

Light and shadows in the inclusive Italian school system: a reply to Giangreco, Doyle & Suter (2012)

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Abstract

The article attempts to provide some answers to the many questions raised by Giangreco, Doyle and Suter (2012). Two aspects have been analysed in detail: 1. Research findings on pull out phenomena regarding students with disabilities and with learning disabilities; 2. Recent Italian laws for inclusive education. Pull out phenomena characterize the majority of the school careers of persons with disability. Furthermore, the phenomenon concerns students with learning disabilities as well, although in smaller percentages. The widespread occurrence of pull out suggests - although further research is needed in this field - the presence of a risky trend of micro-exclusionary processes within inclusive schools systems. As far as recent Italian laws for inclusive education are concerned, a broadening of the category of students with a right to individualised learning can be observed, from disability to a much broader conceptualisation of special educational need. This can be understood as a trend from integration towards inclusion, although a medical orientation is still noticeable in Italian inclusive school legislation.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Pull out, Integrazione Scolastica, Educational Policy

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1. Pull out phenomena in the fully-inclusive Italian school

Since the 1960s, high levels of activism and shifts in public opinion have brought about a considerable de-institutionalisation in governmental responses to the issues of disability, mental illness and children without families. The very fact that the movements which have produced these changes are so deeply-rooted in personal values and political ideas has prevented serious and practical discussion of how to put these important changes into effect without betraying the original intentions upon which they were founded.

After overcoming the initial difficulties and resistance, a process in most cases characterised by enthusiasm, dialogue and a constructive attitude, almost all Italians came to take for granted that the integration of disabled pupils into mainstream schools was of itself an asset, and that there was therefore no need to question or examine the situation too closely. Indeed, Italian pedagogical culture has no tradition of empirical research, and it is only very recently that evidence-based interventions have begun to be discussed. There has been no shortage of discussion regarding school integration, but this has mostly been in order to report cases of dysfunction or where students' rights have not been respected, to suggest or document more effective ways of actually implementing integration, or lastly, to compare legislative with administrative choices which seemed to undermine the quality of integration at all levels. Some of the structural aspects of the Italian integration system were taken to be unalterable; for example, the need for a medical diagnosis before additional school resources could be accessed, or else rendered untouchable the role of the support teacher, a small army (almost 100,000 in 2012/13) which is always prepared to battle for its own existence. The small amount of published research (Gherardini & Nocera, 2000; Medeghini, Fornasa, Maviglia, & Onger, 2009; INVALSI, 2006) has mainly focused on investigating general aspects of the system, such as formal and procedural aspects and processes, with little in-depth analysis of what really happened in classrooms on a day-to-day basis. This was the precise aspect of integration, however, that was increasingly important as far as the key-players in integration, namely the teachers, parents and students, were concerned. They could see that pupils with disabilities were spending less and less time in class with their peers - the ideal situation - and more and more time alone with the support teachers in special classrooms assigned to that purpose. This is exactly what Giangreco, Doyle and Suter (2012) term 'pull out', a phenomenon where they ask their Italian colleagues to provide more information. Five years ago, our research team clearly highlighted, perhaps for the first time, a pattern of study based partly in the classroom and partly outside which, judging by the data, was both worrying (Canevaro,

d'Alonzo & Ianes, 2009) and increasingly prevalent as children moved from primary school up to lower secondary school. The source of the data was a questionnaire completed by 1877 families of pupils with disabilities, or by the pupils themselves with disabilities. Other studies, carried out both by ourselves and by other colleagues, have followed the initial investigation: here we will offer only a brief overview, as the publication of a specific study on the dynamics of the pull out phenomenon is still underway.

Our analysis of the perceptions, opinions and attitudes of 3230 teachers confirmed and provided further information on this phenomenon, which can be termed 'micro-exclusion' (D'Alessio, 2011). This analysis is reported in detail in several more recent publications (Ianes, Demo, & Zambotti, 2010; Canevaro, d'Alonzo, Ianes, & Caldin, 2011; Ianes & Demo, 2013; Ianes, Demo, & Zambotti, in press). The most evident and consistent finding that has emerged from these studies is that 55% of students with disabilities spend part of lesson time out of the classroom, 40% are always in class and "only" 6% are always out of class. Those students who spend part of their time studying elsewhere are out of the classroom, on average, for 30% of their lesson time, calculated by looking at the amount of time set out for out-of-class study by individual, weekly timetables. In-depth analyses of the data on teachers' perceptions were also carried out by correlating the use of pull out with the type and severity of disability, the school grade in question, the education professionals and classmates that accompanied students in out-of-class activities, their teaching methods employed in such activities, the reasons given by teachers to justify the use of out-of-class teaching, and subsequent perceptions of results in terms of learning and social interaction (Demo, 2011; Ianes *et al.*, in press). The results that emerge most clearly are that students with disability leave the classroom less often when active, co-operative, and metacognitive didactic methodologies are employed, and that students who spend all their time in class obtain better results both in terms of learning and of social development, although these positive findings do not generally extend to after-school activities.

