



Disponibile en ligne sur www.sciencedirect.com



et également disponible sur www.em-consulte.com



Research Paper

The historical evolution of school integration in Italy: Some witnesses and considerations[☆]

L'évolution historique de l'intégration scolaire en Italie : quelques témoins et quelques considérations

Andrea Canevaro^a, Lucia de Anna^{b,*}

^a University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy

^b Università degli Studi di Roma Foro Italico, Piazza Lauro de Bosis n. 15, 00135 Roma, Italy

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 7 March 2009

Accepted 20 March 2010

Available online 13 May 2010

Keywords:

Integrazione scolastica

School integration

Inclusive school

Italian model

ABSTRACT

In Italy, the policy of 'integration' that has been implemented since the 1970s, is based on a welcoming culture in the common school context, and represents a particular phase, both politically and socially, of Italian history. It is based on a system of relations around the person with a disability and on the reciprocal enrichment that allows the other students to understand a different way of learning which is concerned with living together. School integration allows the students to share a new understanding of education which is underpinned by the principle that by living together all students can acquire new ways of learning and new kinds of knowledge. The purpose of this article is not to describe the model and the process of integration in Italy – that can be the subject of further and more specific works – but to focus on the historical evolution and the reference points represented by some authors who discuss the principles, and most meaningful aspects, on which the idea

[☆] Gaetanina Villanella has revised the text of this article.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +06/36733 213/214.

E-mail address: lucia.deanna@iusm.it (L. de Anna).

of *integrazione scolastica*¹ is based. The historical analysis is developed through references to some of the key scholars and witnesses who have worked to develop the organizational framework for the development of the inclusive school in Italy.

© 2010 Published by Elsevier Masson SAS on behalf of Association ALTER.

R É S U M É

Mots clés :

Integrazione scolastica
Intégration scolaire
École inclusive
Modèle italien

En Italie, la politique d'intégration qui a été mise en place à partir des années 1970 repose sur une culture de l'accueil dans l'école de tous et représente une période particulière de l'histoire italienne, du point de vue autant politique que social. L'intégration scolaire est fondée sur un système de relations autour de la personne en situation de handicap et sur l'enrichissement réciproque qui permet aux autres élèves d'expérimenter une différente manière d'apprendre par le vivre ensemble. Elle permet aux élèves de partager une nouvelle conception de l'éducation, qui est soutenue par le principe que par le vivre ensemble tous les élèves peuvent acquérir de nouvelles façons d'apprendre et de nouveaux types de connaissances. Cet article n'a pas pour objectif de décrire le modèle et le processus d'intégration en Italie – ce qui pourra être l'objet d'autres travaux plus spécifiques – mais de mettre l'accent sur l'évolution historique et les points de repère représentés par des auteurs qui discutent des principes et des aspects les plus significatifs à la base de notre idée de l'*integrazione scolastica*². L'analyse historique est développée à travers les références faites à quelques uns des experts et des témoins qui ont travaillé à l'élaboration du cadre organisationnel conçu pour mettre en œuvre l'école inclusive en Italie.

© 2010 Publié par Elsevier Masson SAS pour l'Association ALTER.

Introduction

The widening of the membership of the countries that have joined the European Union suggests that those of them that have already faced the challenge of integration/inclusion try to define and put forward approaches to integration/inclusion patterns.

This might suggest that we are talking about codified elements, or a “blueprint” to be applied globally; in contrast, our approach is to point out the importance of developing a program and a process aimed at integration/inclusion of diversity through a critical engagement with issues followed by any necessary modifications, and to ground these in a process of reflection whose roots are in what we call “educabilità” and “scolarizzazione”³ together with the concepts of *person* and of an *appreciation of differences*. Our aim is to focus on the shared meaning of those ideas and to widen the possibility of expression and participation in shared development and growth, in the teaching–learning process, in school and in social life.

If we analyse the models we have considered for comparison, (de Anna, 2001) we realize they are strongly influenced by different factors, for example:

¹ Italian “*integrazione scolastica*” is focused on interaction and on reciprocal change, on context organisation and on integrated didactic strategies.

² L’«*integrazione scolastica*» italienne est centrée sur l’interaction et l’apport réciproque de changement, sur l’organisation en contexte et sur des stratégies didactiques intégrées.

³ “Educabilità” means the possibility to be educated, “scolarizzazione” is school attendance and the policies meant to develop it.

- the organisation of an educational, vocational and social system, together with the cultural reference patterns;
- laws, national policy and local policies and their historic evolution;
- the members of staff and their training.
- internal and external supports;
- collaboration with educational agencies, social agencies and state health agencies;
- the role of families and associations;
- human and economic resources (de Anna, 2006).

Education systems are very different and new issues constantly emerge, some of which may emanate from the experiences and examples of other countries, as a result of ‘policy borrowing’, exchange of ideas and visits on the part of researchers, practitioners and policy-makers, and these influence the cultural context. Let us take for example the question of immigration. Some countries have had a longer experience of immigration than Italy where the early history of integration in the field of education started after the Second World War, in a period characterized by the migration of populations and, in the case of Italy, by important internal movements of people from South to North. Today, the situation has changed and new kinds of poverty now exist, new social exclusions, new discriminations and forms of isolation: the issue of ‘integration’ cannot but take on new meanings and we have to take into account the arrival of people coming from other countries in a condition of great disadvantage, and sometimes even of disability.

