

THE ITALIAN PATH: FROM THE SEEDS OF SCHOOL INTEGRATION TO THE CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE OF INCLUSION

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Abstract

The contribution, through the gaze of Special Pedagogy, intends to study the experience of the phenomenon of scholastic and social inclusion achieved in Italy over the last fifty years.

Emerges a complex and gradual regulatory, cultural, educational and didactic path which in promoting integration for pupils with disabilities, from nursery to university, allowed to guarantee the full participation for all. Rather than being characterized as a process dedicated exclusively to a particular portion of society, inclusion has become a progressive reality that has favored the creation of networks between institutions, has promoted dialogue between different disciplinary fields, it has encouraged the search for strategies and tools to create accessible contexts and has contributed the whole society's democratic and cultural development. The same special-pedagogical gaze, which allows to identify the connections and the reticular nodes at the base of the process development, it becomes the cultural tool through which target the numerous critical issues and challenges that inclusion still presupposes.

Attraverso lo sguardo della Pedagogia Speciale, il contributo analizza l'esperienza del fenomeno dell'inclusione scolastica e sociale realizzati in Italia nell'ultimo cinquantennio. Ne emerge un percorso normativo, culturale, educativo e didattico complesso e graduale che nel favorire l'integrazione agli alunni con disabilità, dal nido all'università, ha permesso di garantire condizioni di piena partecipazione per tutti. Piuttosto che caratterizzarsi come processo dedicato esclusivamente ad una particolare porzione della società, l'inclusione è divenuta una realtà progressiva che ha favorito la creazione di rapporti reticolari tra istituzioni, ha promosso il dialogo tra ambiti disciplinari differenti, ha incentivato la ricerca di strategie e di strumenti per realizzare contesti accessibili e ha contribuito allo sviluppo democratico e culturale dell'intera società. Lo stesso sguardo pedagogico-speciale che permette di individuare i nessi e i nodi reticolari alla base dello sviluppo di tale processo diviene lo strumento culturale attraverso il quale tragguardare le numerose criticità e sfide che l'inclusione ancora presuppone.

Keywords

Special Pedagogy; Inclusion; Disabled Student; Special Educational Needs; Social Inclusion.
Pedagogia Speciale; Inclusione; Alunni con Disabilità; Bisogni Educativi Speciali; Inclusione Sociale.

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From the right to education to social emancipation paths

When reflecting on the inclusion of people with disabilities, it is necessary to wonder not only on the condition experienced by the individuals but on the complex interactions that these experiences have with communities, institutions, political and regulatory systems, services and social networks (Canevaro, 2021; Canevaro et al., 2021; Canevaro & Ianes, 2018; Canevaro & Malaguti, 2014; de Anna, 2014; Gaspari, 2014; Gelati, 2004; Mura, 2016).

In this contribution, the most significant moments, through which inclusion in the school was articulated, are recalled through a historical-pedagogical matrix perspective reading - supported by the special-pedagogical perspective - so as to contribute to the clarification of the cultural, civil and organizational presuppositions that have characterized the long course and the role that this has played in supporting the ethical-civil progress of the whole society.

On a national and international level, the development of inclusion processes is closely related to the important political, cultural and social changes of the Twentieth century.

Specifically, in Italy, school inclusion has begun to take shape thanks to the commitment of disabled people associations and their families who, between the 1920s and 1940s, they made the right to schooling possible and obtained the legal recognition of people with sensory impairments.

These emancipatory impulses, even if sometimes downplayed (Mura, 2004, 2007, 2009), have further evolved with Law 118 of 1971 and have been affirmed with the reform dictated by Law 517 of 1977.

This last measure, starting the integration process of pupils with disabilities in primary and secondary schools, has introduced a new professional, the specialized teacher for support activities, and has provided for a collaborative and coordinative approach between the school, health and socio-pedagogical specialists of the area.

The protection and promotion of school inclusion have become the driving force behind important changes in school institution itself. Indeed, has emerged the need to improve the quality of education in general, with the personalization of didactic interventions, with a holistic approach capable of recognizing and enhancing the contextual elements useful for creating a resource and supports network (Cottini, 2017a; Mura, 2015).

These are key points from which arose and matured the further requests for recognition and full participation in the multiple spheres of social and civil life for disabled people. Indeed, over time it is possible to observe a greater legislative effort was needed to support the objectives achieved and to create the conditions to guarantee the right to inclusion in the further levels of school and university education, to the processes job placement and professional qualification, to personal and identity fulfillment in the sports, public and political fields (Canevaro et al., 2021; de Anna, 2009; Mura, 2007, 2020; Pavone, 2010).

