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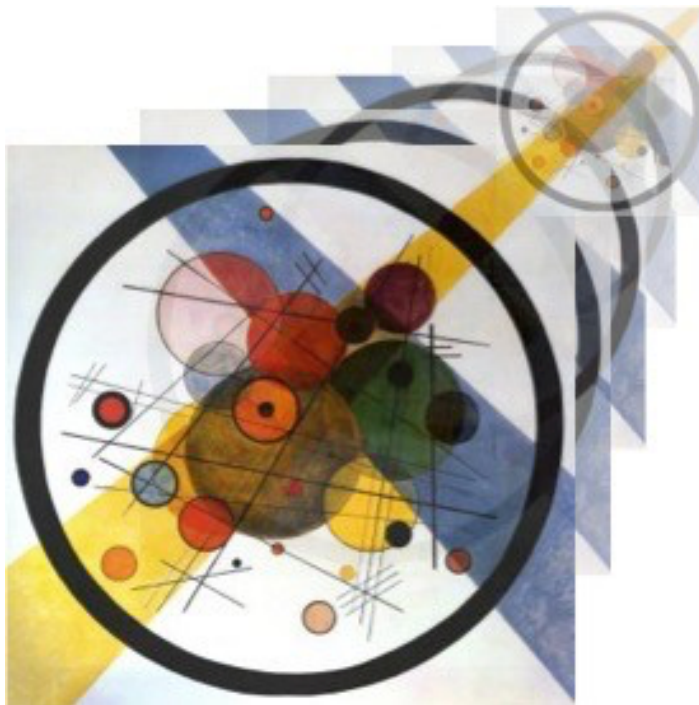
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Understanding Inclusion.
Teachers' Inclusive Attitudes From Values to Practice



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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. This work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. Some result of this study have already been published in a coauthored article and a book chapter as follow:

Camedda, D., Santi, M. (2016a) *Essere insegnanti di tutti. Atteggiamenti inclusivi e formazione per il sostegno*. In Ianes D. (ed) *Evolvere il sostegno si può (e si deve)*, Erickson, Italy.

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Thanks to life, ultimately, for being everyday a marvelous adventure.

Abstract English

This thesis aims to explore the theme of teachers' inclusive attitudes, offering a new theoretical and methodological approach of investigation. Concentrating on teachers' understanding of inclusion, this study examines the complexity of relations between values and practice highlighting some critical aspects related to the transition of inclusive attitudes into inclusive practice. Moreover, the attention focuses also on the role of teacher education in developing and promoting inclusive attitudes, in order to understand and identify possible implementation for initial teacher education and ongoing training. Framing the interpretation of inclusion and inclusive education adopted in this work, particularly related to the development of those concepts at a local and international level, this work takes critically into account the Italian background, where the policy of *integrazione scolastica* has been established for almost forty years, but where there still are situations of intra-exclusion.

The theoretical framework, embracing the idea of inclusion and inclusive education in their wider meaning, proposes an original rationale for studying inclusive attitudes with a qualitative approach, formulating a model configuration that supports the empirical investigation. Methodologically, the study is carried on with the creation of an art-mediated tool through which twenty six interviews to teachers in service, (K13) attending a specialisation course on qualified support teaching, have been conducted.

Data analysis, software aided, is based on a multi phase content coding and a network/table representation, using a top-down/bottom-up approach. Outcomes are then further interpreted and discussed integrating excerpts from teachers' interviews.

Outcomes show that teachers demonstrate inclusive attitudes despite these are then hardly put into practice chiefly due to systemic factors, such as a lack of general teacher preparation on inclusion-related topics and so on. The complexity of relations between values and practice implicates that more efforts and changes need to be taken in order to positively transfer inclusive values into action. In fact, teachers' inclusive attitudes seem to find barriers in the everyday school practice.

Given the results of this study, it is possible to argue that the process from *integrazione scolastica* to inclusion needs to be further investigated within the Italian background, adopting a critical approach and possibly through cross-cultural research with other countries that are experiencing a passage towards a more inclusive education.

Abstract Italiano

Questa tesi si propone di approfondire il tema degli atteggiamenti inclusivi degli insegnanti, offrendo un nuovo approccio teorico e metodologico. Concentrandosi sulla comprensione degli insegnanti rispetto all'inclusione, questo studio esamina la complessità delle relazioni tra i valori e la pratica mettendo in luce alcuni aspetti critici relativi alla transizione di atteggiamenti inclusivi in pratica inclusiva. Inoltre, l'attenzione si concentra anche sul ruolo della formazione degli insegnanti per lo sviluppo e la promozione di atteggiamenti inclusivi, al fine di comprendere e identificare possibili implementazioni per la formazione iniziale e in itinere degli insegnanti. Configurando l'interpretazione di inclusione ed educazione inclusiva adottate in questo lavoro, in particolare legate allo sviluppo di questi concetti a livello locale e internazionale, questo studio investiga criticamente il contesto italiano dove, nonostante le politiche di integrazione scolastica adottate da quasi quaranta anni, si verificano ancora situazioni di intra-esclusione. Il quadro teorico, abbracciando l'idea di inclusione e integrazione scolastica nella loro accezione più ampia, propone una cornice originale per lo studio degli atteggiamenti inclusivi attraverso un approccio qualitativo e la formulazione di un modello di configurazione teorica che supporta l'indagine empirica. A livello metodologico, attraverso uno strumento creato ad hoc, sono state condotte ventisei interviste ad insegnanti (tutti i livelli di scuola) in servizio e frequentanti un corso di specializzazione per le attività didattiche di sostegno. L'analisi dei dati, operata con l'ausilio di un software, si basa su una codifica di contenuti a fase multipla e una rappresentazione di mappe/tabelle, adottando un approccio bottom-up/top-down. I risultati sono ulteriormente interpretati e discussi grazie all'integrazione di estratti dalle interviste, mostrando che gli atteggiamenti inclusive dei docenti vengono poi difficilmente messi in pratica, principalmente a causa di fattori sistemici, come la mancanza di preparazione generale degli insegnanti su argomenti legati ai temi dell'inclusione. Infatti, gli atteggiamenti inclusivi degli insegnanti sembrano trovare ostacoli proprio nella pratica scolastica quotidiana. Infine, è possibile sostenere che il passaggio da integrazione scolastica a inclusione necessita di essere ulteriormente esaminato a livello locale italiano, adottando un approccio critico e possibilmente attraverso ricerche internazionali che vedano coinvolti anche altri paesi impegnati nella transizione verso una educazione maggiormente inclusiva.

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List of acronyms

BES	Bisogni Educativi Speciali
CAQDAS	Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CRDP	World Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSAS	Corso di Specializzazione per le Attività di Sostegno didattico agli alunni con disabilità
DSA	Disturbi specifici d'apprendimento
DES	Department of Education and Science
EFA	Education for All
GLH	Gruppi di lavoro per l'integrazione di student handicappati
GLI	Gruppi di Lavoro per l'Inclusione
ICF	International Classification of Functioning and Disabilities
MIUR	Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PEI	Piano Educativo Individualizzato
SEN	Special Educational Needs
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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Introduction

If men are unable to perceive critically the themes of their time, and thus to intervene actively in reality, they are carried along in the wake of change. They see that the times are changing, but they are submerged in that change and so cannot discern its dramatic significance. And a society beginning to move from one epoch to another requires the development of an especially flexible, critical spirit.

Paulo Freire, 1973

Research and knowledge are indissoluble ingredients for the development and the evolution of humankind. They are essential to the constitution and the preservation of freedom for every human being, freedom to think independently and being deeply connected with the rest of the world.

I always felt attracted by research, the art of discovery, since I was a child.

I spent more than fifteen years in the field of education, formerly as a teaching assistant, then as a support teacher constantly being involved in academic education. This combination of study and practical experience allowed me to develop an interest in educational research, in order to further understand issues related to inclusion and inclusive education.

During my academic education and many years of teaching in schools, I gradually understood that feeling was not just attraction, but also something more. Something related to the thirst of knowledge and the astonishment of discovery, putting creatively together limits and possibilities, entering the space of the unknown.

The unknown is perhaps not a blank page, but rather a new composition of known elements showing something different to what we take for granted.

Researching in education, as well as social sciences in general, it is like discovering that what we know very well can assume a completely different aspect, meaning, and purpose, giving the possibility of reconfiguring the knowledge achieved so far through a constant evolution.

This thesis is the result of my journey through the lands of educational research, where I entered four years ago to trace new paths for known topics.

My suitcase was, first of all, full of passion and the will of doing something in my life that could have an impact, both educationally and socially. I felt like I was starting an exploration; I had with me the knowledge developed with previous studies, the experience I gained through teaching, and the enthusiasm of improving my research skills.

Sometimes I felt like I was travelling on my own, getting lost in the middle of a non-physical nowhere. Intellectual universe can be confusing and isolating, but for me it always represented a call and a challenge, a place where the only way to reach new locations is getting lost, reconsidering everything from different perspectives.

The idea of doing something important, not just for me but also, potentially, for the entire world, guided me like a lighthouse, supporting me in finding, creating and drawing possible and different directions. For this reason I decided to do an experience of visiting research at the University of Edinburgh, taking a different perspective and somehow a certain distance from the background where I conducted the research. This choice was taken thoughtfully, considering difficulties as well as potential that such an experience would give to this work. Furthermore, the decision of writing this thesis in English was deliberately oriented towards the possibility of becoming readable at an international level, in order to involve a prolific and critical discussion not only with scholars from Italy, but more broadly from many different backgrounds. This is what I have already been doing presenting this research in international conferences for four years now, as I do believe in the contribution that such contexts can give to a doctoral research, even when it is still ongoing.

This thesis is the result of a creation of new perspectives through the study of known topics, such inclusion and teachers' attitudes, engaging original views both from a theoretical point of view and from a methodological one.

The first three chapters aim to set the theoretical background where this work takes place. In particular, the first chapter regards the concept of inclusion and inclusive education, discussing some of the most important stages of their development at an international level.

Within the first chapter I analyse the passage from integration to inclusion taking into account some international documents that have played a crucial role in the adoption and diffusion of an inclusive perspective in many countries. Then I analyse the concepts of diversity and difference, giving examples of previous investigation that dealt with the dilemma of difference. Thus, the attention will focus on the theme of diversity in schools and how this aspect can be valued and promoted positively, through teacher education and a change of perspective about inclusion, as proposed within the inclusive pedagogy framework (Florian, 2014). The chapter concludes with a theoretical configuration of inclusion and inclusive education (Santi, 2014a) as they are interpreted in this work.

The second chapter concentrates on the illustration of the cultural background where this study was conducted. Proposing an overview of the development of inclusion-related discourses in Italy, I move through a historical and cultural analysis of the policy of *integrazione scolastica*. Successively, I debate the 'Italian model' of inclusion in relation to some recent laws and norms in terms of inclusion and inclusive education. The argument is then developed through a critical analysis of the latest measures taken by *Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca* (Ministry of Education) introducing new forms of students' identification. Finally, the chapter focuses on the school reform recently approved, discussing implications in terms of an inclusive perspective both at a theoretical and a practical level, and especially considering possible modification to the existent role of support teachers.

Having considered the Italian background, the attention is then concentrated on the designation of the theoretical core of this study: teachers' inclusive attitudes.

In the third chapter I examine the topic of attitudes and inclusion outlining a new theoretical model of inclusive attitudes that is related to values and practice. Starting from the definition of attitudes, as assumed in social sciences, I take into account the literature about this topic in relation to inclusion and inclusive education, highlighting some significant elements, such as teacher education for the development of positive attitudes.

Reasoning on a different interpretation, I then propose a conceptual and linguistic distinction of inclusive attitudes based on an adaptation of six facets of understanding (Wiggings, McTighe, 2005). Lastly, combining all the elements that constitute the perspective adopted in this work, I propose a new theoretical model configuration that shows a systemic approach that has been used during research planning, data collection, analysis and interpretation.

The fourth chapter is entirely dedicated to methodology. Illustrating the research design, I focus on the three main research questions that oriented the study, discussing the methodological approach adopted. Since the study is a qualitative exploratory one, I then introduce an *ad hoc* tool that has been created to interview participants. Successively, the attention is given to the fieldwork, including type of sample, ethical considerations and the process of data collection. In the last part of the chapter I illustrate the analysis phase, discussing different stages I went through in order to have manageable data for result interpretation.

Outcomes are then presented and discussed in the fifth chapter, organised in sections representing six dimensions connected to the understanding model adopted within the theoretical framework. Arguing each section, outcomes offer the possibility to answer to the first research question giving translated excerpts from interviews that function as a basis for data interpretation.

The other two research questions are thus considered in the last chapter of this work, where the argumentation is further developed in order to set a conclusive drawing of the results.

Some considerations are then formulated in the very last part of the thesis, giving an overview of the entire work and further possible research developments.

This work would like to contribute to the scientific field of Education at a national and international level, offering new theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches to research in inclusive education, specifically regarding inclusive attitudes.

The critical approach I adopted in this work represents my personal and professional efforts to deeply understand the educational challenges that this complex society brings, constantly questioning about what can be improved in order to achieve a more inclusive approach. This means also detecting issues often hidden behind a common thought of effectiveness, walking in uncomfortable shoes to bring to the light those issues and improve them. It is not about finding ready solutions but rather about offering intellectual and practical ways to analyse and understand the reality giving spaces for reflections supported by research.

CHAPTER ONE

Inclusion: framing the view

When distant and unfamiliar and complex things are communicated to great masses of people, the truth suffers a considerable and often a radical distortion. The complex is made over into the simple, the hypothetical into the dogmatic, and the relative into an absolute.

Walter Lippmann, 1955

Dealing with brand-new notions is an extremely challenging task. Likewise, well-known concepts, and their development, can be difficult to handle from a critical perspective, especially if they are commonly assumed within a scientific field or, perhaps, taken for granted by communities.

This work finds its homeland in the field of inclusion and inclusive education, well-known and massively investigated topics within educational research (Clough, Corbett, 2000), but at the same time very complex subjects. Overtime, these terms have become progressively more familiar both at an academic level and at a professional one, being used daily by researchers, teachers, school administrators and so on, and permeating the educational discourse in the vast majority of the countries; nonetheless, these shared and apparently simple themes hold an intrinsic complexity that makes them not easily approachable from a scientific point of view. Acknowledging that every subject in all research fields is complex and not easy to investigate, the more specific consideration of the topic here discussed is intended to clarify why researching inclusion is problematic.

