

ELENA PACETTI, ALESSANDRO SORIANI,
DANIELE CASTELLANI

FOSTERING INCLUSIVE CONTEXTS IN PALESTINE

An Index for Inclusion and Empowerment



TRAIETTORIE
INCLUSIVE

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TRAIETTORIE INCLUSIVE

COLLANA DIRETTA DA
CATIA GIACONI, NOEMI DEL BIANCO
SIMONE APARECIDA CAPELLINI

La collana “Traiettorie Inclusive” vuole dare voce alle diverse proposte di ricerca che si articolano intorno ai paradigmi dell’inclusione e della personalizzazione, per approfondire i temi relativi alle disabilità, ai Bisogni Educativi Speciali, alle forme di disagio e di devianza. Si ritiene, infatti, che inclusione e personalizzazione reifichino una prospettiva efficace per affrontare la complessa situazione socio-culturale attuale, garantendo un dialogo tra le diversità.

I contesti in cui tale tematica è declinata sono quelli della scuola, dell’università e del mondo del lavoro. Contemporaneamente sono esplorati i vari domini della qualità della vita prendendo in esame anche le problematiche connesse con la vita familiare, con le dinamiche affettive e con il tempo libero. Una particolare attenzione inoltre sarà rivolta alle comunità educative e alle esperienze che stanno tracciando nuove piste nell’ottica dell’inclusione sociale e della qualità della vita.

La collana presenta due tipologie di testi. Gli “*Approfondimenti*” permetteranno di mettere a fuoco i nodi concettuali oggi al centro del dibattito della comunità scientifica sia nazionale, sia internazionale.

I “*Quaderni Operativi*”, invece, documenteranno esperienze, progetti e buone prassi e forniranno strumenti di lavoro per professionisti e operatori del settore.

La collana si rivolge a tutti i professionisti che, a diversi livelli, si occupano di processi inclusivi e formativi.

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Preface

by Arianna Taddei

This book emerges from a context of profound complexity, marked by the persistent tensions and violences afflicting the Palestinian territories. As we publish these pages, the Israeli-Palestinian crisis continues devastating the lives of millions, generating an endless flow of information and images that strike us and compel us to reflect on human understanding and compassion. Since October 7th, 2023, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has been documenting the impact of hostilities in the Gaza Strip, Israel, and the West Bank daily, reporting shocking figures that testify to the magnitude of the ongoing tragedy.

In a context where violence and death once again seem to dominate the discourse, it may seem futile to discuss themes like education, inclusion, cooperation, and intercultural dialogue. However, it is precisely in these moments of extreme crisis that the commitment to inclusion and education becomes more urgent than ever.

As Pappè (2011a) emphasises, the narrative of war is often polarised and distorted, feeding dangerous myths and oversimplifications. In this challenging context, inclusive education represents not only a fundamental right but also a tool of cultural resilience and peacebuilding. In emergency situations, the international scenario paints an alarming picture of the conditions of children who are victims of natural disasters, wars, and pandemics. The criticalities within emergency interventions are numerous and heterogeneous: in fact, they open up pedagogical reflections on the meaning of educational actions during a humanitarian crisis, on the possibility of identifying educational trajectories to be adopted based on the social, cultural, and political context, and, lastly, on the importance of ensuring an inclusive approach. In these situations, the right to education is often violated for indefinite periods of time, depriving children and

adolescents not only of the opportunity to learn but also of the chance to share and socialise their distress, fears, and loneliness.

For a long time, in the field of international cooperation, agencies provided interventions in humanitarian crisis contexts that were predominantly, if not exclusively, psychosocial and immediate assistance-based, through the distribution of goods and essential materials, excluding educational actions, which would be intended for development projects rather than emergency response. In the context of cooperation in humanitarian crisis situations, therefore, the dimensions of emergency, education, and inclusion appeared incompatible in terms of priorities, goals, and sustainability, until international cooperation policies began to adopt an approach that recognizes education and inclusion as essential tools and dimensions for safeguarding children's rights and their well-being (AICS & RIDS, 2015; EU, 2018). From this new perspective, education is acknowledged for its significant contribution in various aspects, including: the continuity of the school routine that aims to create a sense of "normal" life despite sudden and traumatic changes; socialisation and psychological support in safe spaces through educational experiences aimed at the future with an intentional and purposeful vision, which constitutes the heartbeat of educational action in any place and at any time (Taddei, 2021).

