ARTS, DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES, AND APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY FOR INCLUSIVE TEACHER EDUCATION: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF DISABILITY REPRESENTATIONS

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ABSTRACT
The proposed study presents preliminary findings from an exploratory, qualitative-dominant, multi-source research project involving 66 pre-service support teachers enrolled in the Special Education Teacher Training Program at the University of Salerno. Grounded in Appreciative Inquiry and the Quality of Life framework, the research-training intervention examined how arts-based practices, narrative approaches, and digital and assistive technologies can support a reconfiguration of disability representations and Life Project planning. The empirical corpus includes 10 group-developed Life Projects, reflective narratives, and a currently limited questionnaire subset. Because only five questionnaire records were available for the present analysis, these responses are used solely as contextual, non-statistical material: no means, standard deviations, percentages, inferential tests, or claims of prevalence are reported. Documentary and qualitative analyses suggest a movement from predominantly deficit-oriented and medicalised formulations toward more relational, participatory, and possibility-centred representations. Arts-based practices emerged as identity, affective, and narrative mediators, while the technologies actually documented in the projects were mainly assistive and general-purpose digital tools supporting accessibility, communication, autonomy, and participation. Generative AI was addressed in the theoretical orientation of the course but was not systematically prescribed, tracked, or coded as a distinct empirical intervention; consequently, no empirical claims are made here about its effects.

KEYWORDS
Appreciative Artistic Life Design Model (AALDM); arts-Based education; digital technologies; life Project; disability representations
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1. Introduction and theoretical horizons of the study[1]

Over recent decades, conceptualisations of disability have undergone a substantial reconfiguration, progressively moving away from individualising and deficit-based interpretations towards perspectives that acknowledge the complex interaction between *biological*, *psychological*, *social*, and *contextual* dimensions (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 2017; World Health Organization, 2001). Within this evolving theoretical landscape, the consolidation of the biopsychosocial paradigm, further reinforced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, has contributed to the emergence of participatory, rights-based, and quality-of-life-oriented approaches to disability (United Nations General Assembly, 2006).

Quality of Life is a multidimensional construct that has been examined across a range of disciplinary fields and articulated through a variety of theoretical and explanatory models (Brown, 1997; Brown & Brown, 2003; Cairo, 2019; Schalock & Verdugo Alonso, 2002; Schalock & Verdugo, 2012). Among these, the model developed by Schalock and Verdugo is particularly consistent with a biopsychosocial understanding of human functioning, as it conceptualises well-being as the outcome of the dynamic interaction among eight interconnected domains, namely emotional well-being, interpersonal relations, material well-being, personal development, physical well-being, self-determination, social inclusion, and rights (Schalock & Verdugo Alonso, 2002; Schalock & Verdugo, 2012). Rather than treating these domains as separate dimensions, the model emphasises their reciprocal interdependence and their embeddedness within the environmental, relational, and institutional contexts in which people construct their lives.

In the Italian context, this perspective has acquired explicit regulatory expression through the introduction of the individualised, personalised, and participatory Life Project, or *Progetto di Vita*, for persons with disabilities. Italian Legislative Decree No. 62/2024 defines the Life Project as a process grounded in the person's wishes, expectations, and preferences and aimed at identifying, within a unified existential perspective, the formal and informal supports required to improve Quality of Life, develop individual potential, exercise choice over living environments, and

[1] The work is the result of scientific collaboration between the authors; however, the attribution of the paragraphs is as follows: Alessio Di Paolo is the author of paragraphs 2 and 3. and its subparagraphs; Flavia Capodanno is the author of paragraph 1., Naomi La Manna is co-author of sub-paragraphs 2.5. e 2.6., Maurizio Sibilio is the scientific director of the work.

participate on an equal basis with others (Art. 2, para. 1[n]). Compared with the previous regulatory framework established by Law No. 328/2000, which referred to “individual projects for persons with disabilities” within a predominantly social, healthcare, and assistance-oriented system, the 2024 reform delineates a more integrated, participatory, and person-centred model. It places self-determination, aspirations, rights, and participation at the centre of the planning process and considers the different areas of a person’s life within a unified and longitudinal perspective.

This renewed understanding is consistent with the biopsychosocial paradigm insofar as it adopts a holistic view of well-being that recognises individual potential, personal preferences, environmental opportunities, and the supports needed to enable meaningful participation. The Life Project can therefore be understood as a pedagogical and planning device through which the quality-of-life paradigm is translated into educational, social, and relational practices. In this sense, it contributes to moving beyond approaches that organise interventions primarily around assessed needs and functional limitations, directing attention instead towards wishes, aspirations, opportunities, and possible life trajectories.

Within educational settings, inclusive planning connected to the Life Project should accordingly involve the adoption of pedagogical strategies designed to foster students’ capabilities, agency, and self-determination (Lascioli & Pasqualotto, 2021; Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999). The promotion of self-determination is particularly significant because it enables learners with disabilities to participate actively in decisions concerning their educational pathways, relationships, environments, and future lives rather than remaining passive recipients of externally determined interventions (Wehmeyer, 1998, 2005, 2020). From this perspective, educational planning is not limited to compensating for functional difficulties but seeks to construct the conditions through which each learner can exercise choice, develop competencies, participate in social life, and pursue personally meaningful goals.

Such an orientation places considerable responsibility on teacher education. Future teachers need to be prepared to act consciously, intentionally, and ethically in support of inclusion and equity, developing a professional habitus that encompasses not only disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge but also reflexivity, empathy, agency, collaborative competence, self-efficacy, and a sustained motivation to teach (Aiello, 2024; Lauermann et al., 2017; Priestley et al., 2015; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001; Watt et al., 2017). These dimensions are consistent with the European profile of the inclusive teacher, which identifies valuing learner diversity, supporting all learners, working collaboratively, and engaging in continuing professional development as constitutive features of

inclusive professionalism (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2012; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022).

