

If you do not occlude, include

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Abstract: Inclusion is the idea of making schools a welcoming place for students with disabilities and their families. Italian school is committed to promoting inclusion and integration of people and cultures. Inclusion requires the school and the family to work together to promote learning by collaborating with the community and by identifying resources to implement school curriculum, family practices, and student learning and development. A good inclusion project that involves both schools and families is attentive to diversity, whatever it may be. Not only that: the school that moves in an inclusive way prevents discomfort, identifies the difficulties early and works to contain them and not to feed them. The life project of the students represents a social value if looked at in a forward-looking key, therefore, every school, in harmony with the families, should adopt the idea that the pain of the students, when there are discomforts, manifests itself with many voices. H. Gardner usually states that good inclusive teaching differentiates learning styles and looks at the different forms of intelligence (Gardner, 2005). “The path towards an inclusive school must live on alliances, synergies, forces aimed at a common purpose, despite their respective differences” (Cornoldi, 2008).

Keywords: Inclusion; education; skill; knowledge; Gifted Students; Special Educational Needs.



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1. Introduction

Our great mistake is to try to exact from each person virtues which he does not possess, and to neglect the cultivation of those which he has” Marguerite Yourcenar.

Since ancient times, disability has been perceived as an insurmountable limit for participation in social life.

During the Greek and Roman times, the perfection of mind and body was one of the central elements in defining the identity of a subject. As a result, an individual with physical characteristics considered unfit for established standards was perceived as inferior, a subject to be excluded from society.

¹ This paper is the result of the shared work of the authors; however, for the purposes of the attributions of its individual parts it is divided as follows: Maria Forina: §§ 1 Introduzione e Conclusion; Angelina Vivona: §§ Inclusion; Simona Iannaccone: §§ Special Educational Needs; Clorinda Sorrentino: §§ Gifted Students.

The search for formal perfection is demonstrated by the application of the golden standard to almost all artistic and cultural manifestations over the centuries. The Divine Proportion or, in more recent times Golden Ratio, is "a relationship between unequal quantities characterized by geometric-mathematical peculiarities and by recurring repetition in many natural and cultural expressions. This has insinuated, during ancient and modern history, the confirmation, among men, of the existence of a connection between macro and microcosm, between human and divine, between cosmos and habitat: a relationship between the whole and the part, between one larger segment and the smaller one repeating endlessly through its subdivisions. Numerous artists and philosophers who have come to grasp, over time, an ideal of beauty and harmony, going so far as to seek it and, in some cases, to recreate it in the anthropic environment as a standard of beauty". (Carlson, 2023)

What happens, however, when you don't have a starting point that allows you to reach the standards of perfection? How do you accept an individual who does not correspond to the image that the Divine proposes for man and nature? How can anyone think of inserting someone who is different into society?

In this analysis of disability, it is necessary to bear in mind that the relationship with the divine has represented, and in many cases still represents, a fundamental element in the development of society. Today, the full division between temporal and spiritual aspects has come to fruition in much of the Western world but it is not yet possible to observe a clear split between the two elements worldwide. In the past, therefore, it was almost impossible to separate the two areas. Indeed, due to its mysterious and unknowable nature to most, the spiritual power, through its representatives, bearers of absolute truths, has exerted a very strong influence on the more purely political aspects of the administration of the various societies. A person with disabilities, being perceived as alien because she did not correspond to the divine plan of perfection and harmony, had to be removed from social life.

With Christianity, disability has continued to be perceived not only as a limit, but as a real form of divine punishment. The only way to face such punishment was faith and mercy.

The inability to conceive of other ways to achieve social well-being and the total perceptive absence of the concept of inclusion has led to the opening of numerous asylums and facilities equipped to prevent society from encountering disabilities.

The exclusion of disability becomes a real social issue following the first industrial revolution when the use of new equipment to produce goods causes an impressive number of physical mutilations. Subjects who could not return to the production circuit following such mutilations were condemned to a position of marginality or complete social exclusion.

From the 1700s to the 1900s, not only did the positions on disability not change, but the perspective of eugenics, one of the pillars of the Nazi dictatorship, identified people with disabilities as the first victims. Neonatal euthanasia and torture to make adults sterile and concentration camps were the methods for achieving the goal of the full elimination of disability. In the Aktion T4 protocol, for example, there was a series of medical-military actions which in Nazi Germany provided for the elimination of the so-called "lives unworthy of being lived" (Il Mitte, 2020).

