

THE IMPORTANCE OF ENSURING INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL

L'IMPORTANZA DI GARANTIRE UNA ISTRUZIONE DI QUALITÀ PER TUTTI



Double Blind Peer Review

Citation

Valentino, L., & Tafuri, M.G. (2025). The importance of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all. *Giornale italiano di educazione alla salute, sport e didattica inclusiva*, 9(2).

Doi:

<https://doi.org/10.32043/gsd.v9i2.1284>

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gsdjournal.it

ISSN: 2532-3296

ISBN: 978-88-6022-510-8

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ABSTRACT

We are living in an era that requires transforming the current development paradigm into a new one leading towards a long-term vision of inclusive, intercultural and sustainable development. Inclusive education is of the aforementioned imperative goals and is one of the goals included within the 2030 Agenda. In order to avoid that "some" individuals may be excluded from the right to get inclusive and equitable quality education, as set out in goal n. 4 of the Agenda itself, we need to apply and spread the culture and knowledge of inclusive tools such as Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). Providing everyone in the school context with the appropriate tools to understand and be understandable by those who cannot see and/or give voice to their thoughts, ideas or feelings, is crucial to ensure a truly inclusive learning context for all of our students.

Viviamo in un'epoca che richiede di trasformare l'attuale paradigma di sviluppo in uno nuovo che porti verso una visione a lungo termine di uno sviluppo inclusivo, interculturale e sostenibile. L'educazione inclusiva rientra tra i suddetti obiettivi imperativi ed è uno degli obiettivi inseriti all'interno dell'Agenda 2030. Per evitare che "alcuni" individui possano essere esclusi dal diritto ad un'educazione di qualità inclusiva ed equa, come stabilito nell'obiettivo n. 4 dell'Agenda stessa, è necessario applicare e diffondere la cultura e la conoscenza di strumenti inclusivi come la Comunicazione Aumentativa e Alternativa (CAA). Fornire a tutti nel contesto scolastico gli strumenti adeguati per comprendere ed essere comprensibili da coloro che non possono vedere e/o dare voce ai propri pensieri, idee o sentimenti, è fondamentale per garantire un contesto di apprendimento davvero inclusivo per tutti i nostri studenti.

KEYWORDS

2030 Agenda; Quality Education; Inclusion.

Agenda 2030; Istruzione di Qualità; Inclusione.

Received 09/04/2025

Accepted 21/05/2025

Published 20/06/2025

Introduction

Progress toward sustainable development is a difficult but imperative goal: contemporary societies are engaged in developing communities with greater equity and social justice, where the differences between people no longer contribute to exclusion, discrimination or disadvantage, neither socially nor in terms of education, but rather provide an opportunity to improve them. We are living in an era that requires transforming the current development paradigm into a new one leading towards a long-term vision of inclusive, intercultural and sustainable development. Inclusive education is of the aforementioned imperative goals and is one of the goals included within the 2030 Agenda. In this document, quality education becomes the path to shape better human beings and achieve a society characterized by ethical values, respect for the public sphere, fulfillment of one's duties, and harmonious coexistence.

Back to inclusive education, it is based on three perspectives: it can be seen as a project against school failure and exclusion; as a cultural change in current and future education; and as a political commitment for a fairer world. It generates enormous challenges, such as that of making everyone “understandable” and “able to understand”. Everyone, not just a few; as Shogren et al. (2015) emphasize, “Everyone means everyone”. In order to avoid that “some” individuals may be excluded from benefiting from this right, they also focus attention on those who have traditionally found themselves in situations of greater risk of exclusion from educational processes. These include subjects with impaired sight, speech and language abilities, the ones who may apply different ways of communicating and understanding, depending on where they are. They may communicate with gestures and short utterances at home or at school while using picture symbols, or may need to read texts in Braille or use a communication device, which may “lend” them a voice to say what they want, what they think or how they feel. In short terms, we are speaking of all those subjects who use Augmentative and Alternative Communication in everyday life: from buying a bottle of water to taking a bus and learning a content at school. However, this approach is not applied and known in all school contexts: this hinders the educational path of all those subjects who need it to communicate and, consequently, their social relationships as well. Through a project carried out within the context of a lower secondary school, we will show how any student, whether verbal or non-verbal, sighted or visually impaired, needs to know how to apply this approach both for including and for being included.

