

## Inclusive Education in Spain and Italy: Evolution and Current Debate

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### ABSTRACT

This contribution focuses on the development of the debate over inclusive education in Italy and Spain. The evolution of the academic discussion and educational practices in the two countries share similar aspects, such as the progress from the paradigm of integration to that of inclusion and the focus on students with disabilities and foreigners in the proposed initiatives. At the same time, differences in the historical circumstances of the two countries lead to the implementation of very different practices that is interesting to compare. In the first section, we recount the evolution of the debate on integration and inclusion, highlighting its theoretical context. Crucial conceptual shifts are explained also with the support of relevant legislation. In the second section, the state of the art of inclusive education is described, focusing on the cases of students with disabilities and foreigners. Then, evaluations of the results obtained so far in both countries are reviewed, with special attention to all those processes of "hidden" exclusion that still permeate education, despite the official regulation. It is thus possible to identify the critical points and strengths of the systems in both countries, highlighting the inclusion factors and exclusion practices that persist despite the legislation. Finally, the concrete experience of a European project promoting the social inclusion of migrant students is analysed in light of the reflections developed, in order to point out the interventions needed to overcome the current phase and access a more European perspective.

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## Kapsayıcı Eğitimin İspanya ve İtalya'daki Evrimi ve Güncel Tartışma

### ÖZ

Bu çalışma İtalya ve İspanya'da kapsayıcı eğitim tartışmalarının gelişimine odaklanmaktadır. İki ülkedeki akademik tartışmalar ve eğitim uygulamalarının evrimi benzer özellikler göstermektedir. Örneğin iki ülkede de entegrasyon paradigmasından kapsayıcılık paradigmasına doğru bir evrilme meydana gelmiş ve bu süreçte engeli olan ve yabancı uyruklu çocuklara daha çok odaklanılmıştır. Buna karşın, iki ülkenin tarihsel koşullarındaki farklılıklar karşılaştırılması ilginç olan çok farklı uygulamalara yol açmıştır. İlk bölümde, teorik bağlam vurgulanarak entegrasyon ve kapsayıcılık konusundaki tartışmanın evrimi ele alınmaktadır. Önemli kavramsal değişiklikler, ilgili mevzuatın da desteğiyle açıklanmaktadır. İkinci bölümde, kapsayıcı eğitimin durumu, engeli olan ve yabancı uyruklu öğrencilerin durumlarına

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odaklanılarak ele alınmaktadır. Daha sonra, resmi düzenlemelere rağmen hala eğitime nüfuz eden "gizli" dışlama süreçleri dikkate alınarak her iki ülkede önceki bölümlerde dile getirilen gelişmeler değerlendirilmektedir. Böylelikle her iki ülkedeki sistemin kritik noktaları ve güçlü yönleri belirlenerek, mevzuata rağmen devam eden dışlama uygulamaları ile içerme faktörleri ele alınmaktadır. Son olarak, çalışmada dile getirilen düşünceler ışığında göçmen öğrencilerin sosyal olarak içerilmesini teşvik eden bir Avrupa projesinin somut deneyimi analiz edilerek mevcut [olumsuz] şartların üstesinden gelmek ve daha Avrupalı bir perspektife erişmek için gereken müdahalelere işaret edilecektir.

## **Introduction**

The development of the debate over inclusive education in Italy and Spain is the main object of this chapter. The two countries share similar aspects in the evolution of the academic discussion and educational practices, such as the progress from the paradigm of integration to that of inclusion, and the focus on students with disabilities and foreigners in the proposed initiatives<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, the differences in the historical circumstances of the two countries from the World War II onward lead to the implementation of very different practices, especially during the decades of the '70 and '80, with the development of paths that are growing more similar only from the '90s, under the influence of the European Union indication (especially after the "Salamanca Statement" in 1994 and the Lisbon European Council in 2000).

The chapter is organized around three main topics, each of which is analysed in the Spanish and Italian context. The data collection was developed by consulting three different search engines, one more general and global (Google Scholar) and two more focused on the national context (BOA for Italy and DIALNET for Spain). Journals and publications in the fields of pedagogy, educational sciences and law were consulted, as well as databases of Italian, Spanish and European laws on inclusion and integration within the school system.

The first section recounts the evolution of the debate on integration and inclusion, highlighting the theoretical context in which such discussion was developed in order to summarize the main positions expressed in both countries. Critical conceptual shifts are explained also with the support of relevant legislation aspects. In the second section the state of the art of inclusive education is explained, recounting the process that is allowing a growing number of students of different circumstances and conditions to access supportive practices. Then, evaluations of the results obtained so far in both countries are reviewed, with special attention to all those processes of "hidden" exclusion that still permeate education, despite the official regulation.

The conclusions that can be drawn by this analysis are applied, in the final part of the chapter, to the analysis of a concrete experience of inclusive education, a European project developed between 2019-2020 to promote the social inclusion of migrant students in a number of schools of 4 European countries.

## **Conceptual debates concerning inclusion, integration and attention to diversity in schools and their reflection in the regulatory field**

"Inclusion" and "integration" are two concepts that are often mistakenly used as synonyms, as we try to show in the next sections. For decades, in the educational, political and even scientific spheres, there has been debate in this regard. However, those who criticise the identification of both terms as erroneous do not always agree on the arguments for doing so and do not always agree with

each other. The main source of divergence or disagreement in this regard results from the limitation that is made of these terms, depending on the disciplinary field from which they are used, which responds to a context of use thereof that is also diverse. Let us look at the matter in a little more detail.

