



Cap sur l'école inclusive
en Europe



Resource sheet

Special Educational Needs : differents definitions and specifics terms

Training module/Section D

1/ Report of the situation:

An analysis of the problem of inclusive education can not be done without first reflecting on more specific concepts and their use in the theoretical and practical approach: deficit, incapacity, disability, special educational needs.

2/ Demonstration-approach:

This sheet aims to define the specific terms / concepts of inclusion and their use in the European context, focusing in particular on the origin and definition of "Special educational needs".

Specific concepts and their use

The analysis of the problem of inclusive education requires a reflection on more specific concepts and their use in the theoretical and practical approach.

The World Health Organization (1980) [1] proposes to address three distinct terms: impairments, disabilities, handicaps:

- Impairments, concerned with abnormallities of body structure and appearance and with organ or system function resulting from any cause; in principle, inpairments represent disturbances at the organ level (impairment means the absence, loss or alteration of a structure or function - anatomical, physiological or psychological - and may be the result of a disease, accident, or negative conditions of growth and the environment of the development of an individual).
- Disabilities, reflecting the consequences of impairment in terms of functional performance and activity by the individual; disabilities thus represent disturbances at the level of the person (disability is a complex of functional limitations caused by physical, intellectual or sensory disturbances or health, environmental and mental illness conditions. These conditions or diseases may be permanent or temporary, reversible or irreversible, progressive or regressive).
- Handicaps, concerned with the disadvantages experienced by the individual as a result of impairments and disabilities; handicaps thus reflect interaction with and adaptation to the individual's surroundings (handicap refers to social hardship, loss or limitation of a person's opportunity to actively participate in community life at a level equal to other members. Handicap occurs when a person encounters cultural, material, social barriers that prevent access to the various systems of society available to other citizens).

Handicap is more problematical. The structure of the Handicap classification is radically different from all other ICD-related classifications. The items are not classified according to individuals or their attributes but rather according to the circumstances in which people with disabilities are likely to find themselves, circumstances that can be expected to place such individuals at a disadvantage in relation to their peers when viewed from the norms of society.

Special Educational Needs (SEN) are defined by the International Classification of Functioning (ICF) as "any evolutive difficulty of permanent or transient functioning in the educational or learning field, due to the interaction between various health factors and requires special individualized education" [2]. They can be considered as a paradigm for reading the complexity and variety of learning difficulties [3]. This vision requires to widen the gaze towards the training needs of each individual, going beyond the only certifiable deficits. To respond to the SEN, the Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) is used, a useful tool for designing operating methods, strategies, systems and learning criteria for each student [4].

The term "Special Educational Needs" was used for the first time in 1978 in the United Kingdom with the enactment of the Warnock Report [5], a document that gives a new classification system for pupils with learning difficulties, until then identified as disabled, and a new definition of "Special Educational Needs" which underlines the need for greater support from the educational organ. The educational needs were defined for each subject based on the degree of deficit related to five fundamental dimensions of development: physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional [6].

The concept of Special Educational Needs has been present since the Seventies in Europe and in America, a meaning that can be found in numerous UNESCO documents and educational norms. It officially becomes an international category in 1994 with the UNESCO "Declaration of Salamanca" which states that the term "special educational needs" refers to "all those children and young people whose needs derive from disability or learning difficulties" [7].

Other UNESCO documents that clarify and broaden this concept are the ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) of 1997 (which broadens the notion of special educational needs, still strongly anchored to the idea of individual deficit) and the ISCED of 2011 (which specifies the reasons for the SEN and includes disadvantages of a physical, behavioral, intellectual, social and emotional, economic, linguistic type).

In Italy we start talking about Special Educational Needs since 1998, but it will be necessary to wait until 2012 for a ministerial formalization with the Directive of December 27 [8].

Dario Ianes defines the special educational needs as "any form of developmental difficulty in the educational field that manifests itself in a problematic functioning of the pupil in interaction with the environment" [9]. This difficulty, which requires special individualized education, translates into the subject also in terms of harm, obstacle or social stigma [10].