The 2030 Agenda: working together for common goals

A strategic document, the prospect of a better and equitable world for all: this is what the 2030 Agenda represents. A set of rights that seek to balance the sphere of the individual with that of society. Nevertheless, in order for these rights to be

effective, it is necessary to promote effective public policies that foster respect for human dignity, the notion of otherness and the minimization of prejudices. A first attempt at achieving this scenario was represented by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), introduced by the United Nations in 2000 with the aim to be achieved by 2015 and left only in the realm of idealism. However, not only was its impact on most of its goals unequal and somewhat weak, but it also raised serious questions about its actual legitimacy. It seemed that it did not strive to bring about changes in those patterns leading to poverty and that it rather aimed at economic growth and progress, thus overlooking other crucial aspects of human rights and well-being. However, something changed and the United Nations in 2015 set out further 17 goals that go beyond the MDGs: these are the Sustainable Development Goals, included in the 2030 Agenda. These goals are part of a broader action program involving 169 associated targets to be achieved at environmental, economic, social and institutional level by 2030. All the Sustainable Development Goals are interrelated, as are the fundamental rights of individuals. However, there is a big issue: 2030 is about to come and we have not reached these goals yet. These 17, fundamental goals, are the following:

- *Goal 1 - No poverty*: End poverty in all its forms everywhere;
- *Goal 2 - Zero hunger*: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture;
- *Goal 3 - Good health and well-being*: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages;
- *Goal 4 - Quality education*: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all;
- *Goal 5 - Gender equality*: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;
- *Goal 6 - Clean water and sanitation*: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all;
- *Goal 7 - Affordable and clean energy*: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all;
- *Goal 8 - Decent work and economic growth*: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all;
- *Goal 9 - Industry, innovation and infrastructure*: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation;
- *Goal 10 - Reduced inequalities*: Reduce inequality within and among countries;
- *Goal 11 - Sustainable cities and communities*: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable;

- *Goal 12 - Responsible consumption and production*: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns;
- *Goal 13 - Climate action*: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts;
- *Goal 14 - Life below water*: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development;
- *Goal 15 - Life on Land*: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss;
- *Goal 16 - Peace, justice and strong institutions*: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels;
- *Goal 17 - Partnerships for the goals*: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

Let us now focus on goal n. 4, that is “*Quality education: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all*”. Not surprisingly, the United Nations Education Organization (2019) emphasized that quality education should be conceived as the central driver for ensuring sustainable development in countries. Quality education, nowadays, has become a primary objective pursued by educational institutions to contribute to the human development of countries, seen as the suitable tool to achieve a social balance based on equal opportunities and integration within society. Quality education, indeed, will be the central driver to ensure sustainable development in countries (United Nations Education Organization, 2019). Making sure that every individual - especially those who have to deal with huge barriers, such as people with disabilities and children in precarious circumstances - have access to education, represents a crucial step. In this regard, it is also essential to ensure equity in education for all those individuals who, for a variety of physical and social reasons, are forced to use alternative forms of communication to the speech channel: we are speaking of all those individuals who have complex communicative needs and employ other channels to understand or convey a message. How can this be achieved? The answer is: by applying Augmentative Alternative Communication, an approach that is becoming increasingly popular nowadays in the educational landscape and that gives voice precisely to those who cannot see or use their voice. However, in order for this approach to ensure equitable education and full inclusion for these individuals with difficulties, it is essential for teachers to be trained on this approach and its related technological tools, so that they can use them as an effective communication modality with their students. In Italy, for example,

teachers (and especially support teachers) are not sufficiently trained on educational technologies specifically designed for disabled students. It is true that many education systems fail to provide relevant and effective education that responds to the needs and expectations of students and society. According to the 2019 Human Development Report, only 42% of potential human capital is effectively realized due to deficiencies in health and education for different factors, such as: lack or insufficient financial, material and infrastructural resources; shortage or inadequate training and motivation of teachers; ineffective or inappropriate pedagogical methods. As for the Italian context, according to an ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics) report, no support teacher in 1 out of 10 schools has ever attended a specific training course on the use of such technologies. In 62% of schools, only some of them have attended such courses, while in the remaining cases (28%) all have attended at least one course in their career. Furthermore, many primary and secondary schools do not have computer stations adapted to the needs of their disabled students, and wireless connections at school are not sufficiently powerful to keep all the devices connected at the same time. In this scenario, goal n.4 stands out as a response to the aforementioned challenges. In order to guarantee this fundamental human right, recognized as such by many of the Constitutions around the world, it is necessary to ensure equal access to it, a key factor for empowering individuals and communities.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication: a short overview