Developing these competencies may enable teachers to adopt a different way of understanding disability, one centred on opportunities for development, individual and collective resources, and the possibilities generated or constrained by educational contexts. This process nevertheless requires explicit attention to teachers' professional expectations, implicit beliefs, and social representations. Social representations operate as shared interpretative frameworks through which individuals understand phenomena and organise their actions within particular social and cultural contexts (Moscovici, 1984). In education, teachers' beliefs concerning disability, ability, learning, and their own professional responsibilities are closely associated with the inclusive practices they adopt and with the opportunities for participation they make available to learners (Jordan et al., 2010). Teacher education should therefore create conditions in which such representations can be made visible, critically examined, and progressively transformed.

The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence and generative technologies further broadens the range of competencies required of teachers. Their increasing presence in educational environments makes it necessary to promote critical judgement, ethical awareness, design competence, and professional agency so that digital tools are not adopted unreflectively or used as automatic substitutes for pedagogical decision-making. Rather, they should be employed intentionally, transparently, and in relation to clearly defined educational purposes (Miao & Holmes, 2023; Roe & Perkins, 2024; Varsik & Vosberg, 2024). Recent evidence on teacher-education students also confirms that generative-AI use in higher education combines perceived benefits with methodological and ethical challenges that require explicit pedagogical guidance (Athanassopoulos et al., 2026). In the present study, however, generative AI functions as part of the theoretical and professional-development horizon rather than as an independently evaluated intervention. The empirical technology findings reported below concern only the assistive and general-purpose digital tools that were actually documented in the Life Projects.

Within this scenario, teacher-education pathways should not be conceived as linear processes involving the cumulative acquisition of predetermined techniques. They should instead be understood as complex and non-linear trajectories in which professional knowledge emerges through recursive interactions among experience, reflection, action, relationships, and the continuous reorganisation of previously

acquired interpretative frameworks (Sibilio, 2015). Such trajectories may contribute to the development of an inclusive professionalism oriented towards self-determination, participation, and Quality of Life, while simultaneously supporting the transformation of pre-service teachers' representations of disability.

Arts-based pedagogies may offer a particularly productive space for this transformative work. Through symbolic, narrative, visual, embodied, and performative languages, the arts can support processes of meaning-making, identity construction, perspective-taking, and critical engagement with culturally established representations. In teacher education, disability arts and narratives can enable pre-service teachers to question normative assumptions about bodies, competence, autonomy, and participation and to consider the conditions through which schools may become generative environments of possibility rather than spaces organised around normalisation and compensation (Symeonidou, 2022, 2025). This orientation is also consistent with recent reviews highlighting the educational potential of arts-based approaches for learners with disabilities (Mareza et al., 2025).

The integration of artistic practices with digital technologies may further extend these opportunities when technology is treated as a reflective and creative mediator rather than merely as a tool for rapid content production. Digital images, stories, scenarios, multimodal artefacts, and accessible communication environments may externalise implicit assumptions, make representations open to collective examination, and support the construction of alternative narratives centred not on what a person lacks but on existing strengths, resources, desires, and potential. Generative systems can theoretically widen this design space, but their educational value depends on critical prompting, verification, attention to bias, data governance, accessibility, and the preservation of human agency. Because such systems were not systematically deployed or monitored in the empirical phase of this study, they are treated here as a prospective dimension of inclusive teacher education rather than as a source of outcome evidence.

This orientation is closely aligned with Appreciative Inquiry, an approach originally developed in the field of organisational studies and subsequently applied in educational and inclusive contexts (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Appreciative Inquiry is grounded in the systematic exploration of strengths, successful experiences, generative relationships, and life-giving factors within individuals and organisations. Through dialogue and narrative practices, participants are invited to identify what already works, imagine desirable futures, and design actions capable of bringing those futures into being. Its appreciative

orientation should not be understood as the uncritical celebration of positive experiences or the denial of barriers and inequalities. Rather, it constitutes a deliberate shift in the questions through which reality is investigated, making strengths, possibilities, aspirations, and previously unrecognised resources available as foundations for transformative action.

When connected with transformative learning, this approach may support the critical revision of established assumptions and frames of reference (Mezirow, 1991). Teacher education based on generative narratives can thus help pre-service teachers reinterpret disability as a domain of aspirations, relationships, projects, and possibilities rather than as a condition exhaustively defined by impairment, need, or dependency. Such a transformation does not occur through abstract declarations of inclusivity alone but through educational experiences that enable participants to recognise and question their own interpretative habits, encounter alternative narratives, and imagine enabling contexts in which people with disabilities can exercise agency and participate in the construction of their own life trajectories.

The integration of Appreciative Inquiry, artistic mediation, and intentionally selected digital technologies therefore offers a promising perspective for initial teacher education. It may contribute to the development of representations of disability that are more consistent with a possibility-oriented paradigm and with the principles of Quality of Life, participation, self-determination, and rights. At the same time, it provides a pedagogical environment in which pre-service teachers can connect reflective inquiry, creative production, ethical responsibility, and inclusive educational planning.

Against this background, the present exploratory study investigates how the integration of Appreciative Inquiry, arts-based practices, digital technologies, and the Quality of Life framework may support the transformation of disability representations among pre-service teachers specialising in educational support. The analysis does not focus exclusively on the formal accuracy of the Life Projects developed by participants. It examines the pedagogical quality of their project narratives, their capacity to recognise wishes, aspirations, strengths, and possible futures, the inclusion of mediators capable of enhancing accessibility and participation, and the progressive emergence of a professional stance less centred on compensation and more oriented towards the co-construction of meaningful and self-determined life trajectories.

