



Cap sur l'école inclusive
en Europe



Resource sheet

Looking at difference: an untapped asset

Section of the module / R

1/ Representing disability : a subjective and irrational reaction

In a society characterized by competitiveness and performance, it is fashionable to value what is beautiful, what is strong, what comes close to perfection, or to the idea we have of it.

Fragility and a fortiori handicap and its corollaries (deficiency, difference, and disability), can therefore cause reactions of distrust, even of rejection.

These responses, often instinctive, sometimes lead to unacceptable social behaviors: intolerance, racism, sexism, the rejection of difference.

But these behaviors do not resist a rational analysis:

- Doesn't impairment, that is to say, any alteration of a psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function, constitute a risk for each of us that can arise accidentally or because of aging?
- Rejection of difference refers us to our fear of the other, of the unknown. Isn't this a sign of our own fragility, which urges us to avoid what we don't know? Strength, courage, cardinal values of our society, wouldn't they urge us instead to discover what is different, to approach what scares us?
- Finally, it will be noted that the very image of normality is eminently subjective by itself, and has absolutely no universal significance. We are all different from each other. So why reject what doesn't resemble us, since objectively nobody resembles us?

2/ Pupils with disabilities in class: an asset to be exploited

A teacher welcoming pupils with Special Educational Needs is immediately confronted with a triple problem:

- How to introduce a serene climate conducive to learning in the classroom?
- How to get disabled pupils accepted by the rest of the class? And conversely, how to make disabled pupils feel accepted by the rest of the class?
- How to reassure pupils' parents, worried that their offspring are confronted with children they reject instinctively or unconsciously? As for the parents of children with disabilities, aren't they anxious to see them confronted with the cruelty of teasing?

This teacher has only one mean at his disposal: **reassuring** everyone by changing the look on disability.

For this, he will have to focus on putting differences forward which will amount to show that everyone is different.

Debates between pupils, and even with pupils' parents will be very useful and effective. Making disability visible is such as to trivialize it and therefore making it accepted.

Demonstrating the irrationality of instinctive reactions is also to be recommended.

The presence of handicapped children in class must therefore be accompanied by important work by the teacher to **reassure** the class and its environment.

However this work can be usefully exploited to follow on civic education activities:

- Learning tolerance (intolerance is also a form of rejection of differences)
- Fighting against xenophobia and racism which are the most accomplished forms of rejection of differences
- Addressing the problem of sexism which constitutes a discrimination incompatible with the values defended by the European community.

Having children with disabilities in class, forcing the teacher to address the problem of difference, is therefore an asset that it would be a shame not to exploit fully.