For too long, disability has been perceived as a limitation, a deviation from the norm that did not provide for any meeting point between people with and without disabilities. Inclusion was a distant prospect, a utopia. Today we are trying to put a

stop to this anachronistic and short-sighted attitude, activating a series of actions that have the concrete objective of full social inclusion and participation in the community of all citizens.

Social inclusion is an aspect of participation and, therefore, pertains to the democratic growth of the country.

There is no universally accepted definition of disability today. "The World Health Organization (WHO), in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), takes into account the social aspects of disability and does not identify it only as a medical or biological anomaly" (COE, 2023)

It is, therefore, necessary to ask ourselves about the forms and ways through which social inclusion in the cultural agenda of the country could be truly effective.

One of the necessary conditions for inclusive action to fully manifest itself in the common feeling of citizens is participation, to be meant as an inescapable plot for its taking root, as a co-essential element of democracy.

The plot of the Italian Constitution develops on this assumption which, in every single part, urges citizens to act actively to achieve objectives shared by the community. The extraordinary sense of reality of the Italian Constitution is fully manifested in the second paragraph of article 3: "It is the task of the Republic to remove the economic and social obstacles which, by effectively limiting the freedom and equality of citizens, prevent the full development of the human person and the effective participation of all workers in the political, economic and social organization of the country".

Therefore, a vision of man marked by a "relational" character emerges and finds reason and an instrument of its humanity in the relationship with others.

To build inclusion, therefore, we need a real revolution in the training system: empathy education.

In a universe increasingly attentive to efficiency and speed, few resources are employed in the development of practices to make up for the lack of elements concerning the emotional sphere of the individual.

Empathy and caring for others represent the embryonic stage of community. Community that must be intended as a group of individuals who share the same values. The community, therefore, constitutes the essence of society. No society will ever have such a strong and elastic structure to withstand the violent shocks of hyper-efficient modernity with super-performing standards, if not with a strong community core. A testimony in this sense comes from distant Australia where, since 2005, starting from kindergarten up to the last year of high school, the "Kindness on purpose" program has been successfully applied, a clear example of forward-looking planning for building a truly inclusive society.

The key principles of the project:

1. An individual in pain is unwilling to learn.
2. Empathy must be trained like a muscle. The more empathy is experienced, the more it will be part of relational practices, a habit that will be reflected in community action.
3. Empathy and kindness (not in sporadic and showy actions, but in everyday life) increase the sense of belonging to the community and, with it, the well-being of those who are part of that community. Today, however, technology and "social media" direct individuals towards isolation and closure and towards a purely virtual sociality, to competition and ostentation of what, often, one is not.

4. Teaching of techniques for listening and knowing one's interiority, which will be useful on all life occasions, when dealing with difficult periods that must be contemplated in the existence of individuals and perceived as elements necessary for growth.

It is desirable that the practices and, above all, the proactive attitudes proposed by the Kindness on purpose program are applied globally, until it will be possible to speak of "inclusive natives" as we speak today of "digital natives". This arduous task falls to contemporary society, still lame on the path towards full inclusion, but which with its "inclusive immigrants" (such as digital immigrants) is understanding that an obstacle does not always constitute a limit, but which, instead, represents, often, a concrete opportunity to improve itself.

When you talk about inclusion you refer to a series of actions that aim to make the school a welcoming educating community, capable of dealing with any difficulty concerning the students and their stay at school. Taking responsibility from the family to the school context is not physiological or obvious, it requires careful planning and a strong response to the expectations that parents place towards teachers, true co-authors of their children's growth.

As "development enhancers", (Farina, 2008) teachers work to grasp family needs and to implement an educational, social and cognitive plan that responds to one objective: to guarantee the scholastic success of students, projecting into tomorrow what is sown and made to sprout today.

If integration represented the pioneering dimension with which there was a tendency to differentiate students with certified disabilities from students without disabilities, inclusion represents its evolution. The latter looks at the process as well as at the context and the actors who revolve in and around the student, without excluding the families. The research conducted by Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow in 2001 saw the emergence of a useful tool for collecting materials and methods that would allow teachers, parents, and managers to monitor and evaluate inclusion in their own schools: the Index.