As suggested by Lindsay (2003, p. 6), “the primary difficulty is that it is not a simple, unambiguous concept”; in fact, this topic is massively broad and can suffer of a ‘surfeit of meanings’ (Slee, 2011, p. 63) making difficult to have a single common understanding of

inclusion even within the field of inclusive education research. In this regard, Ainscow, Dyson and Booth (2006, p.14) stress the attention on the definition of inclusion, sometimes not sufficiently explicit in literature, identifying two different types, descriptive and prescriptive, both equally as important within this thesis as they are for Ainscow and colleagues. According to them, a descriptive definition of inclusion will be provided within this chapter, recalling a variety of ways through which inclusion is interpreted within the educational field; also, it will be declared how prescriptively the concept of inclusion is interpreted within the theoretical framework underpinned in this study. This it is necessary in order to give a clear explanation and avoid misunderstandings from the beginning, and throughout this work.

Research in inclusion and inclusive education has been conducted for many decades in different countries across the World, thus within very diverse cultural, political and economic backgrounds, and often utilising various meanings of these concept (sometimes also contradictory) even within the same context, depending on the specific framework it is associated with. The use of the terms such as inclusion and inclusive education has become common within the language of the international educational debate, sometimes taking meanings and understandings for granted (Graham, Slee, 2008), and not deeply considering the underneath layer of different interpretations existing in relation to the two concepts.

In order to illustrate a screenshot of the development of inclusion and inclusive education at an international level, this chapter will touch some main significant steps through which that argumentation will be grounded, functioning as cardinal points for the understanding of the research rational frame. First, I examine some influences that have inspired the adoption of inclusive principles and jargon, developed from the idea of integration, recollecting the importance of some international documents and analysing the impacts of a local policy (UK) on the diffusion of the concept of *special educational needs* education-wise.

Second, the attention will be focused on the contribution of multiple perspectives on inclusive education firstly as a right-based issue for people with disabilities and then as a meaning of education for all. Following these joint views, a particular interpretation of inclusion concerning participation and barriers, rather than 'special needs', will be considered and taken as a rationale's landmark for this study. This will lead, eventually, to the analysis of the concepts of diversity and difference and how they are placed within the theoretical framework of this study in relation to the interpretation of inclusion. A further definition of this concept, regarding *how* it is assumed by the theoretical rationale

of this study, will clarify the use of terms such as inclusion and inclusive education both at a terminological and conceptual meanings throughout this study.

1.1. Towards a common interpretation of Inclusion and Inclusive education

The theme of inclusion has been debated within the educational field for more than twenty years, being defined and described in many different ways in respect to each geographical, social and intellectual background where it has been gradually welcomed and developed.

Where, though, it is possible to detect its “development” at an international level?

The cultural evolution that led (globally) towards a different perspective on education was significantly enhanced by the *World Declaration on Education for All* (UNESCO, 1990), resulted from the “ground-breaking Jomtien Conference of 1990, which committed many countries in the world to achieve the goal of EFA” (Ainscow, Miles, 2008, p. 16). Although within the original documents of the conference “the rights of disabled learners and female learners were not clearly stated” (Nes, 2003, p. 67), Ainscow and Miles report how this statement “was particularly significant because it acknowledged that large numbers of vulnerable and marginalized groups of learners were excluded from education systems worldwide” (p. 16). Recalling the statement of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) regarding the right of everyone to education, the Education for All (hereafter EFA) Declaration affirmed the commitment of the signatory countries in fulfill this right, giving both a set of key principles and a framework for action to be implemented through governmental policies.

Also, it operated as a precursor and a reference for another influential document called the *Salamanca Statement* (1994) issued by UNESCO during the World Conference on Special Needs Education, which hosted over 300 participants representative of 92 governments and 25 international organizations, in order to make clearer connections between the principles held by the EFA Jomtien document and the topic of Special Educational Needs, towards an inclusive perspective. In fact, the Salamanca Conference “linked the education of students with disabilities to the EFA agenda by recognizing that all children should be educated within an inclusive education system” (Florian, 2014b, p. 48), expanding the view on education for all that comprises also students that have been identified as having disabilities.

Since the Salamanca Statement, the concept of inclusion, and *tout-court* of inclusive

education, has being introduced both at a cultural level and in educational policies in most of the European Countries. The Salamanca Statement has been representing one of the most significant documents, internationally speaking, about inclusive education of people identified as having SEN (Ainscow, Miles, 2008). Accordingly, the text points out the necessity of a “fundamental policy shifts required to promote the approach of inclusive education, namely enabling schools to serve all children, particularly those with special educational needs” (UNESCO, 1994, p. ix). Therefore, the importance of promoting a school and education that are actually for *All* is remarked through some indications and commitments that governments signatory of this Statement assumed to pursue towards an inclusive perspective, justifying this emphasis as follow: “regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all” (p. viii). The whole documents is permeated of statements of values and principles but also of indication of what an inclusive perspective should mean in practice, especially focusing on the characteristic of an “ideal” (but realisable) inclusive school:

The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognise and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with communities. There should be a continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in every school.¹

According to Vislie (2010, p. 18), the topic of inclusion was a global denominator during the nineties and the Salamanca Statement influenced considerably a linguistic shift diffusing the term inclusion “as a global descriptor”. Moreover, the linguistic shift was guided, and mutually influenced, by a cultural change and through the Statement those were framed within the political dimension; in fact, “the international community, by their signatures, has formally adopted a new policy and a new term, which has an effect on the international discourse in the field” (p. 18).

Yet, from this shift what has changed? Previously, the common term most used in the western countries referring to the right of student with disabilities to be educated in a mainstream setting was *integration*, reflecting also a conceptual meaning rather than just

¹ UNESCO (1994). *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action*. Paris: UNESCO, pp. 11-12.

a different terminological definition. From this perspective, integration was, as well as inclusion, defined and interpreted in vary ways. Following a straightforward interpretation of integration is possible to say that it meant “that a student from a special school be give access to – be included in – a mainstream school for part or all his or her education” (Black-Hawkins et al., 2007, p. 16), originally intending integration as a way to ‘normalise’ students that were considered different. The normalisation approach, responded to the task of students that were formerly segregated to join the mainstream and “become like the others” (Florian, 2000, p. 15), where ‘the others’ are the students without a certification of disability. Nevertheless, practice, through which that integration was implemented, can assume vary forms, depending on geographical, historical, cultural and legislative factors. In the Salamanca Statement both expressions (integration and inclusion) were used, especially to reaffirm that “experience in many countries demonstrates that the integration of children and youth with special educational needs is best achieved within inclusive schools that serve all children within a community” (UNESCO, 1994, p. ix).

Moreover, the attempt of this document was to redesign the right to participation conceptually evolving the notion of integration with a broader idea, such inclusion, responding to a social evolution. This commitment reflected strong value-based assumptions and agenda for action that, however, need to be framed in each context where they are applied, in order to avoid simplistic rhetoric that, consequently, impedes a real inclusive perspective and the synergy between what it is assumed (values) and what is acted (practice).

As argued by Corbett and Slee (2000, p. 136) the concept of inclusion is guided by political struggles and cultural change (Slee, 2011, p. 110), because it is “about establishing access for all”. Corbett and Slee interpreted the nature of integration as ‘inherently assimilationist’ (Slee, 2011; Corbett, Slee, 2000) pointing out as in this model “the emphasis in upon deficit, diagnosis, categorisation and individual treatment” (Slee, 2011, p. 110), whereas inclusion “requires fundamental changes in educational thinking about children, curriculum, pedagogy and school organization” (p. 110). This view is also recalled by Norwich (2008, p. 19) that points out how “integration is seen to be more about placing the individual child in a system which assimilates the child without adapting itself to accommodate the child”. Although that, yet in the early eighties a different definition of integration were offered by Booth (1981, 2000) that was already indicating it as “a process of increasing children’s participation in the educational and social life of comprehensive primary and secondary schools” (Booth, 1981, p. 289), then

reassumed more generally by Booth as “the participation of people in their communities” (Booth, 2000, p. 79) a fundamental basis of inclusion as it has been developed by him and other academics during the last two decades.

We have so far seen that the role of international documents, in changing not only the lexicon but also conceptual, cultural and political views about education, has determined the predominant diffusion of certain language among the discourse of inclusion and inclusive education, incurring sometimes in latent confusion that can lead to a misunderstanding of meanings between academics, professionals, teachers, students, parents and so on and so forth.

Sharing language and issues

Taking in example the UK², during the 70s and the 80s of the Twentieth Century integration has been increasingly interpreted as the placement of student with disabilities “without any regard to the quality of that placement” (Florian, 2000, p. 14). The integration of students with disabilities was argued by a significant document called the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) that influenced also the adoption of the expression *special educational needs* in UK, stimulating a deal of debate (Barton, 1986, p. 279). Some years earlier, in 1975, US introduced the Law 94-142 The Education of All Handicapped Children (Slee, 2011, p. 77), signifying a former and possibly influential act towards the education of students with disabilities.

As Florian discusses, the process of integration, as defined by the Warnock Report was interpreted as locational (same-site ordinary/special provision), social (shared out-of-classroom activities) and functional (joint participation in educational programmes (Florian, 2000, pp. 14-15) but pursuing the task of normalisation (how to become like the others). In fact, according to Warnock, one of the aims of the Report, and the following legislative acts, was to “normalize special education” (Warnock et. al 2010, p.16) pursuing the “desire to avoid categories of disability into which children could be slotted and in which they would possibly remain indefinitely [that] led to a tendency to refer to children with very different needs as if they were all the ‘same’, i.e. special educational needs (SEN) children” (pp. 18-19). In other words, from this perspective integration, and then inclusion, were assumed as the way-how to normalise individuals that differed from the norm (Slee, 2011; Norwich 2010), integrating them through a process of joining but at the same time assuming that “exclusion of people with disabilities from ordinary life was acceptable” (Florian, 2000, p. 15).

² A further in-depth analysis of integration in the Italian context will be traced in the next chapter.

If on one hand, during the years of the Warnock Report there have been significant attempts to evolve a new conception of rights to education for every individuals, on the other hand that was mostly guided by a certain vision of people who differed from the majority, and the belief that they had to adapt/integrate within a “normal” system in order to exercise their rights or being educated in separated school settings that can better respond to their specific needs. As Slee (2011) reports, this belief was explicitly expressed in the first place by Warnock (2006) then disputed by Ainscow³ in being a “deleterious effect on the progress of inclusive education” (Slee, 2011, p. 78). Agreeing with Booth (1995), the use of such language (special needs) spread confusion and also discrimination, regardless the intentions of the promoters of such language. In expressing his point of view concerning the implication of the SEN concept towards a evolutionary perspective of inclusion, the author says:

I find it very difficult to make its use serve a project of creating ‘inclusive’ or ‘comprehensive’ community schools despite my earlier attempts to define ‘special’ as ‘unmet’ needs. If I use the term ‘special needs’, people take it to imply that there is a division to be drawn between ‘normal’ and ‘less normal’ learners. It implies exclusion.⁴

Surely, the experience (and the aims) of integration led to an important reconceptualisation about the right to education of people with disabilities, and is undeniably part of the history that conducted the international educational debate towards inclusion. Specifically in England, the Warnock Report and later the 1981 Education Act “attempted to leave behind the notion of applying categories of handicap to some children and young people and introduced instead the concept of special educational need” (Black-Hawkins et al., 2007, p. 17), giving at the same time an explanation of what integration meant in terms of specific provisions for children and young people with SEN. But, as Beveridge reminds, this interpretation of integration and the definition of SEN, as a problem of a minority, was often reflected as ‘fitting the child’ into a system not previously designated to respond to their ‘needs’ (Beveridge, 2000, p. xiv), keeping the distinction between the ‘most’ and the ‘some’ in terms of pedagogical actions in a school settings.

³ Ainscow, M. (2007b) *Towards a more inclusive education system: where next for special schools?* In Cigman, R. (Ed.) *Included or excluded? The challenge of mainstream for some SEN children*. London, Routledge.

⁴ Booth, T. (1995) *Mapping inclusion and exclusion: concepts for all?* In Clark, C., Dyson, A., Millward, A. (Ed.) *Towards inclusive schools?* London: David Fulton, p. 99.

Allan depicts this effect quite dramatically; in fact, she argues that Warnock's attack on inclusion, in 2005⁵, "had created winners and losers among individual children and among schools" (Allan, 2008, p. 29). The grim emphasis given by Allan on the role of the Warnock Report, primarily at a political level, but also in adopting the special educational needs perspective, points out how this view had influenced negatively the evolution of inclusion. Moreover, according to Slee (2011), "Warnock's language positions the disabled child both as the additional and the incomplete student" (Slee, 2011, p. 79), embracing a model of disability "as the embodiment of individual pathological defects" (p.79), despite the 'attempt' to leave behind the categories of handicap proclaimed by Warnock herself.

This position is endorsed also by Corbett that in deconstructing the 'special language' reports her view in perceiving the notion of 'special need' no longer useful or constructive (Corbett, 1996, p. 32). As she points out, the Warnock Report offered "a new way forward from the old models of special education terminology but presenting restricted ways of defining 'integration'"⁶, thus those require to be critically analysed and reassessed continuously in order to develop a jargon that is not taken for granted once for all.

Over time, in UK, the former concept of integration has been gradually substituted with inclusion (Booth, 1995), but often remaining linked to the meaning of placement, i.e. "locating students designated as having special educational needs in mainstream schools" (Florian, 2000, p. 17), thus still centering the discourse 'within-the-child' that has different (special) needs, compared to the others (the norm). The SEN conceptual framework has been assumed for years within the field of inclusive education, so it is possible to find it so embedded in local cultures but also within the global educational debate. Hence, this brief analysis of the concepts of integration and inclusion relatively to SEN perspective, as they have developed in the last three decades in UK, is here important to understand the use of these definitions/interpretations within the international documents concerning the right to education of people with disabilities, inclusion and inclusive education at a global level. In fact, the development of those concepts within the British educational context consequently influenced their spreading in Europe and over, leading to a common jargon expressed through those documents mentioned above, i.e. Education for All and Salamanca Statement.

⁵ Warnock, M., Norwich, B., Terzi, L. (2010). *Special educational needs : A new look* (Second ed., Key debates in educational policy). London ; New York: Continuum International Pub. Group.

⁶ Corbett, J. (1996). *Bad-mouthing: The language of special needs*. Psychology Press, p. 32.

