Inclusione scolastica e strategie di integrazione

School inclusion and integration strategies

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to identify and analyze the strategies capable to promoting the processes of integration and inclusion in the school system. Manage phenomena such as disability and types of diversity in a rich context of social relations, as the school, is very complicated. In this respect it proposes an approach which is capable to overcoming the exclusion barriers and stimulate a social and educational development in the school.

Lo scopo del presente paper è quello di individuare e analizzare le strategie in grado di promuovere dei processi di integrazione ed inclusione nel sistema scolastico. Gestire fenomeni come disabilità e tipologie di diversità in un contesto ricco di relazioni sociali come quello della scuola è molto complicato. A tal proposito si propone un approccio capace di superare le barriere di esclusione e stimolare uno sviluppo sociale ed educativo nella scuola.

Keywords

Diversity Management; School; Education.

Diversity Management; Scuola; Educazione

1. Integration and Inclusion Processes

The inclusion at school of students considered as "diverse", because of the presence of a disability, can really be considered a stage of considerable importance and genuine democracy in recent history. It represents a moment of substantial importance and of authentic freedom, especially if considering that this inclusion took place in the 190s in a socio-cultural context where school was accused of authoritarianism, and of discriminating and selecting its students.

It is appropriate and important to note that the first and strong signal against discrimination of the diverse came from Don Lorenzo Milani, creator and founder of the Barbiana School (1967). The spirit and the challenge undertaken by the Prior can now support and be an example for educators. Reflecting on his pedagogical method represents a real opportunity to achieve an inclusive school which takes care of the students' needs. Don Milani considered State school as discriminatory, selective and classist so as to push socially and culturally deprived and disadvantaged subjects (those that today we include in the BES category) to early school leaving, he reappraised alternative cultures, oral and popular tradition, and underlined the need for a "healthy" culture resulting from a close interaction between school, education and social reality (a competence-based didactics). This is why he asked for more education: the establishment of after-school activities, of full-time schools; He wanted school to be open to social solidarity so that the youths had the opportunity to express their thoughts with clarity and directness.

His school was "open", the program was shared by students and the relationships with others were the fulcrum and the objective of the educational activity. "The wealth of men lies in their ability to communicate," giving every man this ability means achieving it in his most intimate potentiality, in his relationship with others, in the fact of "existing". Not allowing him to express his thought means depriving him of his humanity. All in all it is an inclusive didactics, in which everyone is involved, being a participant and a protagonist of the knowledge construction, and fully involved in the relationships with others.

His main concern is manifested in an effort to make the poor express their thoughts back, in order to break the vicious circle in which the upper classes influence language, thus remarking the gap between the social classes.

In short, the task of the school is to make students sovereign citizens.

Don Milani' school aims at its children and is open up to the community. The "I care" hung on the wall of his school, means to care, to worry about someone, to take care of the education of young people. The goal of the prior, today,

must be also our goal too. The main work of the whole school is the "Letter to a professor" (May 1967). In the letter, the boys of the school (along with Don Milani) denounced the school system and the teaching method that supported the education of the richest classes, ignoring the illiteracy in the great part of the country. Since that time there has been a change of direction in the educational and pedagogical approach of the school context, it started to feel essential to co-educate disabled kids with those without disabilities through a life and relationship context that is based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological paradigm, according to which human development is a kind of more and more complex mutual interaction between an active human organism in the development phase and people, objects, symbols within its immediate environment.

Bronfenbrenner's approach, starting from the context analysis, identifies different levels of environments: the microsystem, in which the subject in the development phase is included, the mesosystem that consists of the interactions of single situations (family, school), and the third level defined as " Ecosystem", which considers living and working conditions of people having the same age of the subject.

in this way, we have shifted from the medical-rational perspective to the constructivist and hermeneutic one, which takes into account the external learning conditions, those significant interactions, experiences and learning stimuli that allow intervening on the potential development

area with a systematic, intentional and targeted intervention.

