

## **ANTHROPOLOGICAL BACKGROUNDS AND PEDAGOGICAL BOUNDARIES FOR A REINTERPRETATION OF THE ADULTHOOD OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

### **SFONDI ANTROPOLOGICI E CONFINI PEDAGOGICI PER UNA RILETTURA DELL'ADULTITÀ DELLE PERSONE CON DISABILITÀ**

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#### **Abstract**

Starting from reconstructing the driving forces encompassed in Special Pedagogy, this article focuses on the elements that contributed to reaching the current configuration of educational and social contexts. Specifically, a socio-anthropological analysis of the new working perspectives on the educational undertaking of young adults with disabilities will be carried out in order to present alternative paths leaning towards a greater Quality of Life.

Partendo da una ricostruzione delle spinte propulsive e conservative che abitano da sempre la Pedagogia Speciale, il presente articolo vuole focalizzare l'attenzione sulle coordinate che hanno contribuito al raggiungimento dell'attuale configurazione dei contesti scolastici e sociali. Nello specifico, scenderemo nel merito di un'analisi socio antropologica dei nuovi orizzonti progettuali volti alla presa in carico educativa di giovani adulti con disabilità, al fine di poter giungere alla presentazione di traiettorie attuative orientate ad una maggiore Qualità della Vita.

**Keywords:** Young adults with disabilities; Life Project; Special Pedagogy

**Keywords:** Giovani adulti con disabilità; Progetto di Vita; Pedagogia Speciale

## 1. Introduction

The new interpretative model of human functioning called *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health - ICF* (WHO, 2001; 2007) and the epistemological framework of the Quality of Life (Cottini, Zorzi, Fedeli, 2016; Giaconi, 2015; Schalock et al., 2002) are widely recognised in the field of Special Pedagogy (Galanti, Giaconi, Zappaterra, 2021; Caldin, Friso, 2019b; Friso, 2013; D'Alonzo, Canevaro, Ianes, Caldin, 2011; Aiello, Pace, 2020; Besio, Caldin, 2020). Indeed, as conceptual frameworks, they can guide social policies and institutional governance, providing a vision that takes into account our humanity in all its diversity. Starting from such epistemological paradigms, from our perspective, conducting a socio-anthropological analysis of the new working perspectives on the educational undertaking of young adults with disabilities could be meaningful. As a matter of fact, teachers, pedagogists, and more generally education professionals are called upon to pay attention to the role that environmental, social and cultural context play in creating occasions to increase a Quality Life, also for people with disabilities.

Starting from reconstructing the driving forces encompassed in Special Pedagogy, this article focuses on the crucial elements that contributed to reaching the current configuration of educational and social contexts.

As we will see, the presence of students with difficulties in scholastic contexts is not just a result of social and egalitarian instances, since it calls upon the educational community to reflect on its degree of civilisation, with the aim of questioning how future society will be structured (Zappaterra, 2019).

Additionally, intending to foreground the most recent challenges of formative contexts, this article will be directed at the main critical issues that young people with disabilities and their families face during the delicate phases of transition towards adulthood (d'Alonzo, Bocci, Pinnelli, 2015; Caldin, Friso, 2019), especially in the passage from school to the academic dimension, or to the working one. In conclusion, some pedagogical and socio-anthropological advantageous working perspectives will be taken into consideration (Galanti, Giaconi, Zappaterra, 2021; Caldin, Friso, 2019; Giaconi, Del Bianco, 2018; Cottini, Zorzi, Fedeli, 2016; Giaconi, 2015; Friso, 2013; Schalock et al., 2002).

## 2. The regulatory framework towards inclusion between driving and preservative forces

Considering the normative evolution in our national setting, three macro phases have characterised the educational contexts: people with disabilities are initially “inserted”, then “integrated” and eventually “included” in the scholastic environment.

Up until, at least, the 50s, there was a “double scholastic-educational system normal for students considered as able-bodied and special for disabled people or retards” (Sagramola, 1989, p. 19). Such separation of the student population set off the prohibition of students with physical, psychic or sensory deficits, and more generally of the “diverse”, to be part of normal schools, delegating their education to other institutions (specialised institutes or special schools). In the 70s, in conjunction with a significant advancement of medical and psychological sciences in the field of developmental age (specifically in the diagnosis, prevention and intervention areas), the launch and spread of many special schools (for individuals with major impairments) and special-needs classes inside ordinary schools (for students with minor psychic or sensory impairments) took place. On the wave of the 1968 movements, themes like human rights, equity and participation were foregrounded, contributing to the creation of a political-cultural conscience (Goffman, 1961;

Basaglia, 1967, 1968). The “model of insertion” started to be implemented, involving, in Italy, the dimension of school as well, its premises, and its political and educational choices (Don Milani, 1967). Indeed, the scholastic dimension was affected by this vision, also for what concerned disability. The key passage can be identified with Law 118/1971 that ratified compulsory education in ordinary schools. This law established the attendance of people with minor disabilities in common classes of compulsory public schools and the facilitation for the access to secondary schools and universities (Nocera, 2001). Still not providing the necessary directions to respond to the needs of students with disabilities.