Access to communication is a right that everyone should be granted, in however that communication takes place. Being able to communicate, no matter in which way, allows individuals to self-determine and feel that they are an active and meaningful part of the world around them. One of the means by which all those individuals who “have no voice” can communicate is precisely AAC, or better, Augmentative and Alternative Communication. As the name itself suggests, we can define it as a shared communication code, in which a fully-fledged communicative exchange takes place through alternative means. Yoder & Kraat (1983) stated that individuals employing AAC are those who “cannot say what they want to, when they want, and how they want to”. There are two main types of AAC: unaided and aided. Unaided AAC is communication that occurs solely using the body, such as facial expressions, body language, gestures, and signs. Many unaided communication methods are employed and understood by most people, such as eye gaze, or other gestures. Sign language is considered an unaided communication method as well. Individuals with limited speech/view and impairments may use individual or adapted signs from a sign language to communicate their needs. Aided AAC methods, on the other hand, encompasses two categories: “no/low-tech” devices and “high-tech” devices. “No/low-tech” devices include non-electronic tools and strategies and do not require batteries. Some examples include objects,

pictures, writing, and communication boards or communication books like PECs. Communication by images, for example, remains “alternative” with respect to a merely verbal communication, and at the same time, it is “augmentative” for the possibility of supporting the interaction between people thanks to the visual code. As an exchange of information, communication can take place by any means, in order to qualitatively improve the existing functional language, without replacing it entirely. The possibility of having access to such a communicative code has thus not only the goal - although of primary importance - of sharing basic personal needs, but also opens up the possibility of being able to share one's inner self with others. For an AAC intervention to be effective within a communicative act, it is strongly recommended that all participants in this exchange are able to understand it, including those participants with no barriers or communication difficulties at the verbal/visual level. For this reason, in any context (including the school one), it is important that everyone at least knows what it is about. For a full and effective inclusion, it can be very helpful to show pupils, from the earliest years of school, even just what Braille language and pictograms are and how to create simple, short sentences, useful for communicating with their peers with language and communication difficulties. Therefore, we can state that the strength of AAC which lies in the ability to represent messages and concepts in alternative ways. What is central to “democratic” communication is precisely that: allowing everyone to be able to receive and send communicative messages. The purpose is not solely to provide alternative communicative means, but to develop the desire and possibility to communicate. This is why no prerequisites are required other than the willingness to enter into a relationship with the other, the desire to communicate one's needs, and even more importantly, the possibility of being able to express a choice or preference.

Pictograms in AAC, for example, are intended precisely to be “transparent” since, for the purpose they serve, it is necessary that the meaning can be guessed and perceived even - and especially - in the absence of the referent. It goes without saying that one of the key aspects here concerns teacher training, both on AAC in general and on specific software/devices for creating didactic materials; in fact, every teacher should be able to prepare and administer AAC materials that are appropriate and useful for their intended teaching purposes. The purpose is not solely to provide alternative communicative means, but to develop the desire and possibility to communicate. This is why no prerequisites are required other than the willingness to enter into a relationship with the other, the desire to communicate one's needs, and even more importantly, the possibility of being able to express a choice, thought or preference.