The Italian policy for integration is based on a culture of making people welcome in the common context of a school for all the students. In the 1960s, the comprehensive junior high school was introduced as a reflection of this culture, and in the 1970s, it was decided to abolish special classes and to develop “*integrazione scolastica*” (de Anna, 1983). During the same period, another decision was taken: that of closing some segregating institutions such as the asylums for mentally and psychologically affected people⁴ in order to spread issues of integration within the social life of the whole community. International comparison develops reflection: about our ideas, our national and local dimension, and it helps us to read and maybe even to revise our own experience through a magnifier, because we are called upon to point out and explain aspects of Italian policy that have, perhaps, become obvious to us; with this new approach, we have to investigate reality, its roots and genesis, to find the rationales on which we have grounded our ‘certainties’.

Different experiences provide opportunities to explore and to look at other contexts, to understand different strategies and interventions that sometimes have other roots. It is not a question, necessarily, of making judgements about which approach is better than another but such an approach provides the opportunity to engage in dialogue and be open to different ideas and experiences in order to achieve a new understanding, while keeping our own identity; one possible outcome could be a greater awareness and a strengthening of our policy choices.

What are the elements for reflection on which we will focus our attention? We have to work on ‘equality of rights’ and ‘equality of values’ in a culture of *normality* that does not deny diversity or special needs associated with impairments or particular pathologies but includes these “within a fundamental and essential need of normality, worth and dignity” (Ianes, 2006). Asserting equality includes increasing and accepting the other person, with the knowledge and awareness that diversity belongs to each of us, and that cannot be used either as a reason for discrimination or to justify the reduction of rights and opportunities. It also means “making space for one’s own life and for the life of the others” (Canevaro, 2006).

Different cultures, different systems, different interpretations help us to understand that working with diversity leads to the development of a different culture. The person with a disability can provide new knowledge for other students, increasing the quality of education in the school system. We believe that this is a point of strength, especially when we talk about the integration of people with severe disabilities, because integration is not a one-way route (Canevaro, Chierigatti, 1999). We have often

⁴ “Manicomi” in Italian. See Legge 13 maggio 1978, n. 180 Accertamenti e trattamenti sanitari volontari e obbligatori (www.tutori.it/L180.78.html).

tried to point out to colleagues from other countries that our attention is not focused only on the disabled student, but it is focused also on *all* students.

Integration involves a system of relations that is created around the disabled person, to know his/her personality and human sense, to discover the most effective ways of providing intervention, and the means of communication so that we can know the other person. It involves allowing the students to learn, and to access knowledge, in a different way. It is living together to reach this aim: “*apprendere insieme apprendimenti*”⁵ (Canevaro, 2003). This opening of a dialogue based on observation and listening can allow us to point out and develop the uniqueness of the evolution of each one of us, with the possibility of explaining the competences of each person in a way different from that commonly accepted, in a process that offers possibilities for growing in ways which enhance the value accorded to differences between us (Pavone, 1997). We have, therefore, to pose the problem of the role of school not only in terms of the transmission of knowledge but as an *agent for education*, a context for the transmission of different kinds of *knowledge* and to develop a life project for the individual (de Anna, 2003). The question that we put, to realize this, is the following: what are the forms of *knowledge*, how can we transmit them and develop competences for personal development and for the development of the community we belong to?

Our country has provided a powerful example of this commitment to formation for all, but this is not fully understood internationally. Reality can be different from school to school, from town to town, both in the North and in the South. We cannot allow, though, that the problems and points for criticism endanger this challenging policy that has been thought about and fought for by many, and that has produced meaningful experiences. It is important to develop a dialogue to let people know the different realities and, importantly, the history of our policy of integration; it is also necessary to go further and point out through comparison those aspects of research, of study and experimentation that other countries are now examining, pointing out that we, in Italy, embraced this approach more than 30 years ago.

The international PhD course “Cultures, Disability and Inclusion, Education and Formation”, promoted by the University of Rome “Foro Italico” with the collaboration of the universities of Bologna, Lyon 2 and of other foreign partners from Senegal, French Polynesia, Taiwan and Brazil, is aimed at supporting PhD students in carrying out in-depth research about different interpretations of inclusion internationally and, since the first overview, we have realized that there are great differences both in the language used and in interpretations of concepts in different international settings. This interest in research and comparison has led us to develop a network of international connections and to launch an international PhD course with the collaboration of our French colleagues Eric Plaisance and Charles Gardou, and which is open to the contribution of the colleagues from the other countries involved.

Cultural and historical analysis is fundamental to our research; we are also examining the debate about terminology in relation to the concepts of integration and inclusion, in an attempt to understand their meanings. It is for this reason that we are driven to recall some of the historical stages of the processes involved in the development of our policy in order to increase international understanding of the key moments that have determined the development of policy in Italy. We have attempted to put together a few elements in the history of the development of an Italian model (“*integrazione scolastica*”) and we will, to some extent, adopt a method that could be defined as anthological. We will draw on the work of authors who have contributed significantly to the development of the model we are implementing at present, and this will provide an opportunity to reexamine that model and, to a certain extent, to defend and develop it. This gives us the opportunity to refocus our attention on traces of a recent past which are sometimes overlooked, either because of other developments which have become superimposed on the past, or because they are forgotten and not taken into account.

The way we were

Between 1960 and 1970, Italy experienced very strong internal migration. The economic context of industrial development created veritable satellite cities, and movements from the country to the city, and from south to north, and changed the life of entire communities. Inevitably, the school system was

⁵ Learning together, developing different kinds of knowledge, through the different approaches and styles.

affected by this scenario of change, as it had to face the new responsibilities created by this situation. Initially, facing the consequences that can be broadly described as the emergence of new kinds of 'learning difficulties' – here we are referring to the Italy of dialects, where a child from Calabria or Veneto would find great difficulties relocating in Turin and would experience difficulties in learning because of the unfamiliar cultural and linguistic context. The response was to create differentiated processes and settings, in other words special classes⁶ and special schools.