A fundamental milestone in this sense is represented by the Framework Law 104/92, which, embracing the entire life span, tried to respond to individuals and family's needs. A regulatory provision thanks to which have been established the constitutive elements of school, work and social inclusion with interventions and reticular services that involve educational and health institutions, local agencies and non-profit third sector organizations. The law has established the need to ensure school inclusion through the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), the planning and operational document that has been configured as a fundamental instrument for the consultation and implementation of educational interventions capable of involving different actors.

As the Education for All and inclusion's principles begin to spread and even at international level with the Standards Rules and the Declaration of Salamanca publication (UN, 1993; UNESCO, 1994), in Italy the 90s were fruitful for implementing network interventions between institutions and supporting the implementation of emancipation paths thanks to Law no. 162/98. It is, indeed, a further regulatory measure aimed at social inclusion that, through realization of Personalized Plans, promote people with disabilities autonomy and provide support to their families. In the same period there has been a greater commitment to accompany young people with disabilities in achieving the existential goals that characterize adult life. The enactment of Law no. 68/99, indeed, it has ensured access to employment, and the Law no. 17/99 it has encouraged university education.

At the beginning of the new millennium, the management of services was transferred to local authorities with Law no. 328/2000 which invested the Municipalities with the responsibility to drawing up the Individual Project, to coordinating different services and institutions, including schools, to plan together and implement educational interventions aimed at guaranteeing a better quality of life and thus able to prevent, eliminate or reduce need conditions and disadvantage (Mura, 2007).

The set of these measures, aimed at contributing to the achievement of emancipation and inclusive objectives of people with disabilities, it is the result of a gradual maturation of awareness, even institutional, about the value of networking, of inter-institutional co-responsibilities and of the relationships between organizations and different community subjects.

Inclusion and teachers' professional development

Inclusion has been taking place as a dynamic phenomenon, nourished with the continuous impulse offered by scientific research, with the autonomy's experimentation of the different bodies, with the active contribution of the various social actors and with political-administrative support of the state institution. Such a process took on a multi-perspective characterization which, focusing on the human person and his maturation, identifies his founding and emancipatory element in common education. The shared learning contexts, oriented towards coherent and co-responsible shared planning for the realization of authentic educational paths, have become an opportunity for growth for pupils with disabilities and their peers, as well as an opportunity for teachers' professional development.

The scientific, social and civic inclusion culture thus developed, found confirmation and support in the publication of the 2009 Ministry of Education University and Research *Guidelines*. Indeed, the text shows the school's role as an educating community, committed to creating learning and relational conditions that allow each pupil to achieve the maximum development of their potential in terms of knowledge, skills and competences. Inclusion becomes the constitutive value of the school community in a scenario that attributes significant weight to the School Heads' leadership, responsible for promoting inclusive policies. Indeed, they are supervisor for refresher and training courses for all school staff. Schools are thus involved in an innovation and investment process aimed at improving educational quality, with the enhancement of school development program that allow all pupils to share learning and experiences, with projects and initiatives that involve also parents and local authorities.

Despite some contradictions still present and the not entirely soothed delegation attitudes of many teachers, the IEP is the design tool within which curricular and specialized teachers define and integrate the learning objectives for pupils with disabilities with those envisaged for the entire class.

The needs of common planning, the encouragement of cooperation and co-responsibility of the whole teaching team have allowed, in the last forty years, to confirm the increasingly strategic weight of the specialized teacher in creating inclusive learning contexts. It is a professional profile characterized by a growing complexity of theoretical-practical knowledge, transversal skills and ethical and deontological responsibilities. The specialized teacher has gained a crucial expertise in synergistic networks creation, in the enhancement of internal and external school's resources, enhancing the interaction between pupils and collaboration between colleagues, families and institutional services in the area (de Anna, 2015; Gaspari, 2015; Mura, 2015).

The set of inclusion processes described has mobilized didactic renewal and promoted the all-class teachers' professional development. Indeed, recognizing and enhancing the different disabled pupils' ways of learning has mobilized a gradually increasing number of teachers towards the search for solutions and changes in the classroom setting organization and all school spaces accessibility. The heterogeneity educational needs require teachers' training and updating regarding inclusion issues, urges the use of Information and Communication Technologies. The increasingly accurate recognition of pupils' learning difficulties present in the classroom has oriented the teachers to acquire plural methodologies and languages, to integrate and implement their own disciplinary skills with the use of strategies and tools capable of renewing teaching.