### *Spain*

The concept of "inclusion" in the context that concerns us, has been especially addressed by the Sciences of Education (Parrilla, 2002; Martínez, De Haro, & Escarbajal, 2010; Susinos & Rodríguez, 2011). From this disciplinary field, it is understood that the idea of inclusion has its origin in what is known as the Warnock Report (1978)<sup>2</sup>. This report revolutionised the view on special education (until then exclusively linked to disability), proposing that all human beings, regardless of their ethnic, cultural, religious, physical or psychological conditions, could at some point present "special educational needs". In this sense, ordinary educational systems were urged to be able to provide adequate responses to the specific demands of all students (Navarro & Espino, 2012). In the Spanish educational system, this translated, as of the 1980s, into working so that students considered different shared spaces, were mixed and grew similar to other students; although it did not imply that there were significant changes in educational methodologies or in the educational institutions themselves (Leiva, 2013; Martínez, 2016). In other words, it did not imply - in the first instance - that the school was a de facto "inclusive" school. Here, we have the first brush with both concepts: from the Education Sciences, what was then referred to as "integration" was being carried out in schools in the name of "inclusion". In other words, "integration" is understood, in this regard, as a preliminary step towards the ideal of "inclusion". All of these practices were the subject of intense debate in various forums, one of the most important being the conference organised by UNESCO and the Spanish government in 1994, known as the "Salamanca Statement"<sup>3</sup>. From that moment (having already entered the decade of the 1990s) in the Spanish society, thanks to the movement of teachers and families fighting against an idea of segregated schooling and educational care and thanks to the support of the educational administration, the idea of an inclusive education began to gain strength. It was understood as an education which sees diversity instead of differences and values and recognises diversity as a human right, an education that is aimed at all students, addresses the diverse abilities and potential of all students. Therefore, it presupposes the reorganisation of ordinary schools (UNESCO, 2009). This education model, from the Sciences of Education, is also presented as an alternative to what had been carried out until then, defined and understood as "school integration": "specific or special" actions to attend to the "differences" aimed "only at someone who has been previously excluded, in an attempt to adapt them to school life" (Barrio de la Fuente, 2009, p. 16). The inclusive school would thus be the culmination of an ascending path in the paradigm of attention to diversity.

For its part, the concept of "integration" in the Spanish context has had a greater approach from the fields of Anthropology and Sociology (Aparicio, 1996; Blanco, 2002; Dietz, 2012; García Castaño, Rubio Gomez, & Soto Páez, 2007; Martínez & Olmos Alcaraz, 2015), being central to the development of the Intercultural Education paradigm, which has happened in Spain since the 1990s. From this perspective, attention to diversity is understood in terms of school integration, as an educational process of coexistence of different cultural groups, where everyone (minorities and the majority) mutually enrich each other. School integration must promote a cultural vision of all cultures,

shaping a new reality and eliminating racism and inequality (García Castaño, Rubio Gomez, & Soto Páez, 2007). School integration has nothing to do with an assimilation, nor a recognition of diversities into separate plots as educational actions that do not modify the structure of the educational system, as frequently understood from the Sciences of Education. Therefore, it is not understood that "inclusion" is a superior state of "integration" in matters of diversity management, where the ideal of society to achieve is more equal, but rather that inclusion is – in any case – inherent in integration.

In short, when we talk about "inclusion" and "integration", it is particularly important to know from which disciplinary viewpoint we stand. We must be aware of the aforementioned particularities, given that, in addition to the fact that we often find that both terms have been used interchangeably as synonyms, there can sometimes be criticisms in the field of politics and public management regarding attention to diversity, which originate in the various disciplinary approaches to similar realities, rather than in a clash of educational paradigms.

So, how has all of this conceptual debate been reflected in the legislation and educational and diversity management policies in Spain? Before the 1980s, we did not find explicit references to either "inclusion" nor "integration". The first mentions, in this case, to the concept of integration, are made in the educational laws of 1982<sup>4</sup>, 1985<sup>5</sup> and 1990<sup>6</sup>, to refer - firstly - to the incorporation, into ordinary classrooms, of students who came from specific centres and - secondly - to establish that special education ceases to be a parallel system to the ordinary system and to create a single educational system. When, in the 1990s, criticism began of what - as mentioned above - was being achieved with this integration, the educational legislation incorporated the concept of "inclusion" in its wording, based on the aforementioned Salamanca Statement (1994), which finally materialised into the Organic Law of Education (2006). In the historical journey of Spanish legislation, in terms of integration and inclusion, there has been a constant tendency to label students (distinguishing them by social class, ethnicity or learning ability), which is detrimental to the philosophy of inclusive education, with the risk of converting it into practice in special education (Bolaños Muñoz, Rodríguez Izquierdo, Palacio Salgado, & Conde Jiménez, 2015).

In the case of diversity management policies related to migration in the Spanish context, the term "integration" has been used to a greater extent than the term "inclusion". We have had this type of policy since 1994<sup>7</sup>, but it was not until 2011 that we noticed a change in the concept of integration, although it does not disappear entirely, due to the concept of "inclusion". One is never replaced by the other, but the first is complemented by the second, that is, it is made explicit that integration must also entail inclusion:

(...) inclusion has been incorporated [within integration policies] as a new principle that complements the three that have already inspired the first Plan [equality, citizenship and interculturality]. (...) process of creating the necessary conditions for a more equal society in socio-economic terms. (II Citizenship and Integration Plan, 2011, p. 82)

From then on, the use of the concept of integration in public discourse was relaxed and the concept of inclusion took more strength. There are two issues to consider in this regard. Firstly, although integration had always been discussed (this is the case in the policies of 1996 and 2000), it was understood as a type of assimilationist and unidirectional integration (the migrants - understood as a homogenous whole - who should adapt to the Spanish). Secondly, when the paradigm shift occurred, with the Citizenship and Integration Plan, there was no more talk of

unidirectional integration (2007) and talks about inclusion commenced (2011) and it was also understood that this concerns all citizens (not just migrants). We warn that neither the first nor the current policies take the concept of "integration" in a reasonable manner, as a multidirectional process (neither unilateral, nor bidirectional), which would indicate that the whole of society would need to transform (not just the migrant populations) in order to make way for a new, more equal, reality.

### *Italy*

Considering the historical period from the World War II onwards, the topic of exclusion-inclusion in relation to a given context has intensely animated the events of Italian culture, society and politics for years. The so-called '*68 movement*, that involved students and political activists in many European countries (along with the US and other states), in Italy was essentially the expression of a collective desire to re-discuss the rules and practices that defined what was considered adequate, correct and just, and therefore included within society, and what was not.