1.2. Joint visions: inclusive education for All (and everybody)

The focus on the child (integration) rather than on the whole context (inclusion) started changing through the years, due to the evolution of the concept of inclusion that has been gradually interpreted more as a matter of reducing/eliminating exclusion, and thus redressing the risk of it (Beveridge, 2000), than providing specific solutions just for the students who differ from the norm. That was supported by research in inclusive education (Miles, Singal, 2010) and reflected in the international efforts that from the EFA and the Salamanca Statement wished to share common principles and policies applicable both at a national and global level towards inclusion. In 2000, the goals of EFA were reaffirmed in Dakar (UNESCO, 2000) with the aim of achieving those objects for every girl and every boy by 2015, guaranteeing a quality education that “welcomes diversity among learners” (Ainscow, César, 2006, p. 231). According to Peters, in addition, the Dakar Declaration “clearly identified Inclusive Education (IE) as a key strategy for the development of EFA” (Peters, 2004, p. 5) remarking the challenge in ensuring that national policies reflect the wide vision of EFA as an inclusive concept (UNESCO, 2003). As stated by the Conceptual Paper on Overcoming Exclusion through Inclusive Approaches in Education, the adoption of inclusive approaches as promoter of EFA should be followed as a common an global guiding principle in education. Setting progressively the focus on inclusive approaches as way to tackle the risk of exclusion and marginalisation, this document reports that:

Inclusion is seen as **a process** of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education (Booth, 1996). It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children (UNESCO, 1994).⁷

Accordingly, and supported by the development in educational research on inclusion, the perspective assumed by international movements, such as UNESCO, after Salamanca has become more and more close to an interpretation of inclusive education as a response to (eradicate) exclusion and marginalisation, considering all the elements involved in that process.

⁷ UNESCO (2003). *Overcoming exclusion through inclusive approaches in education: a challenge and a vision*. Paris, Unesco, p.7.

In particular:

Rather than being a marginal theme on how some learners can be integrate in the mainstream education, inclusive education is an approach that looks into how to transform education system in order to respond to the diversity of learners. It aims to enable both teachers and learners to feel comfortable with diversity and to see it as a challenge and enrichment in the learning environment, rather than a problem.⁸

In 2006, the adoption of the *World Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (hereafter CRPD), by the General Assembly of United Nations, was another important goal achieved in order to fight exclusion and promote inclusion and inclusive education, specifically of people who have some disability or other impairments. Concerning the education field, the Convention claimed that the “States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning” (UN, 2006, p. 16), endorsing the idea of inclusion as a right-based process, for all and everybody, none excluded. This Convention has been formulated in response to the necessity of recognition of the human rights for people with disabilities due to a recurrent misrecognition of those at vary levels, such as education, health and so on and so forth. The specification of the right to (inclusive) education with Article 24 of the Convention has been globally seen as an important issue in order to pursue and reach an equal right to education for people with disabilities, still too often excluded from an equal education system. According to Slee (2011), the CRPD was based on anti-discrimination principles aiming to fight exclusion of people with disabilities; concerning the education area the commitment expressed by this document was to support the right to be included rather than segregated in a separate (special) school system. Despite that, it is controversially argued by some scholars (Gordon, 2013) that the right to inclusive education proclaimed in the CRDP should not have a mandatory status because it limits the freedom of education, in cases where “parents and their impaired children agree that a homogeneous educational setting would be more beneficial” (p. 755). Gordon argues that there is not evidence supported by research in explaining whereas and why the human right to inclusive education expressed by the CRDP is actually a human right. Moreover, Gordon declares that the legal/political commitments in defining inclusive education as a human right does not provide proper moral justification, theoretically speaking, and it requires massive financial resources that are not affordable at a global level. This point of view describes the right to inclusive education as utopian in nature both for an unreasonable financial burden and “the lack of

⁸ Idem.

feasibility of a globally inclusive education for *all* impaired students independently of the particular medical impairment” (p. 765).

In our opinion this point of view, which is widely controversial and seems to have a narrow interpretation of disability itself (medical impairment) and inclusive education (limit of freedom of education), would deserve a further confrontation with the Italian experience in terms of education of *all* students together as an expression of values, morality and commitments, interpreted by Cologon (2013, p. 151) as exercise of human rights , as discussed in the next chapter.

As argued by Cologon, Italy legislation⁹ about *integrazione scolastica* reflects the values (morally and legally) of the CRPD, guaranteeing “the right of every child to an inclusive education” (2013, p. 157). In fact, the legally established right of students with disabilities to be educated in a non-segregated environment did not limit their freedom of education, instead, has been assumed as an expression of basic rights even before the declaration of the CRPD, especially from a moral point of view. Herein, as Slee states, “inclusion as a cultural goal speaks to a reconsideration of the structure of power and social relations and their mediation through the ethos and activity of education” (1998, p. 136).

As supported by the international document mentioned above, the implementation of inclusive approaches requires a commitment that is not only conceptual/cultural, but also that involves the application of certain policies in order to promote practice that can be defined as inclusive. Thus, the direction declared by international organisations, as shown so far, has set both conceptual frameworks and elucidations for actions. In addition, the Policy Guidelines on Inclusive Education (UNESCO 2009) aimed to give a common orientation regarding the matter of policies in order to:

[...] assist countries in strengthening the focus on inclusion in their plans and strategy for education, to introduce the broadened concept of inclusive education and to highlight the areas that need particular attention to promote inclusive education and strengthen policy development.¹⁰

The importance of policies in promoting an inclusive perspective has been proclaimed through the years and inclusion seemed to be finally recognised as the more appropriate response to an education for all, and everybody, and generally pursued by the countries that signed international commitments.

⁹ The Italian policy on *integrazione scolastica* will be further discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁰ UNESCO (2009). *Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education*. Paris, Unesco, p. 7.

Inclusion as values put into practice.

One of the main conceptual references in terms of inclusion, globally adopted as well as within the theoretical framework of this study, is linked to the *Index for Inclusion*, a resource developed by Booth and Ainscow (2002) to support a development of inclusion in schools, used primarily in UK based settings, then exported all over the World, translated into thirty seven languages and adapted when necessary to the specific local context (Booth, Ainscow, 2011, p. 5).

The *Index for inclusion* is a set of materials that schools can use to self-review all aspects of the inclusive development, involving all the individuals who participate in the educational process. Nonetheless, the *Index* has a solid theoretical framework grounded on the interpretation of “inclusion” as a never-ending principled process, based on inclusive values¹¹ reflected and put into practice, especially through the participation of students, teachers, parents and each individual that interacts with a school context (2011, p. 9).

What differentiates the interpretation of inclusion proposed by the authors of the Index, in respect to the previous definition of inclusion as have they been presented before in this chapter, is the conception of this term not linked exclusively with disability or SEN, but more universally to the ideas of participation and barriers to education. Ainscow and colleagues, questioning on the usefulness of a special educational needs approach to inclusion, claim that a narrow perspective focusing only on student with disabilities or ‘special needs’ could potentially ignore “all the other ways in which participation for any student may be impeded or enhanced” (Ainscow et al., 2006, p.16). In this respect, the *Index for Inclusion* proposes the replacement of ‘special educational needs and provision’ with the identification of barriers/resources to learning and participation in a way that includes every student, not focusing on those who are identified as having disabilities.

Furthermore, the concept of SEN, tightly related with categorisation processes used in order to allocate special educational provisions in respond to the students’ needs, is seen by the authors as undermining the purpose of inclusion and acting as “barriers to the development of a broader view of inclusion” (p. 17). As argued by Booth (2005),

The labelling of children as ‘having special needs’, similarly [as for those with disabilities, a/n] serves to devaluate a whole group and obscure their diversity. It encourages educational difficulties to be seen primarily in terms of the deficiencies of children and so deflects attention from the barriers to learning and participation that may arise in all aspects

¹¹ This aspect will be further detailed in the section of the Chapter Three related to values.

of a setting, as well as in the pressures acting on it.¹²

The shift from different (special/additional) ‘needs’ of students towards barriers that reduce and resource that increase participation of them to learning processes points out the importance of the whole educational context, understood as community where participation is not only presence but “is about being with and collaborating with others” (Booth, 2005, p. 24). From this perspective, inclusion means on one side that all the students participate actively to their education, including making decision and choice, but always within a dimension of collaboration between students and all the other individuals involved in the educational context, i.e. parents, school staff and so on and so forth. Reporting the authors’ words:

Participation means learning alongside others and collaborating with them in shared learning experiences. It requires active engagement with learning and having a say in how education is experienced. More deeply, it is about being recognised, accepted and valued for oneself.¹³

Another statement that is crucial for the perspective is about diversity and differences: according to the authors, “inclusion starts from the recognition of the differences between students. The development of inclusive approaches to teaching and learning respect and build on such differences” (pp. 3-4).

An inclusive perspective is thus interpreted supporting student diversity and individual differences, recognising them positively and value them when they encounter barriers to learning.

The emphasis on values attributed within this model of inclusion (equity, participation, community, compassion, respect for diversity, honesty, rights, joy and sustainability) shows how this interpretation is closely linked to the rights area, where principles are seen inclusive when authentically put into action (Booth, 2011). The interrelation between inclusive values and action is reflexive and should generate inclusive practice, changing the context in terms of reduction/elimination of barriers to learning and participation.

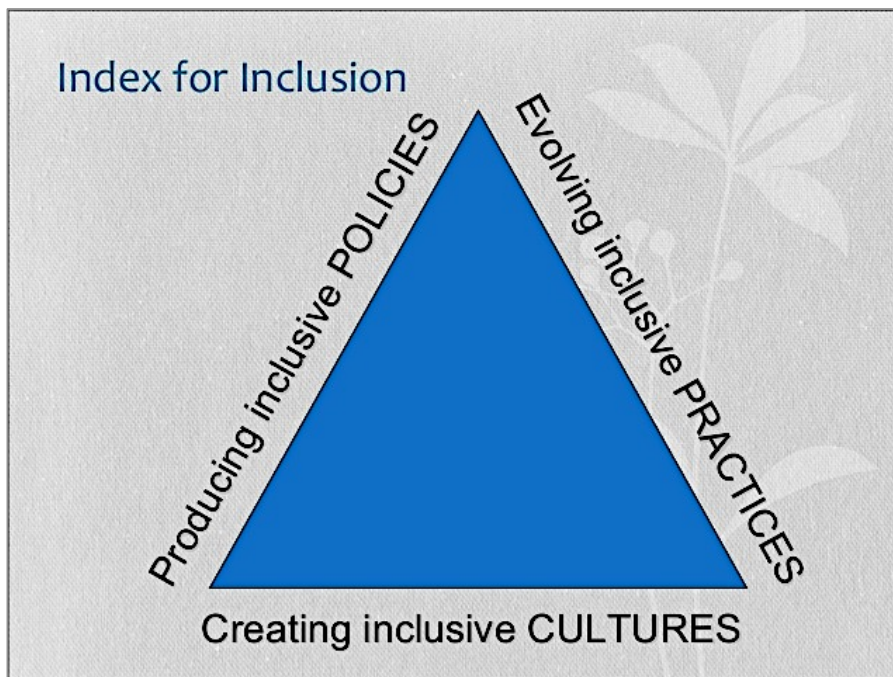
Considering the conceptualization of school inclusion made by the authors in the first two

¹² Booth, T. (2005). *Keeping the Future Alive: Putting Inclusive Values into Action*. In *Forum: for promoting 3-19 comprehensive education* (Vol. 47, No. 2, pp. 151-158). Symposium Journals. PO Box 204, Didcot, Oxford OX11 9ZQ, UK, p. 153.

¹³ Booth, T., Ainscow, M. (2002), *Index for Inclusion. Developing learning and participation in schools*, CSIE, p. 3.

editions of the *Index* (Booth, Ainscow, 2000, 2002), and further revised by Booth in the third one (Booth, Ainscow, 2011), there are three interdependent dimensions involved in this process: creating cultures, producing policies and evolving practices. Each dimension is important and influences the others, through a mutual synergy that is indispensable to stimulate a change of the context towards an inclusive perspective. In other words, to pursue an inclusive school system these three dimensions displayed as faces of a triangle (see Figure 1), represent crucial aspect of school development (Booth, Ainscow, 2002, p. 7) and have to be interconnected in order to implement a change within the educational setting.

Figure 1 – The three dimensions of the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth, Ainscow, 2011)



The first dimension mentioned within the *Index* is about creating inclusive cultures, through community building and the establishment of inclusive values. In particular, it operates as the base for the triangle and aims to:

[...] create a secure, accepting, collaborating, stimulating community, in which everyone is valued as the foundation for the highest achievements of all. It develops shared inclusive values that are conveyed to all new staff, students, governors and parent/carers. The principles and values, in inclusive school cultures, guide decisions about policies and

moment practice in classrooms, so that school development become a continuous process.¹⁴

Within the model proposed by the *Index*, the dimension of policies is indispensable to achieve the changes necessary towards a more inclusive school system. The authors express the value of this dimension as follow:

This dimension makes sure that inclusion permeates all school plans. Policies encourage the participation on students and staff from the moment they join the school, reach out to all students in the localities and minimise exclusionary pressures. All policies involve clear strategies for change. Support is considered to be all activities which increase the capacity of a school to respond to student diversity. All forms of support are developed according to inclusive principles and are brought together within a single framework.¹⁵

The creation, and promotion, of inclusive cultures needs to be supported by legislative acts in order to constitute an appropriate background where practices can be evolved inclusively. About practices, in fact, the last dimension of the *Index* is described as fundamental because it:

[...] develops school practices which reflect the inclusive cultures and policies of the school. Lessons are made responsive to student diversity. Students are encouraged to be actively involved in all aspects of their education, which draws on their knowledge and experience outside school.¹⁶

According with the *Index* and its framework, cultures, policies and practices constitute the three dimensions through which is possible to develop inclusion in a synergic way, in order to promote inclusive values that, sustained by a policy structure, must be put into practice (Ainscow et al., 2006).

1.3. Shaping the outline of diversity and difference

According to what is assumed by the authors of the *Index*, inclusion and inclusive education can be seen as a response to student diversity. The current intellectual debate

¹⁴ Booth, T., Ainscow, M. (2002), *Index for Inclusion. Developing learning and participation in schools*, CSIE, p. 8.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

on diversity is rather heated in many different areas of educational research, such as intercultural and inclusive education, and more broadly social justice related investigation (Slee, 2010, Adams et al., 2007; Terzi, 2008).

Drawing the assumption of diversity, and difference, in this work, this section will be dedicated to the analysis of those concepts in their dilemmatic interpretation, in order to use these terms throughout this study with a clearer (hopefully) understanding of the way they are considered within the theoretical framework in relation to the concept of inclusion.

Patterns of unity

The term *diversity*, as a social construct, could be interpreted in various ways, and every meaning potentially attributed to this concept could have more positive or negative effects, as regards of the context within it is developed. For years the concept of diversity has been related to minority groups, or more generally, to whom who was identified as different (Artiles, 1998, p. 32), for ethnicity, language, functioning etc., in comparison with a majority group, considered as normal; despite “what is ‘normal’ is generally decided by groups and it changes from place to place and over time” (Florian, 2007, p. 9), social and political interest towards *diversity* has been changing more positively during the last decades.