1. Materials and methods

Objectives

In order to raise pupils' awareness of two important issues such as bullying and the importance of the inclusion of peers with disabilities at school, it was decided to produce an AAC book (employing ARASAAC pictograms) regarding the "Manifesto of Non-Hostile Communication," which is "a charter that collects 10 style principles useful for reducing, containing and countering the negative language that is easily disseminated on the Web."¹ It was developed by the association Parole O_Stili, which is a non-profit organization committed to raising awareness against violence in words and is a commitment of shared responsibility, with the aim of promoting respectful and civil behavior. Specifically, the ten principles contained in the document are:

- 1) *Virtual is real* - On the Internet, I only write or say what I would dare to say in person.
- 2) *You are what you communicate* - The words I choose define who I am. They represent me.
- 3) *Words shape the way you think* - I take all the time I need to express my views in the best possible way.
- 4) *Listen before you speak* - No one can always be right, and nor am I. I listen, with an honest and open-minded attitude.
- 5) *Words are bridges* - I choose words to understand, make myself understood and get close to others.
- 6) *Words have consequences* - I am aware that what I say or write can have consequences, small or serious.
- 7) *Share with care* - I share texts and images only after I have read, assessed and understood them.
- 8) *Ideas can be discussed. People must be respected* - Those whose views and opinions differ from mine are not enemies to be destroyed.
- 9) *An insult is not an argument* - I accept no offensive and aggressive words, even if they support my point of view.
- 10) *Silence says something too* - When it's better to keep quiet... I do

Sample

A lower-secondary school class belonging to the Istituto Comprensivo 2° of Anagni, a comprehensive institute (kindergarten, primary and lower secondary school) located in the province of Frosinone (Italy), was involved to carry out this project. For years, this Institute has been active in the fight against the phenomena

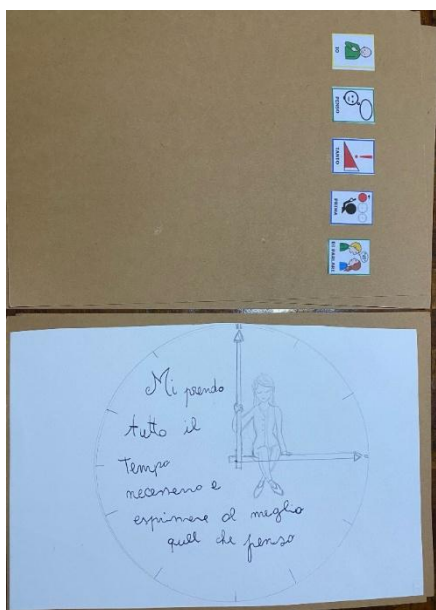
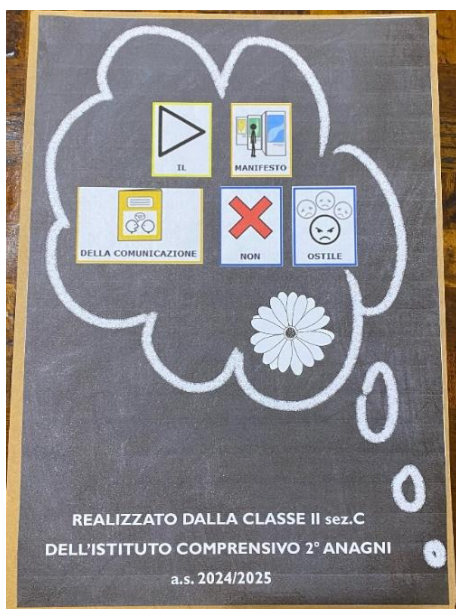
¹ Parole O_Stili (2017), *The Manifesto of Non-Hostile Communication*, available at: <https://paroleostili.it/en/manifesto/>

of bullying/cyberbullying and has, among its main missions, that of ensuring the full inclusion of its pupils with disabilities in both the school and social contexts. The class in question is composed of 13 pupils (6 boys and 7 girls), including two pupils with disabilities (one pupil with ADHD/ODD and one pupil with mild cognitive disability).