The large number of solutions of this kind determined a reaction in Italian schools, involving both teachers and parents, and in society: the common aim should have been to include all children, whatever their condition, in ordinary classes: this issue lies at the heart of the origins of integration in Italy started (de Anna, 2000).

In a few pages by Aldo Zelioli published in 1977, we find an analysis of the data on classes and on the number of places in special classes.

The background is the 1963–64 scholastic year. In Zelioli's words: "in the year in which we started to feel the effect of budget laws on the financing of psycho-socio-pedagogical teams and of hygienic-sanitary and didactic care for disabled pupils, they (the places in special classes) were 2247". Further on, Zelioli states that these places "were increased steadily in subsequent years: 3394 in 1965–66, 4743 in 1968–69, 5876 in 1970–71, reaching a peak of 6790 in 1973–74, and back to 6692 in 1974–75" (Zelioli, 1977, p. 105).

Zelioli wrote further: "Let us now examine a few data relating to the *differenziali* classes in primary schools: in the scholastic year 1963–64 the places were 1133, there is an immense increase in this sector in the following years: 1831 places in 1965–66, 5106 places in 1968–69, and 6199 places in 1970–71, that year it surpassed the number in special classes which had always been greater. After that we see a heavy drop: in 1974–75 we find 3376 places, but the number is actually smaller because of the gradual change from *differenziali* to ordinary classes in sections where we find part-time sectorial actions on pupils with particular deficits, or by effect of the use of teachers in special and support classes for subjects in difficulty" (Zelioli, 1977, p. 106). From an examination of the above data, we can say that towards the end of the school year 1970–71, we get a true picture of the existing situation in the sector of differentiated and special teaching in the primary school area.

The actions caused by the protest against special institutions and the movement for the integration of pupils in ordinary school structures determined experimental situations and solutions that, being experimental and then different from what was legally recommended, could not be statistically recorded. And even when recorded (de Anna, 1983), they could not be comparable because they do not derive from programmed administrative actions but from spontaneous reactions that can only subsequently be studied and rationalised.

Therefore, we could leave out the statistics and try to work on what was happening in the field, in the different areas and institutions. Statistics are useful, though, to understand that the introduction of special classes did not develop the learning of the students with emerging difficulties, but allowed some teachers to remove students from their class who were deemed likely to disturb or slow down the common work of the class.

In the early 1970s, the wave of protest against special schools, defined as discriminating and segregating, invested all the provinces of our country with effects that differed according to the different sociocultural conditions and existing school structures.

The most fierce controversies between the upholders of the integration of "different" pupils in ordinary schools and the upholders of special schools, at least for those with the most "severe" impairments, seemed to have calmed down all over the country. Nevertheless, there was a state of disinformation on the real problems of special education and that certainly did not help to solve difficulties. Zelioli raised the question: "The 'integration'/segregation' dilemma has very simplistically led to another dilemma: shall we abolish or maintain the special schools? This is a false dilemma because

⁶ In the Italian school system there were, in this phase, special classes for disabled students and *classi differenziali*. The *differenziali* classes were attended by students with learning difficulty and even disabilities. Their problems and needs, though, could allow the expectation of a temporary attendance of the separate class. About the difference between special class and *differenziale* class, see de Anna (1998: pp. 52–61). "Integrazione scolastica" allowed the abolition of both special and *differenziali* classes and a focus on learning difficulties.

the many reasons in favour of the greatest possible integration of disabled people in ordinary schools do not necessarily lead to the closure of special schools”: they had positively experienced the refinement of approaches and techniques, therefore they could help in developing “integrazione scolastica” in ordinary schools (Zelioli, 1977, pp. 105–107).

The text we have extensively quoted from contains many elements that suggest a model in continuous evolution, which has to take into account the pressure from the grass roots and from extremely efficient organisational and legislative needs – which Aldo Zelioli himself interpreted in those years, and of which he is today a precious witness.⁷

We have already recalled that those were the years of great internal population mobility; when entire new peripheral cities were built, and this mobility brought children from the south to the north, from the country to cities, which led to many important issues opening up – for example – the learning of Italian and learning to write. The cultural context of these children was therefore different from that in which their parents had grown up, lived, and been socialised. In that sense, the learning difficulties were many, but their consequence was the establishment of *differenziali* and special classes that spread like wildfire. The two situations, *differenziali classes* and special classes, however, belonged to a separate construction which, as we have seen, was widely criticised.

In those years, another technical official of the Ministry of Education, Antonio Augenti, took the opportunity of evaluating the inadequacy of the measures that were taken and the multiplication of the *differenziali* classes and special schools, a multiplication that “was considered the blemish of a school policy that tends towards marginalisation and segregation” (Augenti, 1977, p. 21). The special classes were perceived collectively as a blemish, as an element not to be proud of, and Antonio Augenti, higher executive, counsellor of the Ministry of Education, pointed this out with conviction, believing steps should be taken to overcome what was being defined as “segregation”. But Aldo Zelioli, one of the supporters of integration, believed that the opposition between special classes and integration was not a real problem, as the skills of the “special” teachers had to be integrated within the framework of ordinary classes in ordinary schools.

This led to a model that had to be adjusted repeatedly, and that Zelioli himself had contributed to developing, with the provision of special support and therefore of special support within ordinary classes, and not the elimination of the special structure itself. Rather, this model upheld the *dissemination* of specialist approaches in order to reach the student in a context of socialisation in an ordinary class, while maintaining an appropriate response to his/her particular needs with precision and with technically prepared personnel.