One of the voices to which very little attention has been paid, is that of students with disabilities: research examining 46 students with Special Educational Need (SEN), of whom roughly half with intellectual disabilities, and 424 of their classmates (Ianes & Adami, 2011), based on in-depth interviews carried out by specialist personnel, has produced a worrying picture. Only 10.9% of SEN students reported that they were always in class, a figure that does not diverge significantly from that triangulated from their classmates' responses (17.7%), but which is very different from that given by their teachers (37% of SEN students always taught in class). It is interesting to note that almost 40% of SEN students

clearly expressed a wish to spend more time in class with their classmates.

Other data that emerge from both this and more recent research into SEN students and their classmates (Janes, Zambotti, & Demo, 2012), confirms the need to build triangulation and data cross-checking systems, along with the use of direct, systematic observation, in order to understand exactly the range and quality of several important aspects of school integration; for example, the help given voluntarily by classmates, avoiding the positive distortions of the data provoked by teachers' responses, which are probably influenced by social desirability factors. For example, we found that teachers reported instances of such help in 80% of cases, while in stark contrast SEN students indicated that in 85% of cases there was little or no help (an assessment with which their classmates were largely in agreement).

Research for the official assessment of the school system in Trentino, a small province in northern Italy with very high educational results (Janes *et al.*, 2012), confirms the general pull out situation for students with disability, and also for the first time including students with Learning Disabilities (LD). The results, summarized only very briefly here, show that 33% of students are in class between 90% and 100% of lesson time (based on the responses of 1920 parents), while this figure falls to a rather more modest 20.5%, according to the data reported by 2830 students. The situation improves in the case of students with LD, as will be shown in greater detail in the next section, reaching 79.6% of students always in class. The most recent data available to us, based on a sample of teachers discussed in the next section, indicates that 65.2% of students with disability stay in class for between 80% and 100% of their lesson time, as opposed to 86% of LD students. Another worrying finding is that when students with disability are out of class, 60% of the time they are alone with the support teacher, or with other SEN or LD students and the support teacher. Unfortunately, official ISTAT data, collected from school surveys in 2012 and 2013 (ISTAT, 2012; ISTAT, 2013), confirms that the pull out phenomenon is both established and widespread: for example, children with mild disability in primary school (the largest group of subjects) are in class for an average of 26.1 hours, and out of it for an average of 3.4 hours. The situation is worse for students with severe disabilities in lower secondary school, where they spend an average of 16.7 hours in class and 10.1 out of class (ISTAT, 2012; 2013). Several lines of investigation remain open, both concerning the strictly quantitative extent and the temporal and geographical dynamics of the pull out phenomenon, aspects that we would like to examine from a comparative perspective by contrasting the Italian situation with that of a country with a fully-inclusive school system that is, like Italy, experiencing a growing level of the micro-exclusion phenomenon (K. Nes, personal communication,

2012), and concerning the analysis of the many different mechanisms and factors that produce pull out (different personal variables in terms of teachers and students, as well as methodological, didactic, group, institutional, cultural and social variables, see for example Di Nuovo, 2012) and the positive and negative results that such practices generate.

2. Students with LD and school in inclusion in Italy

As was mentioned in the preceding paragraph, one of the major themes and challenges that the Italian school system has faced in recent years has been that of managing and planning teaching for students with specific learning difficulties (LD).

Law 170/2010, along with the decree of 20 July 2011 which implemented its provisions, sets out unequivocally several key points with respect to the management of school inclusion for pupils with LD. Furthermore, the law also specifically establishes procedures for early diagnosis and identification, and LD students' educational rights. The present paper, however, will not examine these aspects of inclusion in detail.

Since Law 170/2010 recognises only four categories of disability (developmental dyslexia, dysorthography, dyscalculia and dysgraphia), it is clearly evident that inclusion for LD students must be achieved through changes in teaching strategies used within the classroom.

The current legislation does not provide for additional support teachers or other supplementary roles to assist LD pupils in the classroom. Specific inclusive measures for students with LD are to be implemented through staff meetings and by individual teachers, whose knowledge of the day-to-day realities of the class in question will allow them to utilise inclusive teaching methods with the entire class and specific exemptions and compensative measures for LD students.

These are the official provisions set out by the legislation, but day-to-day implementation in schools is more problematic. As Giangreco *et al.* (2012) have highlighted, there are a large number of "grey areas" and differences between the various regions of Italy. Indeed, it cannot be said that the rules and didactic principles set out by Law 170/2010 have been implemented nationwide, in every type of school or at every level.

In this paper we will present sets of data produced by two research initiatives in an attempt to gather, for the first time, information on the management of LD pupils in day-to-day school life.

Statistically, the data is probably not very representative of the country as a

whole, where the situation is more complicated; the studies are lacking both in terms of sample size and in-depth study of the subject. However, they do represent a first step towards investigating a new phenomenon in the Italian school system, and we believe that they may prove useful in terms of contributing positively to the debate surrounding some of the specific questions posed by Giangreco *et al.* (2012) to the Italian scientific community, with respect to integration and inclusion for LD students.

3. The two research initiatives

3.1 Provincial committee for the assessment of schools in Trentino - Evaluating school quality in Trentino.

The first study was carried out on a sample of teachers, parents and students from schools in the autonomous province of Trento during the school year 2011/12, using a voluntary online questionnaire. The data was gathered as part of an initiative by the provincial committee for the assessment of schools in Trentino for the annual draft report into school quality in Trentino. Our contribution regarded inclusion quality for students with special educational needs (Janes *et al.*, in press).