Procedures

- 1) The first step involved providing the pupils with a lesson on Augmentative and Alternative Communication; they learned about its fields of application, the difference between aided and unaided AAC, the various systems of pictograms and what software we have available to create materials by making use of pictograms.
- 2) During the second step, we read together the “*Manifesto of Non-Hostile Communication*” and reflected on the various behaviors to be implemented/avoided, as well as on the consequences of certain actions on oneself and others.
- 3) Then, as a third step, the pupils were shown the “Araword” software, useful for creating texts using pictograms (making use of the ARASAAC system of symbols, an acronym for ARAgonés Sistemas Aumentativos y Alternativos de Comunicación). Once learned how the software works, the pupils themselves practiced writing short simple sentences using pictograms, thus realizing that, sometimes, messages and pictograms themselves need to be adapted for a greater understanding of the meaning of what they want to express.
- 4) The fourth step involved writing the sentences on the software; when poorly understandable due to overly elaborate language, the pupils readjusted and rewrote them in a simpler, more accessible way. In addition, when there were no pictograms in the database that could be useful for understanding a given word, the pupils independently searched for images/cliparts that best matched that content and then uploaded them into the software database.
- 5) After printing out texts in pictograms, as a sixth and final step, the pupils created the book: they cut and glued the sentences written in pictograms on one page and, on the next one, drawings made by them referring to each of the ten sentences of the *Manifesto*.

Below are some pictures of the book made by the pupils:

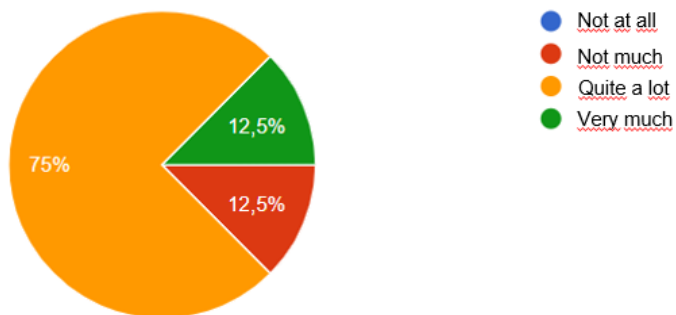


2. Results

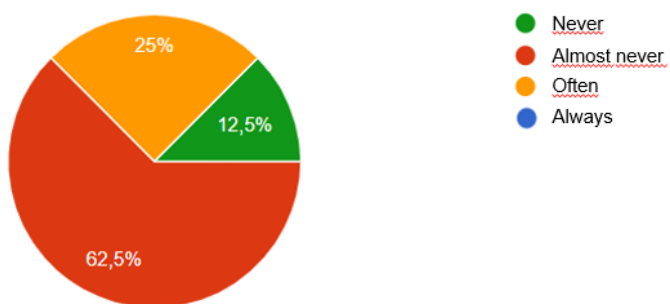
At the end of the activities, it was decided to assess the degree of pupils' understanding about two key issues: countering bullying/cyberbullying and the

importance of inclusion of their peers with disabilities. Specifically, they were asked whether they understood the importance of implementing more responsible behaviors toward themselves, others and their surroundings, as well as the importance of supporting and knowing how to communicate with their peers who, for a variety of reasons, have to use other channels (outside of voice) to express themselves and understand others. Below are the questions asked and the corresponding answers provided:

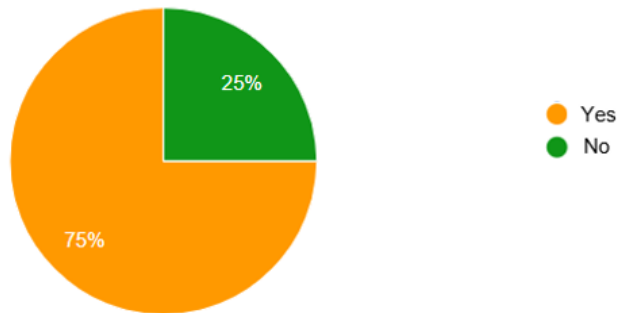
After reading the “Manifesto of Non-Hostile Communication,” do you understand more about the consequences of using words incorrectly?



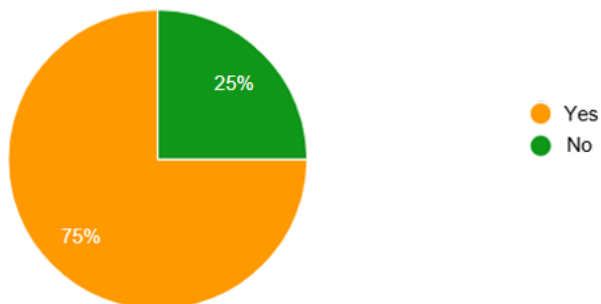
Reflecting on the use and weight of the words we use, whether in person or online, do you think we really are what we say?