This historical period has undoubtedly produced several interesting outcomes, but one of the milestones most relevant for our discussion is represented by the Law n. 180, 13 May 1978. The so-called Basaglia Law, from the name of the experimental psychiatrist and promoter of psychiatric reform Franco Basaglia, is the first law in the world that imposed the closure of mental asylums, establishing a system of decentralized community services for the treatment of mental patients. The approval of the Law was the culmination of a long, collective process of discussion and experimentation of health, educational, pedagogical, organizational and ultimately cultural practices that intended to integrate in social contexts considered "normal" those who had not been considered worthy, until then, to participate (Foot, 2014). Basaglia sustained that "the mentally ill person is ill above all because he is excluded" (Basaglia, 1968, p. 7).

The exclusion-inclusion debate soon extended to the educational and school context. One of its most lucid contributors, the priest and teacher Don Lorenzo Milani, stated during those years that "If you lose them [the students with difficulties] the school is no longer school. It is a hospital that cares for the healthy and refuses the sick. It becomes an increasingly irremediable instrument of differentiation. [...] Actually, the only incompetents in school are you [teachers] who lose them and do not come back to look for them" (Milani, 1967, p. 23).

In the educational field, the focus of the promoted actions was on the idea of integration, and mostly addressed the situation of students with disabilities. When the debate on inclusive education emerged at an international level, many in Italy responded at first by considering the term as synonymous of integration (D'Alessio, 2013) and only slowly the debate opened to the new term (ie: Giangreco & Doyle, 2012; Anastasiou, Kauffman, & Di Nuovo, 2015) until its recent adoption in official documents (2007 ICARE project for the development of inclusive settings, 2009 Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca Guidelines for School Integration) and finally in the school legislation (Ministerial Directive 8/2012; Buona Scuola Law 107/2017) (Nes, Demo, & Ianes, 2018).

From an organizational point of view, the impact of the Basaglia Law was thunderous. Up to that point, children and adults with physical disabilities, mental illness or even learning disorders

were educated in specific institutes, or simply sectioned in mental institutions, were they would often spend their whole lives. The cultural debate of the '60s led to the Law 517/1977, which suppressed special classes and moved disabled students into standard classes. The law defined a number of measures aiming at the promotion of the integration of disabled students, such as the introduction of the "support teacher" (a teacher with specific training who is assigned as an extra resource to the classes and schools that include students with certified disabilities) and the possibility, for schools, to adapt the school program in order to better respond to the specific needs of its students.

The role of the support teacher as an organic resource for the whole class, and not only dedicated to the students with disabilities has been reaffirmed with the Law 104/92 "Framework law for care, social integration and rights of persons with disabilities" which, among other things further defined the use of individualized plans for students with disabilities and the supply of didactic tools and assistive technology to schools, as well as other forms of technical assistance, when needed (Ferri, 2018).

While in 2007 Italy signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the extension of specific support to other groups of learners came later, with the Act 170/2010 addressing the issue of learning disabilities and the Ministerial Directive 8/2012 on socio-economic disadvantages.

Further improvements on the training and number of support teachers (which however leave the structure of the Italian recipe to integration/inclusion unchanged) have been included in the recent Law No. 107/2015 (the so called "Good School Law") which extensively reformed the Italian school system, and the DL 66/2017. Another result of these last two legislations has been the institution of a Permanent Observatory on School Inclusion.

The concept of inclusive education assumed special relevance in the field of intercultural education. The reflective process of the '60s was further stimulated by the UNESCO Recommendation of November 1974 for an education with an international vocation, where the educational process includes actions for the integral development of the individual in relation to his being in the world with others: a formation based on the concepts of understanding, cooperation and international peace (UNESCO, 1974).

So, from an operational perspective, the school curricula began to give increasingly wide space to educational initiatives with an international vocation,<sup>8</sup> and intercultural pedagogy became relevant option (Castiglioni, 2018). The debate around this process was intense, because the question posed by intercultural education was capital: does education consist in developing and strengthening, in each person, what makes him or her similar to all the others, whose principles are considered universal? Or, on the contrary, in placing the individual in communities that carry a specific culture, in groups that consequently defend their existence and their right of expression? (Perotti, 1994) The school system tries to design itself as a continuum between the social, civic, political and the ethical dimension, offering itself as an opportunity for concrete and immediate experience: the school is configured as a society of peers and adults organized according to the principles of orderly growth, constructive coexistence and relational reciprocity (Lazzari, 1994).<sup>9</sup>

For what concerns the strategies adopted by the Italian educational system to deal with the growing number of foreigner students, it's possible to detect three main phases (Favaro, 2010): at the beginning the approach adopted was that of the so called "welcoming", with a sometimes exaggerated focus on folkloric aspects on the cultures of provenience, followed by a second phase, when the ideas of integration and interculture start to be put into practice (for example with the DPR 394/1999 art. 45; the 2006 "Guidelines for the reception and integration of foreigner students" and the 2007 Ministry recommendation "The Italian way to intercultural integration"). Finally, the debate moved to the concept of inclusion.

If we observe more in detail the evolution of the Italian approach to foreigner students, it should be noted that it took more than ten years since the '77's law on the abolition of special classes for the school system to start dealing systematically with the integration of foreign pupils, with Ministerial Decree 301/1989 "Inclusion of foreigners in compulsory education: promotion and coordination of initiatives". The decree focus on the issues related to language, and attempted to plan the placement of foreign students in a constructive way, giving specific instructions not to exceed four to five units per class "in order to facilitate their natural linguistic integration with Italian students, while it may be useful to form even larger groups at times of specific linguistic activities" (MIUR, 1995, p. 4). It also included strong encouragement for the creation of a network between local authorities, families and communities, precisely because "compulsory schooling should aim at a constant increase of its sensitivity to the meanings of a multicultural society (*ibidem*)."

