

UNIVERSITY AND SPECIFIC LEARNING DISORDERS. PRACTICES OF GUIDANCE AND INTERVENTIONS

DISTURBI SPECIFICI DELL'APPRENDIMENTO E UNIVERSITÀ. PRATICHE DI ORIENTAMENTO ED INTERVENTI

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Abstract

The organization of a training project should consider and evaluate the different learning systems that do not always identify themselves, necessarily, in a linearity in the acquisition and understanding of knowledge. The Specific Learning Disorders are generally recognized through a mode of acquisition that does not adhere entirely to a canonical and typical formation, but rather is recognized with its own modality and specificity. People with SLD encounter various obstacles along the educational - didactic path and, in this sense, such problems need solutions that can support, organize and arrange special spaces and suitable materials. The university, through the organization of specific services for the SLD, must provide for the different needs and all the necessary actions to ensure reception, mediation and support, implementing a planned, monitored and effective teaching.

L'organizzazione di un progetto formativo dovrebbe considerare e valutare i diversi sistemi di apprendimento che non sempre si identificano, necessariamente, in una linearità nell'acquisizione e nella comprensione della conoscenza. I Disturbi Specifici dell'Apprendimento sono generalmente riconosciuti attraverso una modalità di acquisizione che non aderisce interamente ad una formazione canonica e tipica, ma che piuttosto si riconosce con una propria modalità e specificità. Le persone con DSA incontrano diversi ostacoli lungo il percorso educativo - didattico e, in tal senso, tali problematiche necessitano di soluzioni che possano sostenere, organizzare e predisporre spazi peculiari e materiali idonei. L'università, attraverso l'organizzazione di servizi specifici per i DSA, deve provvedere alle diverse esigenze ed a tutte le azioni necessarie per poter garantire l'accoglienza, la mediazione ed il sostegno, attuando una didattica programmata, monitorata ed efficace.

Keywords

SLD, university, learning, education, teaching.

DSA, università, apprendimento, istruzione, didattica.

Introduction

Education, study and learning are particularly important aspects in an evolutionary process, since they guide and direct the subject along a path of awareness and competence aimed at the realization of a project of autonomy and emancipation. Each cognitive and educational project

must be aimed at transmitting knowledge and knowledge and, more specifically, at developing quality, skills and abilities in the individual, considering the contents to be transferred, the modalities of such transfer and the audience to which this transmission is addressed. The school, together with the family, represent a fundamental context for the cognitive and affective development of the subject, constituting a privileged territory for socialization and for the experimentation of its effectiveness and autonomy. We can consider as essential conditions for every learning the organization of activities, spaces, materials and the network of relationships that are built and formed over time: to give confidence, to value the skills of each person, better prepare spaces and tools, are actions that should commonly be part of a path of growth, evolution and development of each subject. The path towards knowledge and awareness of their tools and resources, through the conduct of school and extracurricular activities, is not always approached by the subject in the same ways. Autonomy, study and education are often attainable through alternative and parallel paths that vary according to the skills and learning styles that each subject brings with it. In this sense, in the educational field, it is not possible to recognize a linearity of learning in the paths of each individual subject, but rather, a peculiarity of needs and tools. These distinct and specific modalities can be recognized in the definition of the Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) that are proposed with their own identity and characterization, which is manifested through an alternative mode of learning, which of course requires a functional and appropriate system able to respond, in the best possible way, to the particular needs. Learning Specific Disorders can be defined as a difficulty in acquiring some particular skills or abilities that do not allow complete self-sufficiency in learning itself, and that manifest themselves with significant difficulties in the use of reading, writing and calculation. The acquisition of these skills, while changing over time, almost never reaches the expected levels of age and schooling, but in any case and in all cases, it is always possible and desirable to improve skills regardless of the level of severity, and the best results in this regard are obtained with early and targeted interventions. University institutions have taken on the task of implementing inclusive protocols using specific teaching methodologies that take into account the learning modalities, the specific and specific difficulties of students with SLD in adulthood. The considerable increase in the enrolment in Italian universities of students with such disorders, seems to represent a direct consequence of a greater protection of the right to study promoted and favoured by law, and in particular, the specific methods of intervention and the models of personalized teaching that, within the limits of the resources available and within the different courses of study, make use of compensatory tools and criteria for accurate verification and evaluation.