Aldo Zelioli’s pages contain a concentration of all the elements that led to building a positive though challenging model. One should note, for example, the resistance and difficulties involved in gaining acceptance for innovations in the right spirit, with the possibility of seeing them also as a different way of enhancing roles compared to what had been the practice in the past. These elements allow for creativity as well as appropriate responses to different needs.

The change of conceptual framework

The presence of disabled people in ordinary contexts leads to change in parameters. These are not new elements, and have deep roots (e.g. the story of the “sauvage” and of Itard at the beginning of the 19th century). In certain aspects, first empirically and later partly conceptually, there is an anticipation of the diagnostic approach that emerges today in the “International Classification of functioning, disability and health: ICF” (OMS). In other words, from the international diagnostic indicators that mark the passage from a static, individual judgement, in quantitative terms (e.g. the “quantity” of intelligence of a subject), to a judgement based on the possibility of achieving “adaptive operation”. Diagnosis is not a final sentence without an appeal, but a process in which the diagnosis is a phase and not a final destination.

⁷ Aldo Zelioli was a school inspector who looked hopefully and trustfully on the possibility to create a system for integration in ordinary school.

This change has a number of important consequences. We wish to point out two of these:

- the possibility that integration or “inclusion” thinking should focus attention on adaptive and cognitive strategies, with potentially beneficial outcomes for many difficulties (dysgraphia, dyslexia, and other impairments. . .) and for the identification of other problems and contexts that may contribute to, or be a cause of, learning difficulties. Without confusing disability and disadvantage, or disability and cultural differences, it may be helpful to understand a methodological process based on cognitive strategies, and not on one single model;
- the possibility of living continuously in situations defined as “severe” or “very severe” and in situations of disability and normality. What could happen if a boy or a girl in a condition that keeps him/her immobile, without any communication tools, and with no control of the sphincter, attends an ordinary school with his/her peers? These peers could learn a great deal from the presence of this person in their class. Undoubtedly, it depends on the didactic action. It is possible to learn how our organism can work, what tools it uses to communicate within a particular context, how people can express “yes” and “no”, how they can control their interaction with the environment and many other important functions that human beings accomplish, each one in his/her own way and with a particular need for help. It has been shown that the benefits are reciprocal: a motionless child receives a ball in a game modified to include him; the thrower controls the force, the receiver is stimulated. Better still, that child receives support for his/her learning and encouragement in communication; his/her schoolmates will develop knowledge in the different disciplinary sectors on cerebral lesions, and therefore on neurophysiology, on the forms of help, etc.

It is a mutual reinforcement of cognitive skills.

At a certain point, the conceptual framework has changed, but only in part; in some ways it could be said that important changes occur in research, and become a concrete reference point for management and provisions (when elements of change oblige us to consider a different way of perceiving a disabled person). The change may be summarised in these terms: the passage from a concept of disability as a quantitative measurable datum in statistical terms – and therefore an element that will accompany the people throughout their lifetime – to a concept that considers *adaptive operations*, and therefore the necessity of thinking always in relation to a context, or better to different contexts. From this perspective, we can better understand education as a passage between the subject and his/her characteristics on the one hand and the environment on the other, with the possibility of creating mediations between the subject and the environment and mutual adaptations to reduce disabling barriers to participation.

Education, therefore, can be a bridge between the subject, his/her features and needs, and the environment, helping to develop the necessary and mutual adaptations that will reduce the situation of disability (de Anna, 2003).

We can trace this back to the mythical founder of education for the disabled people – Itard and the story of the “savage” boy. Itard clashed with Pinel, the luminary of psychiatry in those days – at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th – a charismatic person in some ways, capable of operating an important change, the change of an epoch: that psychiatric inmates should not be chained. In spite of this open vision to progress, when Pinel examined the “savage”, he considered him uneducable. His diagnosis was definite but not absolute, in the sense that he was not closed in his conviction not to allow his young pupil Itard to develop his own hypothesis about the educability of the boy, and therefore the possibility that there may be *mutual adaptations*, terms that were not used in those days.

In time, it became possible that such an event could lead to greater possibilities in education – indeed, to a greater extension of the term “education” itself. And we find this debate, or rather this contrast, in a long process that takes us from the time of the Enlightenment until today, with times in which static diagnostic indications seem clear, times when a certain school of medicine seems to prevail, and other times when it is the educators that seem to prevail. We cannot but remember that history contains tragic events such as exterminations, that human beings have been considered “rotten products”, who must either live for a short time with no costs, or be killed. These are pages in history that should never be forgotten, and make it even more important to embrace the prospect of “integrazione scolastica”.

It is important to understand the role and the development of local organisations – though this may entail the risk of local parochialism – and, in particular, the role played by some important figures that can be identified clearly if we look at micro histories.

The history of education contains *adventures* that refer to human and scientific sensitivities and skills, expected and unexpected, in a very precise context: the people who know the resources of the boys and girls they meet, the people who work with them and know all the local resources available: those people will know how to educate them and how to mould them.

The Italian concept of “*integrazione diffusa*” (widespread) allows the development of those dynamics everywhere, while always taking into consideration the particular features of the different local situations. And this precedes and goes beyond the acts of government. It comes from continuous, underground, long-travelling flows. The names of important figures may be traced back to Maria Montessori, Sante De Santis, but also less known figures such as Iolanda Cervellati and Maria Teresa Rovigatti: great personages who led the development of local responses to the challenge of disability. Our country went through 20 years of fascist government, and then the years of an epochal turning point between 1939 and 1945. From this period, new approaches emerged, not only analytical approaches, but approaches in relation to didactics and active education, with the development of a new concept of education.