Going through a long process of theoretical and operational implementations, the debate was summarized by the document published in 2007 "The Italian way to intercultural school and integration of foreign students", drawn up by the National Observatory for the integration of foreign students and intercultural education established by the Ministry of Education. The document defined the fundamental principles and actions of an "Italian model" of integration of foreign pupils, in the generalized recognition of the collective importance of the problem and public institutional responsibility. The document provided operational indications to pursuit the valorization of the person and the construction of educational projects based on the biographical and relational uniqueness of the student. The intercultural approach means, in this context, to not limit the proposed actions to mere strategies of integration of immigrant pupils, nor to compensatory measures of a special nature. Instead, it means taking diversity as a paradigm of the school's own identity in pluralism, as an opportunity to open the whole system to all differences (MIUR, 2007).

Summarizing the state of the actual debate on the integration/inclusion paradigms, Angelo (2011) identified 3 main difference between the Italian "integration model" and the inclusive education model expressed by the latest European guidelines:

- the Italian model of integration strongly rely on the figure of the support teacher, which was introduced with the first law on school integration as a professional with specific training. The inclusive model promotes instead the idea of a diffused training that would enable all teacher to respond to student's specific needs;

- the Italian law assign the support teacher only after an evaluation the certify the presence of a student with disability. In the inclusive model the specialized teacher is considered as system's resource, and not connected to the presence of a specific kind of student;
- the aforementioned evaluation of the presence and gravity of a handicap is in charge of the Health Care System and Social Services, while in the inclusive model should be carried out in a less medical and more interactive way, with a greater involvement of the school's professionals.

D'Alessio (2009) argues that there has been a shift in the interpretation of what "integration" means in the educational context. The original conceptualization of the integration saw it as a disruptive action, challenging the whole education system in order to break its rigidities and promote the flexibility necessary to welcome all different kind of learners. Instead, its implementation led to a "compensatory forms of assistance which envisage the deployment of specialized pedagogical and didactical methods to promote the integration of disabled students in mainstream classroom" (p. 113).

The original aim of a global reformation of the educational system toward a less rigid structure was softened, but returns as a necessary way to reach the inclusive model requested by international law, supporting the reflections on the systemic changes that are still needed in order to respond to the occurring change of paradigm.

### **Inclusion and integration in the educational system: brief analysis of the measures implemented within and outside of conventional schools**

Having described the conceptual debates of the terms that concern us in this work, in addition to their reflection in the regulations of the respective countries, we shall next move on to analyse the educational system in both contexts, with the aim of understanding how inclusive/integrative education has developed and is currently developing. To do this, on the one hand, we shall analyse this issue in ordinary schools, and, on the other hand, we shall provide some significant examples of practices carried out in segregated spaces, when existing. We shall follow the same explanatory scheme, first analysing the case of Spain and then, comparatively, that of Italy.

#### *Spain*

To learn about inclusion and integration practices in ordinary schools in Spain, we need to analyse - on the one hand - practices located within what is known as Compensatory Education<sup>10</sup> and - on the other hand - practices included within what is referred to as Intercultural Education.

With respect to the former, various measures of attention to diversity have been deployed (and are being deployed) in all stages of the Spanish educational system<sup>11</sup>, the ultimate aim of which is to compensate, in some way, for possible shortcomings that prevent this desired inclusion in equal opportunities. Officially, it is as a result of Royal Decree 1174/1983, dated 27 April, that such education has been implemented in Spain, with the aim of offering new possibilities to those who are marginalised by the system itself. At this point, we are talking especially about the gypsy population, about the population of rural areas with considerable sociocultural and educational disadvantages compared with the urban world, with urban populations that, with the rural exodus, occupied neighbourhoods of social housing in which poverty and marginalisation occurred and, of



course, populations identified as having special educational needs. It should be noted that, added to these populations, which were initially "targets" of these educational compensation policies, at the end of the 1990s, was the immigrant and/or foreign population, for whom educational compensation programmes with certain specific features were designed<sup>12</sup>.

In the case of Intercultural Education, with all of the reservations and criticisms that may be made in this regard (please see García et al., 2008), we must consider, as a measure implemented with conventional schools, what are known as "Welcome Classrooms". These programmes have been designed for the educational attention of students from migrations, especially for those who do not know the vehicular language of the school<sup>13</sup>, with their main objective being of a linguistic nature. Welcome Classrooms began to emerge in Spain in the 2000s, during which time the development of educational policies identified as "intercultural" in the country was promoted (Dietz, 2012). These are currently very widespread educational measures. So far, they have mainly generated positive criticism, as resources that represent a link between social/school exclusion and inclusion, mitigating school delays and providing privileged spaces for pedagogical innovation; although we also find negative criticisms of them, given that they are segregating measures within the centres themselves, they are compensatory and assimilationist and do not fulfil their objective of teaching the language satisfactorily (Olmos Alcaraz et al., 2015).

In the case of practices identified<sup>14</sup> as "inclusive/integrative", but which are implemented in segregated spaces of conventional schools, we shall analyse several examples that are particularly striking to us. Said practices have also been carried out within the framework defined as Compensatory Education and within the framework defined as Intercultural Education. Thus, with Compensatory Education, paradoxically segregating measures have been developed, which have favoured the isolation and differentiation of certain populations. Amongst them are the so-called "bridge schools"<sup>15</sup> designed exclusively for the gypsy population in the late 1970s and in force until almost the 1990s and the occupational classrooms (external to the centres) which enrolled out-of-school students in the 1980s and which were transformed into Occupation Classrooms, aimed at vocational training.

As we can see, there is a common logic to educational compensation devices and that is that, despite having the intention of "compensating", "integrating" or "including", they are created outside of the school and are gradually integrated into a school logic with more or less success. For its part, within the framework of attention to educational diversity relating to the migration population, which, to a remarkably high degree, has been identified in a reductionist manner with the paradigm of Intercultural Education, we wish to mention Educational Welcome Spaces (*Espacios de Bienvenida Educativa* - EBE). This experience, which did not go beyond being a pilot experience, is another example of a segregated device which, in this case, was developed in Spain during the years 2008-2012. These devices educationally served students from migrations, in segregated spaces of conventional schools (mainly municipal facilities). It was an educational policy implemented in some municipalities of Catalonia, a community that has two official languages.