In fact, while the special educational needs may favor processes of comprehension and integration, on the other hand it is necessary to pay great attention to avoid classification and categorization processes that consequently generate stigmatization, exclusion and marginalization. As Gaspari claims, the concept of need is reductive with respect to the breadth of the concept of a person as being in a state of becoming with respect to his potentialities, expectations, thoughts and desires [11].

At the European level, and in particular in the Anglo-Saxon world, we can witness an attempt to revolutionize the system of SEN and disability precisely with a view to overcoming this term in favor of a more inclusive concept of education. For example, in England there is a new system of "Education Health and Care Plan" (EHC) operational from April 2018, while UNESCO tends today to use the phrase "Education for all" (EFA) [12].

The Social Model approach, in line with the idea that disability is not inherent in the subject but depends on the context, tends to shift the focus of special educational needs from the student to the environment, replacing the original wording with "barriers to learning and participation" (Index for inclusion). The focus is on the role of teachers and on the importance of appropriate educational projects and interventions. In fact, the OECD - Organization for economic co-operation and development - [13] identifies these subjects as needing "public and / or private resources to support their education, made possible by designing enhanced educational, educational and personalized interventions able to guarantee training courses under the sign of equal opportunities" [14].

Special Educational Needs in Europe

The statement of Salamanca of June 1994 [15], which can be considered the manifesto of the inclusive school, affirms that pupils with special educational needs must be able to access normal schools and that the school has the duty to integrate them with pedagogy centered on pupil, who meets his educational needs. Furthermore, it establishes that all countries must adopt the principle of inclusive education, welcoming all children in normal schools.

However, the definitions of "Special educational needs" vary according to the countries and the administrative, financial and procedural rules applied in them. In many of them it is believed that "the medical approach should be transformed into an educational approach: a central point that has consequences on the school system. At the same time it is clear that the educational approach is very complex and countries encounter difficulties of application" [16]. Also the percentage incidence of the phenomenon varies from country to country, however this is not due to a non-uniform diffusion but rather to diversity in the legislative and implementation policies.

According to Integration policy adopted on its national territory, European states can be divided into three categories [17]:

1. The first (one-way approach) concerns countries where educational policies and implementation practices tend to involve almost all pupils in the ordinary school system. This choice is based on a wide variety of school-focused services. Examples are Spain, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, Iceland, Norway and Cyprus.
2. Countries belonging to the second category (multi-directional approach) present a variety of approaches to integration. They offer a variety of services between two school systems (ordinary and differentiated). Denmark, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Austria, Finland, England, Lithuania, Liechtenstein, Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia belong to this category.
3. In the third category (bi-directional approach) there are two distinct educational systems. Disabled pupils are placed in special schools or classes. Generally, most students officially recognized as 'having special educational needs' do not follow the standard curriculum provided for by the norm. These systems are (or at least were up to now) regulated by specific legislation, with standards other than ordinary school. In Switzerland and Belgium, the differentiated school system is very wide. In Switzerland, there is a mixed system: in short, there is a special legislation for schools and special classes (which includes, however, services provided within common classes). At the same time, there is a system of specific services in the common classes in the Cantonal dependencies.

The case of Germany

Germany, which has always opposed the integration of pupils with disabilities and special educational needs in the classes, has recently started to create laws for inclusion in some Laender. In Germany, in fact, it is not the central state that decides for education, but the individual Laender autonomously. These may decide whether to include children with specific learning disorders and special educational needs in special schools or in regular classes, through local legislation.

German law allows the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in primary schools of all Bundesländer [18], but public opinion hinders the implementation of the inclusive model in some Laender. Thanks to the signing of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability in 2006, an increasing number of students with special educational needs attend a regular school.

The case of England

In England and Wales [19] in each school a member of the school staff is appointed coordinator for special educational needs with a wide range of responsibilities including: the provision of supervision, monitoring of pupils' progress, relationships with parents and with external support agencies, support for the school's teaching staff.

The school staff works more and more with the teachers to develop teaching approaches and strategies within the school, rather than directly with the pupils in difficulty.