This was the time when the most interesting and important presuppositions on the model for integration were being made both from the organisational and the conceptual point of view – two inseparable elements. From an organisational standpoint, 1962 is considered an important year, the year in which middle schools were unified. This very important constitutive element needs to be reflected on. Once more, we shall use a method that could be defined partly as anthological, based on the reading of those precious witnesses by key scholars. Let us read a page from one of the pedagogic authors that were certainly an important reference in the development of what we have called here the Italian model – Lamberto Borghi.

“School is called upon to continue this double intent of maternal education, to guide the young with awareness and keep in mind their degree of development, so that they may become capable of acting and thinking independently and always being intimate with others, that is of thinking and acting in unison with them and of considering the promotion of development in others as the end of their own development. Now, if on the one hand the training process of the individual to attitudes of thought, freedom, and sociability, is infinite, in our “one world” also the number of people that that individual must help in the same training process and with whom he is called to share is also infinite, not excluding anyone from his perfected skill and will to understand and love. Freedom, sociability, and universality are therefore among the aspects of the same educational process, they are three aspects of the same training, of the same educational process, of the same shaping of human personality” (Borghi, 2000, p. 144).

This page lights up the concepts on which educational integration is based. There is a need to consider ethical aspects and at the same time live them as an educational commitment, both for adults who have the responsibility of educating and teaching, and for the child, who grows in the responsibility of reaching targets and allowing others to achieve them, without any exception. This statement from Borghi is very important, especially because Borghi, like many other pedagogues who were active on the Italian pedagogical scene during those years, was not targeting his reflections only on disabled students, but he was thinking of *all* children and young people. This reasoning was completely at odds with the notion and practices of exclusion. And this was active education, the new school, which had deep roots in the first part of the century and in many parts of the world.

It demanded the respect of the subject in his originality and diversity. It demanded *the consideration of the statute of the children*, which was held to be an important point that was to be saved from the dangers of the nostalgic memories on the past of parents of their own childhood or from the other risk of adults demanding that children be taught to replicate their own way of life. The statute of the children was seen, and still is, as a statute in the plurality of the subjects, in their originality. Moreover, it demanded that the rhythm of infancy, of those who grow, and the needs of breathing and of rhythms, should be accompanied by significant rituals, capable of linking with the imaginary, with symbols, and

that these should be reflected in the organisation of time and space. It demanded, and still does, that the new organisation link with a political space – the *polis* – and be open to becoming; and the necessity of the educational experience involves a double distancing: the specific scientific distancing and the more widely cultural distancing that should allow the possibility of breathing with respect to growing subjects.

These are the important elements of a construction that contains in its concepts the presuppositions of what would later become “*integrazione scolastica*” and that could also be defined as the Italian model. The consequences are organisational and it is always necessary to consider that the organisation is complex and that in school activities and organisation there is a great variety of elements that cannot (and will not) be considered in one uniform way, but it is fundamental for the integration approach that there is a good school organization (de Anna, 1996).

The achievement of a unified middle school,⁸ and therefore a unitary basic course for all, was a very important element, underpinning the beginnings of the experience of integration. This should not be forgotten, and three scientific dimensions, which we examine, though in a synthetic non-analytic form, converge on this: the sociological dimension, the psychological dimension, and the pedagogical dimension. These constitute a convergence of elements that tend to locate different possibilities for the development of the prospects of integration in a unitary course.

But talking of an Italian model, we cannot but avoid referring to a model that has received important contributions of scholars from other countries. These scholars recognised in the Italian model the achievement of their ideas – but certainly not exclusively. For this reason, we believe there could be a misunderstanding when we speak of the “Italian model”, if this is isolated from the context of studies, research, and achievements also in other countries.

The great risk we run is to believe that only our country has achieved certain things. There is a line of continuity, and we wish to indicate it as a road that links the achievements of the Italian model with studies and achievements of other countries. Think of *normalization* in the US, which is the identification of inclusive and not exclusive processes, typical of North America, but also recognisable as similar to the process that is called the “Italian model”. Certainly, the recognition of the scholars of other countries is only partial. Italian is not spoken in many parts of the world, and the tendency is to translate from the English and partly French speaking world into Italian, and not vice versa. But there is a need to take into account lines of continuity and we must concentrate our attention on this.

The strong points of the model

There are a number of particularly powerful features of the Italian model. These include:

- the possibility of refocusing our attention on learning rather than on teaching, and therefore that of grasping the diversity of the students who make up the class rather than the oneness of the teacher;
- coevolution, which allows us to experience how differences, constraints and disabilities can be a resource;
- the enhancement of social life, in aspects that demand skills in everyday activities such as washing or making a bed do not have a linear progression but a recurring character, typical of care activities which occur in the times and spaces of everyday life. These skills are very often neglected or taken for granted: it is like building in height (cognitive progression) without having a good and wide enough base to rest on. For this reason, “*integrazione scolastica*” may bring a benefit to everyone: it calls the attention of everyone to the nature of ‘care’ as being a common feature of everyday life shared by all members of society.

Moreover, coevolution and participation in living together create the prerequisites for enhanced development in active adult life. In the EU Leonardo Project we have been able to observe that it is easy to find a certain number of “life stories” of men and women identified as having Down syndrome

⁸ Before 1962, the junior high school (“*scuola media*”) was divided into two main addresses and only one of them allowed the students to attend the different types of lyceum.

in our normal work in Italy; while in the other European countries, the partners of the project have faced many difficulties trying to reach this result and have gathered very few “life stories”. The process of integration in Italy recalls ideas taken from the fields of sociology and psychology. The sociologist Gianni Selleri pointed out that Ervin Goffman⁹ identified two groups that a disabled person could turn to in the hope of finding support and understanding. One is related to the *stigma*, in other words it is made up of those that have the same image, the same disability, one would say, and become disabled in the same way – following in Goffman’s footsteps we would add – precisely because they undergo one and the same modelling. The other group is represented by *normal* persons that offer to take part in the disabled person’s private life: the technicians, members of the family, exceptional friends, and volunteers. People with whom the disabled person does not seem to feel ashamed or even impaired, but can be under the illusion of being a normal or *normalised* person. Selleri pointed out the negative aspects of these micro exclusions that no longer need large structures of exclusion because they can easily insinuate or place themselves in an apparent integration (Selleri, 1978; Goffman, 1968; 1970).