One of the main criticisms made of EBEs was related to this reality, given that they served the same immigrant students, including those who had Spanish as their mother tongue (from Latin American countries), whilst not serving students from other parts of Spain, even though, in both

cases, they did not know Catalan. In other words, one of the criteria for segregated schooling in EBEs was nationality, which was denounced by society (NGOs, academics, etc.) as a xenophobic practice. On the other hand, its dubious legality was pointed out given that education in Spain is both a right and an obligation for all children under the age of 16 and the time that students spent in EBEs (albeit scarce) could be considered as time that they spent out of school (Carrasco, Pàmies, & Narciso, 2012).

### *Italy*

Since its very start, the integration of students in public schools in Italy has relied on two main resources: the presence of a specialized support teacher and the definition of personalized school plans for the students. In order to become a support teacher, it's necessary to follow a specific path, obtaining first a degree and the abilitation to teach via a national exam, and then having to follow a specializing course in one of the universities authorized by the Ministry of Education.

However, the support teacher should not be, at least in theory, specifically assigned to a student but to the whole class. In fact, the personalized school plan is developed by the support teachers in collaboration with the whole body of teachers in order to meet the needs of each student with disabilities. Since 1992 the Law 104 explicitly affirms that the principal and teaching staff share the responsibility to ensure the quality of inclusive education, including the preparation of a formal annual plan which is evaluated at the end of the academic year and that schools constantly need to monitor and assess the effectiveness of their inclusive practices (Najev Čačija, Bilač, & Džingalašević, 2019).

The fact that Italian legislation link the assignation of a support teacher to the presence, in a class, of one or more student with certified disabilities and that the share of time that the teacher will spend in the class also depend on the medical assessment of the student's situation lead to a number of issues:

- it disempowers the image of the support teacher as a resource for the class, and not specifically linked to the students with disabilities;
- it may trigger a tendency from schools or social services to exaggerate the gravity of the student's situation, to obtain more resources and personnel;
- foster a vision of the support teacher as an "extra" resource which, in time of economic crisis, became easily subject to budgeting cuts. On the contrary. "resources for inclusive education should be considered as normal resources that are necessary for the daily unfolding of mainstream schooling" (Medeghini & D'Alessio, 2012).

When focusing on the inclusion of foreigner students, it's possible to identify a few core points at the basis of the Italian strategy:

- the principle of a public school that must include everybody, which is defined by the Italian Constitution and specified by the European indication 486 already in 1977, and therefore have to guarantee the enrolment of all foreigner minors living in the country, in any moment of the year they request it;

- the school level in which foreigner students are enrolled shouldn't penalize them in any way and therefore is based on the age of the kid rather than other aspects such as the knowledge of the language (Circular N° 205/1990 "*Compulsory schooling and foreign pupils*")
- the ratio of foreigner/Italian students should always be balanced to avoid ghettoization. The criteria for the application of this principle have been for a long time left to the discretion of school management, and only in 2006 the Ministry of Education has defined more clear guidelines (Grimaldi & Serpieri, 2013). Still, researchers have pointed out how the "anti-segregation" national rules fail to reach the desired results due, for example, to a "poor grasp" on local characteristics of migration (differences among the foreigner students, numbers already higher than the thresholds in many locales and so on) and the autonomy that local entities have in promoting its implementation (Barberis & Violante, 2017).

Unfortunately, these indications remained mostly on paper until 2007/2008, when finally the information system of the Ministry of Education and Research began to collect data on foreign pupils born in Italy and on foreign pupils recently immigrated that, according to the "*Guidelines for the reception and integration of foreigners pupils*", issued by the Ministry of Education itself in February 2014, represent "two opposite sides of the foreigners 'planet'" (MIUR, 2014, p. 5).

In conjunction with the survey, from that moment on, the Italian system reached a "concrete" stage in the management of the foreigners' pupils: the guidelines are no longer just theoretical declarations of intent on the need for an intercultural school, but shared definitions, vademecum of hospitality, indications and orientation for teachers and families.

The Guidelines point to the fluency of the Italian language, as the main factor connected with segregation and social exclusion. Specific indications are therefore given for the "creation and circulation among schools of the most effective organizational models and teaching tools based on self-learning. For newly-arrived pupils, at least 8-10 hours per week for at least 3-4 months should be dedicated to the specific teaching of Italian L2, while discouraging the classic "language courses" and favoring more laboratory and experiential activities, also with the involvement of the class group and the school community" (Ivi, p. 18).

The document also mentions the importance of the valorization of multilingualism, noting that "a plurality of languages and cultures has entered the Italian school" and admitting that "finding a place in the curriculum for multilingual and intercultural education can mean modifying it in an important and substantial way" (Ivi, p. 19).

Finally, the last relevant topic in the MIUR Guidelines is the connection between school, knowledge of Italian and citizenship. Law 94/2009 introduced the obligation for foreign immigrants to pass an Italian language test (not lower than level A2 according to the Common European Framework for Languages) in order to obtain regularization qualifications. Thus, the role of the school becomes crucial also in the capability of foreigners to regularize their stay in Italy and thus undertake the path towards effective integration and active citizenship.

**Towards an assessment of educational inclusion/integration: from formal recognition to the possibility of real exclusion.**

In order to make an assessment of how the path taken to date in the matter that concerns us in the contexts considered, we ask ourselves whether the laws of both countries contribute to inclusive/integrative education becoming effective, or whether, on the contrary, there are still gaps in this regard.

### *Spain*

In the case of Spain, we shall review the educational regulations again, adding some reflections relating to schooling/zoning policies, in addition to an analysis of what is set out in this regard in the legislation of foreigners.

From the regulations of the educational system, the legal possibility of segregating or separating part of the population is not recognised in any case. Furthermore, the respect of the principle of non-discrimination and educational inclusion as fundamental values is explicitly alluded to, something that had already been raised in the Educational Law of 1985. The current regulation, known as LOMCE (2013), continues along the same lines as the previous regulation and states that "in no case shall there be discrimination based on birth, race, gender, religion, opinion or any other condition or social circumstance" (LOE 2006: 17181)<sup>16</sup>. On the other hand, we must point out that the current regulations grant freedom to educational centres to, in favour of attention to diversity (allegedly), integrate subjects into fields of knowledge, propose flexible groupings, divide groups or even propose various measures of attention to diversity. This freedom is granted - it is claimed - to contribute to the achievement of educational objectives by all students, but, nevertheless, very often - and as we have seen in our research work (Rubio Gómez, 2013) - they end up becoming segregating practices, far from the desired inclusive education and integration.