2. Presentation of an exploratory study

The study was designed as an exploratory, qualitative-dominant, multi-source investigation conducted within an initial teacher education programme for prospective special education teachers. It emerged from the need to examine, from an international and special education perspective, the ways in which future teachers may be supported in conceptualising the Life Project not merely as a technical or documentary requirement, but as an educational and ethical framework capable of integrating functioning, desire, participation, self-determination, and Quality of Life. The study is grounded in a theoretical and methodological framework that integrates the Quality of Life paradigm (Hunt, 1997), Appreciative Inquiry (Whitney & Cooperrider, 2011), arts-based practices (Barone & Eisner, 2012), and the pedagogically and inclusively oriented use of educational technologies (Loveless, 2011). This integration makes it possible to interpret inclusive planning not simply as an adaptive response to Special Educational Needs, but as a process through which possible worlds are constructed (Berthoz, 2015), within which persons with disabilities are recognised in the full complexity of their biographical, relational, affective, and future-oriented dimensions. The exploratory nature of the research is justified by the still-emergent intersection among Life Project planning, special education teacher preparation, artistic languages, digital technologies, and affective education. Rather than testing an established causal model, the study seeks to identify recurring patterns, meaningful themes, representational tensions, and mediating devices in the materials produced by the participants. The empirical corpus consists of the group-developed Life Projects, narrative reflections, and a limited questionnaire subset used only to contextualise the qualitative interpretation.

The research therefore adopted a transformative logic, insofar as it did not merely observe whether participants had acquired knowledge of Life Project planning, but investigated whether and how they progressively shifted from a predominantly clinical and deficit-based representation of disability towards an existential, relational, and capability-oriented understanding. In this regard, the analysis seeks to determine whether the encounter among the arts, technologies, and an Appreciative Inquiry approach can foster a pedagogy of possibility (McLaren, 2004), within which educational planning becomes an act of recognition, institutional imagination, and professional responsibility.

2.1. Question and Objective of the research

The general question that guided the study can be formulated in the following terms: how does the integration of an appreciative approach, artistic practices, and intentionally selected digital technologies in the construction of the Life Project

contribute to reconfiguring the representations, design practices, and affective-relational sensitivity of future support teachers?
Five specific research questions derive from this general question:

1. **RQ1:** how the trainees represent the person with disabilities in the Life Project, moving from a vision centered on diagnosis and deficits to one oriented towards resources, desires, possibilities and self-determination.
2. **RQ2:** what role do arts, music, dance, painting, theater and other forms of expression play in the narrative construction of the Life Project.
3. **RQ3:** which domains of Quality of Life emerge most frequently and deeply, in particular self-determination, social inclusion, relationships, personal development, empowerment and emotional well-being.
4. **RQ4:** how the appreciative approach affects the design language, favoring the transition from the lexicon of lack to that of possibility, participation and agency.
5. **RQ5:** what forms of digital affective education emerge from the use of technologies as mediators of autonomy, accessibility, emotional regulation, participation and self-construction.

The general objective of the study was to analyse how the integration of the Quality of Life framework, Appreciative Inquiry, arts-based practices, and digital technologies can support the training of support teachers in the design of individualised, participatory, and quality-of-life-oriented pathways. This objective was divided into five specific objectives:

- describe the structural and semantic characteristics of the life projects developed by the students;
- identify the domains of Quality of Life most mobilized in design;
- to examine the role of the arts as narrative, affective and identity mediators;
- analyze the function of technologies as facilitators of autonomy, participation and emotional accessibility;
- build, starting from the data, an emerging interpretative model, called Appreciative Artistic Life Design Model, capable of describing the interactions between narration, artistic mediation, technological facilitation and affective ecology.

The study did not assume digital technologies as an automatic solution to problems of inclusion. They were considered within an ecological and pedagogical perspective, as tools whose meaning depends on competent educational relationships, emotionally aware environments, participatory processes, and explicit formative intentions (Loveless, 2011). The scientific interest therefore lay

not in documenting the mere presence of art or technology, but in examining how their integration was associated, within the produced projects and narratives, with a planning posture that was less compensatory and more capability-oriented, less deficit-centred and more attentive to participation, agency, and future possibilities.

2.2. Phases and times

The overall research process extended from November 2025 to March 2026. This date range refers to the complete research cycle rather than to a continuous five-month training intervention. The initial period comprised theoretical orientation, group work, Life Project development, integration of artistic and technological mediators, and questionnaire administration; the final period was devoted to corpus preparation, anonymisation, coding, qualitative analysis, and interpretative integration. The chronology therefore includes both the research-training activities and the subsequent analytical work. Across these phases, the procedure was intentionally sequenced to maintain coherence among training, document production, data collection, and analysis.

- *The first phase, focused on theoretical orientation and pedagogical awareness-raising, introduced participants to the main conceptual foundations of the study: the individualised and participatory Life Project, the Quality of Life framework, self-determination, the ecology of supports, the Appreciative Inquiry approach, the role of the arts in educational processes, and the function of digital technologies in inclusive contexts, with generative AI discussed as an emerging professional and ethical issue. During this phase, the Life Project was presented not as a final document, but as a dynamic process of interpretation, negotiation, and collaborative construction of desirable living conditions.*
- The *second phase* was devoted to the formation of working groups and the definition of the project tasks. The 66 participants were organised into groups and asked to develop Life Projects based on person profiles specifically designed or adapted for educational purposes. The task required them to incorporate not only information concerning functioning and support needs, but also biographical elements, preferences, interests, expectations, family and community resources, barriers, facilitators, artistic mediators, and technologies potentially capable of enhancing participation.
- The *third phase* concerned the development of the Life Projects. Participants completed the project template by addressing its main sections: general information, school-related and sociodemographic data, certifications, family and service networks, multidimensional assessment, functioning profiles, Quality of Life indicators, mapping of barriers and

facilitators, expectations of the individual, family, and professionals, goal setting, Quality of Life domains, interventions, outcome indicators, resources, and monitoring procedures. This phase constituted the operational core of the study, as it made it possible to observe how participants translated theoretical frameworks into project-related, lexical, relational, and organisational choices.