Do you feel that you are more capable of not judging others' opinions, even if you do not share them?



Do you feel that you are most capable of collaborating operationally to achieve a common goal?



If you ever noticed that one of your peers with disabilities was being bullied, how would you support him or her?

I would defend him/her by telling him/her not to listen to them

I would help him/her out

I would always stand by his/her side

I would tell him/her that he/she should not listen to other people's judgments and that everyone is different

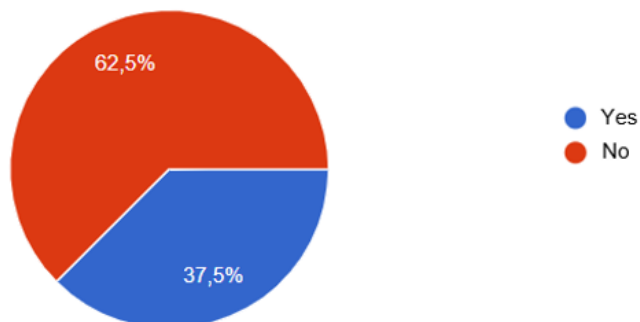
I would have his/her back

I would support and stand by his/her side

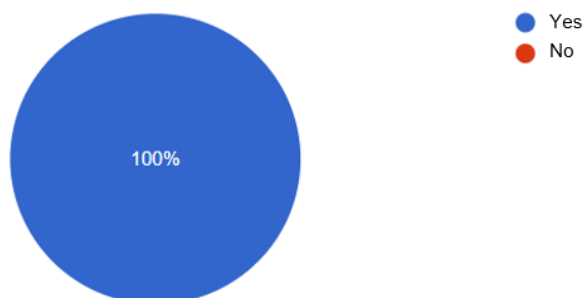
I would suggest him/her not to listen to people insulting or making fun of him/her

I think it is very important that everyone, even those who have difficulty with speaking, understand what we are saying. Communication is one of the foundations for building connections, understanding and inclusiveness. Even if a person has difficulty speaking, the right to understand and participate in the conversation is fundamental for respect and equality.

Let's talk about Augmentative Alternative Communication: had you ever heard of it before?



After this lesson, do you think you have understood what Augmentative and Alternative Communication is?



In your opinion, why is it important that everyone, even those who have difficulty speaking, understand what we are saying? Motivate your answer

Important enough, because everyone has the right to listen to the others' opinions, as well as to express their own ones

It is very important for inclusion

In my opinion it is very important, because we have to try to put ourselves in the shoes of others before judging

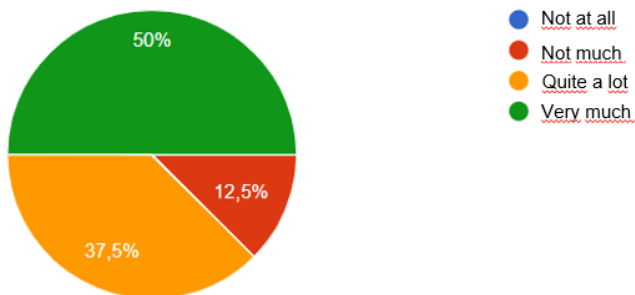
It is important because if they don't understand it, the work we have done is useless

It is very important because, by understanding each other, we can become closer friends and help each other

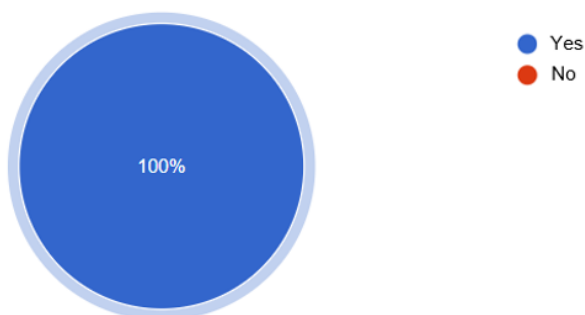
It is important because, in this way, they don't misunderstand what is being said

I think it is very important that everyone, even those who have difficulty speaking, understand what we are saying. Communication is one of the foundations for building connections, understanding and inclusiveness. Even if a person has difficulty speaking, the right to understand and participate in the conversation is fundamental to respect and equality.