The sample consisted of 573 school teachers from all school grades, except nursery school, who took part voluntarily in the research initiative, from schools from throughout Trentino. Of these, 76.3% were class teachers, 14% support teachers and 9.8% fulfilled both these roles. Furthermore, 60 of the 573 teachers that completed the questionnaire were SEN co-ordinators in their respective schools and 171 were responsible for a SEN student.

In addition to the teachers, 1920 parents of students from various grades and in different Trentino schools also completed the questionnaire, and 150 (7.8%) of these 1920 were parents of children with certified SEN. Of these, 32% were parents of children with certified disabilities according to the criteria of Law 104/92 and 58.7% were parents of LD students. The remaining 9.3% were parents of socio-culturally disadvantaged children, a category provided for in Trentino schools and recently integrated into the legislation at a national level as well, thanks to the ministerial directive of December 2012 and the ministerial circular of March 2013 (see the section of this paper entitled: 'Widening the spectrum of recognised conditions' for more details).

Finally, data gathered from 2830 upper secondary school and vocational education students, again produced using an online questionnaire, was also analysed.

3.2 Independent watchdog for integration and inclusion in schools: Study December 2012 – February 2013, “integration in context”

The second study was derived from a research project conducted by the Faculty of Education at the Free University of Bolzano, and was produced using a nationwide sample of primary school and upper and lower secondary school teachers. The object of the study, which was carried out between December 2012 and February 2013, was to investigate the ‘contexts’ in which school integration is implemented.

A total of 383 class and support teachers in 13 different Italian regions took part on a voluntary basis by completing the online questionnaire. The experiences of 299 students with disability and 184 students with LD were described.

Particularly in this second study, our research group carried out its first detailed investigation of exemptions from certain activities and compensative measures implemented for use with LD students, and of the work dynamic between any support teachers present in the class and students with LD.

In the following paragraphs we have published a preview of the results of the second study, comparing them with other research data gathered on a local basis and with pre-existing nationwide data, in order to provide a useful contribution to the debate on the following areas: students with LD and micro-exclusion phenomena; students with LD and support teachers; exemptions and compensative measures for LD students; teachers’ and families’ levels of satisfaction with inclusive education for students with LD.

4. Students with LD and micro-exclusion phenomena

As has already been mentioned in the preceding paragraph, the “micro-exclusion” (D’Alessio, 2011) that is present in Italian schools also affects students with LD, albeit a far smaller percentage when compared to students with disability. In addition to the data research carried out on a local basis in the province of Trento, and cited above in the paragraph entitled “Pull out phenomena in the fully-inclusive Italian school”, we may also consider the data produced by the independent watchdog’s nationwide study.

In response to the question: “Taking into consideration his or her entire school timetable during the last complete week (excluding holidays, strikes, meetings etc.), what percentage of school time did the LD student spend with the rest of the class participating in normal teaching activities?”. It can be seen that, out of the 184 school experiences of LD students described, in 70.7% of cases the student participated in class activities 100% of the time. A further 13% of students participated 90% of the time (table 1).

Table 1 - *Frequency and percentage of responses to the question: “Taking into consideration his or her entire school timetable during the last complete week (excluding holidays, strikes, meetings etc.), what percentage of school time did the LD student spend with the rest of the class participating in normal teaching activities?”*

| | <i>Absolute frequency</i> | <i>%</i> |
|------------|-------------------------------|----------|
| Don't know | 6 | 3.26% |
| 0 (0 %) | 2 | 1.09% |
| 10 | 1 | 0.54% |
| 20 | 1 | 0.54% |
| 30 | 3 | 1.63% |
| 40 | 1 | 0.54% |
| 50 | 1 | 0.54% |
| 60 | 2 | 1.09% |
| 70 | 6 | 3.26% |
| 80 | 7 | 3.80% |
| 90 | 24 | 13.04% |
| 100 (100%) | 130 | 70.65% |
| Total | 184 | 100% |

This data tallies closely with the results of the local study of the Trentino schools, where the parents of LD students stated that their children stayed in class between 80% and 100% of lesson time in 89.8% of cases. This was also the opinion of 87.5% of respondents in the later study - see table 1 (value obtained by adding together the frequencies for 100%, 90% and 80%).

Already, this is a clear example of where the results contradict the criteria expressed in national legislation, which does not provide for micro-exclusion

phenomena either in the case of students with disability or in the case of students with LD. Despite this, we can say with some certainty that roughly 10% of LD students spend a significant part of school time separated from the rest of the class.

The study conducted by the independent watchdog produced, somewhat surprisingly, other problematic data: of the 184 school inclusion experiences for LD students that were described in the questionnaires, in 16.3% of cases the student visited specialist or health centres for rehabilitative or therapeutic activities during school time. This is a well-known phenomenon where students with disability are concerned, but this is the first time that it has also emerged as an issue for a minority of LD students. According to our data, these visits to out-of-school centres occupy between 10% and 20% of weekly school time in 75% of the cases in which they occur. This therefore represents another problematic issue: apparently, there are not only micro-exclusion phenomena present in the classroom, but also instances of partial attendance at the school itself in order to allow time for therapeutic and rehabilitative activities.

