WHEN THE SOCIETY DOES NOT SEE THE FUTURE – WHAT DOES «DISABILITY» MEAN?

Abstract. The article aims to define the changes and evolution of our global economical system and the role played by education in this moment and in particular the education of disabled people.

Methods. Methodological basis for analyzing this problem lies in a systematic approach to studying social processes, and analyze the social systems and the social view and expectation on education and in particular on the inclusive educational systems.

Results. Politicians don’t know what to do concerning disabled people in the future. They don’t need disabled people anymore, (cause the industrial society has ended) but they have to support them. Consider that social policies have, in the last years, enhanced the working age and this will mean increasing the level of disabilities and disabled people.

Scientific novelty of the article concludes in well-founded proof that the solutions are on the mouth of every politician in the world of education, but from the words to the reality we cannot measure the real involvement in maintaining their promises.

The only real possibility is to change the teachers and school’s system: a paradigm where the students will have no more to adapt themselves to the teacher’ lessons, but the teachers will adjust their work to the different students, transforming the slogan «nobody’s left behind» into a reality.

Practical significance lies in the conclusion that a new possibility for the society is the paradigm that I have called a school of the future as «Learning Possibilities» environment.

Keywords: disability, impairment, models of inclusions, educational systems, industrial society, learning possibilities.

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КАКОВО БУДУЩЕЕ ЛЮДЕЙ С ОГРАНИЧЕННЫМИ ВОЗМОЖНОСТЯМИ В ПОСТИНДУСТРИАЛЬНОМ ОБЩЕСТВЕ?

Аннотация. Цель статьи – рассмотреть в связи с эволюцией глобальной экономической системы и изменением роли образования в современном мире проблемы обучения людей с ограниченными возможностями в Европе, а именно – в Италии.

Методы. Методологические основы анализируемых аспектов образования заключаются в системном подходе к изучению социальных процессов, социальной системы и общественного мнения относительно инклюзивного обучения.

Результаты и научная новизна. Показано, что в Европе существуют различные образовательные модели обучения людей с ограниченными возможностями здоровья: инклюзивная, интегративная, смешанная и специальное образование. Выделены критерии, на основе которых устанавливаются отличия одной модели от другой. Это прежде всего неодинаковое школьное пространство, образовательная среда и возможности социализации ребенка. Сопоставлены «плюсы» и «минусы» интегративной и инклюзивной моделей образования. Инклюзивная система позволяет создать для учащихся равное образовательное пространство, но характеризуется замедленными темпами обучения и отсутствием ресурсов для введения в учебный процесс дополнительных учебных часов, из-за чего могут страдать наиболее способные дети. Интегративная модель дает большую возможность развиваться, формировать социальные навыки и умения, получать новые знания, в частности за счет увеличения учебной нагрузки, которая может негативно сказаться на здоровье и психологическом состоянии детей-инвалидов.

Автор поднимает один из наиболее острых вопросов, актуальных для современной Италии, где распространена инклюзивная модель образования. В итальянских школах в одном классе могут учиться дети с особыстями развития и здоровые дети. Чем больше учащихся с ограниченными возможностями, тем меньше наполняемость класса. Для каждого ученика разрабатывается индивидуальный учебный план, но учителю в силу загруженности не всегда удается обеспечить должные условия развития и обучения каждому ребенку, поэтому родители начинают выражать свое беспокойство по поводу реализации права детей на качественное образование. Другой проблемой является огромный поток мигрантов в Европу. Некоторые родители, желающая...
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In the last year of researches I have been thinking about the changes and the evolution of our global economical system and the role played by education in this moment and in particular the education of disabled people. It happened to me to fall into this condition and to experiment how the system is not ready to accept differences [3]. This is why I think everyone is disabled.

In my studies, I have been travelling around Europe and I have visited almost all models of inclusion, integration and segregation of disabled students. I realize that there is a certain confusion about the European society and its future. Therefore I have decided to focus on the meaning of Disability when the European society does not see its future.
Disability

Disability is a concept developed to define the limitation imposed by a system created by the industrial world [2]. We are not all alike in front of a system measuring the persons for what they can provide and give to the industrial complex. In one way or another everybody has a difficulty in some fields: learning a foreign language or math or science or any other topic, or move faster or see perfectly, etc.