Pursuing the creation of an inclusive school implies the commitment to overcoming and reducing the physical and conceptual barriers that prevent students' full participation, embracing their diversity as a unique resource for the learning environment. Increasing the level of accessibility, ensuring individualization and personalization processes, and promoting empowerment (Adams, 2008) are goals that are both necessary and complex. As stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), the right to education must be protected and guaranteed for all people through the creation of an inclusive educational system at all levels. Such a challenge becomes even more complex in emergency contexts. Indeed, in war-affected areas, there is a constant disruption of teaching and learning opportunities, often leading to systematic violence, transforming the oppressed into oppressors and amplifying processes of exclusion and discrimination (Shah et al., 2020; Taddei, 2010).

In these difficult scenarios, education represents a trajectory of hope – since education has always been entrusted with the future of young generations – to overcome physical and cultural boundaries, acting as a driver for change to promote equality, social participation, and democracy (Canevaro, 2006). In transformative processes towards inclusion, empowerment plays a fundamental role in developing emancipatory life paths, where even those living in vulnerable conditions can become

protagonists of their own choices and acquire the awareness and political tools necessary to combat complex forms of discrimination, which can be understood through an intersectional approach (Piccardo, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989). Empowerment, as defined by Adams (2008), is essential in fostering personal and social change, providing individuals with the capacity to challenge structural inequalities and engage in participatory citizenship. Through an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1991), these complex forms of discrimination –intertwining factors such as race, gender, disability, and socio-economic status– become more visible and addressable, enhancing the effectiveness of inclusion processes.

Specifically, empowerment is a dynamic and daily process that has individual and social outcomes. Regarding the former, a person with disabilities and/or in a situation of socio-cultural and economic disadvantage discovers and strengthens their abilities, increasing their perception of personal potential and self-esteem (Piccardo, 1995). On a social level, empowerment involves individuals with the aim of promoting their social participation in the political, cultural, and community life that evolves within the communities and places of belonging (Zimmermann, 1999). It represents a path that allows the progressive abandonment of a paternalistic and welfare model to embark on a journey oriented towards social participation, awareness of one's limits, unexpressed potential, and possessed skills. Therefore, it is a path in which personal and social responsibilities matter when facing difficulties and defining one's own life project and that of the community to which they belong.

People experiencing a condition of vulnerability, by becoming the protagonists of empowerment processes, also become generators of social innovation and change, thanks to their participation, which invites society itself to question its own stereotypes.

The adoption of such an empowerment framework is evident in Barbuto's reflection, which specifically affirmed regarding people with disabilities that empowerment has a strong component of enhancement, not from a non-therapeutic-reparative, but rather from a political-emancipatory perspective, which can be translated into:

- power in, linked to the awareness that every person with a disability has of who they are, what they can do, and what rights they have. It is the power generated by individual attitudes, abilities, and knowledge;
- power with, meaning the power that every person with a disability has to organise and mobilise, and it derives from the fact that people are part of one or more social groups. This power grows or diminishes when one interacts with others and builds

networks. Therefore, it derives from social and support networks, from connections and collaboration with others;

- power over, that is, the form of power that every person with a disability has over institutions (from family to the state), organisations with precise, written or unwritten norms that regulate relationships between individuals. This form of power requires readiness to examine norms, policies, legislation, and accountability mechanisms;
- power to, or rather the power that comes from the resources a person with a disability has to do something or change something. It is generated when one can access resources and services (Barbuto, 2018, p.58).

For some social groups, the management of “power” – as expressed above – is marked by greater uncertainties, with grey areas where opportunities and resources are difficult to access, making empowerment fundamental for initiating paths of emancipation from situations of discrimination that harm the dignity of men and women, children and adults, depriving them of the full enjoyment of their rights. Overcoming conditions of exclusion and disadvantage requires a process of awareness that can only be triggered through deep reflection, finding potentially fertile ground in education (Taddei, 2020).