Concerning this second finding, we currently have no further data available. However, in order to offer a more detailed description of micro-exclusion from the class, we have conducted an in-depth study of two aspects of the phenomenon: the use of support workshops, often a part of Italian schools, by LD students, and the relationship between the support teacher and the LD students.

4.1 Support workshops and LD students

Italian law does not provide for the existence of “dedicated support” classrooms; on the contrary, even the latest ministerial documents explicitly and unequivocally prohibit their use. However, in reality it is much different. This is a well-known fact to those attending schools of every type and at every grade level in Italy (with perhaps the single exception of nursery schools), and is clearly shown by the data gathered by the independent watchdog. Out of 372 responses, 68% of teachers from 13 Italian regions stated that there is a dedicated support classroom in their school.

Table 2 shows that the use of support classrooms is extremely diversified. While it is true that in a relative majority of cases the classroom is a teaching space available for use by the entire class (47.7%), it is also a fact that in roughly 20% of cases the support classroom is only used by SLD students.

We may therefore hypothesize that in the cases where LD students take part in teaching activities outside the classroom, but inside the school itself, these students have access to support workshops.

The following question concerns the professional roles involved: if it is true that LD students spend some of their time out of class, and that support work-

Table 2 - *Frequency and percentage of responses to the question: “In the school, the support classroom/workshop is considered to be...”*

| | <i>Absolute frequency</i> | <i>%</i> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------|
| Only for students with disability | 77 | 24.1% |
| For students who do not speak Italian as their mother-tongue | 26 | 8.1% |
| Only for students with difficulties (disability, SLD, attention problems, etc.) | 64 | 20.1% |
| For all class students, to make it easier to manage small-group activities | 152 | 47.7% |
| Total | 319 | 100% |

shops are common in Italian schools and are used not only by students with disability but by LD students as well, and if it is also true that neither support teachers nor any other education professionals are ever assigned to work with LD students, then who is it that manages teaching activities with these students when they leave the classroom?

In order to answer this question, we first present the data regarding the use of support classrooms by education professionals. Apart from asking what types of students used these classrooms, we also asked who taught in them (table 3).

These results show that the support classroom is in most cases available for all teaching staff, but this still only accounts for 51.6% of cases. In almost half of the cases, therefore, the classroom is a teaching space used exclusively by support teachers and other professionals supporting the integration process, including those from outside school.

In conclusion, for students with LD, we can confirm the existence of a micro-exclusion phenomenon from the teaching activities of the rest of the class in a minority of cases, and that these students have access to support classrooms/workshops, which in roughly half of these cases are described as spaces in which professionals other than the class teacher work.

Table 3 - *Frequency and percentage of responses to the item: “The support classroom/workshop in your school is intended to be used by...”*

| | <i>Absolute frequency</i> | <i>Relative frequency by choice</i> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Other professionals involved in integration management (speech and language therapists, psychomotor specialists, occupational therapists etc.) | 38 | 13.82% |
| Only support teachers and educational specialists | 95 | 34.55% |
| All teaching staff | 142 | 51.64% |
| Total | 275 | 100% |

4.2 LD students and support teachers

In the article by Giangreco *et al.* (2012), the following question was asked: “Are students who have special educational needs but who are considered not disabled (e.g., DSA, learning disabled) grouped in classes or schools with students who have disabilities in an effort to offer them support?” (Giangreco *et al.*, 2012 p. 115.)

As can be seen from the data presented in table 4, according to the independent watchdog, it is very common for LD students to study in classes where a support teacher is present. Further, in 13.6% of cases a support teacher is also present to directly support LD students, even though the legislation does not permit such use of support teachers.

Based on the data in our possession, we cannot yet confirm with any degree of certainty that LD students are deliberately placed in classes where a support teacher is present in order to facilitate their learning. This phenomenon certainly exists to some extent, but it is important to remember that there is a huge support teacher presence in all types and grades of classes; it has become the rule rather than the exception. It is therefore difficult to place LD students in classes where there is no support teacher present.

Both the number of cases in which students with disability attend school, and the length of time they stay in education are constantly increasing (Canevaro *et al.*, 2009), with the result that the presence of support teachers has been extended to almost every class, especially in the grades before the minimum school leaving age (as the data in table 4 shows).

Table 4 - *Frequency and percentage of responses to the item: “In the class you are describing, there is...”*

| | <i>Yes</i> | <i>No</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| A support teacher/educational specialist assigned to the class because there is a SLD student present | 21 13.6% | 134 86.4% | 155 100% |
| A support teacher/educational specialist assigned to the class because there are other students with disability present | 135 78.0% | 38 22.0% | 173 100% |

We believe that it is more useful to investigate how those support teachers who are present work alongside LD students, both inside and outside the class.

In general, we can confirm that it is rare for support teachers to work for a large proportion of their time directly with LD students, on an individual basis (table 5).

The data confirms that in a majority of cases (74.7%), the support teacher never works individually with the LD student outside the classroom, and that when this happens it is for a limited time out of the school timetable (between 10% and 30%) in 16.7% of cases.

