



Patrizia Belfiore

University of Naples Parthenope

patrizia.belfiore@uniparthenope.it



Domenico Tafuri

University of Naples Parthenope

domenico.tafuri@uniparthenope.it



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ABSTRACT

School guidance for people with disabilities is crucial for promoting social and professional inclusion, allowing them to fully express their potential. A key aspect of this process is the collaboration between families, schools, and universities, which must work together to support students with disabilities in their educational and professional paths. The current methods of collaboration will be analyzed, identifying strengths and areas for improvement, with the aim of proposing practical solutions to optimize orientation and promote inclusion.

L'orientamento scolastico per le persone con disabilità è cruciale per favorire l'inclusione sociale e lavorativa, permettendo loro di esprimere appieno il proprio potenziale. Un aspetto fondamentale di questo processo è la collaborazione tra famiglie, scuole e università, che devono lavorare insieme per supportare gli studenti con disabilità nel loro percorso educativo e professionale. Sono state analizzate le attuali modalità di collaborazione, individuando punti di forza e aree di miglioramento, con l'obiettivo di proporre soluzioni pratiche per ottimizzare l'orientamento e favorire l'inclusione.

KEYWORDS

Orientation, Inclusion, disability
Orientamento, inclusion, disabilità

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Introduction

School guidance for people with disabilities is a topic of great importance, which requires a targeted and inclusive approach capable of responding to the specific needs of each student. Disability should not be seen as an obstacle to academic success, but as a condition that requires a personalization of educational paths, so as to guarantee all students equal opportunities for growth and development (Cottini, 2019). In this context, school guidance is not limited to the choice of school or course of study, but extends to the design of educational strategies that allow each pupil with disabilities to overcome difficulties and reach the maximum of his or her potential (D'Alonzo, 2012). This implies an active involvement of all school professionals, including teachers, educators and specialists, who must work together to adapt teaching programs and methodologies, using technological tools and compensatory resources, such as learning software or specific aids (Ianes & Macchia, 2008). In addition, it is essential that school guidance for people with disabilities does not only concern theoretical training, but also includes practical activities that allow them to develop social and professional skills, thus promoting greater inclusion in the world of work and in society (Canevaro, 2013). In this process, raising awareness among the school community and involving families are essential to create a learning environment that values diversity and encourages autonomy (Ministry of Education, 2021). The ultimate goal of school guidance for people with disabilities is not only to provide adequate training, but also to promote integration and full participation in social and working life, helping to overcome the cultural and structural barriers that still limit opportunities for these people (WHO, 2011).

1. The Guidelines on Orientation

The 2014 Guidelines on Orientation of the Ministry of Education propose a vision of orientation as a continuous process, which goes far beyond the simple transition between school and work, to become a permanent and integrated path in the life of each individual. Orientation, according to these guidelines, must be centered on the individual, putting the specific needs and requirements of each student in the foreground. The goal is not only to guide students towards professional choices, but also to help them develop a deep awareness of themselves, their attitudes and potential, so as to foster greater autonomy and responsibility in future decisions

(Cunti & Priore, 2020). In particular, the guidelines place a strong emphasis on inclusiveness, indicating that guidance activities must be tailored to meet the different needs of students, including those of young people with disabilities or in disadvantaged conditions. Each student must be accompanied in a unique and targeted way, so that he or she can build his or her own life project, taking into account his or her specificities and characteristics. It is not just a path that concerns the school years, but a process that must continue even after the end of school, supporting students in their personal and professional development throughout their lives. Another fundamental aspect of the guidelines is the collaboration between school and territory. Guidance cannot be an isolated responsibility of the school, but must involve a network of actors who work together: teachers, families, local institutions and professionals in the sector (Margottini, 2023). Only with effective and synergistic collaboration is it possible to create learning opportunities that truly respond to the needs of students and that are able to accompany them in the different stages of their lives. In this context, soft skills play a crucial role. The guidelines emphasize the importance of developing skills that go beyond mere disciplinary knowledge, such as decision-making, emotional management, critical thinking, and effective communication (Priore, 2018). These skills are essential for students' well-being and their ability to adapt to changes in the world of work and society. Guidance, therefore, must not be limited to preparing students for a specific career, but must help them become aware citizens, capable of facing the challenges of the future with autonomy and a critical spirit. Finally, the guidelines emphasise the need for flexible and adaptable guidance capable of responding to social, economic and cultural changes. The introduction of new technologies and the emergence of new working models require an orientation that knows how to evolve, integrating innovative methods and digital tools, to provide students with the necessary tools to navigate a constantly changing world.