This pedagogical perspective has thus shifted the attention from the single pupil to the whole group, towards the multiple diversities present in the class.

In this sense, the inclusive view has expanded, urging new regulatory supports to better define, explain and regulate the inclusion processes of pupils with specific learning needs. Indeed, Law no. 170/2010, in addition to having defined the access to diagnosis methods, guaranteed the use of necessary measures to encourage participation in educational activities and academic success. Also in this case, the introduction of new methodological and organizational attention has promoted the creation of training courses for teachers on the difficulties and methodologies suitable for the integrated management of pupils with specific disorders.

The culture of inclusion was further enhanced thanks to the Ministerial Directive of 27th December 2012, which extended interventions and strategies to promote inclusive processes to all pupils who have specific developmental disorders. The Personalized Teaching Plan has become, in this sense, the project document which guide the teachers' work in the development of individualized and personalized paths intervention. At the same time, important cultural investments have been planned for the higher education of teachers, with the establishment of university courses and training courses on school inclusion issues provided by the Territorial Support Centers.

With the publication of the Ministerial Circular of 6th March 2013, operational indications were offered for the preparation of the Training Offer Plan in which explain the interventions and the ways in which inclusion is achieved. Self-analysis-self-assessment paths were thus provided for the detection and monitoring of school inclusion quality processes with tools developed on the Index for Inclusion model (Booth & Ainscow, 2008).

With such initiatives the inclusive paradigm has been gradually consolidated, creating the conditions for the development of a shared responsibility for the inclusion culture, offering all teachers useful information to guide their actions according to the perspective of the inclusive teacher profile (Cottini, 2017b; EADSNE, 2012; Mura, 2019; Mura et al., 2019).

Inclusion, families, and Life Project

The inclusion processes, that have progressively taken place in Italy, have been oriented towards overcoming any limiting and prejudicial conception of disability. The school is the privileged place in which it is possible to create the conditions to start the identity development of all students. It is therefore necessary to activate educational devices capable of guiding the person with disabilities towards existential self-determination and full citizenship. This perspective implies an approach to educational guidance (Mura, 2005, 2018), that is the planning of interventions capable of recognizing the person's characteristics and interests and responding to the personal developmental needs, to promote, from the earliest years of life, an educational path capable of responding to the personal development needs of pupils with disabilities.

In this sense, teachers must look beyond the limits of diagnostic descriptions, basing their educational and didactic action on the situated knowledge of the student. Fruitful dialogue between school and family is necessary to accompany students with disabilities to acquire knowledge and develop awareness about their skills, characteristics, and individual resources (Mura, 2018; Mura, Tatulli, et al., 2020; Mura & Zurru, 2021).

Although there are still many cultural prejudices that identify the families of pupils with disabilities as "subjects to be assisted", the historical reconstructions of inclusion processes in Italy have highlighted their active role, gathered in associations, which they have tacked on in guiding the development of inclusive educational and social policies (de Anna, 2014; Mura, 2009; Pavone, 2009). In particular, some of these researches show how the family is a system with specific educational expertise, resilience, and coping skills, aimed at managing the educational challenges related to the disability child's condition (Caldin & Giaconi, 2021a, 2021b; Mura, 2004, 2014, 2016; Zucchi & Moletto, 2013). Family is the emotional and educational environment in which student with disabilities receives motivations, stimuli, and conditions for his Life Project realization. Such an activation take place starting from attendance at the nursery and kindergarten. Families of children with disabilities can find great support in early childhood services, but at the same time, parents are involved in defining the educational project, communicating, and enhancing their children's resources (MI, 2022). It is in the interaction with the school that the experiences lived in the family is intertwined with the educational activities in the different levels and school grades.

It is always thanks to the commitment of the parents' associations of students with special educational needs in advocacy actions that, through L.170/2010, the regulatory recognition relating to Specific Learning Disorders has been reached. Families have played an increasingly active role in ensuring the improvement of their children's learning conditions and school well-being and are involved in defining the Personalized Didactic Plan (PDP).

With the latest regulatory developments on inclusion processes, families have strengthened their participation to the drafting of the Individual Project and the Individualized Education Plan. As expected by the Legislative Decree no. 66 of 2017, indeed, the different projects have taken on an ecological perspective of the person according to the ICF model (WHO, 2001).