However, there is a greater number of cases in which the support teacher works individually with the LD student inside the class. Indeed, a not insignificant 33.3% of respondents answered that the support teacher worked individually with the LD student for between 10% and 30% of the weekly school timetable. Similar values appear for work in small groups outside the classroom, where the support teacher spends part of his or her time working individually with LD students in class, and part of it outside the class working alongside other students with disability and SEN. This phenomenon may suggest the existence of ‘special groups’ that operate within schools during part of the timetable, and certainly merits examination and monitoring in future studies and research. This is a situation that is not unknown to those with experience of Italian schools, but it is worrying, having already emerged from previous research (Ianes *et al.*, 2010; TreElle, Caritas Italiana & Fondazione G. Agnelli, 2011; Canevaro *et al.*, 2011). These studies demonstrate a tendency toward the creation of separate groups, sometimes containing students with similar types and levels of difficulties and sometimes more diverse, in order to manage integration.

Table 5 - *Frequency and percentage of responses to the item: "Indicate the percentage of school timetable during which the class support teacher/ educational specialist works..."*

| | <i>Don't know</i> | <i>Never (0%)</i> | <i>Seldom (10-30%)</i> | <i>Frequently (40-60%)</i> | <i>Often (70-90%)</i> | <i>Always (100%)</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| ...individually with the SLD student in the class | 6 4.0% | 74 49.3% | 50 33.3% | 10 6.7% | 7 4.7% | 3 2.0% | 150 100.0% |
| ...individually with the SLD student out of class | 6 4% | 112 74.7% | 25 16.7% | 3 2.00% | 3 2.00% | 1 0.7% | 150 100.0% |
| ...with a small group of SLD students out of the class | 5 3.3% | 79 52.7% | 48 32% | 10 6.7% | 6 4.0% | 2 1.33% | 150 100.0% |
| ...adapting materials and learning strategies used by the class for use by the SLD student | 9 6.0% | 48 32.0% | 48 32.0% | 18 12.0% | 18 12.00% | 9 6% | 150 100.0% |

It can be seen that this phenomenon is present in a minority of cases, but that it is present nonetheless. A figure close to 5-6% of LD students spend the vast majority of their school time outside the classroom, which is similar to the percentage of students with disability. As has already been shown, this was the result of numerous studies that have been carried out by our research group since 2007 (cf. Canevaro *et al.*, 2009; Ianes *et al.*, 2010; TreeLLLe *et al.*, 2011; Canevaro *et al.*, 2011; Ianes *et al.*, 2012; Ianes *et al.*, in press).

Finally, in table 5, which shows the data regarding the extent to which support teachers spend time adapting materials and teaching strategies used by the class, it can be seen that the percentages are notably higher. This is an inclusive activity and is very much one of the responsibilities of support teachers who, it is to be remembered, are assigned to a class in which a student with disability is present, and not on a one-to-one basis with that student. In this case, the percentages are more widely distributed with respect to the values, and it is the only case in which the values for 'never' are in a minority (32%).

In conclusion, it can be said that there is a teaching relationship between support teachers and LD students, and that in the vast majority of cases this relationship is based inside the classroom by adapting strategies and materials for learning, very probably in collaboration with the class teacher. Only rarely do support teachers work individually with LD students inside the class, and only very rarely do they work one-on-one outside the class. Conversely, it is

more common for the support teacher to manage teaching activities for various types of SEN students outside the class for a limited period during the weekly timetable, in most cases using the support classroom/workshop (as shown above).

Clearly, this rough outline does not definitively answer the many questions that arise from an analysis of the data, and from observing the realities of the classroom, but we believe that it may be of some use in terms of providing a more detailed “snapshot” of LD students’ actual experience of schooling. This day-to-day experience is certainly different from the totally inclusive situation provided for by Italian law.

4.3 Compensative measures and exemptions

In this section we will attempt to offer an idea, albeit a partial one, both of the compensative measures and tools and of the exemptions that have emerged from the study by the independent watchdog. It also aims to respond to the question posed by Giangreco, and which forms the part of the basis of the present study: “What supports are available to students who have special educational needs but who are considered not disabled (e.g., DSA, learning disabled), if the support teacher is not assigned?” (Giangreco *et al.*, 2012 p. 115.)

With regard to the compensative measures and exemptions outlined by Law 170/2010, it can be noted that both are used in many of the situations described, but not in all of them. Of the 184 integration experiences of LD students that were described, 22 stated that they did not use compensative measures and 23 did not use exemptions (equating to roughly 12% of the sample). The data presented in this table refers to 184 students and respondents were able to choose more than one of the possible answers, so we must be careful not to be misled by the relative percentages presented. It is, however, reasonable to expect that those who indicated that they did not use any tools did not indicate any other items on the list.

Of the compensative tools utilised, a wide use of facilitative tools, namely cognitive maps (schemata, mental maps and conceptual maps), and tools which facilitate calculations and compensate for memory disorders can be seen. There is some use of technological tools, but still in only a small minority of cases (8.9% make use of a computer and 3.49% make use of speech synthesis software). In this instance the data may be distorted by the fact that the sample consisted largely of teachers working in primary schools, where personalised technological tools are still not very widespread.

Regarding exemptions, we can see that especially written and oral tests are often adapted for LD students, and that students are sometimes exempted from completing certain tasks that are particularly difficult because of the LD in question.

