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# INCLUSION AS A QUALITY FACTOR IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM: AN INTEGRATED DEVICE

Our analysis focuses on the process of school inclusion. The purpose of our research is to provide tools for a deep reflection aiming at improving quality levels in education. This paper highlights the importance of adapting teaching processes and classroom work to the training needs of each student regardless of gender differences, of ethnic and cultural origin and of skills.

The basic idea of our research is a school conceived as an open “learning community”, an educating community, a permanent laboratory of research, experimentation and didactic innovation, providing learning environments with devices and tools which ensure each student unlimited growth in their learning and participation. Indeed, pupils are welcomed, cared for and let grow through a structured and intentional organization, which addresses everyone with respect and ensure them the right to equal opportunities.

## INCLUSION IN NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXTS

School inclusion is just one of aspects leading to the full implementation of the right to education supported by the Italian Constitution. Our country, starting from the brief but essential constitutional references, has promoted an overall inclusive vision of the society and of the school in particular. By the reading of articles 2,3,34, which are concise but significant, a vision of a supportive society emerges, which accepts equality respecting diversity and a Republic that guarantees equal opportunities and removes every obstacle which can prevent the development of the

personality of every citizen. These principles assume a school open to everyone, without distinction, which is able to support, accept and enhance the special uniqueness of each person, and the development of highest and endless potentialities of multiple intelligences of human nature<sup>1</sup>.

The Italian school system has experienced growth, in an inclusive sense, both theoretically and legally. After an initial period of segregation, the process of integrating pupils with disabilities into the school was developed. Subsequently the manifesto-document of the Falucci commission of 1975 started to stimulate consciences and abolished the separated classes with L. n. 517/77. The latter was an innovative law that introduced a new concept school, a school for everyone, where words such as “carrying out individualized interventions in relation to the needs of individual students or guaranteeing forms of integration and support for disabled students” are relevant. The integration was troubled, worthy of the normative assumptions but immature in the teaching practice and of the culture of the time. Thanks to the sentence n.215 1987 and to the relative C.M. 262/88, a clear path of growth began in the inclusive direction of Italian educational institution: it stated the full and unconditional right of all pupils with disabilities to attend school.

The Magna Carta of this evolutionary path, Law 104/1992 then designated the school as an educational learning environment. It was the first legislative action of an organic nature which reorganized the previous interventions aiming at overcoming the obstacles that prevented the full development of the human potential of a person with disabilities, with particular attention to school integration.

With the so-called framework law, the legislators defined the goals to improve the quality of integration that can be summarized as follows: maximum autonomy, the right to education, overcoming exclusion, prevention and early diagnosis, recognized ability to work, right to health care, interinstitutional conventions. The guarantee of social rights such as the right to health, the right to work, trade union rights, the rights of the family, the rights associated with the environment represents an important achievement of civilization, a value in itself but at the same

1 H. Gardner, *Multiple intelligences: The theory in practice*, Basic Books, New York 1993.

time an important tool for actual enjoyment of a good life.

Social rights, in addition to widening people's profiles of freedom, represent those rights that find their justification both in the principle of solidarity and in real equality, rights designed to prevent any material or existential circumstances such as health, poverty or unemployment from impeding the full development of a person and his/her participation in social life.

The inclusive approach needs to pay attention to both the national and international regulatory framework. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the United Nations in 2006, in particular, revived the need to broaden the field of research and studies to illustrate how it is possible to guarantee respect for human rights and which cultural and technical instruments must be fielded to achieve full inclusion of people with disabilities, without discrimination through equal opportunities. In fact, the condition of disability is the result of the interaction between people with impairments and behavioral and environmental barriers, which prevent their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. It is necessary that the context (environments, procedures, educational tools and aids) adapt to the specific needs of people with disabilities, through what the Convention in question defines as "reasonable accommodation". Reasonable accommodation indicates the necessary and appropriate changes and adaptations that do not impose a disproportionate or excessive burden on persons who are in a disability condition in order to guarantee their enjoyment and exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms (Art. 2).

## **RIGHTS, WELL-BEING IN TEACHING PRACTICE**

The theoretical normative achievement of inclusion in school communities requires their implementation as a cross-reference value. It is necessary to set goals, targets, rules, procedures and resources aiming to respect and enhance individual diversity, to promote coherent professional attitudes, organizational culture and participation. The interventions relate more to the system than to the person, and the training success is guaranteed through a support and assistance project, which integrates

the contribution of the different parts involved: school, family, other subjects, public and private.