This tool was useful for planning educational actions aimed at the sole purpose to "make every student feel good at school" and create an inclusive environment capable of implementing metacognition, as a privileged condition. Metacognition intended as the ability to understand how one's own cognitive processes work to improve the learning process. Both Booth and Ainscow recognize that an inclusive school favours learning by understanding everyone's needs and placing them at the centre of the teaching action, without emphasizing their limits. A school that does not include, but excludes any possibility of action, implements obsolete educational practices that hinder learning and participation, compromising the success of educational success.

It is undeniable that inclusion sets challenges to schools, starting with their structure. It includes not only physical places (classrooms), but also the way in which teaching manages to create cognitive suggestions capable of making students fall in love with knowledge, avoiding disaffection. The school transfers the skills already available to the student and the knowledge learned in the scholastic context towards competences, working for the success of the educational process starting from the starting conditions, i.e., from the reception. Competences represent one of the fundamental educational objectives because they demonstrate that the student

has internalized the knowledge and integrated it with his own previous skills, making learning personal and, therefore, rooted in the individual.

In compliance with the student's learning rhythms that the results can be transformed into an evolutionary key, into outcomes that bode well that the development goals have been achieved and that the school has fulfilled its task.

Among the aims is the guarantee of an active participation of the students in the experiences conceived and planned by the teachers. Experiences that can be implemented by the school which in turn sets itself the objective of effective learning capable of grasping every difference, not by homologating procedures, methods, and strategies, but by responding in a personalized way to the different needs that translate into cultural needs or appetites.

2. Inclusion

Promoting inclusion requires educational alliances between the two institutions par excellence: the school and the family. The purpose of the former is to work for the subjective and collective growth of its members. Although apparently different, the two worlds have the same process and the same goal: to make every potential and every talent flourish. The school, by promoting every difference, educates in proactive sociability and empathy, widespread solidarity, and authentic participation, because it recognizes in every student not only the cognitive dimension, but also the human, emotional and affective one. A student who feels welcomed, responds more intentionally to requests because he trusts both the context and those who live there: teachers and peers. It is a dialogical reciprocity which also finds resonance in the family and which flows into a pedagogical cooperation capable of distributing responsibilities well which, although shared, are different.

The school promotes success by personalizing times and paths, defining its own work paths, nurturing those phylogenetic memories that bode well for a result thanks to which the student will also be satisfied.

"The Italian school develops its educational action in line with the principles of inclusion of people and the integration of cultures, considering the acceptance of diversity as an indispensable value. The school consolidates inclusive practices towards children and young people of non-Italian citizenship, promoting their full integration. It also promotes, with specific strategies and personalized courses, the prevention and recovery of early school leaving and school failure (...) Particular care is reserved for students with disabilities or with special educational needs, through appropriate organizational and teaching strategies, to be considered in the normal planning of the training offer." / NATIONAL INDICATIONS for the Curriculum of the Infant School and the First Cycle of Education - September 2012).

3. Special Educational Needs

Considering the established intentions and the legislation in force, each inclusion project implemented by schools must guarantee academic success by not excluding any student who presents difficulties, both in excess and in defect, with respect to the standards considered "normal". The reference is explicitly addressed to students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The "Inclusive School" model envisages the creation of a project that takes into account human rights and guarantees inclusiveness as a useful opportunity to create the person to whom services and respect must be guaranteed, despite the particularity and originality that distinguishes

them. Don Milani, in this regard, teaches: "... there is nothing more unfair than making equal parts between unequal".

It is in the strategic and methodological personalization implemented by the teaching staff that individualization comes to life and with which the school builds its identity, because it marries the needs of the family with those of its students, making them its own.

The school must look at the characteristics of each individual student to allow him to master knowledge and skills, which, when nurtured, are transformed into skills, passing through authentic experiences, destined to make them permanent, but always capable of producing new instances.

It is known that when it comes to SEN, you refer to all those students who, with or without certification, have difficulties or discomforts that can affect their learning at school, going to hinder their path. What needs to be introduced is greater and special attention aimed at bridging social and cultural disadvantages that refer to the contexts in which students live or to the presence of specific developmental disorders. In Europe you talk about Special Educational Needs, a term that includes three major sub-categories:

- that of disability.
- that of specific developmental disorders.
- that of socio-economic, linguistic, cultural disadvantage. (Muir directive 12/27/2012)

However, the Muir Note n. 562 of 3 April 2019, aimed at providing information (scarce) on gifted students, counted among the SEN and who can present a double exceptionality. Double exceptionality - or "2 e " (English: twice exceptional) is characterized by the presence in a person of talent and a neurodevelopmental or health disorder. The abbreviation of the concept of double exceptionality is "2e" and is indicated by the suffix "2e" before the disorder name. For example, a double exceptionality associated with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder may be abbreviated as "2e-ADHD." Double exceptionality takes shape when there is the presence of talent and a disorder such as attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity, neurodevelopmental disorder, autism spectrum disorder, mental health disorders present in the DSM-5 in an individual.