1. Specific learning disorders: a description

Learning Specific Disorders are defined as a difficulty in acquiring some particular skills that do not allow complete autonomy, with specific difficulties in the use of reading, writing and calculation. Such forms of dysfunctional learning are respectively defined and recognized as Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Disortography, Dyscalculia.

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty of neurobiological origin linked to a problematic reading that is expressed through inaccuracies and poor fluidity. This characteristic, which

commonly results from a deficit in the phonological component of language, is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities shown. Some consequences may include difficulties in understanding and practicing reading that can hinder and slow the growth of general knowledge and vocabulary (Lyon, Shaywitz and Shaywitz, 2003).

The typical symptom of Dyslexia is the difficulty in decoding words, that is, in the ability to associate letters to sounds, so the dyslexic subject can read and write, but cannot do it spontaneously and autonomously. Another typicality is represented by a difficulty in interpreting the contents of the text, however the subject comes to a complete understanding if the reading is carried out by third parties and this shows that this symptomatology has no effect and impact on intelligence, on processing and comprehension skills. The dyslexic person often makes characteristic mistakes in reading and writing, such as reversing letters and numbers or replacing them, presents disorganization in spatial and temporal relationships, as well as difficulties in oral exposure of complex contents. Dyslexia, which is the most common of learning disorders, can present various levels of severity or even elements of overlap represented by problems associated with writing, computation, memory. Each subject has its own peculiarities and characteristics, since the difficulties are not usually presented in a unique and uniform way or in the same combination.

Misfortune is a disorder linked to a difficulty in writing and in the reproduction of alphabetic and numerical signs. It can be defined as a disorder of peripheral components, namely, executive - motor, which prescind from linguistic variables such as lexicon or spelling. Writing is tiring and uncomfortable (deformed, irregular, flickering, slow) due to a disorder that affects the coordination of fine skills or visual - motor coordination. For many subjects with misfortune to hold the pen or properly organize the letters is quite complex, with consequences of reduced ability to transcribe and disorder associated with a narrow dexterity. The main and characteristic elements of the Disgrafia, are attributable both to the mode of coordination of movements necessary to be able to write the individual graphemes, both to progression movements that allow the scrolling of the instrument desk along the horizontal line of the sheet. Misfortune is sometimes associated with Disortografia, another disorder specific to writing, which corresponds to the difficulty of transforming the spoken language into written language, characterized by the presence of inaccurate graphemes, additions, omissions, letter reversals and grammatical errors. It is a disorder of coding of written text that is traced back to a deficiency in the functioning of central components of the writing process responsible for the transcoding of oral language into written language. The spelling is in fact a way through which you can match the writing to the grammatical norm, and an ability to respect the rules and conventions of our language, allowing you to transform the word thought or heard into a written word.

The coexistence of Disgrafia and Disortografia interferes more deeply in the organization of writing, even at the level of its contents.

Dyscalculia, defined as a disorder of numerical and arithmetic skills, differs from a generic difficulty of calculation and is manifested by the incorrect recognition and naming of numerical symbols, in the writing of these, in the association of the symbol with the corresponding quantity and in the numbering in ascending and descending order. These difficulties naturally have important repercussions in more complex tasks such as expressions and mathematical

problems, where a simultaneous functionality of multiple skills is required. The different characteristics and peculiarities of subjects with Specific Learning Disorders cannot be limited to a knowledge of structural difficulties. Often these are accompanied by problems of an emotional, social and relational order, which in some cases produce a state of discomfort that over time can worsen, increasing the original disturbance and promoting a vicious circle between individual difficulties and general problems of a constitutive nature.