- The *fourth phase* explicitly introduced the artistic and multimodal dimension. The groups were asked to incorporate expressive forms such as music, painting, theatre, dance, performance, visual storytelling, culinary arts, and other creative languages, while examining their role not as decorative additions but as integral components of the planning process. The arts were regarded as mediators capable of eliciting desires, competencies, interests, emotional states, and opportunities for participation. Particular attention was devoted to the ways in which artistic practices could shift the focus of the project from compensating for perceived deficits to recognising and developing what the person already knows, desires, values, and may progressively become capable of achieving.
- The fifth phase focused on the integration of educational technologies. Participants identified tools such as compensatory software, optical character recognition systems, text-to-speech applications, augmentative and alternative communication, visual schedules, digital reminders, routine-management applications, mobility supports, tools for therapeutic management, and digital environments for narrative or artistic production. The methodological emphasis was placed not on the technology itself, but on its ecological function and on its capacity to support autonomy, make participation more accessible, facilitate communication, reduce anxiety, expand opportunities for choice, and promote more sustainable forms of social presence. Generative AI was not prescribed as a mandatory design tool, and its use was neither systematically logged nor coded as a separate empirical variable. Accordingly, the present findings concerning technology refer to the assistive and general-purpose digital tools explicitly documented in the projects; generative AI is retained only as a theoretical and prospective line of inquiry.
- The *sixth phase* involved the administration of a reflective questionnaire. The instrument collected data on participants' perceptions of the extent to which the artistic dimension had been integrated into the definition of project goals and stages, the art forms considered most meaningful, the potential of the arts to facilitate the expression of goals that are difficult to articulate verbally, their impact on personal motivation, their capacity

to clarify and concretise the different stages of the project, their perceived contribution to overall well-being and personal fulfilment, the level of inspiration associated with the use of the arts, and participants' intention to continue using artistic practices as tools for monitoring and revising the project over time.

- The seventh and final phase was devoted to data analysis. The 10 Life Projects were subjected to structured documentary coding and qualitative interpretation, while the reflective materials were analysed thematically and narratively. A coding framework was used to identify Quality of Life domains, artistic and technological mediators, indicators of agency and participation, and expressions associated with deficit-oriented or capability-oriented language. At the time of the present article, only five questionnaire records were available for analysis. Given this very small subset, the closed-ended responses were not summarised through means, standard deviations, percentages, correlations, or group comparisons and were not used to support claims about prevalence or effect. They were retained only as contextual observations and read alongside the open-ended and documentary material. Interpretative integration across sources was used to develop the emerging model.

2.3. Participants and procedure

The participants in the study were 66 trainees enrolled in the tenth cycle of the specialisation programme for educational support activities for students with disabilities.

The sample was selected through purposive and context-based sampling. It was not intended as a probabilistic sample aimed at the statistical generalisation of the findings, but rather as a situated educational group considered particularly relevant for investigating how prospective special education teachers construct representations of disability, develop Quality of Life-oriented planning approaches, and integrate the arts, technologies, and affective dimensions within an authentic task. The relevance of the sample lies in its strategic positioning, as participants were undergoing a phase of professional transition in which theoretical knowledge, workshop-based experiences, and initial planning competencies converged in the construction of their professional identity as teachers.

The procedure began with an introduction to the theoretical and regulatory framework of the Life Project, with particular emphasis on its individualised, participatory, multidimensional, and Quality of Life-oriented nature. Participants were subsequently invited to work on real or pedagogically adapted case profiles by means of a structured template requiring the adoption of an ecosystemic perspective. Each group was asked to consider not only diagnosis and functioning, but also family networks, services, community contexts, interests, preferences, the

expectations of the individual, family aspirations, professional assessments, and the concrete conditions enabling participation.

Particular attention was devoted to fostering an appreciative planning stance. Participants were encouraged not to begin the planning process exclusively from difficulties and limitations, but to identify and examine existing resources, including passions, specific interests, emerging competencies, meaningful relationships, motivating environments, expressive languages, opportunities for choice, and aspirations for the future. This step played a central methodological role, as it made it possible to investigate whether the planning process was guided by a logic of deficit remediation or by a logic of recognition, development, and empowerment of the person.

From an ethical perspective, the study required the complete anonymisation of the data, the removal of identifying information, the use of pseudonyms, and the aggregate reporting of findings. Since Life Projects, even when developed for educational purposes, may contain sensitive or potentially sensitive information, the analysis was conducted in accordance with the principles of data minimisation, confidentiality, and relevance. In the scientific reporting of the study, attention was therefore directed towards planning structures, narrative patterns, and emerging pedagogical categories, while excluding any information that could enable the direct or indirect identification of the individuals represented in the projects.

2.4. Tools and data collection

Data collection was based on multiple sources, consistent with the qualitative-dominant and exploratory character of the study. The first instrument consisted of the individualised and participatory Life Project template used by the participants. This represented the principal documentary source of the research, as it made it possible to examine the planning process across assessment, functioning, support networks, barriers and facilitators, expectations, goals, Quality of Life domains, interventions, resources, outcome indicators, timelines, and monitoring procedures. Each project was treated as a complex unit of analysis, simultaneously understood as a technical document, a pedagogical narrative, and an expression of the professional stance adopted by the group that developed it.