For its part, the current Immigration Law<sup>17</sup> (subject to international law and the aforementioned educational laws) specifies that foreigners under the age of sixteen have the right and duty to education under the same conditions as Spaniards and that, in any case, upon reaching the age of eighteen during the academic year, they shall retain this right until the end of the academic year (Article 9). This is why, formally, we can understand that - in this case - the regulations do not allow for segregation processes. However, in order to have a more complete picture in this regard, we must look at how schooling/zoning policies and the informal mechanisms of the schools themselves operate.

From the legislation that regulates the schooling processes that guarantee educational equality and avoid polarising students with "difficulties", specific and non-specific mechanisms are established. The formers are those that affect the equal distribution of foreign immigrant students, such as the reservation of places and the reduction of classroom ratios during the pre-registration period. The latter include the actions by commissions or admission guarantee bodies that must, in any case, be constituted when the demand for places in an educational centre within the scope of the commission exceeds the supply. They also include zoning policies, which aim to guarantee equality in the application of admission rules, which includes the establishment of the same areas of influence for public and subsidised centres in the same municipality or territorial area (Ortiz Cobo, 2010).

In light of the above and given that both educational laws, immigration regulations and schooling/zoning policies formally set out equal treatment and coverage for students considered

diverse, it should be mentioned that there are other informal mechanisms, from the schools themselves, which contribute to the fact that, despite everything, there are cases of segregation. These mechanisms operate explicitly. They cannot be considered illegal, but they do denote a lack of ethics and commitment towards the inclusion of a certain population in certain educational centres. In the case of migrant populations, we have several of our own ethnographic research studies (de Toro, Castaño, Alcaraz, & Gómez, 2013; García et al., 2012) which revealed how these mechanisms are essentially broken down through two ways of acting: 1). Referrals from the center itself at the time of enrolment to other centres unnecessarily, alluding to the fact that there are linguistic support devices only in some schools. The reality is that centres receive this support when they receive students with such needs. Therefore, if families are encouraged to go to schools in which they already exist, what is achieved is that students are concentrated more in some centres than in others and 2). The collection of fees is voluntary for extracurricular activities (excursions, etc.), as though they were compulsory. This discourages families with few resources, resulting in reducing the enrolment of certain students into centres that carry out these practices.

### *Italy*

The academic research dedicated to the evaluation of the impact of Italian policies to promote school integration and inclusion have highlighted both positive aspects and critical issues that still need to be addressed.

Some research points out that in terms of planning, monitoring and evaluation, Italy shows very advanced level of inclusive practices in the European scenario, with key stakeholders assuming joint responsibilities for inclusive educational practices (Najev Čačija et al., 2019). In their research, Sharma, Aiello, Pace, Round, & Subban (2018) find that, when compared to an Australian sample of teachers, “Italian teachers had significantly more positive attitudes, lower degree of concerns and higher level of intentions to implement inclusion in their classrooms” (p. 6).

But the debate on inclusive education is still very active, and researchers have pointed out a number of critical issues. As already mentioned, the need for a medical assessment of disabilities in order to activate processes of support for the inclusion of students lead to practical problems, but is as well symptomatic of a discourse that frame inclusive education in the logic of “normal/deviant”, not recognizing the diversity of learners as sources for enhancing and democratising learning opportunities (Opertti, 2015). Moreover, this medicalized model is not suitable to facilitate intervention in case of learning disabilities, or other kind of special needs.

When analysing the norms and law developed so far, it’s been pointed out that the legislation that should promote concretization of the principle subscribed by Italy with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007 has not yet reached the aimed objectives (Ferri, 2017).

The support provided to the students is not always up to their needs, both for lack of personnel or/and training. This was already noted when students with disabilities firstly entered “normal” classes, which were not always prepared to integrate them, so that the right to an “appropriate education” could not always been guaranteed, but the problem persist nowadays (Anastasiou, Kauffman, & Del Nuovo 2015). Since the year 2013, Italy started to develop “Prove Invalsi”, a national plan of extensive, standardised academic tests collecting data from all students of public

schools. Such data are very useful to compare and study the work and results of classes and schools operating in similar contexts and thus identify possible criticalities or excellence (Amici & Lasorsa, 2010), providing useful information for the researchers investigating the topics of integration and inclusion in school (Falzetti, 2019). However, the use of this kind of standardized tests have been object of critics as for its validity (Trincherò, 2014).

A few studies have focused on the figure of the support teacher, so relevant in the Italian model of integration. These analyses (IDF 2016; Associazione TreeLLe, Caritas Italiana & Fondazione Agnelli, 2011; Dettori, 2009) put into evidence, for example, the high turnover rate among these teachers, who often ask to move to the position of regular teachers. Among the reasons identified for this “flight of support teachers” are lack of support, poor collaboration with colleagues, and an overall sense of marginalisation (Devecchi et al, 2012, p. 172).

On the same line, research highlights the need for teachers to access specific training in intercultural pedagogies, to be able to respond in a more organized and organic way to the growing number of children of second and third generation of immigration, an issue that at the moment is managed by teachers only on the basis of their own specific sensibilities and experiences (Castiglioni, 2018).

Another very important aspect addressed by researchers is the perdurance of mechanisms leading to a “de-facto” segregation among students, in spite of the legislation and the official indications of the Ministry of Education.

A first example of this problem is the persistence, in all levels of education, of pulling out practices, where students belonging to a specific group (disabilities, learning disorder, foreigner...) are taken out of regular lessons for variable lengths of time, singularly or in small groups (Giangreco, Doyle, & Suter 2012; Ianes, Demo, & Zambotti 2014), or, alternatively, the fact that some students physically remain in the class but are involved by the support teacher in a task different from the one developed by the rest of the class (D’Alessio 2011).