It emerged therefore, in the sociological field but in harmony with psychological studies, that the possibility of exclusion does not need large manifestations but may be a part of normal everyday life, and it does not always need to show itself in overtly aggressive ways, but may also manifest itself through ‘positive’ prejudice, the possibility of extending exceptional favours to a disabled person by a somewhat selective, selected, privileged context. These reflections are even more interesting if we imagine that the law has made enormous steps forward in terms of guaranteeing an adequate body of legislation for inclusive policies and practices but does not bring about changes in attitudes and micro relations; rather these must be conquered at other levels by bringing about changes in attitudes and convictions, and through the development of relationships and friendships based on principles of equality.

The emphasis that is at times laid on relational aspects may bring about a sort of pendulum oscillation, alternating periods with greater attention to the dynamics of socialisation with periods that favour learning and therefore also teaching. In fact, the two dimensions need to be mutually united in a way that could well be represented by the expression “learning in order to socialise” and “socialising in order to learn”, in other words “learning while socialising” and “socialising while learning”. This reciprocity is at the basis of the psychological dimension that brings out the learning strategies and the attention to the *meta*: the meta cognitive strategies.

The skill of the teaching staff and of the educators in mastering these terms is extended through the availability of training and exchange of material that is to be found in bookshops and also in Italian networks. And this is an element that is certainly due to research in the field of Italian psychology and of that of other countries; it is another point in which lines of continuity can be found between what we call the “Italian model” and the contributions of applied research, and experiences, led in many other countries. We need to concentrate our attention also on the importance of imitation in learning, of the possibility of having several models available; thus, the presence of peers provides an opportunity to acquire a plurality of models. Each model can contribute to the construction of self identity and therefore it makes the development in learning and understanding by observing and sharing with others possible to occur. But at times this process is blocked precisely by the stereotype that is also internalised by the disabled person.

For this reason, during the years in which the vision of “integrazione scolastica” and *integrazione* itself developed, the psychological approach pointed out the value of the dynamics of reciprocity through *empathy*. Two sides can be related to this term: one is strictly relational, the other is more

⁹ Ervin Goffman, as a sociologist, has been an important point of reference in understanding exclusion and the structures that were acting as separating barriers between the society outside and the institutions inside. The institutions of exclusion that were represented by total institutions but also by administrative mechanisms and small structures that outlined separate processes. And it is precisely on these separate processes that the attention has been placed by the world of education. The phenomenon was also examined by it makes the sociologists in relation to a particular exclusion that represented the large numbers related to internal migration, as indicated. The two phenomena were an important point of reference for strictly sociological studies aimed at understanding the phenomena of micro structural exclusion. Not only those that had important representations of a grand image, such as the institutions, but also the relations and the organisation of spaces which outlined the coding of preclusions and stereotypes.

closely tied to the development of the cognitive prospects whose main points of reference can be found in Vygotskij and in Lewin. Once more we believe that the Italian model is linked into a “network” – as people say today – with many sources that go far beyond the boundaries of our country: the building of learning strategies that need not only the strength of the ‘school for all’ we have already referred to by pointing out its great importance, but also the crucial contribution of the infant school.

The infant school provides the setting, at the reception stage of education, in which children interact together during a period of their development in which imitative actions and exchange through play, and the possibilities of exploring one’s own skills and of those offered by diverse environment and contexts, are particularly important.

Sergio Neri wrote:¹⁰

“It is true that the enhancement of the role of peers is a determining factor in the school enterprise, to such an extent that the activities in the small group and the many forms of collaboration in this school are so particularly cultivated that they have become a distinguishing element. It is also true that slowness (but not laziness, untidiness, letting things take their course, simple amusement) is a cipher of the passage of time and of the mode of operation, thus allowing each to try and try again, to err without being measured and judged, to look for one’s strategy to solve the problem, gradually to find the sense and measure of one’s action and growth.”

Is it all easy then, in infant school?

“The presence of a disabled child can be considered a problem, a difficulty that will require a greater expenditure of energy, intelligence, resources and means. Therefore, the model developed in infant schools had to be readapted and shaped in subsequent school grades to develop pupils’ growth in common school.

Or is not this approach a means of providing education for all, in which all pupils feel better, including those who are disabled” (Neri, 2002, p.19-20).

These words by Sergio Neri contain interesting and important elements which are helpful in understanding the Italian inclusive model. *The possibility of focusing attention on learning rather than teaching contains plurality*. It is obvious that learning belongs to each of the learners, and each has his/her own style of learning. It is therefore necessary to pass from a strategy of *teaching* to strategies of learning experiences or of *learning* in general, because each individual has a different structuring of the process of learning. This favours a possibility of considering the presence of a disabled schoolmate as a resource to build learning strategies. It is clear that it engages us in a challenge that is a *coevolution* targeted at learning experiences; and therefore with the need of finding strategies, mediators, resources and materials that should allow that disabled child to learn. This is observed and also understood, with the help of adults, by the schoolmates who accomplish what we have read in Lamberto Borghi: the possibility of understanding that one’s accomplishment is also the accomplishment of others, not only in vaguely sentimental terms but also with the concreteness of the objectives of learning.