The second instrument was a reflective questionnaire addressing the artistic and musical dimensions of the Life Project. The questionnaire, adapted from Di Fabio et al. (2019), combined closed-ended items, Likert-type agreement scales, multiple-choice questions, inspiration ratings, and open-ended questions. It was designed to explore participants' perceptions of the extent to which artistic and musical practices contributed to the formulation of goals, the clarification of the different stages of the planning process, personal motivation, the expression of experiences or aspirations that were difficult to verbalise, perceived well-being, and the overall meaningfulness of the project. For the present article, only five questionnaire

records were available; this subset was therefore used as contextual material and not as a basis for statistical estimation.

The third instrument consisted of the participants' narrative reflections. These were collected as autonomous qualitative materials capable of illuminating processes of professional transformation. The narratives were analysed to identify indicators of educational empathy, narrative agency, decentring of perspective, affective awareness, critical reflection on technology, and the re-elaboration of the teacher's professional role. From this perspective, narrative was not regarded as a merely subjective commentary, but as a space in which emerging professional identity could become visible and be critically examined (Demetrio, 2005).

The fourth instrument was an analytical coding framework developed specifically for the study on the basis of its theoretical foundations. The framework enabled the coding of the presence of Quality of Life domains, the level of participation attributed to the individual, the extent to which expectations were explicitly articulated, the nature of the proposed goals, the coherence among objectives, interventions, and indicators, the presence of artistic and technological mediators, the types of technologies employed, the functions attributed to art and technology, the prevailing terminology, and the overall orientation of each project. Particular attention was devoted to the distinction between deficit-based and transformative language. The former included formulations centred on incapacity, limitation, dependence, and risk, whereas the latter encompassed expressions oriented towards desire, choice, participation, autonomy, possibility, emerging competence, and future development.

Data collection generated three principal sets of information. The first consisted of documentary data derived from the Life Projects and was used for structural and content analysis. The second comprised the limited questionnaire subset, whose closed-ended and open-ended responses were used only to contextualise the interpretation and not to estimate quantitative trends. The third consisted of narrative data obtained from open-ended questionnaire responses and participants' reflective accounts, which were essential for understanding the meanings attributed to the educational experience. The integration of these sources supported source triangulation, allowing project characteristics to be considered alongside the perceptions expressed in the available questionnaire records and the reflective interpretations developed by participants.

No inferential statistics are reported in the present study. Because the available questionnaire subset comprised only five records, the closed-ended items were not aggregated into means, standard deviations, percentages, correlations, or between-group comparisons. Their role is strictly contextual. The numerical scales were retained only to preserve the original structure of the instrument and to support case-by-case reading; they are not interpreted as population estimates. Likewise, the ordinal values used in the project-coding grid function as explicit

coding anchors and are not treated as validated psychometric scores or combined into composite indices in the current article.

The qualitative analysis adopted a thematic and narrative approach aimed at identifying semantic recurrences, cross-cutting configurations, and ways of imagining the future. The Life Projects were therefore interpreted as project narratives in which persons with disabilities were not reduced to their functional profiles, but recognised within the broader fabric of their desires, relationships, contexts, opportunities, and trajectories of participation. Preliminary codes included agency, self-determination, artistic mediation, technological facilitation, affective ecologies, social participation, transformation of language, relationships among family, school, and services, emotional well-being, and the tension between clinical and existential paradigms.

The methodological quality of the study was supported by the triangulation of projects, available questionnaire records, and narratives, by the explicit coding rules, and by researcher reflexivity. Reflexivity was treated as a necessary condition for questioning interpretative assumptions, monitoring the influence of the researchers' theoretical positioning, and avoiding merely confirmatory readings of the empirical materials.

2.5. Data analysis

Data analysis followed an integrated, qualitative-dominant logic in which documentary, narrative, and contextual questionnaire materials were read as complementary sources rather than as equivalent quantitative and qualitative strands. The study does not seek to estimate effect sizes or test associations. Its purpose is to understand how the Life Project may become a device for reconsidering professional stance, connecting assessment, desire, functioning, possibility, artistic mediation, technological support, and ecological design.

The analysis was organised across four complementary analytical sources and outputs:

- the documentary matrix of the 10 Life Projects;
- the contextual questionnaire micro-extract, comprising five available records;
- the narrative matrix of open-ended responses and reflective materials.

These sources were subsequently integrated at an interpretative level. The Life Project matrix made it possible to analyse planning structures and pedagogical orientation; the five questionnaire records provided only contextual indications about participants' perceptions and were not statistically aggregated; the narrative matrix supported interpretation of meanings, lexical shifts, agency, and inclusive

professional stance. The final integration therefore concerns convergence and tension across sources rather than numerical confirmation (Table 1).

Table 1: Data matrices and units of analysis

Matrix	Source	Unit of analysis	Data type	Analytic function
M1. Life projects	10 projects developed by the groups	Project; section; objective; indicator	Documentary and qualitative structured coding	Analyze project quality, QoL domains, barriers/facilitators, coherence of objectives-interventions-outcomes
M2. Questionnaire	Five available questionnaire records	Record; open-ended response	Contextual descriptive and qualitative	Contextualise perceptions about art, music, motivation, clarity, well-being, and continuity of use; no statistical estimation
M3. Reflective narratives	Open-ended answers and reflections	Narrative segment	Qualitative	Interpreting transformation of the gaze, lexicon, agency, inclusive posture
M4. Interpretive integration	Projects, narratives, and questionnaire micro-extract	Cross-source theme	Integrative qualitative	Identify convergence, divergence, and tensions across sources; support development of the AALDM

The primary unit of analysis was the Life Project; the secondary unit was the working group; the tertiary unit was the textual segment, understood as a significant portion of text referable to an analytic category. This choice allows us to keep together the macro level, relating to the overall structure of the projects, and the micro level, relating to the lexical choices, indicators, representations and mediators used.

