

## Chapter 30

# Inclusion and Universal Design for Learning in Italian Schools

**Paola Aiello**

*University of Salerno, Italy*

**Diana Carmela Di Gennaro**

*University of Salerno, Italy*

**Carmen Palumbo**

*University of Salerno, Italy*

**Iolanda Zollo**

*University of Salerno, Italy*

**Maurizio Sibilio**

*University of Salerno, Italy*

### ABSTRACT

*The present theoretical-argumentative research is aimed to put in evidence the Italian perspective on the use of technologies for promoting inclusion in school contexts. In a society which uses technological innovations and multimediality in all the domains of everyday life, indeed, school is required to explore the potential and meaning of educational technologies. During the last years, in light of these new requirements, national and international educational policies have tried to take advantage of the opportunities offered by new technologies to create flexible educational pathways so as to ensure equal access to information and learning processes, by promoting the elimination of all barriers that deny students the right to education. In the perspective of inclusive education, technologies within the educational field can't only represent a compensatory tool to support students with disabilities or with learning difficulties, but they also definitely play a very important role in the reconfiguration of learning environments by creating the necessary conditions for the promotion of each student's differences and abilities.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In school contexts the development of inclusive education requires the use and promotion of technological tools able to allow the reformulation of educational practices and the construction of new environments for the realization of teaching-learning processes, able to foster the engagement and the promotion of individual differences.

The compensatory didactic approach focuses mainly on the use of technology within educational contexts with the aim of facilitating the learners' development in case of special educational needs as it starts from the assumption that technological tools tend to be able to cope with the complexity of learning difficulties as a result of the disability or disorder.

The compensatory logic which often characterizes the use of technologies within school contexts can be two-fold: on the one hand, it reflects the need to facilitate the educational pathway of students with particular needs; on the other hand, it can be seen as a tendency to delegate certain processes to the tool so as to ensure the access to school contexts and contents without modifying them.

This concept of technologies, with regard to the educational domain and to students with any kind of problems and disabilities, recalls traditional integration policies, which look at technologies as a tool for compensating the deficit with the aim of filling the gap among students. Instead, most recent pedagogical approaches tend to the development of an inclusive school, where each student's abilities can be supported and promoted (Thomas et al., 1998; Medeghini, 2008).

Adopting a real inclusive approach as regards technologies means, in fact, to rethink the latter not only in the light of the opportunities they can offer during the teaching-learning process, but also and especially to re-elaborate the educational contexts and environments to allow the full and active engagement of all students in the formative process (Fornasa, Medeghini, 2003).

The need of a real inclusive approach to technologies, which can modify didactic strategies and contexts, refers to all those tools that can have a deep impact on the whole class such as Multimedia Interactive Boards, electronic calculators, virtual learning environments, the Web and all digital didactic contents. These tools, indeed, represent a valid and effective didactic support aiming to add value to the different abilities of students. In this perspective, it is possible to overcome the compensatory logic which characterizes the so-called assistive technologies to adopt a new perspective which considers technological tools not only as *cognitive amplifiers* but also as *social amplifiers* as regards students with disabilities or learning difficulties (Mangiatordi & Pischetola, 2010) and as a real *trigger* of the traditional school system (Sibilio, 2013).

## EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGIES AND INTEGRATION IN ITALY: A HISTORICAL OUTLINE

There are many international documents that have highlighted the importance of technologies in all fields, including the educational one, putting in evidence the need for flexible pathways and accessible resources.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (1993) and the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (2001), in particular, have advocated for the importance of making technological environments accessible to avoid the risk that the use of technologies can generate new forms of social exclusion. Moreover, the European Commission has highlighted in several documents how the power of technologies has to be used to support people with disabilities, removing all obstacles

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