2. Building Opportunities: Overcoming Barriers in Education and Work

Persons with disabilities face a number of significant challenges in the educational and professional context, ranging from difficulty in accessing adequate resources to the need to overcome prejudices and cultural barriers. Educationally, disability can hinder the acquisition of skills in different ways, depending on the type of disability and the response of the education system (Sharma et al., 2017). Students with physical or cognitive disabilities may have limited access to teaching materials,

assistive technologies, and personalized educational support, which are essential for fostering inclusion and effective learning (Kuntz & St. John, 2019). Another significant obstacle is the lack of adequate training for teachers and tutors, who are often not prepared to address the specific needs of such students (Skerbetz, 2016). This lack of preparation leads to poorly inclusive teaching methodologies, which can significantly reduce learning opportunities for students with disabilities (Hehir et al., 2016). In the professional context, the difficulties are not limited to educational challenges, but also extend to discrimination and limited accessibility to workplaces. People with disabilities often face non-inclusive work environments, both physically and culturally, that are not adequately equipped to meet their needs (Nario-Redmond, 2018). Added to this is the difficulty in bringing out and developing one's talents, which may be due to social stereotypes and a distorted perception of the professional skills of people with disabilities (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The discovery of one's talents and inclinations, in fact, is strongly influenced by social expectations and deep-rooted prejudices, which often limit the professional opportunities of these people (Brown & Leigh, 2019). This phenomenon is accentuated by the fact that many people with disabilities, especially those with cognitive or mental disabilities, face a low value of their skills in the labor market (Schur et al., 2014). The inclusion of people with disabilities in the education system and in the world of work therefore requires targeted interventions that go beyond the elimination of physical and structural barriers, and also include a cultural change that favors greater acceptance and appreciation of diversity. The promotion of inclusive policies, specific training for educators and employers, and the adoption of assistive technologies are fundamental steps to overcome these difficulties (Ferri et al., 2005; Baumgartner, 2018). Only through a comprehensive commitment will it be possible to ensure that people with disabilities can fully discover and develop their talents, having equal opportunities in the educational and professional context.

3. School guidance professionals: key figures

School guidance professionals play a fundamental role in supporting students in the process of self-discovery, in developing their inclinations and in strengthening their skills to face educational and professional challenges. These professionals, which include school counselors, school psychologists, educators, and counselors, are key figures in ensuring that every student, regardless of their ability or background, can

access adequate resources to make informed choices about their educational and career path (Gati & Asher, 2001). The importance of their intervention is evident especially for students with disabilities, for whom guidance can be crucial to overcome psychological, social and structural barriers that could limit their opportunities (Lundberg & Borgen, 2017). The main task of school guidance professionals is to provide accurate information and psychological support, helping students explore their interests, abilities, and potentials (Saks & Uggerslev, 2017). This support, which often includes activities such as individual interviews, psychometric tests, group counseling and training internships, is essential for the construction of an educational and professional project that takes into account the specific needs and inclinations of the student (Savickas, 2013). In particular, school guidance must be seen as an ongoing process that is not limited to the choice of high school or university path, but extends throughout the school career, to adapt to changes in students' desires and life circumstances (Borgen & Hiebert, 2014). School guidance professionals also face the challenge of overcoming social biases and stereotypes that often influence students' perceptions of potential, particularly those with disabilities or from disadvantaged backgrounds (McWhirter et al., 2005). Their ability to act as mediators between students' individual needs and the resources available within schools or communities is crucial to ensuring that students can discover and develop their talents in an environment that fosters personal and professional growth (Brown & Lent, 2019). In addition, continuous training and professional development are essential for guidance professionals, in order to keep up with the new challenges and opportunities that emerge in the educational and work environment (Herr, 2016). Collaboration between key figures such as teachers, families, specialists and universities is essential to support the inclusion and self-determination of students, especially those with disabilities. Educational inclusion, in fact, cannot be achieved without a constant synergy between these actors, each of whom brings specific skills that, if integrated, can create a favorable environment for learning and individual development (Michaels et al., 2017). Teachers play a crucial role in providing quality education, but their work becomes more effective when they collaborate closely with families, who are often the first to understand students' needs and wants (Hornby, 2011). Continuous communication between school and family is crucial to ensure that educational strategies are personalized and respond to the particular needs of students with disabilities, facilitating an individualized approach that promotes inclusion (Epstein, 2018). In parallel, the involvement of specialists – such as school

psychologists, social workers and therapists – can help identify and address the emotional, cognitive and social challenges that students may face. Their expertise allows them to develop targeted interventions that not only support learning, but also the psychological well-being of students (Jolivet et al., 2013). In this context, the interdisciplinary approach is fundamental: through dialogue between educators, families and specialists, it is possible to build educational plans that are truly effective in promoting students' self-determination, facilitating their process of discovery and development of their inclinations (Wehmeyer et al., 2018). In addition, cooperation with universities, and in particular with the departments of pedagogy, psychology and social sciences, can enrich this process, bringing advanced skills in teacher training and family support. Universities can be places where innovative models of inclusion are developed, which can then be applied in schools and local communities. Academic research contributes to providing new evidence and methodological approaches that allow to address inclusion challenges more effectively (Barton, 2018). Continuous training of teachers and other professionals, supported by collaborations between schools and universities, is crucial to ensure that best practices are applied in the field (García & López, 2019). Finally, cooperation between these key figures is also essential to promote students' self-determination, which implies the ability to make autonomous choices regarding their educational and professional lives. Creating an environment where students feel supported by a network of competent figures who are willing to listen to their needs increases their confidence and motivation (Shogren et al., 2015). In this way, it contributes not only to school inclusion, but also to the preparation of students to become autonomous and responsible adults.