The analysis was organised in three phases: data preparation and normalisation; structured coding and qualitative analysis of projects and narratives, with contextual reading of the five questionnaire records; and interpretative triangulation across sources.

2.5.1. Preparation, anonymisation and normalisation of the corpus

In a preliminary phase, all materials were subjected to an anonymization procedure, with the removal or replacement of names, contact details, social security numbers, specific places, health references and other potentially identifying elements. The projects were then segmented into analytical units corresponding to the main sections of the model: multidimensional assessment, functioning profiles, barriers and facilitators, expectations, goals, Quality of Life domains, interventions, resources, outcome indicators, monitoring.

To make heterogeneous project materials systematically comparable, a common coding matrix was prepared. Each section of the project was translated into descriptive or ordinal coding categories. For example, the presence of the domain "self-determination" was coded as 0 = absent, 1 = implicit, 2 = explicit, and 3 = explicit and translated into objectives/interventions/indicators. The same logic was applied to the other domains and mediators (Table 2). These codes served as transparent qualitative coding anchors. In the current study they were not summed into composite scales, interpreted as psychometric measures, or used for inferential statistical comparisons.

Table 2: Project coding grid

Size	Indicator	Scale	Encoding Policy
Self-determination	Presence of choices, desires, preferences, decisions of the person	0-3	0 absent; 1 implicit; 2 explicit; 3 translated into verifiable objectives
Social inclusion	Participation in groups, communities, territorial activities, non-segregated contexts	0-3	Intensity and concreteness of the expected participation
Interpersonal relationships	Friendships, family, peers, social networks, belonging	0-3	From a simple mention to intentional network design
Emotional well-being	Emotional regulation, anxiety reduction, motivation, self-esteem	0-3	From generic declaration to monitorable intervention
Personal development	Learning, skills, interests, talents, growth	0-3	From isolated skills to evolutionary trajectory
Empowerment	Rights, agency, access to opportunities, voice of the person	0-3	From hetero-directed protection to active participation

Artistic mediation	Music, dance, painting, theatre, cooking, performance, visual arts	0-3	From an accessory activity to an identity/design device
Technological mediation	Assistive technology, AAC, apps, reminders, OCR, speech synthesis, digital tools	0-3	From technical support to agency facilitator
Design coherence	Alignment between need, goal, intervention, indicator, monitoring	0-4	0 inconsistent; 4 Fully Aligned
Participation	Presence of person, family, school, services, territory	0-4	Number and quality of actors involved
Transformative language	Lexicon of possibility, desire, future, competence, agency	0-3	Semantic frequency and density
Deficit-oriented language	Lexicon of lack, inability, limitation, diagnosis not pedagogically mediated	0-3	Intensity and centrality in the text

2.5.2. Contextual reading of the questionnaire micro-extract

Only five questionnaire records were available at the time of the present analysis. This subset is too small to support stable descriptive estimates, percentages, dispersion measures, comparisons by art form, or correlational analyses. For that reason, the closed-ended responses are treated as five case-level observations and are used only to contextualise patterns identified in the Life Projects and narratives. The questionnaire component is therefore not presented as a quantitative result strand.

Read qualitatively, the five records show recurrent appreciation of artistic mediation in relation to motivation, the expression of difficult-to-verbalise goals, clarification of project stages, and perceived well-being. Music recurs in several records, alongside performance-related and culinary forms, but the small number of available responses does not permit any claim about relative frequency, dominance, or general preference. Likewise, stated intentions to continue using artistic practices are reported only as individual orientations and not as percentages or estimates. These observations are used exclusively to enrich the interpretation of the documentary and narrative corpus.

2.5.3. Qualitative analysis

The qualitative analysis was conducted according to a thematic-reflective and narrative approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The thematic analysis made it possible to identify transversal recurrences and patterns; the narrative inquiry, on the other hand, has made it possible to read the projects as narratives of the future, in which the person with disabilities is not reduced to his or her functioning, but is

represented through desires, relationships, possibilities and existential trajectories (Table 8).

The initial codes were organized into six macro-areas: *agency and self-determination; arts as identity mediation; technologies as facilitators of autonomy; affective ecologies; language transformation; tension between clinical paradigm and existential paradigm.*

Table 3: Preliminary qualitative coding

Macro-category	Codes	Textual indicators
Agency and self-determination	choice, desire, autonomy, future, decision	"I would like", "I want", "to choose", "to live", "to participate"
Arts and identity	music, dance, painting, theatre, cooking, performance	Art as a language of the person, not as an accessory activity
Technologies and agency	AAC, OCR, text-to-speech, reminders, apps, digital maps	Technology as support for autonomy and participation
Affective ecologies	anxiety, well-being, regulation, predictability, decompression	Attention to the emotional and sensory climate of the rooms
Transformative language	possibility, resource, talent, motivation, competence	Storytelling beyond diagnosis
Clinical persistence	deficit, impairment, incapacity, constant supervision	Tension between assessment and existential project

2.6. Data discussion

The first interpretative pattern concerns the pedagogical status of the Life Project. Within the 10 analysed projects, the document is not treated solely as an administrative container of information but is progressively configured as a planning device in which functioning is read alongside Quality of Life, preferences, relationships, and future possibilities. Diagnoses, assessments, and functional descriptions remain present, but they are situated within a broader framework that gives increasing space to desires, interests, networks, and contexts of participation.