2. Compensatory Instruments and Relief Measures for SLDs

The compensatory tools are mediators who in the process of building knowledge, due to an ineffective autonomy of certain basic skills, play for the subjects with SLD a significant and determined role in education and training. Generally, these tools replace the subject in those operations that affect specific difficulties, allowing him to express his skills in the most appropriate and effective way possible. In this sense, these elements act as support and reinforcement, in order to limit the obstacles linked to a specific condition, by establishing a requirement of equality and equality. These tools cannot be conferred in an indistinct manner but rather selected on the basis of the individual's operating profile, a profile that is generally inferred both from the observation by the teachers, both from the information present in the diagnostic certification. Given the great variability of the manifestations of the SLD, and given the different characteristics of the subjects, it is appropriate to evaluate in a personalized way the most suitable compensatory measures, also in relation to the specificities of the individual disciplines. In all cases compensatory measures are to be considered a factor of equity rather than a system to reduce the cognitive and cognitive commitment of the subject. With the term "compensatory tools" it comes therefore remarked and evidenced the necessity, for subjects that introduce specific difficulties in the reading, the writing and the process of calculation, to use useful elements in order to remedy to such problematic ones that, often, they are accompanied by mechanisms of lowering self-esteem, depression and/or oppositional behavior, which can determine a low-profile choice with respect to the general abilities and potential of the subject.

It is good to reiterate that the disorder highlighted is often attributed to other factors such as negligent behavior, poor engagement and interest, inattentive or absent attitude.

The competent use of the compensatory action can be in many cases a solution, allowing the subject to perceive greater security in his own capacities, reducing the risks of related demotivation (Guidelines, 2011). In addition to the use of compensatory instruments, within the project of support for the SLD there are dispensative measures, which are defined as interventions that allow the subject not to perform certain services that, due to the disturbance, are particularly tiring and, at the same time, do not improve or enrich learning. Also in this case it is appropriate to consider the peculiarities and performance characteristics of the subject, and to what extent a specific difficulty can penalize the individual, calibrating and weighing an additional time to complete a task or evaluate a material reduction. The term "dispense" therefore contains two meanings that represent, on the one hand, the ability and the possibility of additional, bestow and/or enlarge and on the other, exempt and/or free the subject from an obligation or a duty, when there is a difficulty in carrying out a given action. The compensatory

tools and dispensative measures, as well as diagnostic elements, define and trace a profile of the SLD characterizing and precise, allowing a greater understanding of the peculiarities and needs of a subject that presents such difficulties. In some cases, however, it is not enough to provide these tools to be able to protect and support all the needs and requirements that emerge, given that, in addition to emerging issues, complex psychosocial issues often coexist, emotional and formative that cannot be underestimated.

3. SLD and Universities: analysis and interventions

Learning Specific Disorders represent a complex phenomenon that manifests itself in rather peculiar and typical areas. This type of problem generally requires special attention in the educational field, as there is often a difficulty in achieving certain objectives from the point of view of training and learning. However, the dynamics that revolve around the world of SLD are often studded with difficulties that look beyond functionality, increasing and enriching the elements to be observed and evaluated, in order to achieve an image of the issue more clear and overall. Welcoming the individual as a whole, without neglecting any aspect, is particularly important because often, such subjects, in addition to showing the canonical difficulties in the pragmatic field, show significant emotional discomforts that provoke an inadequate recognition of their personal abilities in different contexts and situations, which is manifested in many cases through low levels of self-esteem and relationship difficulties. In this sense it is necessary to prepare and organize different actions in order to ensure and achieve a path of growth and evolution that is adequate, valid and effective. The subject with learning problems generally shows a series of difficulties that are not limited exclusively to the organizational and instrumental part, but in parallel, difficulties that involve different areas of evolutionary, social, emotional and relational character can be manifested. The use of compensatory tools and dispensative measures, undisputed protagonists in this field, are undoubtedly particularly important in the formative and educational path of the subject, representing always a vehicle of great support and support. Yet it is not possible to think of a project aimed at SLD without considering the different elements that generally orbit around this disorder. Difficulties in social, relational and interpersonal skills, often associated with behavioral issues, emotional difficulties and motor perceptual impairments, are just some of the characteristics that often accompany the issues of learning disorders (D. Mitchell, 2008). The concept of SLD therefore takes a form of transversality, where it includes different actions and interventions that aim at its entirety and totality in seeking elements that can lead not only to a proper and adequate use of canonical compensation tools, but in parallel with the construction of a training that can understand and involve all the dynamics and nuances of this problem. This concept is therefore placed in the context of actions that set themselves as a general aim to ensure greater awareness and knowledge in the management of their potential and capabilities. Its declination arises, in this sense, from the needs, needs and needs that the subjects show during their path of growth and evolution, which often is not limited to the sole and exclusive use of compensatory tools, provided by law, but it is identified and also disposed in the management of relationships, in the emotional, communicative and self-efficacy aspects. These aspects all play a particularly important role not only on the curricular performance of each student, but represent elements that, if managed in an effective way, can lead and support the subject towards greater