Another aspect highlighted is the strong difference in availability of resources and practices of integration between north and south of Italy (Canevaro et al. 2011), with a clear disadvantage for students attending schools in the south of Italy.

Numerous research analysing the academic path and outcomes of Italian, foreigner and second/third generation studies have pointed out how foreigner or second/third generation students seem to encounter more difficulties in their academic progress (Barabanti, 2016; Cerbara & Tintori, 2017; Strozza, 2015), and also in their case a number of segregation mechanisms can be found at work.

In their interview of social workers and civil servants on the right to access educational support for migrants, Barberis and Violante (2017) highlighted that some municipalities apply (unlawful) exclusionary measures by requiring a residence certificate to access services – a certificate that by definition undocumented people cannot have. In some cases, there is a shrinkage of rights, partly due to a lack of knowledge on relevant norms.

Another example is the fact that, despite the indications of spreading the presence of foreigners among classes and schools, this criteria has never been realized, and in some metropolitan areas

classes register more than 50% of foreign students, in contrast with the actual rate of foreigners among the overall student's population (Iniziativa e Studi sulla Multietnicità [ISMU], 2017). The 2014 Guidelines admit the over-representation of the group of foreign pupils in some schools, warning that this concentration is to be read as a phenomenon to be monitored, as a potential indication of "segregation trends in society" (MIUR, 2014, p. 20). The document sets as a priority action correct information to Italian parents on the positive potential for growth in a heterogeneous class, but remains vague on how to do it, on how to manage these sometimes explosive situations, returning to an abstract idealism characteristic of the documents of the 1990s (Castiglioni, 2018).

These data seems particularly relevant in light of the fact that scientific studies (Di Bartolomeo, Bonifazi, & Strozza, 2017) have shown that the school performance of immigrant children seems to be strongly influenced by the school context, probably due to the fact that compared to their native peers, these children suffer from a "weaker" family background and are therefore more dependent on the instrumental and human resources present in the school they attend.

In conclusion it's possible to see that in order to reach a fully inclusive education system, the Italian system needs to promote a number of changes, starting from an evolution of the current underlying paradigm to the idea of an "education system as a facilitator of personalised learning opportunities" (Operti, 2015).

### **From theory to practice: the "Creative Learning Districts for Inclusion" (CLeDI) project**

The compared analysis of Spanish and Italian debate over inclusive education allowed us to identify a few core questions that seems to extend over national boundaries:

- the approach promoted both at academic level and in national and European legislations shifted gradually from the idea of integrating the individuals, carriers of "differences", into the "normal" community to the inclusion of all individuals, each according to personal characteristics, in a variegated community.
- This shift lead to a change in the focus of interventions, at least at a normative level, from the individual to the community.
- Gradually, the debate over integration and inclusion has widened, and the populations considered in the undertaken measures have gone from very circumscribed groups to more ample ones, for examples including students learning disorders or in difficult socio-economic conditions.
- There has been, from the academic community, a call for attention on the perdurance of processes of exclusion that have not been yet solved and require a constant reflection on the concrete and sometime unexpected or negative consequences that the proposed practices have in the educational field.

We will close this chapter highlighting the impact that all these reflections had in the planning of a European project that focused on the promotion of social inclusion in the educational field.

The Erasmus+ project CLeDI, developed in 2019/2020 by a partnership including Universities and schools from Italy, Spain, Turkey and Slovenia, aimed at supporting the inclusion of students

from disadvantaged groups, with a specific focus on migrants and second generation pupils; through the adoption of a collaborative and creative use of ICT and the interaction with positive role models, high profile scientists from the astrophysics community with representatives from Spain, Italy, Nigeria, Turkey, South Africa, Colombia, Serbia, Ethiopia and Kenya.

Planning the project, the points highlighted in this dissertation were taken into account in order to:

- achieve the involvement of the whole educational community;
- propose activities able to support each student according to its strengths and its needs,
- open a debate that would involve all stakeholders in the reflection on what it means to promote social inclusion

On a theoretical level, research has shown that teachers tend to be positive about the principle of inclusion, but are at the same time aware of the problems linked to its practical implementation (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002) and their attitude to inclusion practice is influenced by variables such as the training received (Schmidt & Vrhovnik, 2015) and the attitude and support of school leaders in promoting an inclusive ethos within their schools. (MacFarlane, Marks, & Woolfson, 2013).

For this reason, every single step of the project was co-constructed via processes of cooperation and co-creation between the different project actors, involving the school community as an organic entity. Teachers and school leaders were all directly called to contribute in the definition of shared strategies, and in the dissemination of the results achieved, to favour the development of an inclusive school culture that would apply to all of its members.

In fact, although the project focus on the integration of foreigner students, the activities proposed refer to either the whole class, a number of classes or even the whole Institute, promoting collaborative exchange among all of the students.

As for the choice to strongly rely on the use of ICT to reach the project's aims, it stems from the observation of the relevance that digital media play in promoting social inclusion (Ferrari, Castiglioni, Mura, Diamantini, 2018). The Digital Inclusion Team created in UK in 2004 defined digital inclusion as: 'The use of technology either directly or indirectly to improve the lives and life chances of disadvantaged people and the places in which they live' (Digital Inclusion Team, 2007).

The use of ICT allows participation in an informed and productive way, while research also indicates that social exclusion can provoke information disjuncture and an inability to adopt ICT effectively and independently due to barriers related to language, access and skills to use the technology (Alam & Imran, 2015). In many cases ICTs can facilitate the enhancement of youth skills and talents, that sometime may even be "undercover". If properly supported, students can become the protagonists of their learning and improve their ability to creatively cooperate for a meaningful aim. Disadvantaged youth can find, in such a context, an occasion to re-assert their position in the learning community becoming providers of new set of skills or point of views, finding new ways to support their learning and also improving their academic achievement.

The project is still in progress and the impact of the methodology just described has yet to be validated by the data collected on the field. However, we can already venture an encouraging



evaluation: the feedbacks from schools are very positive, the methodology appears to be attractive and engaging and a first qualitative evaluation on the reduction of exclusion factors is encouraging and promising. At the end of the project, the output assessment may confirm these first, qualitative feedbacks.