A recurrent tension can be observed between clinical and existential registers. Several projects begin from diagnostic information, adaptive-functioning descriptions, and standardised indicators, and subsequently shift, in the sections devoted to goals, preferences, and Quality of Life, toward formulations concerning autonomy, relationships, participation, work, leisure, emotional expression, and self-determination. This pattern should not be interpreted as evidence that the training caused a transformation in individual beliefs; rather, it indicates that the produced documents contain a discernible movement between two representational registers.

This movement can be interpreted, at the level of the documents, as a process of narrative de-medicalisation. Diagnosis remains a necessary cognitive component, but it does not exhaust the representation of the person. The Life Project becomes a space in which clinical information is placed in relation to pedagogical intentionality: the analytical question shifts from identifying what is missing to identifying which environmental, relational, artistic, and technological conditions may support a more self-determined, participatory, and meaningful life (Table 4).

Table 4: From clinical representation to capability-oriented representation

Level	**Initial language**	**Transformative language**	**Pedagogical implication**
Person	Deficit, diagnosis, impairment	Desires, preferences, talents, possibilities	Centrality of subjectivity
Objectives	Compensate, reduce, contain	Developing, participating, choosing, living	Transition from restorative to generative care
Context	Barrier to be adapted	Ecology to be transformed	Environmental and relational design
Technology	Compensatory aid	Agency Facilitator	Technology as a mediation of autonomy
Art	Ancillary activity	Identity-affective device	Art as the language of the person
Teacher	Support Technician	Ecosystem Facilitator	Inclusive and interprofessional posture

A second interpretative pattern concerns the role attributed to the arts. Evidence for this pattern comes primarily from the Life Projects and narrative materials. The five questionnaire records are used only as contextual support and are not treated as a quantitative sample. Across these sources, artistic practices are described not merely as supplementary activities but as possible mediators of identity, affect, motivation, and communication. They appear especially relevant where participants seek to represent interests, desires, and forms of expression that are not easily captured by technical or clinical language.

Music receives particular attention in a number of projects and in several of the five available questionnaire records. Within those cases, it is framed as more than an expressive activity: it can organise relational, emotional, educational, and, in some instances, vocational goals. Given the limited questionnaire subset, no claim is made that music is the dominant or preferred artistic mediator in the wider participant group. The more defensible interpretation is case-based: where music is integrated into the Life Project, it is often assigned an identity-related and relational function that extends beyond recreation.

A third interpretative pattern concerns technologies. The projects predominantly document assistive and general-purpose digital tools, including AAC systems, OCR and text-to-speech solutions, reminders, organisational applications, digital maps, and communication environments. These technologies are generally represented not as substitutes for educational relationships but as situated facilitators of accessibility, communication, memory, mobility, task management, predictability, and participation. The data therefore support an interpretation of technology as an agency-enabling mediation within the specific projects analysed (Table 5). They do not support empirical conclusions about generative AI, whose use was not systematically prescribed, documented, or coded.

Table 5: Pedagogical functions of technologies in structured Life Projects

Function	**Examples**	**Inclusive meaning**
Accessibility	OCR, text-to-speech, digital books, maps	Access to materials and reduction of barriers
Communication	AAC, visual aids, structured agendas	Expression of needs and participation
Daily autonomy	Reminders, organizational apps, digital calendars	Time management, health, routine
Emotional regulation	Predictable environments, visual tools, decompression	Reduced anxiety and increased control
Social participation	Smartphones, contact tools, digital environments	Maintaining relationships and belonging
Monitoring	Checklists, apps, digital diaries	Verification of outcomes over time

A fourth pattern concerns emotional well-being. References to anxiety, self-esteem, regulation, predictability, protected spaces, sensory decompression, stress reduction, and group belonging recur across the project corpus. These references suggest that participants did not limit planning to activities and performance outcomes but also considered the emotional conditions under which participation might be sustainable. Within the limits of an exploratory documentary analysis, inclusion is thus represented not only as physical access to contexts but also as the affective sustainability of presence and engagement.

A fifth pattern concerns the ecosystemic character of planning. The projects mobilise school, family, services, territory, associations, health professionals, educators, peers, sports groups, music workshops, day centres, training settings, and potential work contexts. This recurring configuration is consistent with a representation of the support teacher as a network facilitator rather than as an isolated technician assigned to an individual student. The interpretation remains

documentary: it concerns how the role is represented in the projects, not evidence of subsequent professional behaviour in practice (Table 6).

Table 6: Integrated discussion according to the AALDM model

AALDM Model Axis	Evidence in the data	Interpretation
Narrative agency	Presence of personal desires, aspirations, goals	The person is thought of as a subject of the future
Artistic mediation	Music, dance, painting, cooking, performance	The arts make identities and possibilities visible
Technological facilitation	AAC, OCR, reminders, apps, compensatory tools	Technologies expand accessibility and autonomy
Affective ecology	Anxiety, regulation, predictable environments, well-being	Inclusion requires sustainable emotional conditions
Quality of Life orientation	Recurring QoL domains in projects	The project is oriented towards life, not just performance
Appreciative posture	Focus on resources, interests, emerging skills	Shift from deficit to possibility

Taken together, the documentary and narrative materials support a provisional interpretative proposition: when Appreciative Inquiry, arts-based mediation, and intentionally selected digital supports are integrated into Life Project planning, the resulting projects tend to articulate disability through a broader pedagogical grammar that holds together needs and possibilities, support and agency, relationships and environments, care and future. This proposition concerns patterns in the produced materials; it should not be read as a causal effect of the training or as an estimate of prevalence in the population of pre-service teachers.