Starting from the meaning of word disability we understand that all of us are disabled or will be it sooner or later in the life circle [2]. Therefore we have to consider various types and typologies of disabilities incurring during our lives, permanent or momentary, happening when we cannot.

DPI (Disabled People International) Definition of Impairment and Disability.

Impairment: The functional limitation within the individual caused by physical, mental and sensory impairment.

Disability: the loss or limitation of opportunity of taking part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers (DPI 1982).

The dis-able people can be impaired or not, and during the history they have been appointed with different definitions: the most common medical one is demented or stupid, with the consequences that the mentally impaired people were secluded in special hospitals or left alone to die (Shakespeare 1992). This was the main integrative strategy used for centuries, when to be unable to work meant to die in a very early age or to be segregated [3].

Then the industrial society asked the medical system to find a possibility to make those «parasites» useful and to enhance some of their potential abilities to be useful in some matters to the system. The name appointed to those disabled people became «different able people», underlining the possibility to get some abilities useful for the industry or the modern society.

Interesting is to see the construction of the word Im-Pair-Ment which means: I have difficulty in doing something because I'm physically different, therefore I can fulfil less actions. This means that maybe one cannot jump on a chair but it doesn't mean that he is disabled or «wrong». It is only because the chair has been made not to consider the persons but the role of the chair itself. These words have being created by the industrial system: everything that we know is coming from the industry, everything and everyone must serve the system. This is why the system has conformed to itself almost everything, in order to find a possibility to create the environment for a general society without respecting or even considering the persons, the individuals, the differences.
This is why the definition «disability» exists: because one is not able to work like the others and this allows the system to pay less for one’s working time.

**Examples of Exclusion** (Gleeson 1999; 137):

- physical barriers to movement for disabled people, including broken surfaces (streets, guttering, pavements) which reduce or annul the mobility and mobility aids (wheel chairs, walking frames);
- building architecture which excludes the entry of anyone unable to use stairs and hand-operated doors;
- public and private transport modes which assume that drivers and passengers are non-impaired;
- public information presented in forms that assume a common level of visual and aural ability.

Why do we have to define people as disabled if it is the society setting up barriers and difficulties in order to optimize the results and the profit? Is the human being a battery to use and then to define as disabled when decreasing its level of Performance? The problem therefore is what the society is asking a person and which are the perspectives to look at models of inclusion in this weary economical period of time.

**Economical society**

In the last centuries we have seen an alternation of different kind of economical societies: merchant, industrial, social industrial after the second world war, and now the industrial society, employing half of the European population, has moved to Asiatic countries. We are now into the investments, shares, banks society. There is not much job left in the European industrial system. The politicians, on the other hand, are trying to invent the new European society. They focus on research, maths and science future generation, but these dimensions of the society will be able to employ only 2 or 3% of the European population. The second possibility is the trading, services system, linked with tourism and business, but it will not be able to employ the massive amount of populations discharged by the industrial system.

In this context, some European countries are more and more dependent on the European central bank support (quantitative easing) to survive and therefore are living a constraint of resources to invest in the public sectors [4].

The main important question in this moment is why, in almost every European country, there is a string tension towards disabled people, towards poor people, towards immigrants or refuges. All of them are disabled for the system.
If it is true that all of us are disabled, there are different categories of disabled people and in the concept of disability we can also include the concept of poverty.

This is just an example of some conditions of disability. We can imagine a woman, who is normally less paid than a man, has less power and less possibility of career; continuing with these considerations we should imagine a black woman, then a black impaired woman, then a black impaired poor woman and then a black impaired poor woman where all the family resources are managed by a man. In some cases, women are the last step of the society, because towards children there is much attention at school (like special budget for inclusion or integration), but if a mature woman, not useful anymore for the industrial system in which we are worth only if we produce, becomes disabled she is without hesitation rejected by the system. The same system that gives a floating value to human working hours and doesn’t consider anymore the human being.

We should also talk about the concept of poverty and its implication on disability. An example is what has happened in March 2016 in Italy: for a degenerative disease (like cancer or ASL) a teacher suddenly became unable to work but disabled (less able to fulfill her task for a certain salary foreseen). She has been immediately fired by the school administration and passed under the assistance system. That means from an average salary of 1700 euro per month to a support of 500 euro per month. In other words, she has been condemned to die. With such a shame of support by the government in Italy nobody can live, but in some European countries, like Bulgaria, it is considered an average salary because the cost of life is less expensive. The concept of poverty therefore has infinity of aspects going far beyond the quantity of money possessed by a person, in a certain country, at certain age. It is strictly connected with the personal psychology, the society conditions, the access to the social possibility, the internal family’s rules, or the access to the health system [16].