competence and awareness in the conduct of its own path of growth and evolution, going beyond the same educational field. The present work aims to illustrate a recent research activity that has had the purpose of deepening and investigating the needs and needs that university students with Specific Learning Disorders can show during their studies. The autonomy and the ability of independent management that the university brings with it, bring to the surface problems that are often not limited to the use of compensatory instruments and dispensative measures. The aim of the research was to investigate and deepen psychopathological and social aspects, such as:

- emotional skills;
- Self-efficacy;
- relational/communicative skills;
- Cognitive/metacognitive abilities.

The results showed that there are psychological and social relapses in students with Specific Learning Disorders. In particular, in addition to the well-known structural difficulties and complexities, problems have been highlighted in the management of emotions, inattention and problems in communication, which affect their quality of university and daily life. There are, therefore, different levels of problems that are not limited exclusively to the structural sphere, since inevitably this problem shows repercussions from the social, relational and emotional point of view. The questionnaire, used in the aforementioned research, was intended to investigate and deepen aspects and characteristics generally not considered as priorities in the SLD world but, otherwise, could represent, if supported and enhanced, effective elements "compensatory" in school, university, social and relational, representing an important and concrete contribution in the life of the SLD. The group of subjects who took part in the research consisted of 48 university students from different courses of study. The students participating in this analysis were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two, with a higher percentage of male rather than female presence. All the students presented a diagnosis of SLD, for the most part highlighted during the school years, which allowed them to receive specific and adequate support along the training path. The categories of cognitive/metacognitive, emotional, communicative and self-efficacy investigation were examined and analyzed through twenty-seven questions of the questionnaire, carefully divided by domain type. The first domain of the questionnaire, cognitive/metacognitive and learning, was aimed at measuring techniques and organizational strategies that each subject puts into practice to help them learn, efficient and effective cognitive strategies for the programming and autonomous design of your studio. In general, the learning strategies of the subjects depend essentially on how much they are aware of their cognitive abilities (need to exercise, available strategies) and how well their competence in consciously regulating cognition is developed, using self-regulation strategies such as planning, control, monitoring, evaluation and modification of the same strategies, which vary from task to task. Many evidence shows that learners with Specific Learning Disorders possess inefficient cognitive strategies, showing a tendency to adopt a minimal planning approach, a general lack of awareness of their cognitive processes, lack of metacognition and poor ability to cope with verification tests. These difficulties inevitably lead to failure, frustration, embarrassment, anxiety, avoidance of the task and even aggressive behavior. The vicious circle can be broken by teaching people to recognize more the need to