The present dataset does not permit statistical testing of relationships among artistic mediation, technological agency, Quality of Life orientation, and transformative language. Such hypotheses may be examined in a subsequent study only after a sufficiently complete questionnaire dataset has been obtained, coding reliability has been assessed, and any composite measures have undergone independent conceptual and psychometric validation. They are therefore treated here as future research questions rather than as findings.

In theoretical terms, the contribution of the study lies in the proposal of the Appreciative Artistic Life Design Model (AALDM) as an interpretative framework rather than a validated measurement model. The AALDM links narrative agency, artistic mediation, technological facilitation, affective ecology, and Quality of Life orientation in order to describe how inclusive planning may move beyond a purely compensatory logic. Generative AI can be positioned within this framework as a future object of inquiry, potentially relevant to design imagination, multimodal narration, and personalisation, but the current empirical corpus does not allow its specific contribution to be assessed.

The educational significance of the analysed materials lies in the different grammar of planning they make visible. The projects do not merely reproduce a model to be completed; in many instances they connect functional information with desires, relationships, artistic interests, environmental supports, and future possibilities. This documentary pattern is consistent with a situated, relational, and possibility-oriented reading of disability. Because the study lacks a pre-post measure of participants' representations, it would be inappropriate to claim that an individual-level transformation has been demonstrated; the current findings instead document how such a transformation is expressed in the artefacts and narratives produced during the research-training process.

2.7. Methodological precautions

The main purpose of the research was to explore an emerging field at the intersection of Life Project planning, Quality of Life, artistic mediation, digital technologies, and the education of future support teachers. The current evidence is strongest at the documentary and qualitative levels. Ten group-developed Life Projects constitute the principal empirical corpus, complemented by reflective narratives. The questionnaire component is presently limited to five records and is therefore used only to contextualise interpretation, without statistical summaries or claims of representativeness.

The contextual nature of the sample and the exploratory design define the scope of inference. The study can identify recurring representational patterns and generate theoretically informed propositions, but it cannot establish causal effects of the training, estimate prevalence beyond the analysed corpus, or determine whether observed documentary shifts persist over time. The AALDM should accordingly be regarded as an emerging interpretative framework requiring further empirical consolidation rather than as a validated model or index.

Future research should strengthen the design through longitudinal and multicentre studies, larger and complete questionnaire datasets, independent double coding, explicit assessment of coding agreement, and direct involvement of people with disabilities, families, and services. If composite indicators are subsequently developed, their weighting, construct validity, reliability, and sensitivity should be tested independently before they are used for comparison. A distinct development should concern the systematic documentation of generative-AI use, including the tasks for which it is used, the prompts and outputs considered, human revision processes, accessibility functions, ethical safeguards, and the specific ways in which it may or may not influence pedagogical decision-making.

In its current phase, the study therefore offers a carefully delimited account of how Life Projects can function as devices of knowledge, co-design, and inclusive imagination within a specific teacher-education setting.

3. Conclusions

The study documents how, within the analysed corpus, the Life Project can be configured beyond a predominantly documentary function and become a training and planning device through which disability is represented in relation to biography, participation, environment, supports, preferences, and future possibilities. The findings should be understood as exploratory patterns in produced projects and narratives rather than as evidence of a causal change in participants' individual beliefs.

Across the Life Projects and narrative materials, arts-based practices are assigned functions that extend beyond ancillary activities. Music, dance, painting, theatre, performance, and other creative languages are represented as possible identity, affective, communicative, and narrative mediators. These patterns suggest that artistic mediation can make visible interests, desires, competencies, and forms of belonging that technical language may capture only partially. The five available questionnaire records are consistent with this interpretation but are not used to quantify its frequency or magnitude.

Digital and assistive technologies also emerge in the projects as components of inclusive planning that are not limited to deficit compensation. The documented tools are used to support communication, accessibility, organisation, predictability, autonomy, and participation. Their pedagogical value is therefore interpreted in relation to the purposes and contexts in which they are embedded. Generative AI, by contrast, was discussed in the theoretical orientation but was not systematically implemented, tracked, or coded in the empirical work; no conclusion is therefore drawn about its effectiveness or specific contribution in this study.

The principal theoretical contribution is the proposal of the Appreciative Artistic Life Design Model as an emerging interpretative framework linking narrative agency, artistic mediation, technological facilitation, affective ecology, and Quality of Life orientation. At this stage, the model organises observed themes and relationships within the corpus; it should not be interpreted as a validated measurement instrument. This positioning allows the framework to remain in dialogue with international perspectives on teacher education, disability studies, arts-based methodologies, and digital education while preserving the exploratory status of the evidence. The reference to teaching as complex, embodied, situated, and relational action is consistent with a form of teacher education oriented not to reducing complexity but to making it pedagogically inhabitable (Sibilio, 2014; Sibilio & Aiello, 2015).

The research retains an explicitly initial and context-bound character. Subsequent studies should test the transferability of the interpretative categories across settings, examine change longitudinally, expand and complete the questionnaire component, evaluate coding reliability, and involve people with disabilities and other stakeholders directly in the research process. Generative technologies should

be investigated only through a dedicated and traceable protocol capable of distinguishing exposure, actual use, pedagogical purpose, human oversight, and resulting design decisions.

The perspective that emerges is therefore one of research not only on Life Projects but through Life Projects. Within the limits of the present exploratory corpus, these artefacts can be read as spaces of knowledge, co-design, and professional reflection in which future teachers connect functioning with subjectivity, environments, supports, arts, and digital mediations. In the algorithmic era, the educational challenge is not to infer possibility from technology itself, but to form teachers capable of governing technological mediation critically while keeping participation, self-determination, accessibility, and Quality of Life at the centre of inclusive planning.

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