As it is supported by research in many fields, there is not any person alike another and, at the same time, every individual is similar to the others, all belonging to human beings. Studies on genetics (Cavalli Sforza, Menozzi, Piazza, 2000) have shown that the human evolution could be metaphorically represented as an *unitax complex* (Pievani, 1998, p.107): «the diaspora of people on the Earth reveals a deep genetic and anthropologic unity, and simultaneously a considerable diversity of human cultures and morphologies». This characteristic is also indicated by Morin (2001) through the binomial concept of *unity/diversity*, a representative pattern of the whole humankind in all its different forms; it is argued by the sociologist that diversity and unity are bond together and constitute the nature of the human beings, in fact: “is the human unity that brings in itself the principles of its multiple diversity. Understand the human means understand its unity into diversity, its diversity into unity” (Morin, 2001, p. 56). In other words, diversity reveals itself through biological, psychological, cultural, individual and social traits and, at the same time, is commonly crossed in the humankind and it could be considered as the multiplicity of uniqueness (Camedda, 2015, p. 23). In this perspective, diversity is the common core between people and it is inevitably connected to the concept of unity, in a

specular relation that expresses synergy rather than conflict; every individual in their identity and diversity themselves always belongs to the human beings through sharing of universal characteristic (Cardona Moltó et al., 2010, p. 246).

How, then, is the idea of diversity interpreted within education? Caldin (2001) denotes that:

The term diversity concerns what moves away from the habits and the norms commonly agreed, what differs from those and, in specific contexts or particular situations, needs commitment, interest, search of proper kinds of help, to avoid it could cause and start processes of disadvantage, exclusion, marginalisation. In its polysemy the term (diversity) refers to those realities that demonstrate separation from what is usual and require an answer of support and care.¹⁷

From this point of view, diversity is widely linked to a situation of possible marginalisation or exclusion of some people from others, but also it is associated with the concept of care and support of those who are segregated or marginalised to fulfil the rights of an active social participation.

A specific distinction between diversity and difference was proposed by Bertin and Contini (1983), within the theoretical framework of “problematicismo pedagogico”, developed in Italy during the twentieth century. For the authors, *diversity* is constituted of factual and immutable conditions, such as biopsychological and societal existing characteristics that have to be recognised and considered without being discriminating. On the other hand, the category of *difference* is “primarily characterised by the existential possibility (of change) of individuals” (1983, p. 93). The concept of difference is seen as a feasible and positive improvement of all those potential obstacles and barriers stemmed from immutable conditions (diversity). Frabboni (2012, p. 149) identifies the differences belonging to the “variegated anthropological phenomenology” of people, dividing them in gender, societal, cultural and bio-physiological differences. What is important is to recognise when diversity and differences are involved in marginalisation and exclusion but always considering them through a positive and an ameliorative perspective.

Recently, the concept of diversity has become ever more central within the field of education, especially when this notion concerns teaching and learning processes. Due to cultural, legal, economic and societal factors, a progressive change of educational and other social institutions settings has taken place, resulting in more diverse backgrounds (Cardona Moltó et al., 2010, p. 245). The interest of many researchers among diversity

¹⁷ R. Caldin, *Introduzione alla pedagogia speciale*, CLEUP, Padova 2001, p. 107.

has risen during the last decades (Valentin, 2006), revealing how the complexity of educational settings is extremely related to different aspects of diversity of each individuals or groups in a certain context, such as the educational one: “it becomes apparent that diversity is present in every aspect of our lives, and in no place is it more evident than in our classrooms where fundamental learning—primarily, but not exclusively—takes place” (2006, p. 196).

Trying to define what is diversity, allow us to denote that this concept is extremely related to the cultural background, the historical dimensions and the individuals’ identity. The concept of diversity underpinned within the theoretical framework of this research, is identifiable with the idea of *unity/diversity*; thus, differences characterise the uniqueness of each individual, different from another in various dimensions, but at the same time express the common pattern of human beings.

Issuing the dilemma of difference

As many studies from literature demonstrated, diversity and difference are relevant and somehow controversial topics both within educational research and in teacher education.

Some academics have resonated critically on the concept of difference underlining as this could generate some dilemmas about how to consider and treat differences. As it is assumed by Artiles (1998), treating some groups of student (minority) similarly or differently is anyhow an affirmation of difference (p. 32). From this perspective, recognising differences allow to identify that some people differ from others and consequently how to answer to those differences. This reflection and questioning has been called in literature ‘the dilemma of difference’ (Minow, 1985; Norwich, 2008).

Norwich (2002) notes that human differences and differentiation in education (p. 496) can be conceived both in a negative and in a positive way: the former consider differences as a lower status or value that maintains inequalities, the latter sees diversity as a recognition of individual interests and needs. For the author, tensions between this two conceptions of difference induces us to confront with the dilemma of difference:

We experience a dilemma when all the options in making a decision carry some negative consequences, In the case of difference dilemmas in education we have these broad options: to recognise difference or not to recognise difference; both options are associated with negative risks. Recognising difference can lead to different provision which might be stigmatised and devalued; but not recognising difference can lead to not providing adequately for individuality. Here is a tension between what we call the values of inclusion

and individuality.¹⁸

In a further study, Norwich (2009) investigated the dilemma of difference at an international level, exploring how it was interpreted in three countries: England, United States and Netherlands. Comparing different backgrounds where inclusion was introduced and promoted in the last decades, the author points out that the identification and labelling of children with disabilities and special educational needs is a dilemma of difference itself. Also for the identification of some diversity, such as disabilities, there are “potential tensions between having good quality provision for all, providing flexibly in common schools for the diversity of children and treating all with respect” (2009, p. 466); for these reasons, Norwich remarks that the dilemma of difference has to be resolved regarding identification.

Another perspective on the dilemma of difference, investigated by many scholars (Terzi 2005; Norwich, 2014; Florian et al., 2008), applying the capability approach to disability and special educational needs discourses. Essentially, this approach derives from the economic field and focuses on the assessment of inequality through capability, the real possibility and freedom to promote and achieve everyone’s own wellbeing (Terzi, 2005, p. 445).

These studies, considering different perspective on the topic, confirm the necessity of questioning about diversity and difference, in order to answer properly to the individual characteristic but also to understand the relationship between diversity, as a human common aspect, and other factors involved in educational settings, and in society as well.

1.2. Addressing diversity and schooling

Nowadays, schools face diversity and differences as manifestations of the heterogeneous composition of their student population, that can be considered a natural reflection of the continuing evolution of a complex society. According to Morin (2001), education has a crucial role in preserving the idea of unity of human beings without deleting the idea of their diversity and vice versa (p. 56), through a constant dialogue e interrelation between these two synergic dimensions. The idea of a continuous evolution toward possible changes is here intended (Contini, Genovese, 1997, p. 97) as a constant dialogue between diversity and transformability, expressed through the commitment toward difference: to

¹⁸ Norwich, B. (2002). *Education, inclusion and individual differences: Recognising and resolving dilemmas*. British Journal of Educational Studies, 50(4), p. 496.

fulfill the possibility of choosing and create the own existence (difference), avoiding the predetermination logic of immutable conditions (diversity), is undeniable necessary to face with all the obstacles and limitations that could disrupt this existential process. According with Contini (2009, p. 81), the path toward this perspective is a “goal the we pursue, knowing that is not possible to reach it completely but knowing also that tending toward it prefigures room for our possible freedom”, for a possible change and improvement of everybody’s existence. Limitations to a maximum self-realization can be individual, societal and context related, thus is fundamental to consider how diversity and differences can potentially led to reduce the possibility of choice, fulfilment and active participation to one’s own personal and social life. Educators have the task of guaranteeing and favouring everybody to this achievement, hence taking responsibility of individuals in all their complexity, finding positive aspects to support the overcoming process from a previous limiting status to a better one. From this point of view individual differences are interpreted as a potential horizon of empowerment and schools are seen as the central core where to educate people to diversity, through the promotion of the uniqueness of each student, endorsing their best achievement in terms of quality of life and respecting diversity and differences that characterised them. Historically, studies on diversity have been conducted in different sectors of education, such as cultural diversity within multicultural education, disability within special education, and so forth, reflecting specialist perspective on this topic, instead of a wider view that considers interaction and overlapping of those dimensions.

Teacher education for diversity

Research supports the importance of considering diversity in schools, and primarily in teacher education and professionals that work in education (Valentin, 2006; Silverman, 2010). Some scholars have resonated in depth around the ‘dilemma of difference’ (Artiles, 1998; Norwich, 2002 and 2009; Terzi, 2005), while others seem to criticize an excessive attention to diversity and differences as overrepresentation of (Amoroso et al., 2010). The importance of addressing diversity in schools is a theme carefully investigated with a certain consideration of issues such as ethnicity, diverse linguistic background (Villegas, Lucas, 2002; Villegas, 2008) where the role of culturally responsive teachers is assumed as the key to dismantle exclusion and discrimination. Richards, Brown and Forde (2007, p. 65), reflecting on becoming a culturally responsive teacher, note that “to be an effective teacher in a diverse classroom, teachers must have an appreciation of diversity. They should view difference as the ‘norm’ in society”, respecting differences

among students.

Other scholars investigated diversity from a perspective of pre-service teachers' attitudes (Cardona Moltó et al., 2010), considering a wider view of diversity. Through the construction of a beliefs and attitudes toward difference scale (BATD), Cardona, Florian, Rouse and Stough identified nine typologies of diversity: culture, language, socioeconomic status/social class, religion, gender, sexual orientation, political ideology, disability and special talent (p. 245). Exploring how notions of human diversity were understood by student teachers (p. 247), Cardona and colleagues identified three dimensions concerning diversity: universal properties (*etic*), are the common characteristics that people share with other humans; group properties (*emic*), are those characteristic people share only with some groups; individual properties, are unique characteristic of each individual (p. 246). Results from this study confirm that is important to contemplate the cultural properties of difference's construct within different backgrounds, remarking the necessity of considering all the three dimensions when approaching diversity-related discourse.

By contrast, some academics (Amoroso et al., 2010) believe that concentrating on diversity-related discussion may draw attention on status differences (race/ethnicity, gender, disability etc.) and reinforce hierarchies within the classroom with negative consequences for student learning (p. 795). For Amoroso, Lewin and Hoobler what is important is to take into account the risk of reinforcing status hierarchies (e.g. low status of minority groups) through learning objectives directly linked to diversity-related issues to avoid that "inequalities in learning opportunities and outcomes are exacerbated by attention to status differences among students" (p. 800); from this point of view, diversity education could also create or affirm student's stereotypical beliefs about status hierarchies (p. 804). Some functional strategies, e.g. cooperative learning, are proposed by the authors in dealing with the diversity education dilemma in order to "prepare students to recognize, navigate, and hopefully dismantle such hierarchies" (p. 814).

From the theoretical perspective of this research, a teacher preparation towards diversity is desirable at many levels; as evidence have demonstrated is important to educate teacher to be conscious about diversity and differences in order to recognise possible elements of marginalisation and be culturally responsive towards a diverse student population (Villegas, Lucas, 2002).

Furthermore, knowledge and understanding about diversity could consciously help teachers not to perpetuate stereotypes, being aware of the risk of reinforcing status hierarchies and give them teaching-learning skills to use in a inclusive perspective.

Inclusive pedagogy

The concept of inclusive pedagogy (Florian, 2010; Florian, Black-Hawkins, 2011) offers a conceptual reconstruction based on the theory of a principle of inclusion in education and school, understood in a different way than special education. The concept of inclusive pedagogy is developed as a response to students' differences in terms of teaching strategies that are made available for all, rather than just for some students. This specific approach considers all the differences in learning, including those who are identified having disabilities or other additional needs. Inclusive pedagogy lays on the assumption that inclusive principles regard all students belonging to the school community, posing the emphasis on some peculiar aspects that distinguish this approach to others:

It is different from the notions of special and inclusive education that assume that students identified as having special educational needs are those who need something 'additional to' or 'different from' the educational provision generally made to children of a similar age. It challenges the idea of inclusion as differentiation according to individual need, in favour of an alternative approach that responds to individual differences but avoids the stigma that can occur when individual differences are isolated and targeted for intervention. In so doing, the inclusive pedagogical approach aims to avoid the negative effects (such as labelling, stigma and separation) that can occur when teachers provide for 'all' differentiating for 'some'.¹⁹

Challenging the idea of inclusion, understood as a direct response to the "needs" of some specific student, this pedagogical perspective suggests, instead, an alternative approach that responds to all learning differences inside a classroom, avoiding stigmatization, which can occur when the differences are marked and isolated through the teaching practice, for example when teachers organise regular lessons for the vast majority of the students and differentiating only for someone (logic of special needs). The focus, therefore, moves from the pupil to the whole context, this approach does not conceive an adaptation or differentiation just for some students, but rather the opposite. The separation from the rest of the class because, strategy implemented through a special education approach, is seen as basically tagging and potentially causing negative effects that are likely to emphasise the 'inability' of some students to participate in class activities, rather the 'inappropriateness' of teaching strategies to respond effectively to the differences of each student.

¹⁹ Florian, L. (2010). The concept of inclusive pedagogy. *Transforming the role of the SENCO*, p. 62.

The variety of strategies used by teachers should, according to this approach, be extended in order to be available as much as possible to all pupils without separating some students for differentiated activities, promoting instead a genuine participation and making learning a binary process (individual and social) that affects the community as a whole class. The role of teachers is central not only regarding teaching strategies chosen but even more for *how* those strategies are implemented. The substantial importance attributed to values of authentic participation in the pro-learning process, emphasises the concept of inclusion as a matter of all and not just of some. This principle is different from the idea of school where separate paths (curriculum, activities, spaces) are organised for students that are classified as not able to attend the class activities; in fact, it supports the idea of teaching that has to be made available to all the students, allowing everyone to reach their maximum learning potential, in a collaborative perspective.

1.4. Encirclement of inclusion's rationale

Considering the existence of a variety of terms and definitions regarding inclusion, Ainscow and Miles (2008) attribute this confusion “in part at least, from the fact that the idea of inclusive education can be defined in a variety of ways” (p. 17) depending on contextual, historical, cultural and political factors in which this topic is investigated. The scholars found five different interpretations of this concept, resulting from the analysis of international research (Ainscow et al., 2006) conducted by the authors and other academics. The five perspectives about inclusion, identified by the authors, are:

– *Disability and “special educational needs”*

This first perspective concerns the concept of inclusion mostly linked to disability and special educational needs (hereafter SEN) and the right to education in not segregated settings.

– *Disciplinary exclusion*

In this interpretation inclusion is closely connected with “bad behaviour”, so students that behave badly are excluded or expelled from schools.

