

MARIATERESA CAIRO
MARIA CONCETTA CARRUBA

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT AND MEDIATED LEARNING IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN EUROPE

In collaboration with ASuMIE Project Team



VITA E PENSIERO

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PEDAGOGIA E SCIENZE DELL'EDUCAZIONE

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CHAPTER SECOND

Contributions

2.1. ON THE ROAD TO INCLUSION: 7 PARTNER COUNTRIES

Mariateresa Cairo and Maria Concetta Carruba



Like a true Odyssey, the ASuMIE project allowed for an articulated journey to delve into how the education and welfare systems in the seven project partner countries find their place in the European dimension. Like Odysseus, the journey shared with the project partners has been one of true knowledge, awareness, and the desire to promote shared good practices in the area of Special Educational Needs.

The process of Europeanization is fundamentally a process in which East and West Countries and North and South Countries, despite the different nationalities think of a common future, expressing the Euro-

pean values of tolerance, for instance as regards religion, cultural and ethnical minorities, health, and gender differences. European Countries are witnessing rapid changes in cultural and socio-economic habits and practices. Research says that these changes are due to globalization, mass immigration, and technological development. It is interesting to understand how the school system of every partner Country has adapted to this new situation. Then, it is interesting to inquire if the way disabled people are represented has changed in the last years, bringing about a transformation in the methods and methodologies in schools, relationships among schools – families – support services, and life projects for disabled people. But every European Country in has its own legislative system when it comes to special education and inclusive education. The situation in former communist countries is certainly one of openness to proposals coming from the European Union, but it is also one of caution as European proposals need to be gradually merge with the customs and cultures of these peoples and territories. Let us not forget that Slovenia, the Czech Republic, and Bulgaria are also inhabited by some minorities who struggle to be both economically and culturally integrated (Roma and Jews, for example), and that forcing certain processes of adaptation can lead to rejection and resistance which could otherwise be avoided. The way forward to keep the principles of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2012) alive is not that of a forced colonization, nor t that of individualism and socio-economic liberalism, but that of the search for the right balance between rights and duties when it comes to participating in the political, economic and social life of each country based on the values of dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity, right of citizenship and justice. Everyone mushe be given the opportunity to participate. A right to equality that is fair and starts by compensating for any disadvantages, whatever they may be: “In European cultural policies, the definition of culture has been interpreted as following an anthropological view that emphasizes shared values and cultural production and practices as underlying elements of all human behavior, and sees culture as a key arena in which contestations over identities and rights are played out’ [...]. Although culture (and cultural consumption) is often framed in European cultural policies in terms of belonging, it nevertheless often excludes various groups of marginalized or dispossessed people [...]. Following the interest in the centralization of European integration, the ideal of unity within diversity, repeated again and again in European policy documents, became understood as arising from embracing a set of ‘common’ (cultural/culturalized) values, such as democracy and human rights, or valuing certain freedoms, such as gender equality, freedom of speech,

and individualism [...]. In this discourse, differences in ways of life are considered assets as long as they do not conflict with these 'common' values and freedoms. [...]" (Lahdesmaki T. et al., 2020, p. 46). The greatest risk affecting European countries is that of locking themselves into nationalism, which produces the exacerbation of forms of racism and stigma toward individuals and groups or tensions between peoples such that they lead to war (as is happening in Ukraine). Fighting all forms of discrimination starting in childhood (early intervention for children aged 0-3) may be the best preventive tool against ignorance and violence, both symbolic and physical: "...proposing that discrimination arises not from the intrinsic nature of the child's disability but rather from a rejection of difference, poverty, social isolation, prejudice, ignorance, and lack of service and support. Furthermore, it pointed out that in cultures where disability is viewed as a curse or punishment, a child born with an 'impairment' is blamed as the embodiment of past failure, inadequacy, or sins and that female children with disabilities experience the most severe forms of discrimination and harassment" (Nastasi B.K. - Hart S.N., ed. by, 2020, p. 503). Specialists and teachers caring for students with disabilities in the European countries represented in the ASuMIE research encounter three different types of schools: 1) mainstream school system: the student attends the common (ordinary) school aided by a special educational support unit - internal and/or external to the school; 2) shared school system: the student attends differentiated classes in common (ordinary) schools and/or partially attends the common school (sharing the timetable); 3) special school system: the student attends the special school/rehabilitation center for the whole day. This different organization of schools in the countries in our sample created quite a few problems in comparing the concepts of inclusion, reasonable accommodation, and accessibility, which are considered fundamental by all, but in practice implemented differently depending on the school systems and laws. Further, while each country, since the 2000s has aligned its national laws since with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, they have applied the principle of inclusion according to different criteria and logic. Moreover, it would appear that the countries considered do not intend to follow a predefined model of an ideal school, but want to maintain their own school organization, as they glimpse into the 'roots' of their identity. This is the case not only in Slovenia, the Czech Republic, and Bulgaria, which share a medical-psychological approach to disability, which sees Vygotskij as an authorized representative, and in Russian psychology, the foundations of their best practices and activities but also in Portugal and Italy where the school represents an important point of ref-