Another crucial turn towards the “model of integration” took place with Law 517/1977, through which flexible educational models, based on offering different educational responses, are introduced in public schools, as well as the figure of the specialised teacher.

Fifteen years after Law 517/1977, Law 104/1992 introduced significant normative and operative innovations by virtue of gradual achievements in the field of integration through time, aiming at increasing the quality of the integration of students with disabilities both in common classes of schools and in universities (art. 12, 13). Following this direction, supporting the design of educational actions for the individual’s autonomy development becomes a necessity in every educational context (concerning children in schools or young adults in universities) (Tramma, 2017; Del Bianco, 2018) as well as the definition of a project of life of the individual (Giaconi, 2015), to guarantee the broader Quality of Life (Giaconi, 2015). Such perspective strives towards the inclusion of every person, reaching an oriented pedagogical construct. Therefore, the result is the “model of inclusion”, in which the involvement of every individual is not based on the measurement of the distance from a standard of “perfection”, but rather on the recognition of the full involvement of every person in the school life (Del Bianco, 2018). If integration tends to identify a status or a condition, inclusion, instead, represents a process that can activate a truly significant and qualitative educational and existential planning for every actor involved (Giaconi, 2015).

Lastly, in the last decades a series of laws have been introduced with the aim of guaranteeing the right to education and scholastic success to everyone throughout an adequate education, in which every individual can be granted with a personalised and individualised didactic through flexible forms of scholastic work. Among the most recent regulations, the Italian Decree Law No 66/2017<sup>1</sup> and its integrative and corrective regulations, being the Decree Law No 96/2019<sup>2</sup>, and the inter ministerial decree No 182/2020<sup>3</sup>.

The regulatory evolution through time shows the historical, cultural and socio-anthropological changes that characterised the transitions from “exclusion” towards “inclusion” in educational contexts.

As we will see in the following paragraph, the retraced stories and evolutions allow the whole educational community to look beyond the contextual boundaries of the scholastic institution in order to rethink actions capable of relaunching perspectives that can support adulthood of young people with disabilities starting from their adolescence.

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<sup>1</sup> Regulations for the promotion of school inclusion of students with disabilities, in accordance with article 1, subparagraphs 180 and 181, letter c), of Law 107/2015 (Norme per la promozione dell’inclusione scolastica degli studenti con disabilità, a norma dell’articolo 1, commi 180 e 181, lettera c), della legge 13 luglio 2015, n. 107)

<sup>2</sup> Integrative and corrective provisions to Decree Law No 66/2017 (Disposizioni integrative e correttive al decreto legislativo 13 aprile 2017, n. 66)

<sup>3</sup> Adoption of the national model of individualised educational plan and related guidelines, and modalities of assignment of supportive measures to students with disabilities, in accordance with article 7, subparagraph 2-ter of Decree Law No 66/2017 (Adozione del modello nazionale di piano educativo individualizzato e delle correlate linee guida, nonché modalità di assegnazione delle misure di sostegno agli alunni con disabilità, ai sensi dell’articolo 7, comma 2-ter del decreto legislativo 13 aprile 2017, n. 66).

### 3. From adolescence to adulthood: educational emergencies

Focusing on the complexity characterising the life path of a young person with disability, a specific reflection upon the transition towards adulthood must be carried out, including perceptions that belong to domestic contexts as well as scholastic and social ones.

Among the most delicate existential passages that can “influence the meaning that the individual ascribes to the life experience” (Giacconi, 2015, p. 74) are the phases of transitions, that happen by reason of the advancing age of the supporting family network as well as the person with disability’s own.

The perspective of the future, often marked with uncertainty, raises profound questions from an educational point of view, such as: “What will happen to my child after school? Will he/she be ready to face everyday life and working contexts?”. The life path until youth is structured inside the safe contextual boundaries of school: “school allows relatives to be confident, to hope for a future for their children [...] It’s often the only certainty that lets them nurture the dream of a future. It’s the only safe brick for creating a Life Project [...]” (De Piano, 2015, pp. 294-304).

Families can rely on school until a certain point of their child’s existential life, “but what happens next? The answer is simple: nothing happens usually” (Ibidem). At the end of the school years, young people with disabilities, and their families, often find themselves in a void. The ending of school, rather than being the stepping stone towards adulthood, risks to turn into a leap in the dark. The adolescent, especially when presenting an intellectual disability, is forced into the domestic dependency world or is thrown into contexts like specific Institutes or Centres, out of necessity and without a designed path, shared and built “with” and “for” the person (Giacconi, 2015). This situation becomes a reality because, with the end of the school years, young people with disabilities and their families do not always find an adequate and efficient integrated system of institutions that gives them the chance to widen the spaces of participation and integration in society (Giacconi, 2015). De Piano (2015) clarifies that millions of people after school find themselves partially isolated and bound to invisibility.

Among the main critical issues emerging from this reflection, a detachment between the different educational institutions on various levels can be recognised.