– *Groups vulnerable to exclusion*

More broadly, inclusion is from this point of view connected with social inclusion, then regards how to overcome discrimination and disadvantage of groups that are vulnerable and that might be excluded.

– *The promotion of a school for all*

In some context, inclusion is linked with the concept of comprehensive schooling, thus not based on selection criteria of students linked to their academic results.

– *Education for all*

The access to education is still something to be achieved in certain parts of the World, especially for some groups; in this regard, the concept of inclusion tends to be associated with the right to education, i.e. as it is promoted by EFA.

Another model, proposed as an alternative (integration) to these five, defines inclusion as a principled approach to education (Ainscow et al., 2006, p. 22) and it is substantially adopted within the framework of the Index for Inclusion (Booth, Ainscow, 2000, 2011), previously mentioned. According with Ainscow and colleagues (2006):

Inclusion is concerned with all children and young people in schools; it is focused on presence, participation and achievement ; inclusion and exclusion are linked together such that inclusion involves the active combating of exclusion; and inclusion is seen as a never-ending process.²⁰

Mainly inspired by with these perspective, the concept of inclusion is assumed, within this study, in a circumscribed way, given that this contour is neither pre-determined nor fixed and seeks to set out some premises that are fundamental if we want to carry on presenting this work in an accurate manner.

The interpretation of inclusion here proposed does not presume to be the best or an original one, neither follows just one paradigm developed in the field of inclusive education, as discussed above, but it tries more likely to combine perspectives that are significant to my personal view in terms of what inclusion should/could mean in the field of education.

What I will try to do in the next pages is to draw a profile of inclusion, aware that this figure deals with uncertainty and constant evolution, in order to build the base of the theoretical framework underpinned in this study, having already shown its foundations in the former paragraphs of this chapter.

Said that, inevitably my personal views and values influence this interpretation and interact with a critical perspective that guided all my work, and experience, so far.

²⁰ Ainscow, M., Booth, T., Dyson, A. (2006). *Improving schools, developing inclusion*. Routledge, p. 25.

Undeniably, the researcher's subjectivity here plays a prominent role, but always taking in account that the body of this study pursues a hermeneutic perspective and it does not propose itself in a dogmatic way on the topics investigated.

A spiral system

Inclusion is assumed in this study as a right-based process, constituted by values that are put into practice (Booth, Ainscow, 2011), through attitudes, actions, commitments (Santi e Ghedin 2012) towards an authentic active participation of every person in their private and social life, fighting exclusion and barriers that impede the realisation of one's existence within a community, such as school settings. It is a never-ending process and can be seen as an educational (im)possible utopia (Camedda, 2015), meaning that is not a fixed destination (impossible to reach because not predetermined) but rather a journey (Canevaro, 2006) that is questioned step by step and never taken for granted (so possible to be pursued). From this perspective, inclusion values diversity and difference as constitutional patterns of every human being (Florian, 2014), in terms of evolution and constant transformation of the uniqueness of everybody. In the same way, inclusion concerns any situation of marginalisation or discrimination and it can be seen as a (theoretical and practical) response to reduce and eliminate exclusion of individuals or groups that can be subjected to vulnerability (Caldin, Friso, 2012).

Inclusion and inclusive education is here assumed as to be for all and everybody, not only related to some groups of people that are identified as different from a norm (Florian, Black-Hawkins, 2011). The view that is encompassed within this interpretation is that diversity needs to be recognised and value in order to fulfil the highest potential for everyone, in a collaborative environment where individual can realise themselves only in connection with the others, within a community. People, who perceive themselves included, feel to belong to a community (Santi, Ghedin, 2014), having roles and agency, freedom and commitment, interacting and collaborating with others.

School-wise, from this perspective, the pedagogical response to students' diversity should consider the widest range possible of teaching strategies (Florian, Black-Hawkins, 2011) not providing differentiated activities just for some and delivering a 'regular/normal' curriculum for others. Inclusion at school does not concern only students but more broadly every person that is involved in the educational setting.

According with Santi and Ghedin (2012, p. 100), that take inspiration from the set theory, to include is not just "stay in" but it implies an interaction of the elements within a context; in that respect, to be included is not something pre-constituted but derives from

the relationship between people in a certain environment.

Furthermore, in my personal view, an inclusive context could be visualised as a spiral system that embraces, welcomes, recognises uniqueness of the elements in a constant interaction with other interdependent contexts, never closing nor constraining such elements in a fixed setting. This interconnection and interdependence act at different system levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) but it is cross-sectional and inter-influential. Being interpreted as an open spiral system, inclusion, literally meaning 'to contain', assumes a different aspect: it is not a fixed container, a place where persons are put into, but rather it functions as a spring in a constant movement, a gravitational interaction between elements, such as individuals, space, ideas, emotions and so on, that interact between each other constituting the system itself.

Conclusion

In this first chapter I outlined the concept of inclusion and inclusive education, starting from its international development endorsed by movements and documents that fostered its diffusion. Taking into account the contribution of the UK in establishing the concept of special educational needs in order to replace the medical approach to classification of students having disabilities, the argumentation reflected on consequences that this perspective brought to the concept of inclusion and inclusive education, locally and internationally.

The focus posed then on the Education for All principles and how they have been integrated with those regarding inclusive education, with a special attention to the matter of rights. Following this view, I proposed a reflection on the principles embraced within the theoretical framework of the Index for Inclusion, more specifically regarding the idea of values put into practice, emphasising the importance of cultures, policies and practice in order to fulfill inclusion and inclusive education.

Having drawn a general frame of inclusion, through some important steps of its development, I moved on explaining the relevance of the concepts of diversity and difference, offering an interpretation that see these notions as signs of individuals uniqueness that at the same time make all us similar. A brief discussion about how difference has been dealt in educational research shown that this topic had a controversial evolution, resulted in what is called in literature dilemma of difference.

Diversity and difference are assumed as central in the theoretical corroboration presented in this chapter, and a specific section dedicated to diversity and schooling analysed some crucial aspects related, such as teacher education, offering an alternative perspective,

inclusive pedagogy, in order to deal with diversity in schools adopting an inclusive approach for everybody.

The final section traces the theoretical boundaries that underpin further on the entire work here presented, outlining which interpretation of inclusion, and inclusive education, is adopted.

CHAPTER TWO

On the move towards an inclusive perspective. The case of Italy.

Look beneath the surface; let not the several
quality of a thing nor its worth escape thee.

Marcus Aurelius

When approaching traditions deeply engrained in a culture, both historically and conceptually, aiming to analyse them through critical lenses, the goal of understanding becomes more challenging and requires a deconstructive approach: digging the surface of certainty layer by layer until to reach a structural vision of the constitutive elements.

In order to further comprehend the framework where this study takes place and frame the story of inclusion in Italy, this chapter enlightens some crucial steps that led the Italian school system towards an inclusive perspective, giving an essential analysis of the legislative acts that sustained and promoted the introduction of *integrazione scolastica*, the integration of students with disabilities in mainstream school settings from the early seventies. The pathway walked by Italian legislation from a segregated school system for people with disabilities towards a conceptualization of inclusion, as it is interpreted by the European context (D'Alessio, 2011), will be depicted in its crucial moments, pointing out some critical aspects that need to be taken in account for the next argumentations.

In fact, before presenting more accurately the theoretical framework about inclusive attitudes underpinned in this research, it seems extremely necessary to give here a brief illustration of the Italian background, setting up some preliminary connection with the concept of inclusion adopted in this work.

Considering the motivations that led Italy to be the first country in the World to implement a policy for the education of students with disabilities in mainstream schools and classrooms, at a national level, the first section will illustrate the initial and fundamental steps that opened this way almost forty years ago, making Italy to be

globally renowned as the first case of inclusive national school system.

Continuing on the legislative path, the attention will be focused on the main piece of legislation, established in the 90ties, regarding the rights of persons with disabilities in every life dimensions, thus also regulating the right to education at every level through *integrazione scolastica*.

In the second section, the Italian ‘model’ will be discussed considering the international development on inclusive education and the promulgation of crucial documents that influenced the promotion of such a perspective. Then, another significant Italian normative act will be illustrated before presenting a critical analysis of the effects caused by a fragmented approach to inclusion.

Thirdly, disputing the most recent regulations in terms of inclusion, the argumentation will explain some contradictions of the model of inclusion as it has been recently developed in the Italian background, through the introduction of the ‘special educational needs’ approach to the previous ones adopted in the inclusion discourse.

A fourth section will present the most recent Italian school reform, introduced in 2015, depicting some issues related to this law in terms of an inclusive perspective. The section will be also dedicated to a reflection of possible impacts of this reform on the role of support teachers, highly debated in the Italian academic and professional background.

2.1. Milestones of a long story

Globally, Italy is recognised to be a leader in inclusive education (Kanter et al. 2014), having the highest percentage of students with disabilities in ‘regular’ schools (OECD 2004, Santi 2014b, Sandri 2014, Ianes et al. 2014, Anastasiou et al. 2015) since the legally introduction of the *integrazione scolastica* within the educational system in 1977 (Nocera, 2001). This record has been substantially achieved thanks to political and legislative efforts enacted in the last forty years. Nevertheless, this radical change did not directly stem from the knowledge gained through educational research but was more a reflection of a broader social emancipation towards an “educational policy of ‘comprehensiveness’ whose purpose was to break the inequalities through a selective education system” (D’Alessio 2012, p. 2). In this regards, the change towards a more just and “inclusive” society started with the necessity of a social change not only at an intellectual level, but more deeply reflecting this cultural emancipation into policy. Taking in account the dimensions of the *Index* (culture, policy, practice), it is possible to

claim that Italy started its walk towards inclusion, from a cultural change that consequently influenced also the political and jurisdictional field, allowing the spread of ‘so called’ inclusive school practice (Ianes, Canevaro, 2015).

Foundations of a cultural, political and practical change

Historically, the development of an Italian inclusive educational system has been traced by some legislative measures that have signed significant steps during the second half of the twentieth century. Italian history after Fascism and the Second World War, has been permeated with the proliferation of a general awareness of social inequalities and concrete attempts to reduce them through the political commitment. Italian Constitution, proclaimed in 1948, can be seen as the first Italian legal document claiming the ideal of a just and equal society (Camedda, 2015, p.97; Menegoi Buzzi, 1995, p. 76). Through all the Constitution an anti-discriminatory attitude is shown and the article 3 expresses this concept very clearly:

All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions.

It is the duty of the Republic to remove those obstacles of an economic or social nature which constrain the freedom and equality of citizens, thereby impeding the full development of the human person and the effective participation of all workers in the political, economic and social organisation of the country.²¹

Other articles, such as 33, 34, 38, are also important in regulating the new born state school system and giving a sharp view about which kind of education Italy wanted for its population.

The article 34, therefore, declares since the first line the educational ethics embraced by the Constitution and the commitment of the State towards those students that were not allowed to achieve a higher level of education because of certain issues:

Schools are open to everyone.

Primary education, given for at least eight years, is compulsory and free of tuition.

Capable and deserving pupils, including those lacking financial resources, have the right to attain the highest levels of education.

The Republic renders this right effective through scholarship, allowances to families and

²¹ Senato della Repubblica (1948), *Constitution of the Italian Republic*, p.5, English Version on the official website https://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/istituzione/costituzione_inglese.pdf, last view in December 2015.

other benefits, which shall be assigned through competitive examinations.²²

A specific reference to the education of people with disabilities is then reported in the article 38, where it was stated that: “Disable and handicapped persons are entitled to receive education and vocational training. Responsibilities under this article are entrusted to entities and institutions established by or supported by the State”²³.

As shown, the Italian Constitution reveals the willingness of a nation to sustain the development of a more equal society, where rights to education are for everybody, independently from personal, social or financial condition. This document, written during a period of change both in political and societal terms, and after the Fascist dictatorship, was the manifesto of the democratic values of Italian population represented by the politicians who signed the Constitution, aiming to “put the dignity of the person and rights of minorities at the centre of the constitutional charter” (D’Alessio 2012, p. 6).

According to Abbring and Meijer (1994), Italy introduced relatively late the education of students with disabilities, in comparison to other countries; in fact “for a long time the care and upbringing of children with special needs had not been considered a task of the school”²⁴, while churches and charity were generally involved in educating children with impairments (Abbring, Meijer, 1994; Nocera, 2001).

In 1923, under the Mussolini’s dictatorship, a series of legislative interventions called “Riforma Gentile”²⁵ constituted a school reform, and for the first time the education of students with visual impairments in special schools was legally established and education became compulsory at a primary level. Although this period of the Italian history was characterized by a limitation of the individual freedom and ruled by rigid policies, the attempt to create a unite school system led to regulate also the schooling of some students with disabilities, recognising the right to compulsory education for pupils with visual impairments in special educational settings with specialised teachers and support workers.

Other interventions about students with disabilities schooling were taken during the twentieth century, gradually incrementing the access of them to the special educational system, until the promulgation of the Law n. 118 in 1971 (Camedda, 2015), the first intervention about the placement (*inserimento*) of students with disabilities in ‘normal’

²² Ivi, p. 11.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Abbring, I., Meijer, C.J.W. (1994). Italy. In Meijer, C.J.W., Pijl, S.J., Hegarty, S. New perspective in special education. A six-country study of integration. London: Routledge, p. 14.

²⁵ The reform “Riforma Gentile” took its name by Giovanni Gentile, the Minister of “Pubblica Istruzione” (public education), and comprised several legislative decrees about public education at a primary and secondary level and school administration.

classes and schools. The article 28 of this law claimed the entitlement of civil invalids and physically injured people to attend regular classes with their peers and established to overcome and eliminate the architectural barriers to allow those students to be at school. In agreement with D'Alessio, the Law n. 118 played an important role in determining the prerequisite base for *integrazione scolastica*. In fact, despite the word *integrazione* is never used in the text of the legislation (D'Alessio, 2012, p.7) the article 28 gives regulations regarding the school attendance of civil invalids and physically impaired people guaranteeing the free transportation from home to school, the abolition of physical/architectural barriers, the assistance during the school time. Moreover, this section of the law also establishes that:

Compulsory education must take place in regular schools, in public schools except in those cases in which the subject suffers from severe intellectual deficiency or from physical handicaps so great as to impede or render very difficult the learning processes in regular classrooms. (Booth 1982, p. 15)

This article of the Law n. 118 had a revolutionary role because was the first legislative measure entitling people with disabilities to attend a regular school system with the other peers. Although this law did not contemplate the placement of those student with severe disabilities, for whom was thought a special education was more beneficial, it is the very first attempt to create a more inclusive educational environment for many students that, by that time, were segregated. The local institutions were in charge of the provisions cited by the Law n. 118 but they did not have much information about how to respond to such a call. Italian academics in education, such as Canevaro and Vico (Nocera, 2001), aware of the lack of pedagogical indications in this law, started a debate and a dialogue in order to reflect about how to implement pedagogical and didactical significant interventions in the new-born mainstream²⁶ school system. Through the guide of scholars, many actions have taken place in schools experimenting interventions that, even if supported by a theoretical framework, were mostly practical (Camedda, 2015).

