METHODOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF SPECIAL TEACHING: SOCIO-ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF DYNAMICS AND CATEGORIES

ASPETTI METODOLOGICI E EPISTEMOLOGICI DELLA DIDATTICA SPECIALE: ANALISI SOCIO-ANTROPOLOGICA DELLE DINAMICHE E CATEGORIE

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Abstract
The first section of this contribution will be followed by an epistemological analysis of the dynamics, paradigms and canons that have influenced the definition and diffusion of the construct of inclusion in social and school contexts. It will deal with how neoliberal individualism and "ministerial pedagogy" have contributed to slowing down the emergence of the inclusive phenomenon, and how this has assumed a central role in the Italian social and scholastic framework only in the early nineties, owing to the spread of the model promoted in Disability Studies. The second section will deal with Disability Studies and how it has had an impact on mitigating the phenomenon of social and school segregation, promoting the diffusion of the social model and the concept of relative ability. The third section will elicit the characteristics of the inclusive approach in reference to the BES categories identified in the national and international scenario. The fourth and final section will deal with the methodological aspects and good practices useful for inclusive teaching.

La prima sezione di questo contributo verte ad un'analisi epistemologica delle dinamiche, dei paradigmi e dei canoni che hanno inciso nella definizione e la diffusione del costrutto dell'inclusione, nei contesti sociali e scolastici. Si tratterà di come l'individualismo neoliberale e la "pedagogia ministeriale" abbiano contribuito a rallentare il delinearsi del fenomeno inclusivo, e di come questo abbia assunto un ruolo centrale nel quadro sociale e scolastico italiano solo nei primi anni Novanta, grazie alla diffusione del modello sociale promosso nei Disabilities Studies. La seconda sezione tratterà degli Studi sulla Disabilità e di come questi abbiano inciso nel mitigare il fenomeno della segregazione sociale e scolastica, promuovendo la diffusione del modello sociale ed il concetto di abilismo relativo. Nella terza parte del contributo si eliciteranno quali sono le caratteristiche dell'approccio inclusivo in riferimento alle categorie BES individuate nello scenario nazionale ed

internazionale e nella sezione finale si tratterà degli aspetti metodologici e delle buone pratiche utili alla didattica inclusiva.

Key-words
Bes - Disabilities Studies – Didattica inclusiva – Modello sociale

Key-words
Special Needs – Studi sulla disabilità - Inclusive education - Social model

1. Liberal individualism and the exclusivity of the medical model

Contemporary pedagogy is driven by the continuous debate surrounding the concept of school inclusion. Educational policies and practices have become increasingly attentive to meeting the needs of all students, to comply with the principles of equality, equal opportunities and active participation of each in social life. Booth and Ainscow (2002) have underlined that inclusiveness must be understood not as an end or a goal to be pursued. Inclusion is a process, aimed at guaranteeing the possibility for each human being to be able to see themselves formed according to their inclinations and abilities, in compliance with the principle of self-determination, first introduced in pedagogical terms by Deci and Ryan (1985) and then deepened thanks to the studies carried out by Milthaug (1996) and Wehmeyer (1995). To self-determine, skills are needed to solve the problems that inhabit the human condition, and it is precisely the construct of competence, understood in cognitive, metacognitive and transversal terms, that urges the world of contemporary pedagogical research in the same way as inclusion (Franceschini, 2018). Two opposite perspectives define the paradigms of inclusiveness and competence in a double way: methodological individualism and the social model. Individualism has its roots within the concept of *capabilities,* that is, those systemic and contextual circumstances that, if adopted, allow man to function (Greblo, 2013).