4. The role of guidance in the recognition and enhancement of the personal abilities of students with disabilities

The recognition and enhancement of the personal abilities of students with disabilities represent one of the main objectives of inclusive education, which aims not only at integration, but at the full participation and fulfilment of the person in every area of life. School guidance, in this perspective, is not an isolated action or relegated to a specific moment of the educational path, but a continuous and dynamic educational process that accompanies the student in the construction of his or her identity, in the discovery of his or her potential and in the development of a life project consistent with his or her inclinations and aspirations (Cottini,

2019). For students with disabilities, this process takes on an even deeper value, as they often have to face prejudices, low expectations and educational models that are not always able to read and enhance their uniqueness. One of the main obstacles that people with disabilities encounter in the school context is the lack of personalization of the orientation path, which tends to be limited to generic information on training offers or after-school possibilities, without an adequate analysis of individual attitudes, skills developed and lived experiences. This approach risks canceling students' potential and relegating them to "protected" or unstimulating paths, often far from their real desires (D'Alonzo, 2012). In this sense, guidance must take on a profoundly inclusive, person-centered and empowerment-oriented character, i.e. the strengthening of self-efficacy, self-determination and the ability to make conscious and meaningful choices. The role of the guidance counsellor – who in Italian schools can coincide with curriculum teachers, support teachers, tutors or external professionals – is to build a shared path with the student, in which active listening, constant dialogue and critical reflection are fundamental tools for bringing out personal inclinations. This implies not only a technical competence in the management of guidance activities, but also a deep pedagogical sensitivity, capable of grasping non-explicit signals, hidden passions or skills not yet developed (Ianes & Macchia, 2008). Furthermore, guidance must be articulated on several levels: cognitive (assessment of skills), exploratory (knowledge of oneself and opportunities), planning (definition of objectives) and operational (activation of strategies and tools to achieve them). Particularly important are concrete and laboratory experiences, which allow students with disabilities to confront real contexts, experiment with practical skills and develop transversal skills, such as problem solving, effective communication, teamwork and emotional management. According to Canevaro (2013), it is precisely through these experiences that the subject can understand his or her inclinations and, at the same time, receive social and personal recognition. Orientation, therefore, cannot be thought of without a connection with the world of work, with the territory, with the contexts of adult life, in a logic of transition that overcomes the fragmentation of interventions and takes on a unitary and planning character. However, to make this process truly effective, it is necessary to overcome some cultural barriers still present in the school system. Too often, in fact, people with disabilities are defined exclusively on the basis of their limitations, while their abilities remain in the background. A quality orientation must, on the other hand, start from a competent and potentially evolutionary vision of disability, in line with the bio-psycho-social

model proposed by the WHO (World Health Organization, 2011), which considers the person as a whole, in relation to the environment and social context in which he or she lives. In this framework, the task of the school is not only to educate, but also to believe in its students, offering them tools to build a positive identity and a sustainable and dignified life project. The Ministry of Education's Guidelines for the Lifelong Guidance of People with Disabilities (2021) underline precisely this: guidance must be an instrument of equity and social justice, capable of offering everyone, without distinction, the same opportunities for growth. The personalization of pathways, the collaboration between school and family, the use of assistive technologies, and the shared planning between educational institutions and local services are all indispensable components to ensure that every student with a disability can not only be included, but also valued as an active resource for the community.

Conclusions

Include, support, grow together: these are not just keywords, but concrete and shared objectives that must guide every orientation path aimed at people with disabilities. School guidance cannot be considered an isolated moment, but a continuous and personalized process, in which each student is recognized in his or her uniqueness and accompanied in the discovery of his or her potential. Among all the actors involved in this process, the role of the teacher proves to be fundamental. It is the teacher, in fact, who finds himself at the student's side on a daily basis, to grasp his needs, progress, difficulties and talents. It is thanks to his ability to listen, his pedagogical sensitivity and his professional competence that guidance becomes truly inclusive. The teacher not only adapts methodologies and tools, but becomes a bridge between the school, the family and other professionals, promoting a welcoming and stimulating educational environment. Investing in teacher training and support therefore means investing in the future of all students. Because inclusion is not an individual task, but a collective commitment that starts from those who, every day, educate with passion and responsibility.

Author contributions

Domenico Tafuri wrote abstract, Introduction, Paragraph 1 and revised the Manuscript. Patrizia Belfiore wrote Paragraph 2, 3, 4 and Conclusions.

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