A further element that emerges from this reconstruction is the strategic value of the educational alliance between parents and teachers for the identification of educational and didactic objectives and goals aimed as much as possible at adult life (Caldin, 2019; Canevaro, 2007; de Anna, 2014; Mura, Zurru, et al., 2020; Mura & Zurru, 2019). The relationship of trust and dialogue, indeed has become the constitutive basis for educational guidance actions, for recognition of potential and resources to build paths aimed at the Life Project realization.

Awareness and cultural challenges

From the experiences illustrated, it is clear that the commitment to inclusion has been characterized by the succession of emblematic moments marked by the need to implement regulatory interventions to support the goals achieved and to promote provisions that respond to new emerging needs. It is thus possible to find the contribution of inclusion to the realization of socio-cultural changes and developments, enhancing the institutions' organizational capacity, thanks to a model that has been able to mobilize human, technical, and financial resources to foster empowerment processes, for people with disabilities and the entire community (Mura, 2020).

The historical-pedagogical reconstruction of the Italian experience shows as what in the past was considered a utopian choice and considered as difficult to achieve, took shape, developed, going beyond the immediate need for a small group of people to reach and involve the entire civil society. In an attempt to overcome difficulties and contradictions, it was slowly understood that through the most powerful means of individual and collective emancipation, education, the person in a situation of disability, placed in the conditions to experience inclusive environments, it can cultivate the personal existential project and contribute to the community development. This awareness has inaugurated gradual opportunities for updating and innovation for the entire school community.

However, to generate inclusion culture, it is necessary to invest in interventions that guide the democratic, fair and inclusive development of the entire society. This is necessary to overcome and prevent attitudes of indifference, passivity, and resignation that promote conditions of poverty and marginalization. Furthermore, considering how insidious contradictions continue to lurk among the pressures towards emancipation, the special-pedagogy discourse is called upon to assume the role of continuous process guide. For this reason, in order to fully exploit the progress made so far, it is necessary to take into due consideration some challenging issues that question the inclusion process.

It becomes essential to overcome the prejudices that identify disability as a condition linked to a psycho-social health problem to which bureaucratic-institutional answers can be provided. Looking at disability as a universal human condition, allows us to recognize the contributions it has made to the overall development of the community's well-being.

To increase and consolidate the culture of inclusion, it is necessary to invest in school and university training. On the one hand, by rethinking the accessibility of education processes even for students with complex disabilities and ensuring an educational continuum that overcomes the fragmentation of education cycles, on the other by stabilizing the initial and in-service training models of professionals, curricular and specialized teachers, constantly upgrading their contents.

Furthermore, it is essential to promote integrated planning between public and private services and professionals. Therefore, are necessary the conditions to overcome the difficulties of communication between aid professionals and different decision-

making and organizational systems and share responsibilities according to the logic of dialogue and authentic consultation, based on the complementarity and interdisciplinary nature of skills.

Social and democratic progress is closely related to the design and construction of accessible environments, products, tools, communication, and technological systems. It is a question of creating a context of environmental and social sustainability that guarantees conditions for the Life Project realization in the different areas of personal, family, and working life.

The inclusion culture is promoted through the dissemination of knowledge and appropriate communications. It is necessary to develop an adequate knowledge of disability problems so that the language used by media and institutional decision-makers is appropriate and responsible. An appropriate and inclusive language is capable of supporting and promoting the logic of change, it allows to eradicate stereotyped ideas and false beliefs conveyed by inappropriate expressions.

The processes of inclusion are achieved through the promotion of a coherent and mature gender culture, to overcome the double discrimination against women, increasing their opportunities and emancipatory possibilities. In this sense, it is necessary to identify educational guidance paths that allow everyone, men and women, from childhood, to be fully involved in the learning, relational, emotional, professional, and cultural processes that are the foundations of every subjective realization possibility.

It is in this sense that Special Pedagogy, in accompanying and guiding the inclusion process, has promoted and still support, an anthropological and pedagogical phenomenon rereading and, going beyond medicalizing and standardizing visions, grasping the complexity of the meaning's nuances of which the subject is bearer. The key aspects that emerge from the proposed reconstructions show that the Italian experience has inaugurated, and at the same time it presupposes, a logic and a network process that hardly admits unilateral and a priori readings, under penalty of putting into play the perspective with which the development of the whole society has been promoted.

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