For Nussbaum (1997), capabilities have a dual nature; they can be endogenous and combined. Endogenous individualism asserts that a person is capable of performing actions and can perform their functions in relation to the abilities pertaining to their level of psychophysical development. In mediated or combined individualism, the functionalities of a subject are the result of the mitigation of an encounter between the individual's internal capacities and some external circumstances, which is likely to favor the fulfillment of a specific action or function. It is a circumstance external to the exercise of a function, for example, a right. A right protects the execution of an action, which is an expression of the subject's will, and at the same time binds the activity of anyone who tries to hinder them from exercising a faculty protected by the law. The fact is that Nussbaum's reflections are based on the individual and their ability to always carry out an action that favors the context in which they are inserted while respecting the other members of the collective. According to the individualistic point of view, an organic good cannot be accepted if it does not benefit each of the members of the group. Special pedagogy, in this scenario, can be contemplated as that branch of pedagogy that protects the right to education of everyone, as a resource for society. According to methodological individualism, the subject is the holder of resources and potential. The development of skills and abilities is determined by the biological-genetic components of the individual and by the didactic methodologies applied to allow them to achieve full personal maturity. Within this model, a continuous comparison between individual performance and a reference performance standard, defined by precise regulatory references, can be observed (Franceschini, 2018). This generates competitive pressures among individuals, which, driven by continuous self-improvement, allow the system to select those who are most projected toward educational success.

Talking about inclusion in such a system is absurd, as the individual who does not reach the standards imposed by the system is automatically excluded, isolated or marginalized—a bit like in Sparta, where newborn babies who exhibited conspicuous imperfections and deformities were abandoned on Mount Taygetos because they were not suitable for the art of warfare. Such discrimination determines different forms of verbal labeling and the provision of spaces within which to contain the socially excluded and marginalized. This systemic rigidity transforms learning environments into industrialized environments, where students who can use the educational devices available for the execution of a performance will receive a stylized and symbolic form of remuneration, which is a vote. This is the scenario that John Dewey experienced in the "traditional" schools that characterized the education industry during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century: a rigorous discipline, a hierarchy of roles, an education based on notions and the transmission of ideas from the teacher to the learner, strict compliance with programs and dictates imposed by the institution, and segregation of the "unskilled" in "special schools". From these paradigms comes a school even of poor quality. In the 1960s, in Italy, "ministerial pedagogy" posed insurmountable obstacles to the free circulation of ideas and to the transformations necessary for teaching to become oriented toward the other as an active member of the social fabric (Cantatore & Castagno, 2016).

On teacher training, Luciano Biancatelli (1964) asserted that: through painful personal experience, by now everyone—parents, students and teachers—knows that the Italian public school, especially at the compulsory level, lacks, among other things, teachers. And this deficiency is not only quantitative but also qualitative. That is, even those who are there, teachers, have not had sufficient preparation.

The unpreparedness that Biancatelli refers to is determined by the chaos of the ministerial programs, the continuous demand for teachers in society and the dogmatic approach to teaching roles (Biancatelli, 1964).

Thirty years later, Semeraro (1993) still denounces studying in schools subjected to "vertical bureaucratic and authoritarian relationships: such a climate left indelible marks on the formation of the student's moral character, leading him to early isolation and closing him in an individualism that is difficult to correct himself further on". The neoliberal school of the late twentieth century is the school of liberal and dictatorial regimes. In this regard, Bocci (2018) states:

Whether represented as liquid (Bauman), complex (Morin) or more generically globalized, the time we live in is undoubtedly dominated by a liberal vision of society and human relations, a vision centered on logics top-down and separating [...] We are witnesses of rampant poverty, the return of nationalisms, the re-emergence of proclamations on the need to restore well-defined individual and collective identities, distinct, not mixed or compromised [...] An identity light years away from that vision that imagines identity, instead, for what it should be: a generative trait, a process to recognize and recognize the other, in the act that leads each of us to encounter what is different from us.

In this scenario, the teacher himself Is also affected. Lombardo Radice reports that the teachers of those years, if questioned, showed enormous discomfort with respect to their profession, because, despite the apparent freedom acclaimed in that period, the school system claimed that they were the "repeater of conventions and manuals."