be strategic and to apply more flexibly the cognitive strategies appropriate to the different disciplinary areas. At the basis of the use of cognitive skills and strategies there is the challenge of developing positive mental habits that encourage reflection and an effective approach, curbing impulsiveness and emotionality. The investigation in this field for the SLD is particularly important, since it analyzes and describes the ability of the subject to recognize himself, his skills and to be able to better use his skills in different contexts and situations, defining in this sense the aptitude to self-regulate on several occasions to seek the best solution. The communicative and interpersonal scope of the questionnaire was aimed at measuring the relational and social skills of subjects with specific learning disorders. Communicative and relational aspects are particularly important in the life of a subject, since possessing functional and effective interpersonal resources can contribute in a rather significant way in the management and coordination of one's social life, working and university. The communicative act, together with its abilities and modalities, represent one of the most significant behaviors of the human being. Through communication, each subject has the possibility of coming into contact with the external world and being understood and included in its own context. All the elements underlying and closely related to communication are particularly important and fundamental, given the social and interaction issues often encountered and associated, in experimental research, in subjects with Learning Specific Disorders. The presence or absence of this type of ability can allow the understanding of the level of ability by the subject to be understood and/ or to be understood by establishing relationships and interpersonal relationships that can be effective in its growth and its evolution. The ability to communicate in a functional way also shows us the ability to effectively express their needs and needs, so that every action and every behavior is aimed consistently to the achievement of a precise purpose and goal. The third area of the questionnaire identified as personal effectiveness was aimed at assessing the levels of self-efficacy present in students with Specific Learning Disorders. The objective of this field is to explore the elements of self-esteem and self-efficacy present in the subject, that is, the subjective perception of what a person believes he can do, the ability to keep alive his mental commitment in an activity and to believe deeply that he can achieve the desired result. The presence or absence of the sense of self-efficacy makes it possible to understand, on the one hand, beliefs and beliefs about one's own abilities and abilities, on the other hand, to recognize the value that each person can associate with his own person. From these judgments and opinions each subject determines what it is able to do and what objectives it can achieve, thus determining, in this way, its own actions and behavior: The degree of self-efficacy we associate with ourselves will determine our goals and actions. Self-efficacy is also a constituent part of the concept of self-esteem, addressed to a series of beliefs that the subject has of himself. The construct of self-esteem and self-efficacy are intimately related to each other, to the point that they influence and determine each other. The fourth and final area of the questionnaire finally explored the ability of a subject with Learning Specific Disorders to manage and recognize their emotions. Emotions represent a particularly important aspect and element in the life of each subject, since they are closely connected to our behavior, our relationships, our thinking, our way of acting and learning. The ability to manage, regulate and recognize their emotions, for subjects with SLD, is particularly important because it allows them to support their learning process and support their interpersonal skills, encouraging the

management of their lives in different contexts and situations. The scope and categories of the questionnaire described above were then analysed according to a percentage calculation of the answers given (very disagreed, disagreed, undecided, agreed and very agreed), in reference to each individual item, to be able to understand and identify the presence of any problem and/or difficulty in subjects with Specific Learning Disorders, who participated in this research. This assessment has made it possible to examine different skills in order to monitor areas that may need more support and development than learning, cognition/metacognition, communication, personal effectiveness and management of one's emotional state. The questionnaire used the Likert scale, defined as a technique for measuring a subject's attitude to certain claims. It consists mainly in developing a number of statements (items) that express a positive or negative attitude to a specific object. The sum of these judgments will tend to delineate, in a reasonably precise way, the attitude of the subject towards the object. Below are the results as a percentage of the answers given by the students, in the form of a graph, for each individual item divided by areas of interest:

- Cognitive/Metacognitive and Learning Environment (item 1 to item 7)
- Interpersonal and Communicative Environment (item 8 to item 13)
- Scope of Personal Effectiveness (item 14 to item 20)
- Emotional Scope (item 21 to item 27)

The students had the opportunity to indicate, for each item belonging to a certain field, one of these possible answers associated with a precise value:

- Much Disagreement (Value 1)
- Disagreement (Value 2)
- Indecisive (Value 3)
- Agreement (Value 4)
- Very Agreed (Value 5)

From the result determined by the percentages for each item, we can observe and say that university students diagnosed with SLD show a more or less homogeneous and compliant overall problem in all the areas explored and examined, with particular and slight complexity in the field of communication and self-efficacy, as shown in the following table:

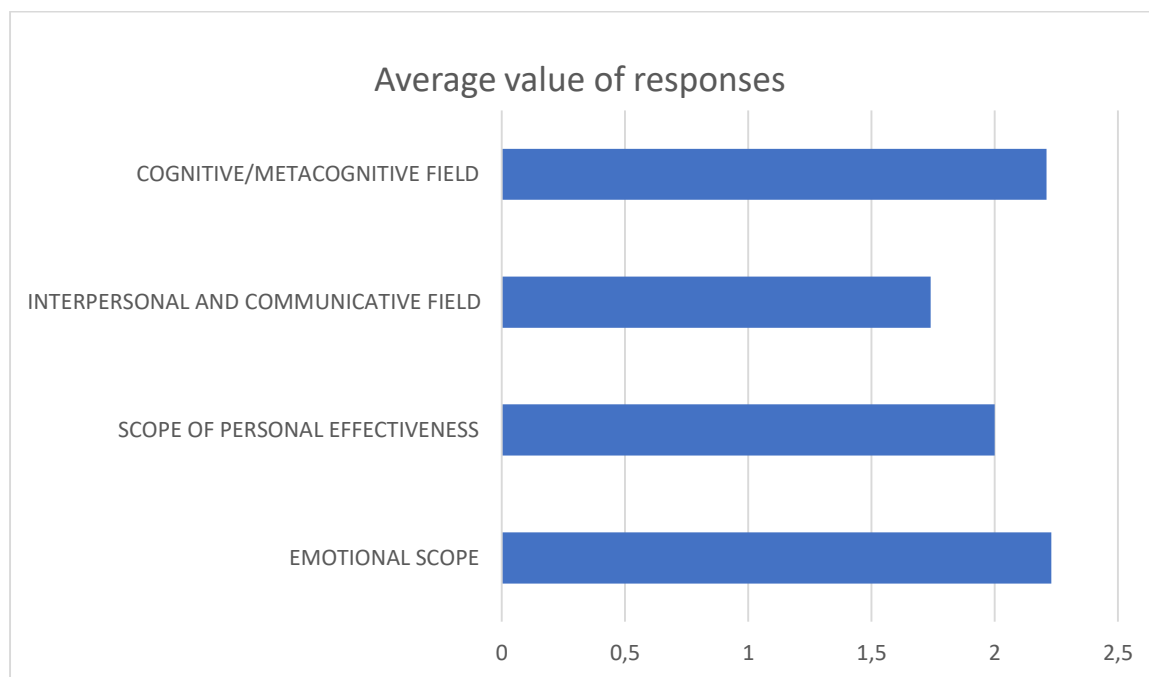


Fig.1: Scopes and Values

The observation, analysis and study of learning, cognition/metacognition, communication, self-efficacy and emotions defines and establishes a profile in subjects affected by problematic and complex SLD, highlighting the need to consider and understand elements that go beyond the instrumental and structural ones. In this sense, the difficulties linked to the world of SLDs cannot be limited to the mere and simple use of compensatory and dispensative instruments, essential for their education and university, but expanded and extended to other elements that concur and contribute in equal measure to the good outcome of their path of growth and development.

From the results of the questionnaire comes therefore the idea of a prospectus that can consider factors and areas that involve and include all the possible difficulties that revolve around such disorder, thus arriving at an idea of a complex and punctuated planning, rather than the one and only use of traditional instruments. Therefore, putting into practice a broader and more global perspective of intervention, allows us to consider and evaluate all the elements that constitute and underpin the problems linked to the world of the SLD. Acquiring a conceptual reference framework capable of taking into account the complexity of this phenomenon thus allows us to respond, in an appropriate and appropriate manner, to the real needs of these subjects.

Conclusion

The Specific Learning Disorders include all the possible difficulties of acquisition and knowledge that compromise and invalidate the path of growth, education and inclusion of each subject. In the school environment, subjects with SLD show a difficulty in learning and social participation with respect to which a targeted teaching intervention is required, with the main objective of inclusion, education, learning and knowledge. All educational and educational

areas aim to respect the needs and requirements of all, organizing learning environments so that everyone can participate in social life, community life and acquire skills more actively, autonomous and valid possible. The school and university contexts show themselves as pivotal elements in the perspective of inclusion and education for subjects with Learning Specific Disorders and, in this sense, this type of contexts represent social places, places of learning where a certain behavior acquires meaning and meaning. The university as a social and learning context, therefore, comes to be defined by the elements that constitute it, representing an ideal context for a decisive support and support in the educational path.

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