The possible development of infant school, as forecast by Sergio Neri, entailed a few risks: a reproduction or an evolution of this style in secondary education was not considered possible; and therefore either out of favour dictated by generosity, or out of fear dictated by a sense of the duty of teaching, they imagined that while all the other subjects may go through the processes of learning in evolution, *the subject*, the disabled boy or girl, must, for some reasons related to his own condition, maintain that way of dealing with learning experiences that was typical of infant school, even though he/she has already finished infant school, and perhaps a good while ago: there would be a gap between one’s own modality of living the learning experiences and their developments and the modalities of carrying them out by the others in the class group of peers, and in general.

Now this is the point on which we run the risk of reproducing a situation of support that does not have an evolutionary form. Evolution in a context of sociality should be *coevolution*, and this is the way we wish to interpret it. This is another important point about the Italian model, or what we call the

¹⁰ Sergio Neri was the inspector who had the task to coordinate the National Observatory on Integration of the Ministry of Education in the 1990s.

Italian model, in other words the possibility that there should be coevolution in the comprehension, and therefore also in cognitive development, of disabled people, included in a context. There should be the need and possibility of integrating in disciplinary processes the knowledge of the deficit in order to understand it, and the knowledge of disabilities, in order to reduce barriers to participation. Knowledge makes it easier to master, and disabilities and differences, are no longer mysterious. Now, it should be evident – but it is not always so – that such a coevolutionary line presents differences that depend on the deficits: a visible deficit, that is large enough to reduce the subject's mobility for example, is faced in a certain way, while an invisible deficit, or a psychic or sensory deficit needs other kinds of approach.

This is plurality; plural processes, within one school. This is one of the basic elements that transforms pedagogic and didactic reflections and allows *didacticism* to be relegated to the past. Didactics is underpinned by the belief that the approach adopted by the adult is absolute, as regards the organisation of the syllabus, progression, study techniques, and it can be repeated in the same way, regardless of diversity and who is present in the class group. There is a sharp separation between subjects which are only connected by chance in the weave of thematic groups. Authority is invested in those that teach, and the use of memorising as a study technique is dominant – an approach which is reproductive: today's learners will be tomorrow's teachers and parents, and they will be applying in education the same model they experienced in their childhood and youth.

Thus, the control and evaluation techniques are essentially founded on the mnemonic reproduction of the transmission of teaching.

These characteristics may be mitigated, or made even more difficult in their application by the unruliness of the pupils, and generally speaking, if this is the model followed by the teachers, unruliness brings the matter to be felt by pupils rather than being considered a problem of the teaching model. This model has another important characteristic – that is *naturalism*: it is considered the way – not *one* way – of teaching and the way of learning. There have been controversies and not only in our country but in other countries as well, about the pedagogic approaches to teaching, of the scholastic condition, and at times they have created misunderstandings, for example the crude misunderstanding of believing that this pedagogic approach meant the abolition of disciplines, and of the subjects studied. But that is a superficial interpretation: the approach implies focusing on learning experiences and enhanced focus on learning in Italian schools is a consequence of “*integrazione scolastica*” (de Anna, 2008).

Difficulties can be regarded either as problems that will be solved or as a cause for a certain failure. There can be two interpretations. One is decidedly negative: disabled pupils are not included, they create difficulties and the ‘problem’ is theirs; they should not be where they are. But the other interpretation, which we find is the most common, is that of adopting – thanks to the presence of a disabled learner, or learners – constructive prospects in the field of knowledge, and therefore of understanding that the problems experienced by disabled people are only latent, or in some way masked, problems that are also the problems of other persons; the real core of the matter is that of passing from the illusory homogeneity of the learner to the plurality of learners, and therefore to a construction of disciplinary didactics capable of facing plurality and *living it as itself a resource* in the learning process (Canevaro, 2007).

This is the fundamental purpose of coevolution; it poses many problems to imagine a successful infant school which does not involve the principles and practices of coevolution, that also involves didactic approaches which are the responsibility of *all* teachers, rather than being delegated to special teachers (specialised in support, appointed as support teachers). This issue also concerns the trainers themselves – and we know how difficult the training course for teachers in general has been, and still is – as well as of those specialised in support within this general framework.

We need to remember that the terms “organisation” and “skills” are precious in the Italian model of “*integrazione scolastica*”. We have often pointed out that this Italian model does not have a closed structure but is related as in a neural network to the ongoing research in the world. We need to maintain this curiosity towards what happens beyond the confines of our country, outside our circle, because by preserving this curiosity we shall avoid presenting our system as “the” model and we will be able to integrate it with others and build an integrating outlook or an inclusive one that should be vaster, stronger, and certainly more problematic. In the understanding of those problems, there is the richness of what we have experienced so far and that we would like to go on experiencing it.

The integration system in Italy is based on the possibility for all the students to attend the community school in the common class, with a reduction in the number of students in the class, the attendance in each class of no more than two disabled students, the support of one specialized teacher for every two students (according to the national range, that locally can vary from one student to four students). Disabled students, even those who experience the most complex difficulties, can follow their educational pathway, even though they may be operating at the basic foundation stages in the curriculum. Evaluation is based on the student's Individual Educational Planning (PEI) that is linked to the common planning of the class and of the school: the collaboration of community services (of local institutions, of local medical centres charged to support school and social integration) are fundamental to building the "Project for Life" (Canevaro and Ianes, 2001).

The parents are involved in the different stages of the integration process: from the first reports relating to the child and their disability, to the drafting of the PDF (functional dynamic outline) and of the Individual Educational Plan; they are also involved through the participation to the GLHs and GLHOs (operational teams of work at different levels), that are created in each school and class to enhance the collaboration among different partners, inside and outside the school. According to Italian legislation, this process can continue right up to the highest educational levels, including the university (de Anna, 2007).