The notion of SEN (in Italian BES), which appeared for the first time in England in the Warnock report (1978), suggests the need to integrate the supposed “different” pupils in the schools, through an inclusive approach based on the identification of educational goals common to all pupils regardless of their skills and disabilities. This concept is based on the innovative idea according to which differences, the supposed “normal specialty”, are a resource for education, whose enhancement requires the educational systems to identify needs and differentiate responses. The full realization of the system of “inclusive education”, therefore, does not consist in finding a place in the school to those who are representatives of some diversity, but in transforming the school system into an organization suitable for taking charge of the education of the SENs that all students can meet, helping them to neutralize particular inequalities. In this respect, the ICF model, International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, developed by the WHO in 2002 for adults and in 2007 for subjects in developmental age, represents an essential tool for the recognition of human functioning resulting in the interaction between bio-structural, environmental and psychological factors.

Inclusion is a dynamic and complex process that involves the whole school community in an educational approach based on strong ethical principles, respect for human dignity, equal opportunities, equity, the right to study and a series of fundamental values of civil life. This need is unequivocally clarified by Amartya Sen who proposes a concept of human development whose core is satisfying people’s needs and increasing human abilities. According to Sen it is fundamental to think in terms of human capability, as a person’s real freedom to promote and achieve his well-being. The Indian philosopher and economist defines development as “the process of expanding real freedoms enjoyed by human beings” and the evaluation of the state of well-being linked to the quality of their lives (Sen 2000). To achieve the individual’s well-being (for example, walking, reading, being self-confident), the person must meet contexts that really give the freedom to grow or contexts that compensate for the structural and / or functional deficits.

Humans, according to Sen, are different for three big dimensions: their

personal and structural characteristics, the external and environmental circumstances they experience and their ability to transform resources into adequate functioning to build their well-being. So human functioning must be considered as a global, systemic reality, rejecting the rigid individual-social dichotomy, because the human being is the result of the complex interaction between individual and social factors. Well-being in this sense will depend on the situations to which the individual attributes positive value and on the possibilities offered by the environment to satisfy the needs redefined by Marta Nussbaum as needs of the wider sphere of human rights. Rights are not abstract guidelines but are concrete practices in which managerial ideas must deal with the social and political conditions for their implementation.

Therefore, it is proposed to conduct a study aiming at the realization of a tool orienting school institutions and making them evolve towards the idea of an educating community in which each pupil, regardless of gender differences, of ethnic, cultural, evolutionary origin and ability, is valued, treated with respect and ensured in its right to equal opportunities and the expression of talents. In this respect, school inclusion is achieved through the construction of an inclusive system addressed to all subjects and designed (UDL) from the beginning to respond to the “different” needs of people. Over the years, the *Index for Inclusion*, a work by Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow, published in 2000 by the Center for Studies on Inclusive Education, has become reference point in the international arena for what concerns the development of inclusive design in schools. The aim of the research is to hinder the “policies of incapacitation”, oriented to the marginalization, in order to achieve a real inclusion, participation and autonomy of disabled people. The shared need, in the different areas of the planet, is surely to overcome the predominantly biomedical point of view with respect to the disabled condition, to analyze the phenomenon of disability in a global perspective, which is able to grasp the real extent of the discomfort and stigmatization, in order to promote movement, participation, accessibility and empowerment representing the common traits of the existence of disabled people. In particular, schools are called upon to develop a curriculum capable of defining specific skills at the end of their training courses, characterized by the learning targets set at national level, and prepared on the basis

of the abilities, attitudes, preferences of each student regardless of their background. Promoting the expansion of inclusion in education, a factor of quality and well-being of life, requires the school system to create an inclusive design developed through an integrated and flexible device. Valid reference tools for the construction of learning situations are UDL (Universal Design for Learning), CAF (Common Assessment Framework Education), Index for inclusion and TQM (Total Quality Management).

## CONCLUSIONS

Briefly, schools will have to be provided aggregate surveys on the level of awareness of the various factors that affect well-being at school and the real possibilities of inclusion. In this way, school policies attributable to the main educational choices can reconsider the role of inclusion as a regulating principle of the school community as a whole. As the Center for Studies on Inclusive Education points out, inclusion is what happens when “everyone feels they are appreciated and that their participation is appreciated”. The notion of inclusion recognizes that there is a risk of exclusion that must be actively prevented, and at the same time states the importance of involving all students in the creation of a truly welcoming school, also through the transformation of the curriculum and organizational strategies of the schools, which must become sensitive to the entire gradation of the differences which are present among the students.

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