Table 6 - *Frequency and percentage of responses to the question: “Which compensative tools are used with the student? (more than one answer may be given)”*

| | <i>Absolute frequency</i> | <i>Relative frequency by choice</i> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| No compensative tools are used | 22 | 3.84% |
| Personal / netbook computer | 51 | 8.90% |
| Tablet | 3 | 0.52% |
| Word processor programmes with auto-correct | 57 | 9.95% |
| Speech synthesis software | 20 | 3.49% |
| E-book versions of set texts | 34 | 5.93% |
| Use of conceptual, mental and schematic maps (with or without specialist software) | 135 | 23.56% |
| Measurement tables, Pythagorean tables, timelines | 110 | 19.20% |
| Calculator | 98 | 17.10% |
| Digital dictionary | 13 | 2.27% |
| Digital recorder | 6 | 1.05% |
| Smartpen / Pulsepen | 3 | 0.52% |
| Class website with teaching materials and announcements, accessible from home | 21 | 3.66% |
| Total | 573 | 100% |

4.4 *Teachers’ and families’ levels of satisfaction with inclusive education for students with LD*

Finally, to conclude this in-depth examination of the subject of LD students, we would like to present some data regarding the general levels of satisfaction with inclusion as experienced by these students, not only from the point of view of teachers but also from the families. Some of the data on this subject that emerged from the studies cited is presented below.

In the study by the independent watchdog two questions were asked of teachers:

1. “Considering the experience you have just described, how far do you consider the educational needs of the student with disability to be satisfied, both in terms of learning and in terms of socialisation?”

Table 7 - *Frequency and percentage of responses to the question: “Which of the following exemptions are conceded to the student? (more than one answer may be given)”*

| | <i>Absolute Frequency</i> | <i>Relative frequency by choice</i> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| no exemptions | 23 | 2.67% |
| exemption from reading out loud | 90 | 10.44% |
| exemption from fast dictations | 97 | 11.25% |
| exemption from using paper dictionaries | 35 | 4.06% |
| exemption from learning multiplication tables by rote | 95 | 11.02% |
| exemption from studying the written aspect of foreign languages | 40 | 4.64% |
| concession of more time for completing learning activities | 136 | 15.78% |
| use of planned oral tests | 118 | 13.69% |
| assessment of written and oral tests in a way that takes into account content rather than form | 144 | 16.71% |
| reduction of amount of homework | 84 | 9.74% |
| Total | 862 | 100% |

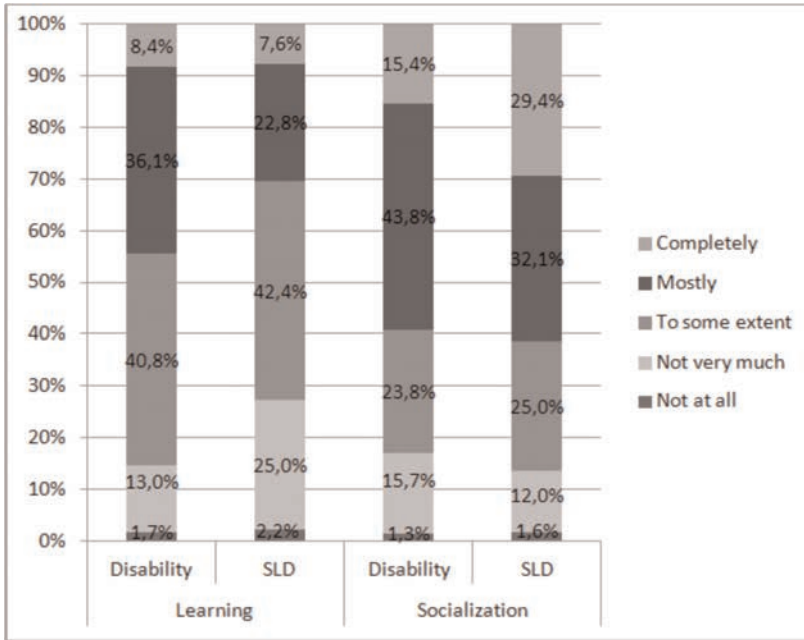
2. “Considering the experience you have just described, how far do you consider the educational needs of the student with LD to be satisfied, both in terms of learning and in terms of socialisation?”

The data presented in figure 1 confirms the tendency, already identified in previous research projects (Ianes *et al.*, 2010; Canevaro *et al.*, 2011), towards notably higher levels of satisfaction with the socialisation process than for the learning process, both for students with disability and for students with LD.

At the same time, however, there is another important element that is very much in evidence: levels of satisfaction are greater for students with disability than they are for students with LD.

This finding also emerged in, and was confirmed by the study in the province of Trento, the results of which are presented below.

Figure 1 - *Frequency and percentage of responses to the question: “Considering the experience you have just described, to what extent do you consider the educational needs of the student to have been satisfied?”*



It is a surprising finding, given that specific disturbances should not affect the student’s cognitive abilities.

The values for dissatisfaction with learning processes for students with LD are very high: 27.2% of the sample stated that they were either ‘not at all’ or ‘not very’ satisfied with the capacity of the school to respond to the educational needs of students with LD, compared with 14.7% of the sample that described the educational experience of students with disability.