The inclusion of disabled pupils in the common classes is finally achieved with Law nr. 118 of March 30th, 1971, which states that: "Compulsory education (of students with handicap) must take place in the normal public school classes, except in case in which subjects suffer from serious intellectual deficiencies or physical disabilities of such a gravity as to prevent or make very difficult their learning or inclusion in the normal classes. "

This Act is intended to inspire a long legislative season protecting the right to education and instruction of Sen students in sections and common classes of every grade, which finds its most exhaustive formulation in the statement contained in art. 12, paragraph 2 of law No. 104/1992.

However, there is criticism like that expressed by Canevaro (1999), who clarifies the difference between inclusion, assimilation, integration and mutual adaptation: when a child (disabled or not) is admitted to a school where there is no positive development for himself means that he has been simply assimilated from the school system; If, instead, there are small changes by the child towards the school teaching methods, and by the school towards the child's learning abilities, in this case we can speak of integration.

Not by chance, in 1975, Falcucci's report highlighted the shortcomings of Law nr. 118, giving the input to a real process of educational integration of students with disabilities. Falcucci's report is defined as a magna carta of inclusive education, and states that the inclusion of handicapped students, from kindergarten to high school, can be implement only through a new way of doing school linked to the "teachers' training and updating". In addition, this legislation requires teachers to develop delicate experimentation, research, updating and programming tasks. Time is ripe for welcoming a strategy of inclusion that values the disabled person, and makes him the protagonist of the educational and didactic intervention.

In this context it should be noted that the teaching methods able to support the integration require some operational steps, including:

• The educational programming that defines the teaching and learning path for the disabled;

• The "personal card" that accompanies and records the student's path, his learning and development levels attained;

The quarterly "evaluation" of the global development level, which makes it possible to record successes and difficulties and to review the didactic and organizational processes and decisions.

This is a new way of "doing school" that moves away from the spontaneous features of the past to get new features based on the intentional intervention, the action planning, the provision of goals, paths, activities, and the organization of the learning environments. In fact there is nothing in the disabled children's teaching that is not preemptively settled and programmed; integrative and interdisciplinary activities are also included, aimed at extending educational paths consistently with the cultural and expressive interests of each pupil.

In this regard, the support activities have great importance for overcoming difficulties during the educational and didactic path.

Another factor of significant interest for the school integration process is certainly the Constitutional Court judgment nr. 215 of June 3, 1987, which allows disabled students attending high school, and especially points out that the school intervention, cannot be limited to the mere socialization, but it has to ensure globally learning compared to the paths expected for everyone, although with necessary adaptations. So the integration of diverse students must benefit not only socialization, but also learning.

The M. C. 262/1988 gives effect to this judgment and spreads the topic of the integrated programming of interventions through agreements between schools, local health units, and local authorities. Finally, the framework law No. 104 of 1992 emphasizes the right to education and education, and remarks that: inclusive education aims to develop the potential of disabled persons; thus the exercise of the right to education cannot be prevented from learning disabilities or other difficulties arising from disabilities related to the handicap.

The concept of integration is inevitably related to that of inclusion. This approach is based

on the innovative idea according to which diversities are a resource for education, their enhancement requires that educational and pedagogical systems have the ability to both identify the needs and differentiate the responses for the latter.

The concept of diversity needs the inclusion and takes into account every student that manifests the so-called "special educational needs"; he finds himself in particular and temporary or permanent difficult situations, pervasive and sectoral, at organic, biological, physical, environmental, social, cultural or family level that hinder learning and development and therefore require attention and special educational care, choices, pathways, solicitations, resources and special assessments.

The concept of special educational need welcomes all those students who, for other reasons, have school difficulties (failing) that do not allow for their optimal progress. So, not taking care of these needs means condemning the student to the educational failure and to his exclusion from educational processes.

Inclusion assumes that the school environment must be able to read and recognize the needs and differences of his students, which characterize them for the possession of solid pedagogical psychological, didactic-methodological, organizational and relational skills. It needs to have specific tools and resources to employ in the design and implementation of measures to ensure the success for everyone.

The application of the model of Inclusive education requires that educational systems develop a pedagogy focused on the individual student (child-centered pedagogy), responding flexibly to the needs of each of them. It is no longer enough to provide a place in the school for those who have some diversity, but it is essential to manage and change the educational system in an organization suitable to deal with the different special needs that students can have.