Empowerment, therefore, represents a strategic path to counteract the phenomenon of economic, educational, and professional “impoverishment” that often dramatically marks the lives of the most vulnerable populations.

The primary objective of this volume is to explore inclusive educational approaches in an extremely fragmented context like the Palestinian one, where geographical division, segregation, and territory occupation impact daily processes of educational, personal and social development. The analysis it presents examines Palestinian schools, where physical and psychological barriers combine with structural and cultural ones, imposing enormous challenges on students, teachers, and the entire educational community. Schools and educational structures in refugee camps have been facing for years a reality characterised by overcrowding, infrastructural destruction, and lack of resources, which profoundly affects the quality of education. This situation, particularly in the Gaza Strip, has deteriorated without precedent (UNRWA, 2024).

Through a series of international cooperation projects promoted by the Italian NGO EducAid, described in the following pages, the University of Bologna research group developed and implemented the Index for Inclusion and Empowerment (IIE). This tool, based on the inclusive education

approach proposed by Booth and Ainscow (2002), represents a concrete attempt to address educational challenges in Palestine, involving not only teachers but also local communities in a process of active participation and collective construction.

The research, conducted in collaboration with the Palestinian Ministry of Education, highlights how the promotion of scholastic inclusion can represent a concrete alternative to social disintegration. The study, carried out through field-based research and training, aimed to strengthen teachers' professional skills, promoting a culture of cooperation and continuous improvement of contextualised educational practices. The greatest challenge was, and continues to be, transforming an educational system characterised by multidimensional limitations into a space of resilience and empowerment, capable of adapting to the diversity and specific needs of each community.

“Fostering Inclusive Contexts in Palestine” thus represents a significant contribution to the field of international cooperation and inclusive education, offering an operational perspective for addressing educational challenges in highly vulnerable contexts.

Through a path that intertwines academic research, international cooperation, and field-based educational interventions, the volume aims to promote inclusion and empowerment in a highly challenging territory. Each chapter addresses a facet of this complex process, highlighting structural, social, and political difficulties, as well as possible solutions and strategies that can improve access to education and the quality of life in Palestinian communities.

Specifically, the first chapter offers a broad overview of the historical, geographical, and political complexity of the Palestinian context. The narration focuses on occupation, territorial divisions, and their impact on local communities. The distinction between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the Palestinian enclaves, and the isolation of the population are illustrated, highlighting how the continuous erosion of territory and "divide et impera" policies have created a mosaic of fragmented identities and vulnerabilities. The context analysis is essential for understanding the challenges faced in the field of inclusive education.

In the second chapter, the concept of inclusive education is presented as a necessary approach to promoting equality and participation in Palestine. In this context, the Palestinian education system is described, emphasising the difficulties faced by students and teachers, from physical barriers to mobility restrictions imposed by Israeli occupation. In this section, the Index for Inclusion and Empowerment (IIE) is introduced, an important tool developed to assess and improve inclusivity levels in Palestinian schools, inspired by the Index for Inclusion model by Booth and Ainscow (2002).

The third chapter delves into the core of the conducted research, divided into three summarised parts. In the first part, the project's methodological framework and main objectives are described, including the analysis of the school context and educational practices in various Palestinian schools. The perspectives of teachers and students are explored to understand the challenges and opportunities of inclusive education. The second part of the study concerns methodological adaptation to respond to emerging needs during the research. The involvement of teachers and families in the study is explored, with a focus on enhancing skills and resilience in communities. Finally, the third part is dedicated to the development of Guidelines for teachers and parents, aimed at promoting inclusion in Palestinian schools. The guidelines represent a set of useful indications for addressing the complex challenges characterising the local educational context from an inclusion perspective.

In the concluding section, critical reflections on the projects and research presented are unveiled. The difficulties encountered in carrying out educational initiatives in a context of conflict and occupation are analysed, while also highlighting the positive results achieved through the inclusive education approach.

The entire volume aims to emphasise the importance of continuing to invest in educational processes that resonate as actions of empowerment and peacebuilding realised together with Palestinian communities.