erence to guarantee the maintenance of a democratic culture, through good practices of socio-emotional and metacognitive education. It follows that focusing too much attention on school systems and changing them to include people with disabilities does not seem a winning strategy. Instead, it seems more effective to promote school culture, policies, and good practices, but above all social, welfare, and labor practices that facilitate the construction of life paths for people with disabilities (long-life education, life project, individual support plan). People with disabilities, which this survey considers, are the subject of many myths and prejudices centered on disabilities rather than abilities. It is necessary to think about and develop a general public/mass idea about the various abilities of people with disabilities. There is a need to link the world of education with the world of work, to overcome the reluctance of employers to open up employment opportunities, including programs to support the creation of inclusive workplaces. Future directions for this anti-discrimination movement should enhance an empowerment approach, which: reaches the majority rather than just a few services around the world (effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance of professional service); develops parent and family participation and support (including through public grants); plans individualized educational programs and educational differentiation as common practice in schools; improves needs-based assessment (dynamic assessment) rather than priority labeling (static assessment); and puts into place a process that needs public and private funding to prioritize inclusive education with continuity and periodic verification for individuals and services. It is important to create continuity between IEP/ISP (Individual Educational Plan/Individual Support Plan) and Life Project (work, leisure, independent living): “Disability is just a way of perception and it is relative. At the same time, whether the disability is temporary or becomes permanent depends on the context, the environment, and its members. Acceptance of diversity and individual differences should be a fundamental part of any curriculum in any culture, from the very beginning, to instill in budding young minds the central aspect of ‘inclusion’ [...] Once acceptance of differences and diversity becomes an integral part of life, implementation of inclusive transformation can occur spontaneously in various ways. There is a need for a holistic model that includes, on the one hand, identification/assessment, intervention, and, on the other hand, strategic actions needed by all professionals from different subjects and disciplines to facilitate an inclusive environment that also includes attitudes or context. There is a need for mandatory content in every course or study that teaches the acceptance of diversity and the mutual benefits of diversity in society” (Halder S. - Argyropoulos V., 2019,

pp. 683-684). It is necessary to include such action-oriented programs, activities, and practices making them obligatory.

2.2. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN BELGIUM

*Beno Schraepen*¹

Legal framework

a. International Human Rights Law

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was signed by Belgium on 26th January 1990 and ratified on 16th December 1991. Belgium signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) on 30th of March 2009 and ratified it on the 2nd of July 2009.

b. National legislation and educational policies

Belgium has a history of segregated education and both special primary and secondary schools operate in all three Communities. Since 2009 however there have been increased efforts to support inclusion through policy (United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006) (European Parliament, Directorate – General for Internal Policies, Country Report on Belgium for the Study on Member States’ Policies for Children with Disabilities, 2013, p. 11).

Federal level

At a Federal level, Belgium guarantees the right of free education to all in Article 24 of its Constitution. Compulsory education starts on 1st September of the year in which a child turns 6 years old and lasts 12 full school years.

Article 24

§ 1. Education is free; any preventive measure is forbidden; the punishment of offences is regulated only by the law or federate law. The community offers free choice to parents. The community organises non-denominational education. This implies in particular the respect of the philosophical, ideological or religious beliefs of parents and pupils.

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