Apparently, it might seem like an achievement, but not going to define specific Guidelines, not providing actions and proposals regarding the drafting of the Customized Learning Plan, which should be elaborated for certain needs, in reality, one is groping in the dark, leaving every action to the inventiveness of the teacher intended to promote talent.

The taking charge of these students has been entrusted to the schools, in virtue of the autonomy recognized at the regulatory level. (L. 59/1997, art.21 and DPR 275/1999) Teaching autonomy is exercised in respect of forms of freedom: freedom of teaching; the freedom of educational choice of families; students' right to learn. If this triptych of intentions could be strengthened, families would not find themselves defending their children from pressures deriving from schedules which, instead of nourishing their potential, would seem to demotivate them.

Many students accuse and manifest difficulties in living at school. To design ideal teaching-learning situations, each action should move according to the student, vice versa, the criterion of levelling and homologation of learning and experiences is adopted that do not look at the heterogeneity of the class. Scholastic difficulties, like those of learning, are connected to the ways in which methods and paths are put into circulation. A multitasking didactic, capable of being hybrid and of being original, responds well to the needs of gifted students. And yet, even now, in Italian schools, it is difficult to bring out enrichment programs or targeted planning which, for gifted students, would be the ideal solution.

A horizon to be achieved is represented by the possibility of building a truly cooperative method between school and family to encourage the learning process. To give voice to the freedoms mentioned above, perhaps it would be necessary to activate a cooperation such as to keep the roles of school and family distinct, distributing to both clear and differentiated educational objectives and tasks for their respective roles, but with the goal of a common vision of the learning. Learning that must aim to highlight the real skills achieved by the students.

4. Gifted Students

To include the gifted students and carry out a good inclusion plan, it is necessary to know the facets that the intellectual giftedness presents. It is, in fact, an obligation that the teacher cannot refrain from deepening.

The educational continuum between the two processes implemented between school and family is possible on condition that a communicative space is created which can be defined as a free zone, where everyone contributes, through co-responsibility, their own contribution to the success of the developmental and scholastic process of every student. It would be useful to appropriate that ecological model mentioned by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1986), designed to encourage intersections between the two educational ecosystems. Joyce Epstein speaks of school-like families and family-like schools to represent the cooperative and integrated approach to education, where families represent a useful support for strengthening school skills, while schools promote relationships and affectivity, guaranteeing cultural circularity and social interaction.

Joyce L. Epstein highlights six areas of cooperation aimed at involving the parental dimension in the school world:

1. Parenting

Support every family to create home environments that support children and students in their school life.

2. Communicating

Implement effective forms of communication both in the school-home and in the home-school context, calibrated on the school programs and on the evolutions that the student can register and implement.

3. Volunteering

Enlist parents in the organization of school activities, also as a supplement to curricular ones;

4. Learning at home

Provide information to families intended to help students in the family context to carry out tasks or activities.

5. Decision making

Invite parents to be present when decision-making processes are started that the school implements, by participating in meetings.

6. Collaborating with the community

Identify resources to implement school curriculum, family practices, and student learning and development. (<https://www.invalsiopen.it/alleanza-educativa-scuola-famiglia/>).

5. Conclusions

A good inclusion project that involves both schools and families is attentive to diversity, whatever it may be. Not only that: the school that moves in an inclusive way prevents discomfort, identifies the difficulties early and works to contain them and not to feed them.

The life project of the students represents a social value if looked at in a forward-looking key, therefore, every school, in harmony with the families, should adopt the idea that the pain of the students, when there are discomforts, manifests itself with many voices. H. Gardner usually states that good inclusive teaching differentiates learning styles and looks at the different forms of intelligence. (Gardner, 2005)

“The path towards an inclusive school must live on alliances, synergies, forces aimed at a common purpose, despite their respective differences” (Cornoldi, 2008).

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