Integrazione scolastica: a step forward

The need of knowledge based on research data was supplied by a national inquiry coordinated by the senator Franca Falcucci in 1975, with the intent of provide some evidence about the integration process of students with disabilities in regular classes and

²⁶ In this case mainstream is used instead of regular or normal in order to have a correspondence with different international background.

schools started after the Law n. 118.

The report of this investigation, known as the “*Documento Falucchi*”²⁷, traced the first pedagogical orientations about *integrazione scolastica* and officially introduced its definition for the first time (D’Alessio, 2012).

The *Falucchi* document stated from the foreword the necessity of an adequate school environment for the students with disabilities, considering them as the protagonists of their life and identified schools as the best place to overcome marginalisation and discrimination of people with developmental disorders and learning difficulties. Moreover, the statement of this report regards a new concept of the school, a new way of being, a disruption from the past to create the conditions for a full school integration (*piena integrazione scolastica*) of students with disabilities (Camedda, 2015) through “a transformation of the entire education system, its methodology and its conceptualisation” (D’Alessio, 2012, p. 8). This document was diffused through the Ministerial Circular 227 on *Interventions in benefit of handicapped students*²⁸ in 1975 in every state school and to all the professionals working in such institutions.

Considering the *Falucchi* document, followed by the Ministerial Circular 227, the outset of *integrazione scolastica*, the Law n. 517 enacted in 1977 is generally renowned as the first legislative measure that ‘abolished’ special schools and differentiated classes (D’Alessio, 2012, p. 8; Canevaro, De Anna, 2010, p. 205) giving indications regarding additional provisions such as support teachers and specialised personnel, individualisation of the curriculum and so on and so forth (Canevaro, 1999). However, the Law n. 517 did not expressly abolish special schools, but rather incentivised the attendance by student with disabilities in ‘regular’ classes, providing “additional resources by which ordinary schools could be improved, such as support teachers and local specialised personnel”²⁹.

The content of this law was not specifically the enactment of *integrazione scolastica* and the term was not used once within the legislative text, despite that, this Law actually determined the drop of a segregated special school system and stated the right to education of every student in a regular system at a primary level (scuola elementare 6-11 aged; scuola media 11-14 aged).

After this law, special schools and classrooms gradually closed and an integrative school system began not only at a primary level but also in pre-schools/kindergarten (3-6 aged)

²⁷ The official title of the document is: *Relazione conclusiva della commissione Falucchi concernente i problemi scolastici degli alunni handicappati*. Falucchi’s committee final report concerning scholastic problems of handicapped students (translated by the author).

²⁸ Translation by the author.

²⁹ D’Alessio, S. (2011). *Inclusive education in Italy a critical analysis of the policy of Integrazione Scolastica*. Studies in inclusive education Sense Publishers (v.10). Rotterdam. Boston: Sense, p.8.

and in upper secondary schools (14-18 aged) with further norms in 1982 and 1987 (D'Alessio, 2012; Camedda, 2015). Surely, the gradual closure (but not definitely) of special schools and the consequent placement of students with disabilities in regular classes meant the beginning of a new school that since the 1980s lost the denomination of 'normal' to become just school. This change of policy, yet, was taking place without strong empirical evidence but more with the proliferation of good practices supported in some cases by research (D'alessio, 2012, p. 2).

In 1992 the Italian Government issued the Law n. 104 named "*Legge Quadro*" on the *Rights of people in situation of handicap*, a specific act responding to every aspect of people with disabilities' life. Several chapters of this law were dedicated to *integrazione scolastica* extending the right to education from the childhood care services (asili nido, 0-3 aged) to the university level for every individual in ordinary schools and not in a segregated setting. The purpose of *integrazione scolastica*, specified in the law, was to allow the personal, social growth and development of every person with disabilities guaranteeing the full access to education, the relation with peers in order to overcome situations of marginality. Furthermore, the law gave detailed instruction regarding operative implementation of the school integration process through the indication of documents (*Diagnosi Funzionale, Profilo Dinamico Funzionale, Piano Educativo Individualizzato*)³⁰ draft by the people operating within the integrative network: school, families, health service. The legislative text says:

After the identification of the student as a handicapped person and the gathering of documentation resulting from the functional diagnosis, it follows a dynamic-functional profile in order to formulate an individualised educational plan, jointly drafted, with the collaboration of the handicapped person's family, by the operators of the local health service, and the specialised teacher for every level of school [...].³¹

The *Piano Educativo Individualizzato* (PEI) is an "inter-institutional document – between school, local education authority, local health units and parents – containing the information for curricular and organisational modifications necessary for the education of

³⁰ *Diagnosi Funzionale*: Functional diagnosis describes the clinical-functional situation of the pupil at the time of the assessment and highlights their disabilities and their potential on the cognitive, affective, relational and sensory level (Sandri 2014, p. 94).

Profilo Dinamico Funzionale: Dynamic functional profile reports the physical, cognitive, communicative, social, affective and sensorial functioning of the student with disabilities at the beginning of every cycle of education and indicates the next development expected in each area of functioning in a short time (six months) and medium term (two years) with or without additional support (Presidential Decree 24/2/1994).

Piano Educativo Individualizzato: Individualised education plan.

³¹ Translation by the author.

a disabled child in ordinary settings” (D’Alessio 2012, p. 120). Quoting the Presidential Decree 24/2/1994 about specification on students with disabilities:

The Individualised Education Plan [...] is the document describing the integrated and balanced interventions established for the student in situation of handicap are described, in a certain period of time, in order to fulfil the right to education and instruction[...].³²

In other words, the PEI is an educational tool regarding both the structure and the organisation of the classroom, in terms of adaptation of time, spaces, activities (intra or extra curricular) for the integration of the student with disabilities, and the curriculum (individualised) that can be modify in respect of the student’s functioning. Added to the PEI, there is another document called *Programmazione Didattica Individualizzata*³³ that reports exclusively the curriculum plans with the specification of activities s, objectives, contents, evaluation if they are modified respect to the regular curriculum run for the whole class.

The collaboration and synergy between the diverse actors participating in the integration of people with disabilities is claimed by the Law n. 104 to be absolutely important; in fact, to support the integration process in a broader way, the law indicates another substantial intra-institutional document, in order to improve:

[...] the coordinated planning between school and health, socio-assistance, cultural, recreational, sport services and other activities in the territory managed by public or private institutions. For that purpose the local authorities, school’s authorities and local health units, for the own respective competence, stipulate the *plan agreements* (accordi di programma) [...].³⁴

This indication meant a significant element in terms of promotion of *integrazione scolastica* and the networking between schools, local authorities and families strengthened the pedagogical commitment that led Italy to be identified as the “most inclusive education system in the world” (Kanter et al. 2014, p. 29).

Moreover, the Law n. 104 established also important regulations about support teachers (*insegnanti di sostegno*), specifying their role (Devecchi et al. 2012), the allocation in schools and classrooms, but more importantly indicating which kind of education was required to get the qualification (specialisation).

³² Translation by the author.

³³ *Programmazione Didattica Individualizzata*: Individualised didactic programme.

³⁴ Translation by the author.

In the last decades, the Italian experience in terms of quality of *integrazione scolastica* has been reinforced due to the widespread diffusion of good practices and research in *pedagogia e didattica speciale* (Ianes, Tortello, 1999) that so far has been the academic field of study of special education, integration and eventually inclusion, terms interexchangeably used within educational research.

2.2. The ‘Italian model’ and international contexts

As previously reported, due to its legislative foundation on *integrazione scolastica*, Italy is often recognized as the first country in the World with the highest percentage of included students reaching 99% (Treelle et al. 2001, Anastasiou et al. 2015), however according to Canevaro and De Anna (2010, p. 211), this achievement needs to be analysed and further investigated in order to deeply understand what in practice means, especially when it is taken as an example by scholars from other countries (p. 211). For Anastasiou, Kauffman and Di Nuovo (2015, p. 2), Italy “represents the only national example of implementation of a nearly fully inclusive education system”, supported by a clear and innovative set of laws that since 1971 introduced primary form of inclusion (meaning here placement of certain students with disabilities) in mainstream school settings. Recalling the view of Kanter, Damiani and Ferri (2014) about Italy and its policy of *integrazione scolastica*, Anastasiou and colleagues reaffirm that the ‘Italian model’ (Cottini, Nota, 2007; Canevaro, De Anna, 2010) should be followed as a leader for other countries aiming to develop, or achieve, an inclusive school system.

According to Florian (1998, p.13), around the 90ies many international policy documents, such as the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), the latter *Standard rules on the equalisation of opportunities for persons with disabilities* (1993), and the *Salamanca Statement* (1994) “ all affirm the rights of all children to equal education without discrimination within the mainstream education system”.

It is surely inevitable to point out that Italy promulgated the Law n.104 in 1992, in the middle of the international commitment towards a more inclusive perspective for people with disabilities that, until then, were mostly educated in segregated settings. Therefore, more than giving a response to the CRPD, lately emended in 2006, Italy formerly shown its courage in establishing by law what was argued by those international documents during the 90ies. But it was not an isolated case.

The echo of these international movements led to a gradual increase of the inclusive

perspective in many countries all around the world, which have shaped the perspective into their own cultural, political and social background.

The result of the global philosophy of equal rights to education for all pupils in mainstream schools developed during the 90ies revealed, however, a gap between policy and implementation (Florian, 1998, p. 14), confirming that the legislative commitment towards an inclusive perspective is absolutely important but is not enough to ensure the achievement of the intents declared.

In 2000, *The Framework for Action* developed at the UNESCO World Educational Forum (Dakar 2000) reaffirmed the goals of EFA specifying that despite many progress achieved in many countries, much effort was still necessary in order to reach a quality and equal level of education for every individual. To support the development of inclusive educational settings and policy, other documents were produced by UNESCO, such as the *Inclusive education and education for all* (2000) and *The open file on inclusive education* (2001), aiming to eliminate social exclusion and welcome diversity among students (Ainscow, César 2006). Some years later, the first decade of the new millennium has been signed by the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD), adopted by the United Nations in 2006; this crucial international document was the “first treaty to specifically protect the rights of people with disabilities to equality and non-discrimination in all areas of life, using a human rights approach to disability” (Kanter et al., 2014, p. 21).

As argued by Kanter and colleagues, “Italy has responded positively and proactively to the Article 24 of the CRDP” (p. 25) on equal rights to education for people with disabilities, showing a pioneering profile within the framework of international law.

Undeniably, Italian laws, such as Law n. 517/77 and Law n. 104/92 demonstrated ground-breaking insights, and, despite they are extremely connected with the local/national context, have been influenced also by the international debate and emancipation regarding people with disabilities and rights. Referring to the CRPD, this document was officially ratified in Italy through the Law n. 18 in 2009 that also established a National Observatory on people with disabilities. Even if the values and rights claimed in the CRPD were already shared and expressed within the Italian Constitution and other acts, the adoption of the CRPD in the Law n. 18/2009 was an important goal because it “confirmed the interest and the commitment demonstrated by institutions and society towards the establishment of an inclusive community”³⁵ within the Italian context (Camedda 2015, p. 92).

³⁵ Translation by the author.

Opening views on differences in learning: recent developments

The national and international commitments towards a more adequate response to diverse student population, not only in regard of persons with disabilities but more broadly towards all those students that experience obstacles in their education, led Italy to amend the Law n. 170 in 2010 on *Disturbi Specifici d'Apprendimento* (DSA)³⁶. Considering the fact that this condition within the Italian context is not defined and diagnosed as disability, but rather as disorders/difficulties, the government established with the Law n. 170 the norms for the school intervention about students with dyslexia, dysgraphia, dysorthography, dyscalculia (Giangreco, Doyle, 2012). This law derived from some previous ministerial communication that since 2004 informed teachers and school operators about the interventions for those students that were identified by the local health service as having one or more learning difficulties.

The intent of the Law n. 170, and of the following *Linee guida per il diritto allo studio di alunni e student con disturbi specifici d'apprendimento*³⁷, issued in 2012, was to assure an adequate response in teaching students with DSA, giving indication about “instructional accommodation by their general classroom teachers” (Giangreco, Doyle, 2012, p. 81), measures of compensation or dispensation in order to facilitate the learning process at every school levels, including universities. The guidelines (*Linee guida*) indicated the use of an *Piano Didattico Individualizzato* (Individualised Didactic Plan), drafted by teachers, for every student with DSA in the classroom, recalling the role and value of the pedagogical approach to such difficulties that should not be delegated only to specialists (e.g. speech therapist, psychiatrist). Moreover, what is central about this legislation is that the family, schools and local authorities should cooperate and reinforce the network for the benefits of students with DSA (Camedda, 2015). The attention given to the disadvantages deriving from DSA, expressed by the Law n. 170 and the guidelines on school intervention, helped the raise of awareness about learning differences among learners also when they are not certified as having disabilities.

The commitment of Italy towards a more inclusive school system through the legislative development on *integrazione scolastica* and gradually on a broader concept of diversity and difference among students is commendable, but needs to be deeply enquired through a critical lens in order to draw strengths and weaknesses, in an ameliorative perspective.

³⁶ Learning difficulties.

³⁷ Guidelines on the right to education of students with learning disabilities.

Beyond the model's surface

The Italian law on *integrazione scolastica* has been described by local and international scholars (D'Alessio, 2011b; Kanter et al., 2014) as an admirable piece of legislation, a 'pioneer' for a democratic change of the society and a policy example for other countries around the world. The legislative history that led to the constitution of *integrazione scolastica* is a long path that has been signed by many acts in order to make Italian education more equal and just for every students, guaranteeing the right to education for all in a mainstream setting. However, the complex and often segmented legislation did not allow having a common understanding of differences among learners and, contrarily, led to a fragmentation of guidelines and directions on classification. Not denying the good intentions demonstrated by the Italian government to find a response for the issues faced by students and teachers, as well as parents, in the everyday school life, i.e. when there is some obstacle to learning or some possible exclusion, the result of a not organised and clear theoretical paradigm is reflected on the several documents that regulate differences separately or without a harmonised management.

