



Cap sur l'école inclusive  
en Europe



## Resource sheet

### The influence of the humanist current and the « New Education » Section of the module / R

Over time, the perception of disability by European societies evolved strongly, from a deserved divine punishment to a status of social being equal to others.

This evolution, which began in the second half of the 19th century, was accentuated after World War II.

This radical change can be explained by the vigor of the humanist current that appeared at this period of our history. This philosophy inspired the great pedagogues of the new school. For a better understanding of the spirit of laws and the UN convention on disability, it is important to summarize the foundations of this current of thought and its influence on the new school.

#### 1/ Humanist philosophy

Humanism is a movement of thought that appeared at the Italian Renaissance, to move away from the obscurantist dogmas and beliefs of the Middle Ages, by getting back to these foundations of knowledge that are values, philosophy, literature and art as they were conceived in Greco-Roman antiquity.

This philosophy places human being at the heart of all preoccupation, freed from all divine or other influences. Humanism is based on new values such as rationality and free will.

In its modern sense, the word humanism refers to an optimistic movement of thought, whose objective is to facilitate the development of mankind, in which it is very confident on its ability to learn and to improve during lifetime.

#### 2/ New education

For humanists, pedagogy is of considerable importance, since it allows children to be given the weapons to move away from irrational dogmas and to flourish unhindered.

Many great educators were inspired by the humanistic philosophy to offer a conception of school based on:

- respect for the child's personality
- the sense of dialogue between teacher and student
- the spirit of emulation between students
- alternation between fun and educational activities
- openness to the real society and to the world

New Education advocates the active participation of individuals in their own formation. Learning is not only an accumulation of knowledge, it must above all facilitate the social development of the pupil and of the adult in the making. It relies on observation to identify his/her interests and try to sharpen his/her curiosity that makes it possible to open the dialogue. These are "active" teaching methods. It gives equal importance to different educational disciplines, whether intellectual, artistic, physical, or manual.

Humanist pedagogues of the Renaissance summarized this conception of pedagogy quite well by an evocative shortcut: "the child is not a vase to be filled but a fire to be lit."

These great, often erudite, educators constituted over centuries a true aristocracy of intelligence who opposed to the teaching methods of ordinary school, too standardized and mechanical, and weighed on political choices.

The New School movement had a decisive influence in affirming the notion of educability of children. He largely inspired policies on handicap caretaking.