I don’t want to deal with the contract between government and citizens, which in some European countries in the last two decades has been fully erased, because it is not the aim of this article but this implies a new review role of the disability in the society and its implication in the social life.

**Labour market**

As previously explained, in Italy disabled people, since few years ago, have been called differently able because the industrial system wanted to provide them with a little, but very important, role in the society, letting them feeling useful and part of the system.
This philanthropic attitude is showing nowadays its real face where, due to the progressive substitution of the workers role played by automation and robots, the work integration of diversity able people has become a huge problem to solve. We are at the end of the European industrial system, which is moving to Asiatic countries and substituting persons with automatic and robotic processes [19].

Disabled people in this moment are still living in a limbo, they are still untouched, in some countries, for the following reasons:

● because they are protected by lobbies activity of disabled people’s association in politics;
● because the modern society has grown up protecting the weaker and disables (see the inclusive models of education and the philanthropic society) and if they would strike the news will be reported in all the magazines and mass media. They have a strong political influence;
● because around disability there is a huge economical market, pharmaceutical production, assisted technologies, tools and equipment for home life and working places (special environments) and a huge investment in assistance, from special needs teachers and assistants, from associations, from open daily centres for disables. To dismount and disinvest in this structure means to destroy a strong economy in every country.

Furthermore, politicians don’t know what to do about disabled people in the future. They don’t need disabled people anymore, but they have to support them. Consider that social policies have, in the last years, enhanced the working age and this will mean increasing the level of disabilities and disabled people.

The society’s view on disability

But what is like to be considered disability in our society? From a religious aspect there is still a tendency, very strong and strict in the past, to consider disabled people as a result of sin and guilty, parents’ mistakes and in some traditions ancestors’ fault since seven previous generations.

From a social point of view, it is a strong economical aspect, a problem to solve such as labour non-integration, waste of resources; disability is not appealing to show, it is considered a disease, there is still a feeling of danger and infection concerning the disabled.

Luckily most of these considerations are not very common and most people consider the presence of disabled in classrooms a chance to promote social values and help the students grow as persons in a correct pedagogical and human environment.
The factor of the disabled dignity has been moving the general consciousness since the young revolution of ‘68, where everyone was considered equal. Furthermore, all the economic system running around the disability, in medical field, assistive technologies, education and psychology, has represented a truly welfare industry, which continues nowadays. This system is not easy to dismount and it represents an important part of the Governmental investment in the society.

**Educational system in Europe**

In all European countries teachers and the educational system are considered the basis of society and in some European countries teachers are seen like the column of the new world. But teachers are treated differently from country to country.

Except some Scandinavian and other few countries or some wealthy society, teachers have the lowest wages of any category (even in Italy) and at the same time there is a huge stress on their role in being able to interpret the social changes and to adapt themselves to those changes.

Why everyone is asking teachers more work time and bureaucracy, to teach in crowded classes to more and more students with disabilities or difficulties and to adapt to the new social models, to be trained, to learn new modern pedagogy, to be technologically updated and at the same time to remain at work up to 67, 68, 69 years old?

It seems a kind of schizophrenic system. In reality there is a special puzzle drawn for them and for the society. The society looks at the teacher and the school, the politicians are doing the same. Everyone is looking at the school and at the teacher to solve the future challenges.
model of inclusion of impaired people affected by any kind of disabilities is focusing on the teacher.

If we think that the changes of society imply very rapid changes, it becomes very hard to understand why the educational system sees year after year a strong reduction of its economic resources. This seems a contradiction, but we will see how this is in reality a matter of fact of a generation of politicians with a quite confused perspective for a future human dimension [4].

In this context Education, as it has been organized 30 years ago, is a burden to carry and it seems less and less important for the Governments. The situation becomes even more dramatic considering the disability context and the very expensive inclusive educational systems in Europe.

The world of the disabled has lived a period of well-being of resources arriving from the Government, for different reasons. The philanthropic view of the society, derived from some National constitution and the United Nation Charter of Human Rights.

**Models of disability integration in education**

There are different educational models in Europe for the disabled people. Every one of them represents a possible solution with pros and cons to be considered carefully.