2. Promote Integration and Inclusion at School Context

The school is the first, and among the most important, places of meeting and relationship, where every individual's didactic and educational experience is characterized by the continuous presence of the other. Entering into a relationship with others obviously means getting in touch with another identity, that is, with someone who is different from oneself (Giusti, 2012). In this way, in addition to knowing more about one's own identity, it is possible to enrich oneself thanks to otherness.

We can affirm that there is an "I" precisely because there is a "You" from which to differentiate ourselves, a "He" from which to differentiate ourselves, and so on (Portera, 2006). Not always, unfortunately, this dialogue is properly recognized and valued. Diversity is often seen in a negative light, as something that can represent a threat to one's own identity, and for this reason the presence of the diverse frequently generates feelings of fear, anxiety and suspicion. Often, this distorted perspective generates behaviors of violence and discrimination, and this is why it is essential to review the role of the main public place where the first and fundamental relations with others are established, and the pedagogical foundations for the training of the individual are laid: the school.

In this regard, a few years ago, the Italian Ministry for Equal Opportunities has funded a project of public awareness and information, with a related work divided into three volumes, entitled "Educating to diversity in education", worked out by Beck (2013), and based on a contract with the Italian National Bureau against Racial Discrimination.

Its main objective, which is still of considerable significance, is that of educating to the understanding that every individual is different, so to the concept of uniqueness, but at the same we are all equal; Science and DNA prove it (Banks, 2009).

Talking about oneself and listening to each other at school would make relationships, exchange and growth easier. Bullying, homophobia, racism, religious intolerance, abuses against women and against children originate from prejudice and ignorance. But prejudice is not innate;

it rather has its foundation in family, environmental and social influences, and is structured from early childhood (Batini, 2010; Maritain, 2001; Palmieri, 2012). Therefore, if we believe it is right to try to minimize the occurrence of prejudices as much as possible, it is essential to intervene mainly at school, educational and family level to make diversity a real treasure, a new educational paradigm, and to encourage children to think critically (rather than telling them what they have to think about). Educating to diversity is therefore an ethical duty, especially in a school that wants to be defined as inclusive.

School has the characteristic of being one of the most important meeting places of the society. The diversity of presences inside it should be the reality of ever class. It would be important to check, for example, when the classes are set up, and that each class is extremely heterogeneous. A principle of "equi-heterogeneity" should be stimulated, i. e. a strictly fair heterogeneity in terms of composition, variety of social, sexual, religious, cultural origins and so on.

School should become a place where diversity is produced and stimulated. A place where diversity means extreme richness given by the originality of every one (Giusti, 2012; Lodge & Lynch, 2004).

Instead, school often aims at massifying, homologating, assimilating the other in the group and conforming him. It must be understood that our collective wealth is our diversity. The other, as an individual or as a group, is valuable insofar as he is diverse. In a socio-economic context like the current one, now more than ever, schools should educate students to consider the diverse not as a danger to their own security, but as a resource for individual and collective growth (Miron et al, 2010). However, an effective pedagogy of difference is certainly not expressed in sermons and indoctrination or through more or less sophisticated persuasion techniques, but above all by experiencing every day the reality of a school as a community of the diverse, thus not marginalizing those who are not equal or those who are not able to keep pace with the best ones.

In fact, a true pedagogical and inclusive type of teaching process must absolutely consider the diversity in the class group as valuable resources allowing both to pursue the highest level of learning for every student, and stimulating social participation (Miato & Miato, 2003; Andrich & Miato, 2003).

It is precisely diversities, regardless of their nature, that form the basis of this teaching and pedagogical strategy, which, moreover, does not only condition the students' heterogeneity, but also the different teaching styles that the various teachers have. In this perspective, the aim is to stimulate diversity in order to be employed in daily activities to work synergistically and grow in a sustainable way over time (Calvani, 2012; Ianes & Macchia, 2008).