For instance, the Ministry of Education emended in 2006 the *Linee guida per l'accoglienza e l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri* (guidelines for the integration of foreign students), then revised in 2014, a document concerning the student population who is defined foreign, because the principles for having the Italian nationality is based on the *ius sanguinis* (right transmitted by blood, parents) and not on the *ius soli* (right given by the place of birth). Surely, the motivations for such a document were to improve the integration of students without Italian nationality, even if the vast majority of those were born in Italy, guaranteeing a complete exercise of the right to education, considering and valuing cultural differences. This was also in response to an exponential increase of immigrants in the last two decades mainly in northern and central Italian regions, and the consequent growth of the number of students from a migrant background³⁸.

One of the effect of this rise was the increasing number of students with disabilities and different nationalities, around 15% on the total of students with disabilities population in 2015 (Camedda, 2015). Surprisingly, a part from statistical survey, any kind of documents was elaborated by the Ministry of Education about this interesting feature, while educational research started promptly to investigate pedagogical aspects of this situation during the last decade (Goussot, 2011; Caldin, 2012; Martinazzoli, 2012; Camedda 2015).

³⁸ See the detailed study in Camedda, D. (2015) *Come ali di farfalla. L'incontro tra disabilità e migrazione nella prospettiva di una scuola inclusiva*. Roma: Aracne Editrice.

It could be assumed that, since there was already the guidelines for the students with a different nationality and, since 2009, also the *Linee guida per l'integrazione scolastica degli alunni con disabilità* (guidelines for the integration of students with disabilities), the consideration of the two joint dimensions was not a priority at least at a political level.

Resuming, specific guidelines are formulated about students with disabilities, with DSA and also about 'foreign students', revealing on one hand the attempt to respond to educational issues faced by students, teachers and parents everyday, but on the other hand demonstrating a fragmented view on integration. A segmentation of categories that, however, is not always coherent in other documents. For instance, reading the last national statistic report on the integration of students with disabilities in Italy (MIUR 2015) it is possible to find a specific section about students with DSA, even if they are not considered under the same category as those with disability as stated by the Law n. 170/2010.

It is reported that the number of students identified as having DSA for the academic year 2014/2015 was at 2,1% (108.844) on the whole student population 3-18 aged. The number of students with disabilities was just over that figure, reaching 2,7% (228.017) of the students (8.845.984).

Regarding students with disabilities and different nationality the report gives information about the percentage on the population of students with disabilities (12%) at a national level, then other information about each school level and local distribution. There is any information about the number of so-called foreign students with DSA. This lack of information does not allow to make further consideration about, for example, a possible overrepresentation of culturally diverse background students in the diagnosis process for DSA, and respectively pedagogical consequences. Moreover, the entire document does not use a clear terminology, using every now and then the term *integrazione scolastica* and *inclusione scolastica*, implying they have the same meaning.

Overall, it seems that despite a genuine attempt to develop inclusivity in Italian schools, the measures taken by the Government and the Ministry of Education have not really helped the construction of a new (innovative) conception of inclusion, suggesting that difference is still perceived as a problem.

2.3. (De)-evolution of the leading model

We have seen, so far, how the Italian commitment towards a more equal education developed during more than 30 years, through “one of the most progressive body of social legislation regulating *integrazione scolastica* and the provision of social services” (D’Alessio, 2008, p. 52).

This ‘model’ became a regarding example for other countries, i.e. as it happened in U.S. (Begeny et al., 2007), and the Italian Ministry of Education³⁹ (MIUR) was recently awarded by the Zero Project, an international organisation, for the innovative policies and practices in terms of inclusion of students with disabilities. This achievement was pleasantly welcomed by the current Minister Giannini and by others members of the MIUR, that reaffirm the intention of the Government to keep on the improvement of inclusion in Italy. Some of those also ascribed this success to the most recent normative intervention on inclusion, such as the Ministerial Circular in 2013 and the most recent education reform enacted by the Law n. 107 in 2015.

But what is really happening in Italy regarding inclusion and inclusive education?

Trying to avoid rhetorical and patronising perspective, I will adopt a critical lens in order to enquire the current situation, mostly from a policy viewpoint, analysing here those documents mentioned above but also proceeding backwards to highlight aspects that constitute solid basics of *integrazione scolastica* but that could perhaps impede a progression towards a wider meaning of inclusion and inclusive education as they have been described relatively to the rationale of this thesis.

The urgent need of ‘needs’

After the Law n. 170/2010, new terminologies such as DSA became more familiar within the schooling contexts as well as the provisional procedures adopted by teachers and medical professionals in order to intervene for the benefits of the students who are identified as having learning disorders. Another effort towards those students that face some kind of disadvantages (psychological, physical, socio-economic, linguistic, cultural, and so on) that impede their learning advancement was taken by the Ministry of Education in 2012 with the Direttiva Ministeriale n. 27 on the “intervention for students with special educational needs (*bisogni educativi speciali*) and the local organization for school inclusion”⁴⁰.

³⁹ Ministero dell’Istruzione, dell’Università e della Ricerca (Ministry of Education, University and Research).

⁴⁰ MIUR, Direttiva Ministeriale n. 8, Roma 6 marzo 2013.

Drawing on D'Alessio (2008), it is noticeable that the notion of special educational needs was formerly introduced in Italy by some scholars (De Anna, 1998; Ianes, 2005) within the educational academic debate, basically “borrowing from the tradition of the Warnock Report (1978) the definition of *bisogni educativi speciali*” (D'Alessio, 2008, p. 56), but never used in any norm until the Direttiva n. 27 in 2012.

The linguistic, and conceptual, choice expressed by the Ministerial act can be seen as a reflection of certain lucubration around the concept of *integrazione scolastica* and the need to further development towards a more inclusive view.

The premise of this document affirms that:

The principles that founds the basics of our model of *integrazione scolastica* – assumed as an example for the policies of inclusion in Europe and over – have contributed to the construction of the Italian educational system as a place of knowledge, development and socialization for all, highlighting its inclusive aspects rather than the selective ones. In light of this experience, our Country is now able, after more than thirty years from the Law n. 517 in 1977 that launched the *integrazione scolastica*, to consider the criticalities revealed and to evaluate, with greater awareness, the necessity of rethinking some aspects of this system.⁴¹

The opening statement of this document points out some interesting consideration: the first sentence stresses the emphasis on the principles, thus values, that permeate the conception of *integrazione scolastica*, expressing the pride of Italy in being an example for Europe and the rest of the World in terms of inclusivity. Secondly, the document focuses the attention on the necessity of going beyond the established tradition of *integrazione* and rethink its principles through a broader interpretation (and application) of inclusion, both in policies and practice. The attempt of this document, reinforced by the applicative Circolare Ministeriale n. 8 2013, is somehow comparable to the aims of the Warnock Report, concerning the change of terminology and of a rationale's paradigm in terms of identification of students who face serious difficulties at school and the consequent allocation of provisional benefits. In particular, the Warnock Report aimed to reduce the 'negative' disability labelling, introducing the new notion of special educational needs that comprehended a broader definition and classification. The same aim is expressed by the Direttiva in 2012, 34 years later the Warnock Report and of *integrazione scolastica*, in a controversial way: in fact, on one hand the text affirms the will of opening the view towards disabilities and difficulties, using the category of

⁴¹ MIUR, Direttiva Ministeriale n. 8, Roma 6 marzo 2013, p. 1. Translation by the author.

bisogni educativi speciali (BES) to contrast the potentially constricting distinction between students with disabilities and student without disabilities, but on the other hand this is done through an additional classification that does not exclude the previous ones. Recognising that, nowadays, student with disabilities are placed in a school setting increasingly diverse, the Direttiva explains how the traditional distinction of those students under the model of ‘with-without disabilities’ is not longer appropriate in reflecting the complex reality of Italian classrooms. Therefore, continues the document (p. 1):

It is necessary to assume a truly educative approach, for which the identification of students with disabilities is not based on an eventual certification, that surely maintains a character of utility in providing benefits and guarantees, but also risking a constriction within a narrow framework.⁴²

The Italian Ministry of Education, according to its interpretation, identifies the BES model as a more inclusive alternative to the ‘with-without disabilities’ one, recalling the importance of the International Classification of Functioning and Disabilities (hereafter ICF), in order to adopt a more educative approach to the issue of identification. However, according to D’Alessio (2008), despite the intentions declared, the Direttiva still recommends the use of a medical interpretation (ICF) for the identification of the differences among students, referring to it as an educational approach, when it is not.

The BES model introduced by the Direttiva was presented as an umbrella category covering disability, DSA and other disadvantages, but in practical terms it was not substituting the former traditional distinction (with-without disabilities) but just integrating it with a new classification, then labelling, of students that were not eligible for a diagnosis of disabilities, or not identifiable as having DSA.

In particular, the texts refers to an international interpretation of special educational needs, specifying how in classrooms there are students who need a ‘special attention’ because of some condition of disadvantage, identifiable in: disabilities, evolutionary disorders (DSA, linguistic disorders, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder), and socio-economic, linguistic, cultural disadvantage.

Since the Italian legislation covers only the areas of disability (Law n. 104/92) and DSA (Law n. 170/2010), the Direttiva Ministeriale n. 27 was declared to be a ‘solution’ to guarantee ‘special attention’ to those students that could not be protected by the other

⁴² Idem

legislation in terms of *integrazione scolastica*.

Boosting a culture of inclusion, the document however keeps referring to it as *integrazione* or interchanging the two terms (*inclusione/integrazione*) without a clear distinction, reflecting an attempt to follow the terminologies adopted by international contexts (D'Alessio, 2008) but also protracting the terminological and conceptual confusion largely discussed in Chapter One, that in my view continues reproducing a sort of exclusion (Allan, 2006).

Inclusion through labels: re(pro)ducing dilemmas of difference?

With the introduction of the concept of *bisogni educativi speciali*, another set of labels has been added to the school lexicon that circulates during teachers meetings or other institutional moments.

What I argue in respect of this document is that the introduction of a notion such as *bisogni educativi speciali* did not open the view on inclusion but added a new terminology (labelling) that still focuses on the 'within the child' perspective rather than concentrating more on the contextual factors and adopting changes in the teaching strategies available for all the students in a classroom. The risk, as far as I am concerned, is that teachers will keep planning a curriculum for most students and adaptations for some, considering that the group of some is going to increase significantly if it comprises student with disabilities, with DSA and BES.

Creating a new category of students with BES allowed applying the principle of *personalizzazione degli apprendimenti* (personalisation), established by the Law n.53/2003 on the general norms of education, in a more extensive way in terms of typology and duration of individual interventions. However, the intent of the *personalizzazione* was not to create individual curriculum adaptations but rather to differentiate the range of teaching strategies in order to respond to students' learning differences.

The effect of a new category, such as BES, could very easily result in an over-labelling of student and fragmentation of curriculum, reinforcing the idea that students without a label (i.e. with disability, DSA, BES, foreigner) are the 'normal' ones that do not need personalised activities because can follow a more standardised lesson.

A reflection of this effect can also be found in the changing lexicon used by teachers when they refer to their students. In more than fifteen years of experience in schools, as a support teacher, I have personally heard many times teachers describing their classes as having, for instance, two H (students with disabilities but described using the H of

handicapped), five foreigners (students that were born in another country or in Italy but have migrants parents), three DSA and many other problematic students that possibly now will be labelled as BES. What is interesting is that the acronym, the label represents the person, becoming a noun, a nickname, i.e. a student identified having DSA is called a 'DSA'; linguistically speaking this means to forget the 'person' as being the subject (student *with* DSA) and, from a conceptual point of view, this omission could be seen as a reflection of excessive focus on the difference, the 'special needs', as an expression of the whole student's identity. The risk, for I see in this use of labelling, could be identified in the power of language not only as a descriptive instrument but also as action (Austin, 1987). Following this view, the choice of the Italian Ministry to introduce in 2012 the special educational needs system, debated and argued in its original background (UK) for more than 30 years, risks to bring the over-labelling of students that do not fit into an implicit norm (normal students) or neither in a 'special' category (disability, DSA) as a reinforcement of the dilemmas of difference, and a profusion of the 'mania of categorizing' widely criticised by Corbett (1996), taking for granted a model that has been demystified by many scholars.

In order to clarify some aspects that in the previous document were ambiguous and give instruction to schools in relation to the application of the norm, the Direttiva was followed by the Circolare Ministeriale n. 8 in 2013,. The inclusive approach indicated by the Circolare n. 8 was described as an extension of the right of a personalised learning for all the students facing difficulties, through a *Piano Didattico Personalizzato* (personalised educational plan).

Again, the labelling via the BES model is interpreted as a way to pursue an inclusive perspective, continuing to focus the attention on the 'special needs' of the students rather than the inadequate response of the school system/teaching approach to their differences (Camedda, 2015, p. 95). For instance, regarding the teaching-learning strategies the document reclaim the adoption of an inclusive approach rather than one based on the special education model, but at the same time it establishes that the school system has to respond to the 'special needs' through personalised and individualised strategies. The solution indicated is, once again, an adaptation of the programme just for some (those with disabilities, DSA and finally with BES) without questioning the general teaching strategies for all. The distinction between learners is not avoided but, from my perspective, just named with other words, and perhaps reinforced. Moreover, the 'some' are going to be (possibly) the 'most' within a class, as the identification of students with BES is delegated mainly to teachers, resulting in an overrepresentation of students with

BES rather than a deep reconsideration of the teaching approaches.

Continuing on the lexical terrain, the whole document shows many terminological (and also implicitly conceptual) discrepancies that do not allow a clear understanding of the new viewpoint on inclusion that is declared to be pursued.

Hence, concerning the actions of single schools, the Circolare n. 27 provides indication to institutions in order to pursue an inclusion policy. In this section the responsibility to manage “the problems concerning all the BES”⁴³ is given to the Gruppi di Lavoro per l’Inclusione (GLI)⁴⁴, groups formed within each school (or group of schools that are under the same local Institute/Direction) by teachers, specialists, parents and students and other professionals involved. This new committee, however, does not substitute the former Gruppi di lavoro per l’integrazione scolastica degli student handicappati GLH⁴⁵ established by the Law n. 104/92, but is introduced as a complementary body that should work with the others in order to realise a school inclusion.

This overlapping of categories, roles, and definitions, in the name of inclusion seems not to represent the inclusive perspective as I discussed it, but rather to introduce a new categorisation system, a new way for ‘boxing people in’ (Corbett, 1996) that pushes away from a broader conception of inclusion. If we adopt a broader meaning of inclusion and inclusive education concerning difference and diversity as elements belonging to each individual, the direction taken by Italian legislation seems to contrast with the core principles that support the rationale of inclusion as here embraced. In fact, the excessive focus on classification of students that differ could perpetuate a within the child approach, reinforcing the idea of difference as a deviation from what is (supposed to be) normal, emphasising the distinction between students with and without labels.

