

Chapter 13

An Online Master of Diversity and Social Inclusion in Italy

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ABSTRACT

Contextualizing the development of the Master's program on diversity and inclusion at country level and specifically in Italy, this chapter has several objectives: providing an overview of regulations and approaches promoted in Italy for inclusion in education; defining the objective for a Master's program in the country; introducing International Telematic University UNINETTUNO experiences in inclusive research and education activities targeting several vulnerable groups, ranging from migrants and refugees, to ageing people, to students with sensory disabilities; presenting the main references for technological challenges in accessibility; and summarizing the specific dimensions to be addressed for the development of an international Master's program focusing on diversity and inclusion.

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF EDUCATIONAL INCLUSION IN ITALY

To fully understand inclusion in Italy, we must seek the roots of this construct at the foundation of Italian law: the constitution. The Italian Republic¹ guarantees the right to education (Article 34) and states specifically that “disabled and handicapped persons are entitled to receive education and vocational training” (Article 38). Article 3 combines these rights with the “duty of the Republic to remove any obstacles constraining the freedom and equality of citizens in order to ensure the full development of the human person”. The process to achieve these goals has been marked by many historical stages, which have significantly changed Italian pedagogy, not only from a legislative point of view. The “Integrazione scolastica” law was the first step towards the realisation of the constitutional principles. With law 118/71 and subsequent law 517/77 on the subject, has been possible the institutional overcoming of special schools and differential classes for disabled pupils and, consequently, the scholastic organisation has

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been prepared to guarantee school inclusion within the “Normal classes”. This educational revolution has enabled teachers to experiment with a variety of new teaching methods enjoyed by all students (Ianes et al., 2014) in a pioneer approach universal learning and teaching for all (Hall et al., 2012). Despite the good intentions of the law, many problems persisted for pupils both with regard to real inclusion and access to educational content and few authors underline that the theoretical framework was strongly rooted in an individual-medical model of disability (Ianes et al., 2020). The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities² and its Optional Protocol (A/RES/61/106) adopted on 13 December 2006 at the United Nations addresses this vision. The Convention, ratified by Italy in 2009, is the result of decades of work to change attitudes to persons with disabilities. From persons with disabilities as “objects” of charity, medical treatment and social protection towards persons with disabilities as “subjects” with rights, who are capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent as well as being active members of society. In the same year, the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research published the “Guidelines for the integration of pupils with disability at school”³. These guidelines aimed to increase the quality of educational interventions for pupils with physical, intellectual and sensory impairment. From 2010 the law 170/2010 establishes and include in the risk category students with specific learning disabilities like dyslexia, dysgraphia, dysorthographia and dyscalculia. The next year (2011), “Guidelines for the right to study of pupils and students with specific learning disorders”⁴ were published, specifying educational and didactic measures to support the teaching and learning processes.

The inclusion process that seeks to include a broader target student population continues through the Ministerial Directive of December 2012, on ‘Measures for pupils with special needs and local organisations for school inclusion’⁵ cites all the initiatives taken for pupils with different types of Special Education needs (SEN): pupils with assessed disabilities, specific developmental disorders or socio-economic, linguistic and cultural disadvantages.

Current Regulations in Italy

This section will describe the national landscape in terms of laws and regulations promoting inclusion, specifically in the education sector. In Italy, the right to education of disabled people⁶ is guaranteed by the Law n.104/1992⁷ - later integrated with law n.17/1999⁸ - ensuring their social integration and highlighting their right to be informed and educated. The same law guarantees the provision of didactical and technical material, programs and specialised languages of adequately qualified staff (teaching or not).

The term “Buona Scuola”⁹ refers to Law 107 proposed by the Renzi government in 2015. The goal of this legislative measure is to reaffirm the central role of the school, improve the skills all learners’ levels of education, based on individual learning times and styles and combat socio-cultural inequalities and prevent school dropout (Barone & Argentin, 2016). The new legislation also aims to create an open school, conceived as a permanent laboratory for research, experimentation and didactic innovation, which guarantees the right to study and equal opportunities and achievement. There have been several changes in teaching. The reform introduced the PTOF (Three-year training offer plan) which replaces the POF as a curricular, extracurricular, educational and organisational planning document for individual schools. It provides for greater flexibility in teaching, so that in the last three years of high school specific autonomous curricular paths can be activated. In this way, students will have the opportunity to personalise their school path, based on individual preferences, also in view of a post-school career.

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