In the passage from youth to adulthood, one of most frequent problems is what Medeghini (2006) calls “sectorisation excess”, that can be traced in both the planning of life paths and in the proposal of experiences. The emerging issue, during the adolescence of a child with a disability, concerns the relationship between the institutionally standardised dimension (the school) and the personalisation of the age transitions and their related statuses (Medeghini, 2006). We agree with the author on claiming that the sectorisation perspective, favouring a single segment of experience (for instance, school or extra-school), a context (the class or the peer group) or a specific period of life (childhood or maturity), introduces elements of fragmentation at the expense of the creation of an “ecological” Life Project. The limited provision of occasions and adequate times for an authentic discussion and sharing of educational strategies inevitably generates a lack of the Life Project realisation. The result is a scarce capacity of widespread supervision and a constant adaptation to the unexpected, scarcely adherent to the changing reality of individual profiles and the related emerging educational needs.

The outlined situation is connected to a further critical level, being the “lack of educational planning syndrome” (Pavone, 2014, p.187) during the moment of exit from the scholastic dimension. Indeed, such a temporary moment appears to be inadequately planned and prepared on time (Giacconi, 2015; Pavone, 2014). This leads to students struggling with embracing role, space and time dimensions that are broader than the scholastic ones. The initiatives linked to soft skills and orientation<sup>4</sup> that

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<sup>4</sup> Called “PCTO”, “Percorsi per le Competenze Trasversali e l’Orientamento” (Paths for Soft Skills and Orientation)

should serve as moments of “training” for the world beyond school often turn into places that lack a planning perspective that can effectively orient the transition towards working environments. Therefore, the critical issue of oriented transition is affected by both the internal weaknesses of the subsets involved in the support of the creation of the Project of Life and the limits of the devices designed for the organic coordination of the respective intervention and responsibility domains.

#### **4. Conclusions and implementing perspectives**

In light of the aforementioned criticalities, the direction that should be taken, planning focused educational actions, with a certain urgency, is the one that goes beyond the scholastic comfort-zone period, embracing a perspective that can involve institutional networks and social policies in the design of a long-term Life Project. Implementing a line of action that follows this perspective means widening and enriching the network of the contextual opportunities of relationship and support in which the individual can be integrated. Arranging strategies during the school years, anticipating the period subsequent to school, means strengthening the constant dialogue between families and territory, pursuing social and working interaction. Creating a puzzle of common experiences, widening the outlook concerning the “actors” involved, in sharing objectives and modalities, is necessary to build a bridge between adolescence and adulthood. School, family, Services (socio-sanitary, social, for the employment, educators, and so on), informal associative, recreational and cultural resources of a territory and a community, relatives, friends, neighbours, storekeepers, etc. can collectively contribute to the creation of an approach pointed towards the Life Project; qualitatively oriented both in the adolescence phase and the projection towards adult life. By building these relationships and reciprocities, the design of existential trajectories acquires a transversal perspective feature, turning into a concrete action, a solid program that blooms from a collective endeavour (Pavone, 2009). In this perspective, the design of life paths can swing between macro and micro-planning actions (Giaconi, 2015), allowing the connection of the macro experiential contexts that inevitably weave together with the micro relationships inside them. Through this bond, the educational potential broadens to form a reciprocity network that not only involves the interaction between the individuals in situations of need and their external realities, but also fosters the exchange with the contexts and the social dimensions it is part of.

As an example, we mention the significant bond that can be found between the university institution and social contexts. As we have already pointed out in previous research (D’Angelo, Del Bianco, 2019; Giaconi et al., 2020; Del Bianco et al., 2021), universities should foster inclusion processes, being par excellence places of aggregation for community and social life. The university context can rethink its mission, which is not merely institutional (Caldin, 2017) but generative of inclusive contexts and opportunities, also for people with disabilities, to experiment with social roles and growth (Bocci et al., 2020; Gariboldi et al., 2020; d’Alonzo, 2009). Infact, universities could engage in new generative links with the local area to support the achievement of widespread education and greater social democratization (Mura, 2011). On this assumption, the university can be the place for encountering and social exchange in the frame of qualitatively inclusive processes. For people with disabilities not enrolled in higher education, the university can still be an educational place and driver of social inclusion. For example, traineeships for people with disabilities not enrolled in the university can be an opportunity to pursue that aim, becoming an instrument for a social activation measure, expressly aimed at supporting empowerment and autonomy processes at personal, family and social level. For these reasons, the organization’s network should be extended to all the material and personal resources that are typically present in the building of educational pathways, to be, on the one hand, qualifying for the person with disabilities and, on the other, a promoter of inclusive processes capable of creating cultural interconnections.

In summary, starting from a reflection upon the possible forms of undertaking of adolescents with disabilities translates into a shared planning which is intentionally thought by the individual, the family and the services. This aims at guaranteeing an alignment of needs, expectations and desires, in order to create paths and life projects following the concept of Quality of Life (Giaconi, 2015; Schalock et al., 2002).

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