In 1964, the Nobel laureate in economics Milton Friedman supported and promoted a school system based on competition. According to the American economist, families with vouchers should have rewarded the schools they thought were best. We witnessed in this era the subjection of schools to the principles of the market and the brazen promotion of the concepts of educational efficiency and effectiveness, which guaranteed educational success only to the most capable and deserving. It is easy to understand how in a similar context there is no room

for the other, for the different. For both the student who does not excel in performance and the one who shines in the exercise of their functions. There is room for strategic homologation, as the single individual is too busy competing with his fellow man to decide to subvert a predefined and predetermined system that makes him unhappy, because he is alone. The school of these years was exclusionary, separatist and discriminatory, although it did allow the disabled to have access to their public facilities from 1971 onwards. In recent years, biological determinism has been on the rise. According to this concept, everyone plays the role that they owe within society by virtue of their own genetic makeup. The idea of a meritocracy founded on genetic, natural, and therefore, irreversible, predetermined bases is spreading. This mental construct is also reflected in schools, where unfortunately only those who are born and considered "intelligent" can excel and feel perfectly included and integrated.

2. The inclusion of the social model

The social model of disability is a heuristic tool that perceives disability as the consequence of a myriad of social factors (Barnes, 2008). This movement began from the Anglo-Saxon political activism of people with disabilities in the last decades of the last century. The intent is to oppose the view of a disability centered on the deficit or the handicap, and therefore, on the condition of disadvantage experienced by the person with disabilities, and focus attention on the disabling role determined by social barriers (Oliver, 1990). From the perspective of the social model, society must be reimagined and reorganized so that it includes in its own schemes the needs and requirements of people with disabilities. From this point of view, biological deficits are considered disabilities because society is not organized to accommodate multiple human functions (Cottini, 2014). From the perspective of the social model, competencies and inclusion are considered properties of the training system in the encounter between a didactic stimulus and the training environment, both single and collective. This theoretical framework helps derive the discipline of *Disability Studies* (DS), which questions the link between disability and impairment while proposing a change that begins from the foundations of society, that is, in school contexts. The framework proposed by DS is an opposite look to that of the medical model: people with disabilities are no longer handicapped to normalize, recover and ensure health and social assistance; they are finally bearers of interests, desires and a unique and unrepeatable life project (Travaglini, 2020). The inclusion process promoted by DS aims to make students acquire skills both directly, through the use of innovative teaching methodologies aimed at satisfying the educational needs of all students, and indirectly, thanks to the design of learning environments that can enhance the differences of each.

In Italy, unlike in the international context, the vast theoretical production of DS did not initially provide space to relevant sociological, legal and pedagogical arguments, apart from some reflections by E. Goffman on social stigmatization (1963). This probably occurred as a result of the hegemony of the medical paradigm. The difficulties of the late twentieth century sociological and pedagogical disciplines in assuming an epistemology different from the individualistic bio-medical one are more evident in the debate on people with severe and extreme disabilities. These people, in almost all cases, were the total prerogative of health and medical facilities, which inevitably subjected them to a social invisibility that limited the inclusion process proposed by the DS (Medeghini, 2013). Even today, paradigms on the human dimension are anchored to rigid models that refer to the existence of a hypothetical concept of normality to be strived for. As Goussot (2015) points out, society has a natural propensity to separate what is considered normal from what is perceived as abnormal. The

entry into the Italian debate of the inclusive approach promoted by the DS, albeit late, does not limit the development of fields of study that involve multiple disciplines. Thanks to *Critical Disability Studies,* our country is given a renewed vision of diversity that outlines a new paradigm that is no longer linked to individuality but focused on the concepts of subjectivity, diversity and inclusivity (Piccioli, 2019).