The number of disabled students attending universities today is much larger than one would even have imagined in the past. There are about 16,000 disabled students in Italian universities (AA 2007–2008): the number of disabled students in all the universities of Italy is significant, and their distribution involves all the graduation courses.¹¹ For this reason, every university has a "representative" of the Vice-Chancellor, in other words a professor whose duty is managing available resources so as to facilitate the studies of disabled students; and the services for the right to education must guarantee that every disabled student have the basic requirements, that are indispensable to his university life. This is as a result of the spreading of understanding about "integrazione scolastica" and its concepts, and it could lead us to think that problems are solved and all difficulties overcome. However, there is still a lot to do and there are still many problems to be solved; a model can be identified, though: not separate from the prospects of other countries and especially from the "good practices" that involve the whole of Europe. An integrated model for *integrazione*. This is so fascinating that it gives a meaning to all our work.

Conclusions

The Italian model is based on a wide set of laws that has been grounded, since the 1970s, on the ideas that we have briefly explained, and has followed the historical vision and pathway that we have presented. In Italy, "integrazione scolastica" is based on the flexibility of educational planning, on the interaction between school community and the wider social community, on the internal organization of the different phases of integration processes, on the role of teachers and on the professional development of teachers, together with that of all the professionals involved. The main features of the Italian model can lose their meaning and effectiveness without a deep reflection and an approach that are both inspired by-and take into account the concepts and ideas that we have expressed.

References

- Augenti, A. (1977). *La questione scolastica dei ragazzi handicappati*. Firenze: Le Monnier.
Borghi, L. (2000). *La città e la scuola*. Milano: Eleuthera.

¹¹ In senior high schools, education is possible for all the disabled students, regardless of the kind of disability: it is based on individualised projects tailored on the student's potentialities. In Italy, final certificates ("diplomi") of the upper secondary have a legal value and then cannot be gained by students who cannot achieve the goals of the course of studies; many young people in a situation of cognitive or psychic disability attend the upper secondary through educational individualised planning and integrative intervention: in this case, they can achieve a certificate of attendance with a report about the competences acquired (which implies their continuous assessment all along school attendance). According to the present law, university attendance is allowed to all the students who have a regular final certificate of the upper secondary.

- Canevaro, A., & Chierigatti, A. (1999). *La relazione di aiuto*. Roma: Carocci.
- Canevaro, A., & Ianes, D. (Eds.). (2001). *Buone prassi di integrazione scolastica*. Trento: Erickson.
- Canevaro, A. (2003). Pedagogical, Psychological, and sociological aspects of the Italian model, a methodological preamble. In: SEDC & CND (2003), *Mainstreaming in Education: the Italian model and opportunities in the countries of southern Europe*. Pisa: Edizioni Del Cerro.
- Canevaro, A. (2006). *Le logiche del confine e del sentiero*. Trento: Erickson.
- Canevaro, A. (Ed.). (2007). *L'integrazione scolastica degli alunni con disabilità*. Trento: Erickson.
- de Anna, L. (1983). *Aspetti normativi dell'inserimento sociale degli handicappati in Italia e all'estero*. Roma: Tempinuoovi.
- de Anna, L. (1996). Pedagogical, curricular and classroom organisation in Italy. In *OECD Conference proceeding - Good practice in mainstreaming students with special needs*. Paris: OECD.
- de Anna, L. (1998). *Pedagogia speciale*. Milano: Guerini.
- de Anna, L. (2000). Généalogie de l'intégration scolaire en Italie. In M. Chauvière, & E. Plaisance (Eds.), *L'école face aux Handicaps. Education spéciale ou éducation intégrative ?* (pp. 132–146). Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- de Anna, L. (2001). Integrazione: la dimensione internazionale. In A. Canevaro (Ed.), *Pedagogia speciale, Studium educationis* (pp. 605–622). Padova: CEDAM.
- de Anna, L. (2003). Didattica speciale. In E. Nigris (Ed.), *Didattica generale* (pp. 1–19). Milano: Guerini.
- de Anna, L. (2006). L'integrazione scolastica in Europa. In N. Serio, & P. Moliterni (Eds.), *Qualità della Didattica, qualità dell'integrazione "Dal dire al fare"* (pp. 98–104). Vasto: Gulliver.
- de Anna L. (2007). Educational Integration of students with disabilities in Italy, in the school for all. In: S. Ališauskienė (Eds.), *Specialusis Ugdimas - Special Education*, 1(16). Šiaulių: Šiaulių universitetas Lietuva.
- de Anna, L. (2008). Les processus d'intégration scolaire en Italie et la formation des enseignants. *Reliance. Revue des situations de handicap, de l'éducation et des sociétés*, 27, 111–120.
- Goffman, E. (1968). *Asylums*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Ianes, D. (2006). *La speciale normalità*. Trento: Erickson.
- Neri, S. (2002). *Guardare vicino e lontano*. Milano: Fabbri Editori.
- Pavone, M. (1997). *Valutare gli alunni in situazione di handicap, aspetti formali e individualizzazione*. Trento: Erickson.
- Selleri, G. (1978). Per una psico-sociologia dell'handicap. In *AIAS Quaderni della riabilitazione, notiziario AIAS dicembre*. Roma: AIAS.
- Zelioli, A. (1977). Il problema degli handicappati nella legislazione italiana. In: R. Zavalloni (Eds.). Il problema degli handicappati. Cesena: Istituto Psico-pedagogico Pio XII About the Law n. 180/1978: www.tutori.it/L180.78.html, retrieved 19/02/2009.