The initial teacher training provides them with the skills necessary for the education of pupils with special educational needs. The Statute of qualified teacher foresees the attainment of a general knowledge relative to the procedures for the identification, evaluation and reception of disabled pupils in the ordinary classes. Furthermore, voluntary complementary training is possible for all the educated areas of pupils with special educational needs. Many teachers attend recognized courses, often at degree or diploma level (for example in relation to the problems of autism or specific learning difficulties) and almost all follow short, non-accredited courses.

Note

(1) WHO, International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps (ICD) - A manual of classification relating to the consequences of disease - Published in accordance with resolution WHA29. 35 of the Twenty-ninth World Health Assembly, May 1976

http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/41003/1/9241541261_eng.pdf

(2) WHO, International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), 2007

<http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/en/>

http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/43737/1/9789241547321_eng.pdf

(3) P. Gaspari, Pedagogia speciale e BES. Spunti per una riflessione critica verso la scuola inclusiva, Roma, Editoriale Anicia 2014, p.193

(4) Ivi, p.42

(5) Special education needs - Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People (si veda la pagina <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/warnock/warnock20.html>)

(6) P. Gaspari, Pedagogia speciale e BES. Spunti per una riflessione critica verso la scuola inclusiva, Roma, Editoriale Anicia 2014, p.132

(7) UNESCO, 1994, P.6

(8) Nota Direttiva del 27/12/2012 "Strumenti d'intervento per alunni con bisogni educativi speciali e organizzazione territoriale per l'inclusione scolastica".

http://www.laricerca.loescher.it/images/stories/pdf_normative_1/direttiva_27_dic_2012.pdf

(9) D. Ianes, Bisogni Educativi Speciali e inclusione, Trento, Erickson, 2005

(10) D. Ianes, S. Cramerotti, Alunni con BES Bisogni Educativi Speciali Indicazioni operative per promuovere l'inclusione scolastica sulla base della DM del 27/12/2012 e della Circolare Ministeriale n 8 del 6 marzo 2013, Trento, Erikson, 2013.

(11) P. Gaspari, Pedagogia speciale e BES. Spunti per una riflessione critica verso la scuola inclusiva, Roma, Editoriale Anicia 2014, p.102

(12) R. Caldin, P. Sandri, Riflessioni sui recenti documenti ministeriali riguardanti i BES Gruppo congiunto Supervisor, Università di Bologna – Dipartimento di Scienze dell'Educazione Scuola di Psicologia e Scienze della Formazione

(13) OECD, Students with disabilities. Learning difficulties and disadvantages. Policies, statistics and indicators, OECD Publications, DEDEX, Paris, 2007

(14) P. Gaspari, Pedagogia speciale e BES. Spunti per una riflessione critica verso la scuola inclusiva, Roma, Editoriale Anicia 2014,, p.24

(15) UNESCO The Salamanca statement of framework for action on special needs education, UNESCO, Salamanca, 1994

(16) MINISTERO DELL'ISTRUZIONE, DELL'UNIVERSITÀ E DELLA RICERCA DIREZIONE GENERALE PER LE RELAZIONI INTERNAZIONALI INDIRE - UNITÀ ITALIANA DI EURYDICE, p.16

(17) European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education: www.european-agency.org Agenzia Europea per lo Sviluppo dell'Istruzione per Studenti Disabili (con il contributo di EURYDICE, la rete di informazione sull'istruzione in Europa), L'Integrazione dei Disabili in Europa, Pubblicazione tematica Gennaio 2003, autori: Cor Meijer, Victoria Soriano, Amanda Watkins. https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/special-needs-education-in-europe_sne_europe_it.pdf

The text offers a comparative analysis of the various forms of school integration in European countries, provides information on funding of schools, training of teachers and the use of new technologies in the field of special education, all adequately correlated from synthetic synthesis tables.

http://www.isismaratea.gov.it/images/allegati_10/I_BES_in_prospettiva_europea_di_Pepe.pdf
(18)

http://www.schulministerium.nrw.de/BP/Inklusion_Gemeinsames_Lernen

(19) MINISTERO DELL'ISTRUZIONE, DELL'UNIVERSITÀ E DELLA RICERCA DIREZIONE GENERALE PER LE RELAZIONI INTERNAZIONALI INDIRE - UNITÀ ITALIANA DI EURYDICE, pp. 53-57