with disabilities constituted a reference for some work sectors that had very few people with disabilities. Therefore, they considered that, in the near future, making disability visible in certain professions would be an important step for this group and for society in general.

P75: I like to say this when they struggle personally, because they really are included and can participate at the university. When they get it, it is not only an achievement for them; it is social progress. It even makes disability visible in certain professions where people with disabilities are under-represented.

**Conclusions and discussion**

The experiences with students with disabilities that the faculty members describe in this study prove to be an essential analysis dimension in the framework of a multifaceted perspective of inclusive pedagogy. They allow us to identify certain teaching motivations that are constituting a stimulus for students to continue and complete their degrees successfully. Furthermore, the testimonies of faculty members also help us to recognize that students with disabilities have an impact on the faculty, enriching their professional and personal development, as well as on the university itself as an institution. Although previous studies have identified faculty members as a barrier to student inclusion (Martins et al., 2018), our work shows the other side of the coin, regarding positive attitudes and inclusive actions. The participants of this study were nominated by their own students with disabilities for considering them as key elements in their learning process. This is the main contribution of our study, since the perspective adopted has not been approached before, and it provides a different view on disability in the university scope.

These faculty members, regardless of their branch of knowledge, have shown a common profile and a ‘way of being a faculty member’, characterized by their sensitivity and empathy toward disability, showing their interest for all students, being eager to improve professionally, and demonstrating an incredible passion for teaching. They are
professionals who enjoy their job and believe that the concept of inclusive education involves all students. Other studies, although focused on earlier educational stages, have drawn a similar teacher profile (Forlin, 2013; Pantić & Florian, 2015).

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that, according to these faculty members, attending to students with disabilities is not considered as something ‘exceptional’ or ‘extraordinary’, since these students are regarded as any other student with the same value. These data contradict those of previous studies, which concluded that some faculty members did not make reasonable adjustments, since they considered it favouritism (Bunbury, 2018; Kendall, 2016), whereas other studies have reported on faculty members who showed negative attitudes (Martins et al., 2018). Furthermore, the participants of the present study consider that the role of students with disabilities is essential in the teaching and learning processes, since the actions they carry out for them influence the rest of the students. Therefore, the presence of students with disabilities is considered as an opportunity to keep improving their teaching practices. In their classrooms, all students are welcome and they believe in the learning potential of all of them (Veitch et al., 2018). This confirms the contributions of Bunbury (2018) and McKay and Devlin (2016), who concluded that faculty members who base their actions on the principles of inclusive education will benefit all students.

The attitudes shown by these faculty members demonstrate the importance of these when developing inclusive designs and actions. Therefore, university systems must be encouraged to implement initiatives that raise awareness in the university community about the inclusive response to disability. In fact, there are studies, such as that of Becker and Palladino (2016), which conclude that successful inclusivity requires faculty members to develop and maintain a positive attitude. In this sense, training is a powerful tool that should be implemented by universities. This should be designed with the aim of sensitizing, informing and training faculty members in inclusive education, as recommended in previous studies (Black, Weinberg, & Brodwin, 2014; Moriña & Carballo, 2017).

Thus, it seems that delving into the experiences of these faculty members, who carried out a pedagogical approach that reached all students, contributes to a research line that can be used to fight stereotypes and break the stigma that, in many cases, surrounds students with disabilities in the university scope (Vaccaro, Daly-Cano, & Newman, 2015). Therefore, we believe that our research helps to discard the deficit model that is strongly reflected in a large part of the literature about students with disabilities, who are considered as inherently ‘problematic’ (Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2013). On the contrary, in our case, disability is considered as an opportunity for enrichment and growth at the professional and personal levels. This study reveals a profile of faculty members who consider that his/her duty is to give a quality response to all student. The participants hold their students with disabilities in high regard as evidenced by their comments showing their admiration of students. Among these contributions, there is a topic that has gained importance internationally, that is, teaching accountability (Unesco, 2017). In fact, it has been shown that teaching accountability criteria must be established and that a better quality control over teaching is not enough. In addition to this, the sense of responsibility of faculty members must also be valued, not as mechanic responses to external demands, but as a constant process of reflection and willingness to improve their teaching.
Undoubtedly, the teaching profession requires high doses of responsibility and commitment that must be guaranteed to provide quality teaching and learning processes.

Another conclusion of this study is the valuation of disability itself. While other studies have provided a perspective about the inherent difficulties of attending to disability (Vlachou & Papananou, 2018), our work focuses on its benefits and contributions. In this study, disability is a challenge for the faculty members, which contributed to their professional development and, as suggested by the participants, enriched them personally. This leads us to think that universities should not only work on the access, permanence and success of students with disabilities; they should also make use of the great resource that these students pose as an example to others: they have a strong will and are eager to learn and excel, and they show great motivation and interest, despite the adversities they have to overcome. Beyond naturalizing the diversity that is present in society, these attitudes and qualities may inspire the rest of the students. Furthermore, their experiences may also favour inclusivity in other educational, economic and social scopes.

Lastly, we strongly believe in the idea that it is necessary to humanize the role of the faculty member, in order to create more inclusive universities, both educationally and socially. This entails reconsidering our beliefs, training constantly to increase our knowledge, designing and accompanying, with the hope that everyone can participate and act together to achieve the success of all students. The data provided by this study suggest that inclusion is possible and that disability, far from being interpreted as a difficulty, is an additional value in a university that moves forward and away from the deficit lens, acknowledging that every student is important and has something to contribute, both to the university itself and to society.

**Limitations and future research**

One of the limitations of this study was the time allocated to the recruitment of the participants. The process took one year, as we had to negotiate with the support services of the different universities to deliver the project to the students with disabilities (who were going to be the ones in charge of selecting the faculty members that carried out inclusive pedagogy). In this process, in order to access more students with the aim of increasing the sample size, we contacted different universities and people that were not considered in the initial project.

The time spent gathering the data was also a limitation, since the faculty members were overloaded with research and teaching tasks, and it was difficult to find suitable hours to conduct two long interviews. Another limitation was the fact that we did not conduct an analysis by universities or by field of knowledge. However, this was not the purpose of the study, and no significant data were found to allow differentiating a particular analysis by university or by field of knowledge.

Nevertheless, despite these limitations, we consider that our study is novel and fills a gap in the research line about higher and inclusive education. Our findings give value to students with disabilities. Faculty members, as direct witnesses of their attitudes and qualities, provide a privileged view on disability. Future studies could include observations in the classrooms, in order to analyse these good practices and explore in more detail the actions carried out by these faculty members. Moreover, students with disabilities could be interviewed with the aim of detecting the most effective strategies that contribute to their
learning and participation. Lastly, the rest of the students could also be interviewed, in order to identify and describe the good practices of faculty members.

**Disclosure statement**

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