Within the concept of inclusion, it is possible to find a new principle, that of *relative ability*. In fact, in inclusive teaching, there is no normative reference with which to rigidly evaluate the performance of students. Instead, within it we find unique and unrepeatable people who develop in relation to the educational context that welcomes them. D'Alessio (2018) identifies two research perspectives on inclusive education. The first views inclusive education as an evolution of special education and social integration. From this point of view, the research has focused on the integration processes of those excluded and marginalized from the school system, as they are considered uneducable and to be segregated in institutes set up by ad hoc institutions. The institutionalization of the integration processes proved to be a failure, leading to the elimination of all forms of segregation and reaffirming the need for totalizing integration aimed at all students. The second research perspective views inclusive education from a more generalist perspective, which places emphasis on educational processes, educational spaces and relationships, the organization of schools, the school curriculum, evaluation, and how these factors may or may not affect the student's full education. This last meaning stands as a renewed vision, according to which it is the contexts, mechanisms and systems that must be conceived to favor the presence of a learner with disabilities. A perspective in which a school aimed at normality has to adapt to the needs of the different is no longer appreciable. It is necessary to design, organize and manage educational spaces according to a "normal diversity" in which disability is contemplated, where it finally loses that segregationist and discriminatory meaning that for so long has bored, and in some ways continues to do so, many dimensions of society.

3. The inclusive approach: BES categories in the national and international framework

As has been ascertained so far, inclusion originally concerned only students with specific disabilities. Over time, this concept has expanded considerably, embracing the educational needs of all students, including those with specific learning disabilities (SLD) or belonging to cultures other than the host one or socially disadvantaged categories due to economic or social reasons. Inclusion, as understood today, is the result of an internationalization process aimed at guaranteeing equal opportunities for all students, in every school context. The World Conference on Education for All of 1990, the Framework for Action, Education for All: Completing our Collective Commitments of 2000 (*Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting our Collective Committments*) and the Salamanca Statement of 1994 reaffirm and consolidate the principle that only through total inclusion can a fair education be guaranteed for all categories of students. With the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (2006) in the United States and the Code of Practice (2001) in England, inclusion has become part of the legislation of the respective countries.

In Italy, the acronym BES, which identifies students with Special Educational Needs, is widespread in the regulatory and educational fields, i.e., those who, in international literature, are indicated with the expression SEN or Special Educational Need. The SEN category includes all students with educational problems and learning difficulties and not only those with certified disabilities. All students who are disadvantaged from a biopsycho-

social point of view and face difficulties in the learning process (2005) are to be attributed to the SEN category.

The concept of BES was obtained following a global analysis of the student and is attributable to the application of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). The national system currently considers worthy of attention even those disadvantageous situations experienced by students without any diagnosis or certification. Collegially, teachers can prepare a Personalized Didactic Plan (PDP) to identify the teaching strategies, compensatory tools and dispensatory measures most appropriate for students with Special Educational Needs. The Class Council in secondary schools and teaching teams in primary schools, with the authorization of the family and the signature of the Headmaster (DS), can draw up a PDP to protect the training of students in difficulty. An inclusive school faces various individual situations by resorting to a biopsychosocial anthropological analysis, which differs well from medical, biostructural and functional models (Striano et al., 2019).

To protect the rights and guarantee the inclusion of every single category of student, the legal system and the Ministry of Public Education have produced multiple regulatory devices. Among these, we remember the Ministerial Decree of 27/12/2012 and the CM 8/2013. A further step forward toward inclusion was the one achieved following Law 170/2010 introduced to protect students with SLD. This large array of ordinal devices is oriented to the personalization and individualization of teaching for and of all students using active, constructive and participatory methodologies (Ianes, 2005). Several ways and strategies that teachers can employ to formulate an inclusive and constructive approach to teaching that effectively and efficiently enhances the normal diversity of students (Dyson, 2013). To stimulate dialogue and reflection and, above all, help teachers develop their own pedagogical approach, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE), in 2012, released the 'Profile of Inclusive Teachers'. The value framework produced by EASNIE elicits four items or fundamental values around which the Profile of Inclusive Teacher has been built. These are: enhancing diversity, supporting students, working with others and providing for their own development and updating lifelong professional.

The philosophy of the profile is based on the belief that educational inclusion, to be truly materialized, must be preceded by a series of social and political interventions that allow the person to develop holistically. Numerous studies show how teachers' attitudes and beliefs affect the practices and inclusive strategies they apply in teaching contexts (Aiello, 2017). Several studies argue that the development of an inclusive culture does not depend only on issues of values. Aiello et al. (2017) and Forlin (2012) highlight how direct contact with a disability, and the sense of adequacy or inadequacy, comfort or discomfort, and tranquility or worry affect the perception of the effectiveness of teachers in the inclusive management of a class. Many teachers, despite continuous updates, do not feel sufficiently prepared for the inclusive management of the multiple dynamics within a class (Zanazzi, 2018). According to Giraldo (2017), it is necessary to acquire solid methodological and didactic skills so that an effective change in terms of school inclusiveness can take place.