The models of disability in Education varies from country to country: inclusive system, integration system, a mixed system and special school's system. The main difference between the inclusive system and the integration system lays in the school environment and in the role of the special needs teachers.

In Italy in every school since more than 40 years exists only the inclusive system, where, in every classroom the students group is made of: immigrants, with Specific Learning Difficulties, impaired students, (down, cerebral palsy and multiply learning difficulties) and mainstream students all together following the same lessons.

Every disabled student has a Special Needs Teacher and in the heaviest cases an assistant. The special needs teachers prepare, at the beginning of the school year, an Individual Educational Plan and all the curricular teachers of the class have to read it and agree with it. This is because the special needs teacher does not work only for the disabled student, but mainly for his/her inclusion with the classmates. The Individual Educational Plan has to be integrated onto the POFT (three yearly Educational School Offer) and therefore distributed to all the community by electronic format. It is a kind a school manifesto. The presence of a student with a disability «certified by external authorities» (with the ICF certification) allows the reduction of a certain number of student per class. In other words: more disabled, less students.
Furthermore, in the inclusive system, in the same classroom there are also students with severe and light learning difficulties (like dyslexic, dysgraphic and dyscalculic), with ADHD, social– economical, disadvantages or immigrants (they are defined under the category of SEN – Special Educational Needs). For them the curricular teacher has to prepare a Personal Plan and supporting them in the learning process during the whole school year.

Into the disabled and learning disabilities students category the Italian Government includes: ADHD, cerebral palsy, autistic spectrum, Down syndrome, heavily impaired, multiple and profound learning disabilities.

The families of disabled students

Since the society and the political choices are constraining the resources and possibilities of integration of disabled people, to which we can also add the concurrence of the huge waves of immigrants and refugees present in Europe, the families are more and more aggressive towards the teachers and they want to be able to tell them what to do and how to do it in classroom. They are suffering and very much scared about their children future and they want to protect them.

In some countries like Italy families are not allowed to go into the school and they cannot tell any teacher what to do; they can only ask what is going on but without interfering with the educational plan and the teachers decisions [2].

The families of disabled students have some discordant opinion about the model of inclusion and integration in the educational system of their children. Integration means that a group of disabled work together, inside the school in separate classrooms but with some moments together with the other students. The feeling of safe contrasts a bit with the model of inclusion where the students are all together in the same classrooms. Inclusion is a challenge, there is the risk to be mocked or to receive jokes or to be bullied, but at the same time it is a «space» for the possibilities, the common activities, the enthusiasm, the emotional learning processes and a new approaching to learning processes.

The students’ families also have different opinions about the two models:

- integration is seen as safe environment, a protection of disabled students, a better learning environment for their children, a respect of the differences in a philanthropic way, a social pride of taking care of the disabled. The families, both of disabled and other students love this system very much because they feel the protection for their children, they feel the students assisted by the schools and not neglected. Integration can be seen as a protecti-
When the society does not see the future – what does «disability» mean?

on, safe environment, but at the same time as a devious form of exclusion and segregation;

- inclusion is seen by some families as a way to have less lessons, to lose time and to acquire less abilities, slowing learning processes in a society asking more skills. On the other hand, it is seen as a way to learn from the differences, to respect the other, to develop an empathic attitude, to have the patience to wait, to participate in the cooperative learning processes and to build a peer education society.

In this context we can consider the role of the special needs teacher and the impact on the society. Special needs teachers are the link between teachers and students, between students and society. They harmonize the situation, they are pedagogically prepared to organize common activities and to enhance the level of «nobody left behind» strategy. About their preparation and role, I will add more detail in the future. Their role in Italy is not an assistance role, they prepare didactic material for the classroom, support the curricular teachers, and above all the students for letting them all feel accepted in their diversities.

A new paradigm

The solutions are on the mouth of every politician in the world of education, but from the words to the reality we cannot measure the real involvement in maintaining their promises.

The only real possibility is to change the teachers and school’s system: a paradigm where the students will have no more to adapt themselves to the teacher’ lessons, but the teachers will adjust their work to the different students, transforming the slogan «nobody’s left behind» into a reality.

Here we can start a new chapter about my observation in some primary schools in 2016 where the valorisation of the pupils peculiarities and abilities comes first than any kind of evaluation and assessment and the result has always been personalized. A paradigm that I have called a school of the future as «Learning Possibilities» environment.

References