Nevertheless, we cannot forget that the role of the educational administration is central in any process of transformation and change. If we want to promote a real shift toward inclusive education, we must be aware that the educational system has to adapt to the specific of nowadays society: diverse, changing, heterogeneous. And for this result to be achieved, the implication of the government, along with schools and families, is fundamental, because the change needed is a structural transformation.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this work and considering the current state of the debate in Italy and Spain, the analysis within this study focuses on the concepts of integration and inclusion. Mainstreaming, which refer to the practice of educating students with special needs in regular classes during specific time periods, however close, will not be discussed within this dissertation, because, as a norm, in Italy and in Spain students with special needs are expected to attend school in regular classes and "special schools" are almost inexistent. For more details see, for example, Bishop, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> The *Warnock Report: Special Educational Needs*, was developed in 1978 by the British Commission on Special Education, chaired by Mary Warnock from the premise that there were no "uneducable" boys or girls, but rather poorly prepared schools.

<sup>3</sup> World Conference on Special Educational Needs: Access and Quality. Salamanca, Spain, 7-10 June 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Law of Social Integration of the Handicapped.

<sup>5</sup> Royal Decree on the Organisation of Special Education.

<sup>6</sup> Organic Law on the General Organisation of the Educational System.

<sup>7</sup> The integration policies aimed at the immigrant population in the country have been as follows: Plan for the Integration of Immigrants (1994), Global Programme for the Regulation and Coordination of Immigrants and Immigration-GRECO (2000) and Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration (I -2007- II -2011- y III - in preparation).

<sup>8</sup> The school curriculum for secondary school in 1979 underlines that it "will also promote the education of the citizens of Europe and the world, educating them to a mental attitude of understanding that exceed any one-sided view of the problems and brings them closer to the intuition of values common to men, even in the diversity of civilizations, cultures and political structures" (MIUR, 1995, p. 13-14). The 1985 primary school program highlights how the representation of society does not coincide with the idea of nation, but opens up towards supranational horizons and the formation of sociality is interpreted in a transversal perspective, which crosses the boundaries of monoculturalism, trying to operate "so that the child has a basic awareness of the various forms of diversity or marginalization in order to prevent and contrast the formation of stereotypes and prejudices against people and cultures" (*Ibidem*).

<sup>9</sup> To better understand the assumptions of this discussion, it is necessary to briefly argue about migration in Italy, one of the social phenomena that has most affected the Italian reality (Ambrosini, 2004; Bonifazi, 2015). For almost a century, Italy has been mostly a country of emigration until becoming, in the last twenty years, a destination of international migration, at the same time, characterized by an intense internal migratory flow. The disruptive economic growth that characterized the first thirty years after the Second World War made internal migration a valid alternative to emigration: millions of people moved from the countryside to the cities, from inland mountainous and hilly areas to coastal and plain areas, from the South and the North-East to the industrial triangle and the Centre. From the second half of the Seventies until today there has been a progressive intensification of international migration dynamics. The number of foreigners residing in the country has increased from 356 thousand to 4 million between 1991 and 2011, with an average annual increase rate of 13.3%. At the same time, internal migration, after having experienced a phase of stagnation until the mid-1990s, grew again due to a resumption of inter-departmental flows from the south to the center-north

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and, subsequently, the higher mobility of a foreign population in strong size growth. This photograph on the migration in Italy provides the right key to understand the debate on inclusion and intercultural education in the years after the adoption of the Legge Basaglia. A fragmented Italy, deeply divided from an economic, social and cultural perspective, quickly blended together, producing very strong social tensions caused, ultimately, by the struggle for a balance between identity and inclusion.

<sup>10</sup> As a general rule in Spain, students identified as having Special Educational Needs are enrolled in ordinary educational centres. The attention to them can be provided with support within the reference classroom with the class group, although there are also specific times when the students are separated from the reference group and cases in which full-time students are served in specific classrooms within those centres. However, there are also specific special educational centres in which students with severe developmental disorders, severe mental retardation, profound or multiple disabilities are enrolled.

<sup>11</sup> In the current Spanish educational system, we have three types of education: non-university, university and that known as "special regime" that are linked to sport, art and languages. As regards non-university education, we have early childhood education (non-compulsory and ranging from 0 to 6 years old, with 3 to 6 years old being free); primary education (from 6 to 12 years old) and compulsory secondary education (from 12 to 16 years old) - both free and compulsory for the entire population. From here, we have a non-compulsory secondary stage that includes higher educational studies (up to 18 years old) and basic and intermediate vocational training (up to 17 years old).

<sup>12</sup> Currently, the actions referred to as "educational compensation" actions are aimed at students "who present significant curricular lags and are not explained by the existence of special educational needs or learning difficulties, but may be related to their personal, family and/or social history; with irregular schooling due to periods of hospitalisation or home care, due to the fact that they belong to families employed in seasonal jobs or who carry out itinerant professions, due to compliance with judicial sentences that affect regular attendance to the educational centre, due to school absenteeism at origin or at destination and due to late incorporation into the educational system" (Regional Government of Andalusia, 2019).

<sup>13</sup> In the case of regions with two official languages, the teaching of Spanish is prioritised in these classrooms.

<sup>14</sup> We authors separate ourselves from considering these examples as "inclusive/integrative" practices (hence, we affirm that they are "identified" as such, by various sectors of society and the world of education, but not by ourselves). Rather the opposite would be true: examples of educational exclusion, with the excuse of working towards "inclusion/integration".

<sup>15</sup> Active from 1978 to 1986, they were segregated schools created exclusively for gypsy boys and girls identified as "marginal", who were attributed few characteristics that could be integrated into ordinary schools and which were created through an agreement between the Catholic Church and the Ministry of Education (Salinas, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> It is necessary to make a note in this regard, given that a paragraph is included in which it is clarified that schooling and teaching is not understood as differentiated by gender, thus shielding educational agreements with private schools that carry out these practices, which, in our opinion, are segregating practices.

<sup>17</sup> Organic Law 4/2000 dated 11 January, on the rights and freedoms of foreigners in Spain and their social integration, partially amended in 2003, 2009, 2011 and 2012.

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