Conclusions

By exercising a partition of the educational offer in relation to the needs of each student, the perspective proposed by special pedagogy and, specifically, inclusive teaching, does not relate to the educational needs of students. The group is intended as a single entity and requires a primary listening, reading and interpretation activity to enhance the potential of all students

(Franceschini, 2018). Active and prudent listening, not driven by the obsessive need to categorize and measure the effectiveness of educational interventions but rather concentrated on being aware of the learner's needs. An inclusive teaching does not foresee the use of continuous tests to verify the students' abilities, as such an approach would result in discrepancies and discrimination between the elements within the group. An approach focused on assigning grades and synthetic judgments to students would jeopardize the inclusive phenomenon at birth, and thereby contribute to the formation of subgroups and internal hierarchies. The formation of a cohesive, integral and integrated group, one in which everyone feels valued, would require proceeding with an evaluation activity only when the class proves to be mature enough and capable of understanding its formative value. Initially, it would be necessary to proceed with recreational activities organized in small groups, to promote knowledge among class members. When the maturity within the group allows it, it would be possible to proceed with the administration of tests that can promote self-assessment processes among the students.

In the initial phase, the teacher places himself among the students as an attentive director and conductor who discreetly (Zaoui, 2015) satisfies the educational needs of each student. The teacher must also be able to communicate in relation to the environments with which they interact. The school is made up of various contexts and environments that involve significant interaction with different actors. The teacher must learn to manage different communication codes, both internal and external to the class, that are diversified in relation to the interlocutor and the purpose of the communication. In the teacher-student interaction, it is preferable not to use terms that refer to technicalities pertaining to the medical and clinical field. In the classroom, terms such as BES, DSA, disabled and the like should be banned. Such terms create insurmountable walls in the psyche of the students because they categorize and, if misinterpreted, become discriminating. Each student, as a person, is the holder of a complex identity that is attributable to a simple condition and which claims and deserves to be defined with a name. In addition, it would be necessary to establish the same concern in the relationship with the pupils' parents. Care must always be taken to not feed the onset of differentiations and discrimination.

To do this, it is necessary to abandon technicalities that could be misinterpreted by the adult as by the student and prefer a vocabulary that is aimed at sharing information, strategies and objectives that are useful for the purposes of education. In their relationship with colleagues, head teacher and health sector experts, a more technical language would be more than justified, as it is useful for the planning and strategic organization of transversal, interdisciplinary and interdependent interventions, which are essential for correct inclusion (Goodley et al., 2018). Having analyzed the importance of communication that is adapted to different contexts and interlocutors, it is necessary to verify the relevance of a didactic approach that promotes the personalization and individualization of educational interventions. Personalization involves the theoretical and practical research of didactic strategies to promote the development of individual talents as personal and social assets. Individualization of learning involves the adoption of educational strategies that support the achievement of educational objectives by all students. These processes are not to be considered contiguous, nor do they disregard the possibility of coexisting in educational practice. They can be considered complementary to the extent that the right organizational and planning measures are adopted.

The correct arrangement of a classroom setting, appropriate use of didactic tools and a well thought-out micro- and macro-planning activity allow the construction of educational interventions that are both personalized and individualized at the same time. The choice of an activity organized by groups, in which mutual knowledge is encouraged, can contribute to the individualization of learning, while teaching based on the interests of the students can support

the development of talents, thereby personalizing the educational action. The correct management of contexts, times and methods is vital for the success of an inclusive didactic intervention and to promote a dialogic relationship between the teacher and students in which they feel motivated to pursue their ambitions, along with respect for oneself and for everyone, by virtue of the enhancement and mutual recognition of "normal diversity".

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