Would you feel ready, following this activity, to help a probable future peer with difficulties in verbal communication, even in understanding a simple sentence said by a professor?



We experimented with the “Araword” software: would you like to work with this tool again and learn how to create, for example, materials for your peers with problems in verbal communication?



The answers provided by the pupils paint a fairly clear overview of the situation: on the one hand, they affirm to have understood the importance of not implementing “bullying” behaviors in any context of life and of defending a possible bullied peer (especially those with disability, since they may be weaker and less able to self-defend from bullies), as well as of giving the right weight to the words they use both in real and virtual life for they may hurt others’ feelings. On the other hand, they have realized that being able to understand even those who cannot express their thoughts through their voice is fundamental, so as to help them not only in the classroom, during an assignment or a test, but also in everyday life. Regarding the latter aspect, having never heard of Augmentative and Alternative

Communication before the activity carried out, they expressed a clear need to have to - and above all to want to - learn more about the topic; this denotes the importance of having to introduce this knowledge in the school context, since even pupils without difficulties have the right to be able to communicate with those who, on the contrary, have difficulty speaking. They need it. They demand it. They want to learn about other ways to communicate with their peers struggling with communication. This is what the 2030 Agenda, in its goal n.4, suggests us; this is one of the many ways to implement a truly equitable and inclusive education for all, starting precisely with the education of our non-disabled pupils: in this way, they will become the primary resource for the educational and social success of our pupils with disabilities.

3. Discussion

The educational activity carried out had as its primary objective to raise students' awareness on two fundamental issues: the prevention of bullying and cyberbullying, and the promotion of school inclusion, with particular attention to classmates with disabilities. The results gathered through the answers provided by the students offer a significant snapshot of the progress made and the awareness developed, allowing for a broader reflection on the effectiveness of the interventions and the future direction of inclusive education. The students' responses demonstrate, first of all, a deep understanding of the messages conveyed during the activities. The importance of avoiding bullying behaviors—whether physical, verbal, or digital—was understood not only as an ethical and social norm but also as a personal duty toward others. The students showed they had become aware that words, even those written in virtual contexts, can hurt just as much as physical gestures. This recognition is crucial in today's era, where the boundary between real and digital life is increasingly blurred and where cyberbullying represents one of the most insidious and widespread forms of peer violence. However, this understanding does not remain in the abstract dimension. The students stated they had realized the importance of intervening concretely to defend peers who are victims of bullying, particularly those with disabilities, who are often more vulnerable and less able to defend themselves independently. This aspect indicates not only a theoretical acquisition but also the beginning of a transformation in attitude: from passive spectators to potential active agents of change. In this sense, the school proves to be not only a place of formal learning but also a privileged context for the construction of active and supportive citizenship. Another relevant result that emerged is the openness shown by the students toward Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), a topic they had never heard of before the activity. This is a key point. The interest shown in forms of communication other than voice indicates a concrete willingness to break