Evidently, teachers are expressing dissatisfaction with the way in which teaching is managed within the learning processes of these students, highlighting a lack of preparation on the part of schools to implement effective measures to compensate for disorders and ensure effective learning.

The socialisation process is more satisfying. Apart from any other factor, the number of respondents stating that they were “completely” satisfied is higher

(29.4% for students with LD, compared with 15.4% for students with disability). However, the values do not differ enormously between the two categories, even taking into account that the socialisation processes of students with disability are far more difficult and structured than those for students with LD, whose specific disabilities should not result in any negative consequences in this regard.

The data produced from the research sample in the study by the autonomous province of Trento, on the other hand, investigated satisfaction levels of students' parents rather than those of their teachers. The final question of the on-line questionnaire asked parents of students with SEN to offer an overall judgement of schools' capacity to field all of the teaching resources necessary to respond to the educational needs of their children: "To what extent do you believe that the school manages to use the specific techniques and tools required to respond to the educational needs of your child?"

A generally positive picture emerges from this data, which shows answers grouped principally around the intermediate assessments ("to some extent", 49%). Neither the category indicating complete faith in the school nor that indicating a complete lack of confidence were indicated by many respondents, signifying a certain cautiousness in the assessment. In any case, the data is positive for the majority of respondents (62.6% for both those who are "to some extent" and those who are completely satisfied), meaning that parents are again putting their trust in schools' capacity to field efficient resources for the inclusion of their children.

Despite this, a higher level of dissatisfaction on the part of parents of LD students, when compared to SEN students and especially when compared to students with disability, is again in evidence here: 10.2% of parents of students with LD stated that they were completely dissatisfied with the actions their school had taken, but - above all - the percentage of completely satisfied parents is very low. Only 8% stated that the school was able to support their child's education in the best way possible (this, it should be remembered, in what is not only one of the finest local school systems in Italy, but also one of the richest in the country, where the average satisfaction levels of families with respect to the educational services offered is very high).

It would therefore appear that a certain level of dissatisfaction can also be confirmed among the parents of LD students with regard to the teaching given to their children, and the image that emerges is one in which families do not believe that the school is making enough effort to adapt its teaching methods to the educational needs of these children.

The overall picture presented in the data shows that LD students represent a highly problematic element for Italian schools and that, as will be seen in the following section, they are very much affected by further, positive changes

Table 8 - *Frequency and percentage of responses to the question: “To what extent do you believe that the school manages to use the specific techniques and tools required to respond to the educational needs of your child?” for each category o medical certification.*

| <i>Type of medical certification:</i> | | <i>Extent the school manages to use specific techniques and tools required to respond to the educational needs of your child</i> | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| | | <i>Completely</i> | <i>To some extent</i> | <i>Not very much</i> | <i>Not at all</i> | <i>Total</i> |
| Disabled according to Law 104/1992 | Absolute frequency | 9 | 20 | 13 | 3 | 45 |
| | % | 20.0% | 44.4% | 28.9% | 6.7% | 100.0% |
| SLD | Absolute frequency | 7 | 47 | 25 | 9 | 88 |
| | % | 8.0% | 53.4% | 28.4% | 10.2% | 100.0% |
| Socio-culturally disadvantaged | Absolute frequency | 4 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 14 |
| | % | 28.6% | 35.7% | 35.7% | .0% | 100.0% |
| | Absolute frequency | 20 | 72 | 43 | 12 | 147 |
| | % | 13.6% | 49.0% | 29.3% | 8.2% | 100.0% |

in the school system towards greater inclusivity. However, these changes have met with significant resistance, and create difficulties for those working day-to-day within schools, and who must adapt to changes not only in rules and legislation, but also in the demands put on them as education professionals by both families and the students themselves.

5. Widening the spectrum of recognized conditions: Disability, Learning Disabilities, Special Educational Needs

It is well known that Italian inclusion has followed a different course with respect to most other formative and school systems in Europe and the rest of the world. In the aftermath of the Second World War (1948), the Italian constitution established state schools, guaranteeing equal access, removal of obstacles to educational success and adequate provision for differences.

However, many students were excluded from normal classes until the struggles of the 1970s, which led to the admission of the wide category of students with disability. School legislation in the thirty years that have followed were aimed at an ever-increasing more profound articulation of the rights and operative procedures for the integration of pupils with disability, but neglecting those for other categories of students with difficulties that are equally important, or in some cases even more so. It was not until the end of 2010, that the right of students with learning disabilities (dyslexia, dysgraphia, dysorthography and dyscalculia) to an adapted learning programme was recognized, as was mentioned in the preceding section. In December, 2012, a ministerial directive from the Italian ministry of education broadened still further the categories of students with a right to individualised lesson plans, marking the first official recognition of special educational needs in Italy (MIUR, 2012). This macro-category, which is essentially a political term rather than a clinical or diagnostic grouping, covers students with specific difficulties (ADHD, speech disorders, etc.), but also any students in difficulty at school, be they caused by social, cultural, behavioural or psychological issues. Such problems are identified and assessed by teachers, but a clinical diagnosis is not necessarily needed. A recent circular, produced in March 2013, calls for class teachers to create and put into effect a personalised didactic plan (as with LD students), adapting teaching and assessment to the specific characteristics of SEN students (MIUR, 2013). This effectively renders all class teachers responsible for such students, avoiding the dangers connected with delegating this duty to support teachers.