The development and adoption of this didactic-pedagogical philosophy, which aims at stimulating integration processes and inclusive dynamics, cannot ignore a number of assumptions and action strategies that must coexist and interact positively with each other (Ainscow, 2005; Salvia, Ysseldyke & Witmer, 2012; Walther-Thomas, 2000):

- • Adaptation as an inclusive strategy. In order to be able to integrate all students into the educational pathway, it is of utmost importance that teachers give great importance to the training and adaptation of their communication styles, lesson forms, and learning spaces that suit students' abilities and needs.
- • Enhancing cognitive processes. To facilitate learning, while simultaneously promoting the work of everyone within the class group, it is also important to strengthen and consolidate cognitive processes: memory, attention, concentration, visual-spatial-temporal relationships, logics and cognitive-motivational processes. A truly inclusive didactics implements this course of action both for students and for the teaching modalities.
- • Maps, diagrams and logical-visual strategies. For their feature to match visual code to a few written words, the maps (conceptual, mental, etc.) and schemes make learning faster and more effective, encourage information retrieval during written and oral verifications, help make logical connections, get key words and key concepts, and put the presentation of topics in order. These are tools that facilitate learning, but that are not

necessarily linked to recovery or support interventions.

- • Classmate understood as a resource. Classmates are the most valuable resource to engage inclusive processes. It is necessary to promptly stimulate and work on collaboration, cooperation and class spirit. In particular, collaborative work strategies in pairs or in small groups must be emphasized. Learning is never a solitary process, but is deeply influenced by relationships, stimuli and peer contexts (Andrich & Miato, 2003).
- • Improving feedback on results. The feedback on results is an instrument of great importance not only for learning, but also and above all for the development of a good self-image and of the motivation needed to achieve school success. It plays a primary role in curricular didactics and strategic role in that inclusive aimed at students with difficulties who need to be supported, more than others, both in their tasks and in their self-esteem and self-efficacy. Therefore, it is important for the teacher to have the tools best suited to provide effective information and motivational feedback, in addition to the materials to act on positive in-itinere strengthening.
- • Metacognition and study method. Metacognitive didactics develops in the student the awareness of what he is doing, why he is doing it, when it is desirable to do so and in what conditions, making him the direct leader of his cognitive processes. It forms the basis for an effective study method (Miato & Miato, 2003).
- • Developing self-esteem, motivation and emotions. A key role in learning and participation is played by emotions. It is crucial to stimulate the development of a positive self-image by promoting good levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy. In addition, motivation to learn is strongly influenced by these factors, as well as from the emotions related to belonging to the peer group and the class group.

It is clear that the human resources involved in the implementation process of this set of strategies, which characterize the inclusive education process, need to be managed so that they can support and develop the whole project efficiently and effectively.

In this regard, the adoption of management principles, including at school level, of the innovative model of the Diversity Management already consolidated (mainly in the Anglo-Saxon countries) at enterprise level, are proposed.

3. Diversity Management: an Effective Model for Inclusion

The term "diversity management" dates back to 1987, when the Hudson Institute published the report Workforce 2000: the report informed the Americans that by 2000 the majority of their workers would have be Afro-American, Hispanic, Native American, woman, and belonging to other "minority groups."

This news surprised many American businessmen who, concerned by this, began to think seriously about the enhancement and support of their talents, belonging to different races, religions, ethnicities and lifestyles (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000).

Thus the concept was developed in reference to a human resources management model aimed at enhancing the various differences in US businesses, given the high diversity of the workforce. "

For the American businesses, Diversity Management represents a strategic and operational solution. Working on two apparently opposite levels, the concept of equality and awareness of difference, Diversity Management makes the same opportunities accessible to any worker but in a different way. With this approach, every resource is strengthened according to his pace, competences and qualities (Buemi, Conte & Guazzo, 2016; Castellucci, 2009).

this management approach is a voluntary organizational program designed to create greater inclusion of all individuals into informal social networks and formal company programs (Gilbert, Stead & Ivancevich, 1999). It tends to create a culture that values and appreciates diversities, although requiring a greater, systematic and planned effort as it means adopting an

organizational paradigm that goes beyond a human resource model based solely on legal compliance, for the benefit of an organization committed in promoting the integration of any kind of minority, and the effective management of corporate diversity, at any level.