down the communication barriers that often prevent students with disabilities from fully participating in school and social life. AAC includes a set of strategies, techniques, and tools that facilitate communication for people who, for various reasons, cannot use their voice or verbal language. The willingness of students to learn about these tools shows a shift from a pity-based view of disability to an inclusive view, in which relationships are based on reciprocity and sharing. This desire to learn other ways of communicating with classmates in difficulty is a valuable indicator of the need to systematically integrate AAC into educational paths, not only as support for students with disabilities but also as a training tool for other students. For a school to be truly inclusive, it must not only adapt teaching to the needs of students with disabilities but also train others to interact through different communication methods, developing empathy, flexibility, and relational competence. The results and reflections that emerged demonstrate that school can and must be a driver of social change. When students say they want to learn new ways to communicate with their peers, they are essentially asking the school to give them tools to become better citizens. This desire is perfectly aligned with what is advocated by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. True educational equity does not only mean guaranteeing the right to education to students with special educational needs, but also involves educating their peers. It is the latter who, by understanding, supporting, and integrating classmates in difficulty, become the primary allies of the inclusion process. In this way, the idea of a “two-speed” school is dismantled and an environment is built where diversity is not seen as an obstacle but as a resource. Another element that emerges from the responses is the need for such activities not to be episodic or extraordinary but to become an integral part of the school curriculum. The students themselves, expressing the desire to further explore certain topics, invite us to reflect on the structure of our educational paths, which often do not dedicate sufficient space to socio-emotional and relational education. To ensure the effectiveness of inclusive education, it must be continuous, systematic, and transversal. It must be present in curricular and extracurricular activities, involve all disciplines, and be experienced not only in dedicated moments but also in everyday relationships. Only in this way will it be possible to move from theoretical awareness to lasting changes in behavior and attitude. In this process, the role of teachers is crucial. They are not merely content transmitters but true cultural and relational mediators. Their ability to manage the class, address group dynamics, and value each student becomes decisive for the success of inclusive activities. At the same time, it is essential that the entire school community—principals, staff, families—is involved in a shared educational project that places the individual and their rights at the center. Only through a collective vision of education as a tool for empowerment and social cohesion will it be

possible to build a school that leaves no one behind. The results obtained show that this is possible: students, if guided with competence and sensitivity, are capable of developing empathy, critical thinking, and a sense of responsibility toward others. In conclusion, what emerged from the students' responses is a significant signal: new generations are ready to embrace diversity, to defend the most fragile, and to build relationships based on respect and solidarity. It is now up to the school—and more generally the education system—to provide them with the tools, opportunities, and contexts to transform these intentions into everyday practice. Inclusion is not an abstract goal but a path that is built day by day, in classrooms, hallways, laboratories, and shared spaces. It is made of small gestures, carefully chosen words, welcoming looks, respectful silences, but also concrete actions and specific skills. And it is precisely from the school that a new culture of relationships can emerge, in which no one is excluded and in which everyone, no one excluded, can feel fully part of a community.

Conclusions

In a very interesting work by Musselwhite & St. Louis (1988), Rick Creech, a young man with cerebral palsy, provided a very direct and, perhaps, tough description of the concept of impossibility of communicating, stating that: "If you want to know what it is like to be unable to speak, there is a way. Go to a party and don't talk. Play mute. Use your hands if you wish but don't use paper and pencil. Paper and pencil are not always handy for a mute person. Here is what you will find: people talking; talking behind, beside, around, over, under, through, and even for you. But never with you. You are ignored until finally you feel like a piece of furniture."² Here lies the core of our paper: why not provide everyone with the opportunity to be understood? Why not provide everyone with the proper tools to understand those who have no voice or clear/total sight? When we say "everyone," we really mean everyone, including non-disabled pupils and teachers. Yes, because for all those individuals who need it, it is guaranteed (or at least, should be guaranteed) the presence of communication assistants able to make them learn that fantastic and functional communication system known as AAC; but what about pupils and teachers? What happens when, having no adequate tools, they have to interact with the ones who have difficulties in the sphere of communication or sight? The answer is simple: without the presence of a communication assistant in the classroom, they would not know how to do it, but these figures are only present for a few hours in the classroom (at least, this is what happens in the Italian school context). Of course, there are also the extremely valuable support teachers, but

² Musselwhite, C., & St. Louis, K. (1988). *Communication programming for persons with severe handicaps* (2nd ed.). Austin, TX: PRO-ED.

very often, they are forced to find training courses independently in order to be able to apply AAC in their teaching activities. At this point, with a view to providing a really quality education, which truly includes everyone in the school and extra-school context, let us begin to spread a greater culture of inclusion and turn the school environment into an “AAC friendly” context. In fact, being a flexible, customizable and inclusive tool, it makes all the actors involved in the learning process benefit from its use, since it turns out to be “democratically” within everyone's reach.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization L.V.; methodology, L.V. and M.G.T.; software, L.V. and M.G.T.; validation, M.G.T.; formal analysis, M.G.T.; investigation, M.G.T.; resources, L.V.; data curation, L.V. and M.G.T.; Bibliographical research, M.G.T.; writing—original draft preparation, L.V.; writing—review and editing, M.G.T.; funding acquisition, M.G.T. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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