Though informed of these undeniably positive developments, many teachers and experts still fear that the act of officially recognising the category of students with SEN may lead to the labeling of such students, or to schools taking advantage of the category simply in order to obtain more support teachers (despite the fact that the directive does not call for this). The exploitation of various diagnostic categories and certifications to obtain ever-greater numbers of support teachers is a well-known, negative phenomenon of the Italian school system.

The concept of special educational needs had already entered into the Italian pedagogical debate in 2005 (Ianes, 2005) with the explicit objective of recognising the right of other students with various types of difficulties to individualised and personalised learning plans, of the kind already utilised with students with disabilities. This conceptualisation of SEN based assessment and comprehension of the personal and social situation of each student on the ICF model of human functioning (WHO, 2001; WHO, 2007), argued that comprehending the true functioning of a student based on a biopsychosocial anthropological model, such as ICF, guaranteed a more impartial interpretation of educational and didactic needs compared to an interpretation based on an individual biomedical model.

The ministerial directive of December, 2012, and the related ministerial circular of March, 2013, in extending the adaptive measures in place for students with learning difficulties to those with SEN, can therefore be seen to be moving towards a more equitable recognition of various difficulties, although they still betray an attachment to the idea that SEN are primarily connected with those problems and conditions classified as disorders according to international DSM and ICD criteria.

6. Conclusions

Since about 2010, Italy has been witnessing the advance of two parallel phenomena.

The first is that the integration of students with disability in schools, a process that has now existed for more than forty years, is showing a worrying tendency towards regression. Despite the ever-growing numbers of students with disability and support teachers, and the increasing amount of time such students spend in integrated education, there is also an increasing amount of data that indicates the existence of pull out situations, in which students with disability work and study outside of their class, generally by themselves or with other students with disability or LD and managed by a support teacher. With respect to this situation, which is very familiar to teachers in schools but has received less attention from researchers, many questions arise that merit further, in-depth investigation. First of all, it is vital that the scale of this problem is quantified in the different school grades and various Italian regions as well as the diachronic trends it presents over the course of time. It is also vital that the data indicating that such 'mixed' patterns of school attendance lead to inferior results when compared with full integration into the class, both in terms of learning and socialisation, is confirmed with greater certainty.

However, it is the causal mechanisms which produce pull out among students with disability that are most in need of analysis. To what extent is the phenomenon determined by didactic difficulties encountered by class teachers, by an interpretation of the support teacher's role that lends too much weight to the importance of individual work outside the classroom, or by the existence of the support classroom? Do the dynamics of pull out differ from one school level to another, or with different types of disability? In searching for the causes of the phenomenon, it is important to realise that both implementation-related explanations (whereby it is caused by difficulties with implementing rules or practices that are, in themselves, well-conceived) and structural explanations (whereby rules and structures

distort practice; for example, the way in which support teachers are effectively assigned to a student with disability, or the existence of a support classroom) may operate alongside one another. In parallel with this analysis, other worrying data emerge: it would seem that roughly 25% of teachers believe that placing students with disability in groups, and having them leave the classroom to take part in specific educational and didactic interventions - in a classroom assigned to that purpose - is a useful teaching strategy.

Clearly, it is vital that the causes for this phenomenon are understood to allow for an adequate intervention so that preventative measures can be put in place. It is interesting to note that the pull out phenomenon is also a worrying presence in other countries with an advanced levels inclusion, for example Norway (Nes, personal communication, 2012).

Along with this phenomenon, in recent years and in particular since 2010, when Law 170 for students with LD was passed, Italian schools have been increasingly involved in a “push” towards inclusion, although this has mainly been understood as a recognition of students’ rights to a personalised form of teaching (exemptions and compensative measures) motivated by the fact that the student has a LD and, more recently, a SEN. This inclusion has largely been characterised by a broadening interpretation of the ways in which school activities can be adapted to students’ individual difficulties, largely in terms of teaching, and which does not call for the assignment of support teachers. In this way, it has been possible to recognise various types of difficulties that do not fall within the classic definition of disability, and to set out suitable ways of personalising such students’ education. However, this also raises some inherent problems: the road to inclusion in Italy appears to lead from one problematic category to another, gradually approaching the ideal of a school system that recognises and values the differences of 100% of its students, rather than concentrating on their problems and disorders.

This course is very different from that indicated in the field of disability studies, which supports profound change across all school levels, beginning with the ‘normal’ differences between all students. Another problem, which has apparently arisen in the first few months since the SEN circular appeared, is that class teachers have indicated that they are experiencing difficulties in taking on direct responsibility for the personalised learning of SEN students, a task which was previously part of the support teacher’s role even if, officially, it was not one of their responsibilities. Law 170 on LD and the SEN circular therefore represent, despite the difficulties perceived by teachers and real problems with implementation, two important steps towards a fairer and more inclusive school system which attempts to remove barriers to learning and participation,

and to implement various facilitative measures not only for students with disability, but also for those with other SEN.

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