It is precisely this voluntary effort to address and deal with the issue of diversity that has led to the creation of the Diversity Management, understood as the set of actions of strategic use of business resources aimed at enhancing the traits of diversity (gender, age, sexual orientation and ethnical-cultural belonging) in the business, in order to promote better organizational conditions (Lauring, 2013).

the principles of the "Diversity Management" are becoming gradually more important in the business world, which must adapt, or rather act proactively, to be ready to face successfully the changes that are transforming (and have already transformed in part) the global socio-economic context, by evolving in synchrony with the environment that surrounds them and with which they must be able to operate and interact.

So this is a real business process of change that aims to enhance and make full use of the unique contribution that each employee can make to achieve business goals, and to help the organization meet the challenges and deal with the uncertainty from many external socio-cultural contexts.

4. Enhancing the School System through the Diversity Management

Many studies have shown that inclusion policies have a positive impact on several aspects, including improving management styles, competencies and performance in areas such as communication, staff management, and objectives identification and planning (Buemi, Conte & Guazzo, 2016).

Benefits therefore affect the whole enterprise, and this is why the Diversity Management is defined as a "business case", that is, an approach that would lead to increased company profits in the long run. In order to have a concrete idea, the European Commission conducted a research in 2003 entitled "Costs and Benefits of Diversity", in which, from sample of 200 community enterprises, the main perceived benefits that diversity can bring to the business of organizations were detected (Buemi , Conte & Guazzo, 2016; Castellucci et al., 2009; Laurinig, 2103).

In particular, purely socio-economic benefits were identified, such as:
- •Increase in productivity.
- • Encouragement to find innovative solutions;
- • Ability to meet the most varied needs of consumers by increasing the customer base;
- • Possibility to increase the competitiveness of the company.
- There must be matched with the ethical and pedagogical advantages, such as:
- • Promotion of the interaction between different ethnic groups;
- • Incentive to cultural change;
- • Fight against prejudices;
- • Increased commitment of employees;
- • Set up of a more harmonious working environment.

Most socio-economic benefits, just as those ethical and pedagogical, are strongly contextualized to the school environment. In fact, the possibility of increasing human resource productivity, in relation to the school context, is equivalent to the ability to increase every student's performance regardless of his peculiarities.

The same goes for the search for innovative solutions that enhances resources characterized by any diversity, develops the possibility of diversifying training offerings and, on the other hand, of getting a series of new stimuli and prospects from students, which can culturally enrich the school environment.

Yet, succeeding in meeting a wider and varied range of needs from consumers corresponds to the ability of the education system to educate and equally form a wider pool of students, irre-

spective of their geographical origin, religion, the presence of physical or mental disability, etc, making the educational offer global and competitive. Greater competitiveness is, in fact, a clear consequence of the benefits gained through the adoption of the Diversity Management model at the school level; the term competitiveness may seem alien to the public education sector, but in an environment characterized by strong competition from private structures and an increasing pressure from European, US, and even Australian companies, it is of great importance. Being able to provide a school service, through the innovative management model described, able to welcome and enhance the many diversities of the current socio-economic context, would be a key strength for re-launching the whole system at international level.

With reference to the ethical and pedagogical advantages pursued in the corporate context, the transposition towards the school context is certainly more direct, natural and explicit. In fact, they are all the conditions that maximize the individual's well-being and, at the same time, increase the cultural level of the school environment. This creates a situation in which there are students with more developed human values, and professors and teachers encouraged to work in a more harmonious and stimulating context. The ethical benefits are also the basis for achieving economic advantages.

Finally, it is important to observe that the primary benefit achieved by the adoption of the Disability Management, in order to encourage a process of diversity education in the school context, is the ability to generate a social and cultural revolution for the benefit of the integration of the subject considered as diverse. In fact, by acting at a school level, a process of acceptance and appreciation of diversity is stimulated from the beginning; all this in a place, the school, where, otherwise, there would be the risk of consolidating the mental structures and prejudices which can hardly be modified later on.

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