An example of that can be seen also on the official MIUR website (see Figure 2 on the next page), where in order to present the interventions for promote inclusion in schools, the different categories are described as separated: *integrazione scolastica* for student with disabilities, DSA for students with learning disorders and BES for students that have ‘special needs’ for physical, biological, physiological, psychological or social reasons.

⁴³ MIUR, Circolare Ministeriale n.8, Roma 6 marzo 2013, p. 4.

⁴⁴ Groups for Inclusion.

⁴⁵ Groups for Integration of handicapped students.

Figure 2 – National Intervention for school inclusion on MIUR official website



What I would like to highlight here is that the representation of inclusion offered by the Italian Government is only connected with students that somehow differ from the norm, and that are identified as ‘problematic’ (D’Alessio 2011, p. 76) and does not concern all the students that are usually in a classroom, bolstering a model that reflects more attention towards the individuals rather than the system interpreted in a ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

According to D’Alessio (2011), this perpetuation of a narrow interpretation of inclusion, despite many attempts of the Italian Government to open the perspective through the years, needs to be challenge by profound changes: not only through a reform of the educational systems but also through a radical transformation of the principles and assumptions that constitute the base of a new (or at least evolved) culture of inclusion. That will result, consequently, in influencing also policies and practice (Booth, Ainscow, 2011) towards a metamorphosis of paradigms. In other words, the condition of uncertainty amplified by the recent Law n. 107 could lead to a reconsideration of the concept of inclusion and its interpretation in the Italian background, opening the debate on *bisogni educativi speciali* and taking the chance to reconsider practitioners’ thinking and practice.

2.3. The Good School

Coming from decades of governmental instability, the Italian legislation on schooling and education has been subjected to many, sometimes very close, changes that increased the sensation of uncertainty and confusion both at a political level and for the practitioners that deal with the everyday school practice.

In this section I will offer a reflection on the latest, and very recent, law on the educational/school system deriving from a previous law draft called “La Buona Scuola” presented by the Government in 2014. The *Buona Scuola* (good school) was a legislative proposal (disegno di legge) discussed for almost one year by many representatives (teachers’ unions, parents, students, associations, scientific societies and so on) in order to draw a so-called innovative education reform, resulted then in the Law n. 107 *Riforma del sistema nazionale di istruzione e formazione e delega per il riordino delle disposizioni legislative vigenti*, in 2015.

This law (Nocera, Tagliani, 2015, p. 11), aiming to put in order the previous acts reforming the Italian school system, has been disputed by many teachers, scholars and associations for its controversial intent to renovate the Italian school introducing some radical changes that contrast what was, so far, established in terms of workforce recruitment, teacher education, curriculum, teaching assessment and so on and so forth.

Before the publication of the Law n. 107 in July 2015, the Government demonstrated a remarkable interest in listening to the parts involved in the scholastic system regarding the points of the *Buona Scuola* through parliamentary consultations (*audizioni parlamentari*) and meeting with interested subjects. However, according to Nocera and Tagliani (2015, p. 11) “formerly the text has been approved with a normal form, divided in eight chapters consisting of 24 articles, split in clauses” but due to thousands of amendments presented to the Senate the Government established the Law, through a voting process called *fiducia* (trust), unifying all the parts in one maxi-amendment of just one article and 212 clauses. A part from the fact that some jurists consider this action as a constitutional illegitimacy (Nocera, Tagliani, 2015), the absence of a regular legislative structure makes the reading and interpretation of the law not easy even from an applicative perspective.

At the beginning of the academic year (anno scolastico) 2015/2016 the *Buona Scuola* reform officially started introducing some change into Italian schools in a climate of increased uncertainty. The *Buona Scuola* reform is a burning issue widely debated within the education field, especially because it is quite new and broadly contested by many

teachers (Nocera, Tagliani, 2015) that face with decisions taken by the Government that influence directly their profession and the development of schools and are felt as authoritarian. In fact, in March 2016, a referendum campaign ‘against the Buona Scuola’, promoted by teachers’ associations, officially started in preparation for the popular consultation in April 2016 that will include many topics to be decided by the Italian population.

Even if this topic is massively controversial, it is not the intention of this work to analyse in details every aspect of the Law n. 107, but rather focusing on the parts regarding the theme of inclusion in order to observe the evolution of this concept in Italy, surely from a political/legislative point of view that influences in many ways the educational practice.

Good (and) inclusive school?

Despite the Law n. 107 reports many changes for Italian school education, very little space is left in this text for the promotion of inclusion, intended here as stated in Chapter One. Probably due to the existence of former laws, such as the Law n. 104/92 and the Law 170/2010 still active, the Law n. 107 refers to *inclusion* (inclusion) just twice in the whole text and merely regarding students with *bisogni educativi speciali* (comma n.7, clause *l*) and students with disabilities (comma n. 181, clause *c*). Regarding *integrazione* (school and social integration) and students with disabilities this law gives few other directions but generally not using the term *inclusion*.

What is noticeable is that the first statement of the Law implies an inclusive perspective, although this concept is not further recalled throughout the text except in the two clauses mentioned above. The Law states that the school has a central role of the school in the society and it is the way to contrast socio-cultural and territorial inequalities, respecting and preserving the right to education and equal opportunities of academic success for every student. From an inclusive perspective the values expressed by the first sentence of this law are unequivocally ascribable to an interpretation of school as a place for an inclusive way to educate student. However, the specification about inclusion concerning students with disabilities and BES (including student with DSA) leaves this concept as a matter for special issues, not really developing it towards a broader interpretation.

Although some Italian scholars have interpreted the reference to inclusion as one of the great cultural and social innovations brought by the Law n. 107 (Galliani, 2016), my view tends to be sceptical about that, according with a substantial numbers of Italian scholars, most of whom belong to the Italian Society of Special Pedagogy, that see in the possible implications of this law a potential step backward, instead of an advancement of Italian

inclusion.

This criticism is based on the nature of the interpretation of inclusion expressed in the Law; in fact, when stating the strengthening of school inclusion and the right to education of student with BES, the law indicates the individualisation and personalisation of activities, with the support and collaboration of social and medical local services, as the way to empower inclusivity not adding anything more (comma n.7, clause *l*). Then, when recalling the promotion of inclusion of students with disabilities (comma n.181, clause *c*) the first mention is the redefinition of the role of support teachers also with the creation of specific academic training. In addition to other indications, the text also refers to a:

Revision of criteria of the disability certification that has to identify the residual ability in order to develop them through interventions jointly decided by all the specialists of the public, private health services that ‘follows’ (literal translation) the students recognised as disabled from the Law n. 104/92 and the Law n. 170/2010, participating in the GLH and GLI.⁴⁶

Moreover, the clause n. 181 uses interchangeably both the words *inclusione* and *integrazione scolastica* without a distinction of the two terms and always linking them to students with disabilities.

It is quite controversial that referring to student with disabilities and the review of certification’s criteria the Law n. 107 includes also student that are not defined as ‘disabled’ (here I am maintaining the word used within the law), again, without clear distinction that, instead, is clear in the Law n. 170/2010 establishing that students who are recognised having learning disorders are not considered as having disabilities. Moreover, the recall of ‘residual ability’, in the extract of the law reported above, represents the usual ability paradigm that characterised the special education perspective. Despite the intent of the Law was probably to give indication for collaborative partnerships in planning specific intervention, especially between school institutions and health care service (public and private) which is the only one entitled to diagnose disabilities or DSA, this point of the law, as many others, shows terminological and conceptual confusion that do not help to understand properly the law itself.

What is clearly understandable is the perpetuation of a model of *integrazione scolastica*, with some usage of the term inclusion but without the innovative evolution of this concept that is desirable in order to include every student, and every person involved in the education process. Furthermore, this interpretation pushes away the possibility of a

⁴⁶ Repubblica Italiana, Legge n. 107, 13 luglio 2015, p. 22. Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana

paradigmatic inversion that would mean thinking about inclusion not from a ‘special’ or ‘problematic’ perspective but rather from a rationale that considers diversity and difference as a part of the natural human development and not something that divides the ‘some’ from the ‘most’ (Florian, 2010).

In fact, the Law n. 107 seems to perpetuate the model of special education, still utilising a lexicon that reflects the ability (within the child) paradigm which, I argue, shows a reductionist view of difference. Drawing to, Hart and colleagues (2004):

Explaining differences in terms of inherent ability is not only unjust and untenable, but also deprives teachers of the chance to base and develop their practice upon a more complex, multifaceted and infinitely more empowering understanding of teaching and learning processes, and of the influences, internal and external to the school, that impinge on learning and achievement.⁴⁷

Considering that the Law n. 107 is a reform and aims to innovate the current school system, it was an opportunity to reaffirm or newly establish the principles that allowed other countries to define Italy as the so-called leading example of inclusion, such as the principles shared in the Constitution, in order to avoid the repetition of a vicious cycle that maintains contradictory elements as they are currently present in the system. From the brief analysis proposed so far, the concept of inclusion “as a reform that respond to diversity amongst all learners” (Ainscow, 2007a, p. 147), and not just regarding some students, seems to be still far to be reached in Italian legislation.

The debated role of support teachers

Questioning about the role of support teachers, in light of the nearly forty years of Italian school integration, may seem a provocative act compared to the undeniable educational and didactic contribution that this professional role has meant the creation of a system school, globally recognized as one of the top example of inclusion (D'Alessio, 2011b; Santi, 2014b; Kanter et al., 2014). Yet, the recent and still heated debate (Cottini, 2014; Goussot, 2014; Ianes, 2014; Nocera, 2015) about the reconfiguration of what and whom in everyday language school is usually called *sostegno* (support), invites us to reconsider this educational role in terms of training, skills and expertise, especially due to the recent reform of the Italian school system, better known (and equally disputed) as the reform of the 'Good School'.

⁴⁷ Hart, S., Dixon, A., Drummond, M-J., McIntyre, D. (2004). *Learning without limits*. Maidenhead, Berkshire, England: Open University Press, p. 17.

In fact, concerning this issue, the Law no. 107/2015 (Art.1, paragraph 181, point c/1) stipulates the "redefinition of the role of the support teaching staff in order to encourage school inclusion of students with disabilities, including the establishment of special training courses university ", although not making explicit, as often happens (Favorini, 2009), the implementing terms of this change (Nocera, 2015).

While, the norm calls to rethink and change this role in terms of teacher training and capabilities, on the other hand, none of practical criteria are expressed, leaving a space of uncertainty, but also of possibilities, challenging the evolution of a school system which has been distinguished worldwide for its legislation (Lauchlan, Fadda, 2012) of *integrazione scolastica*.

It is therefore in this fertile area of 'uncertainty' that the debate about the possible developments of the role, training, and above all professional identity of support teachers, continues to expand through comparison of positions, if not diametrically opposed, they assume decidedly mixed profiles. Some scholars, though formulating different transformative proposals, tend to stress the importance of this professional role as specialized, emphasising the specialised characteristics corresponding to a technical training with respect to the types of disability, pointing out, also, the inadequate preparation compared to individuals' needs special 'education in everyday teaching practice (Nocera, 2014; Ianes, 2014, 2015).

Regarding the Italian background, the shift from integration to inclusion, at least at the conceptual level, began his path only recently, and requires a deep reflection supported by research (D'Alessio, 2011; Canevaro, Malaguti, 2014), theoretical and empirical, about the meanings that this change implies in educational contexts. Rethinking the role of the teachers and the support is part of this process of metamorphosis, but it certainly cannot be considered the only component, reducing the inclusion speech to the binomial disability – support teaching.

We agree with the Santi (2014b, p. 201) that “talking about inclusive school means admitting the transformation of relations between the parties of the system and accept the reciprocity of the change as an opportunity evolutionarily fruitful for individual, collective and wider human development”.

From our point of view, to talk about inclusion, and assuming this perspective as a challenge to the reality of the Italian school, may only mean a change of terminology (from integration to inclusion), unless there will be a profound reconsideration of the elements which interact between them, they constitute the system. Reiterating that, in our view, it would be necessary to broaden the discourse of inclusion in legislation, not

reducing it primarily to the question 'support' teaching; this period of transition may be appropriate to reflect on the positive aspects that the training for support teaching can promote, or impede, within an inclusive perspective.

But this depends on the kind of meaning that is to be assigned to the concepts of inclusion and inclusive education and the type of linguistic and conceptual challenge that we want to take (Santi et al., 2014). Considering the use of ambivalent and interchangeable lexicon, inclusion / integration, which is adopted in the recent ministerial documents (C. M. 8/2013, annual reports on school integration of students with disabilities, etc.) and proposed in the Law n. 107/2015, it seems to be a paradigmatic homeostasis that prevents the conceptual progression necessary to truly realise an inclusive perspective, as an appreciation of differences of each element (cultural, individual, contextual) involved in educational and social process. This is not to deny the achievements of forty years of integration but rather try to understand in a profound way how to make it the basis of a further cultural, political and practical progress (Booth Ainscow, 2011) that responds to the constant transformation of a complex society (Morin, 2000).

Within this analysis, the role of support teachers needs to be deconstructed, analysed and rethought in an inclusive perspective, offering the possibility of a reflection that may reconsider in a broader way teachers' role in general. In fact, reducing the distinctions (curricular / support teacher) and expanding the connections, it could mean to fulfill a new vision of inclusive teacher, responding to the educational task of teaching all the students, recognising and valuing the differences of each respecting the uniqueness of each person. To do so, it is crucial to take the challenge (Santi, 2014b) of change, courageously facing the risk of leaving the 'special' approach to enter the 'inclusive' one, without forgetting the origin of the journey that led Italy to turn its eyes towards the horizon of inclusion.

Conclusion

Drawing the path walked by Italy on the way to inclusion, this chapter focused on significant aspects of this journey that is now facing critical challenges. Starting from a cultural, political and historical review of the first steps Italy made towards a more inclusive school system, resulted in the implementation of *integrazione scolastica* for students with disabilities, the first section analysed and discussed the development of what is internationally recognised to be a model of inclusion. In the second section, this model has been then examined in relation to international contexts, with a particular attention to some recent Italian norms regarding students with learning difficulties and

some critical effects, such as the overrepresentation of cultural minorities in this category of students.

Successively, I critically discussed about the introduction of a new classificatory system of students with special educational needs (BES) that functions as an additional category of labelling that seems to enhance the necessity of marking some students that presents some kind of disadvantage but are not being identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities. Debating some criticism of this recent regulation, I highlighted a linguistic, conceptual and practical incongruity that could result in a step backwards on the way towards inclusion and inclusive education in Italy.

In the last section I concentrated the attention on the recently emended Italian school reform pointing out how this norm does not consider the inclusion discourse as central and, in fact, shows a reiteration of a homeostatic paradigm of inclusion as 'ability/disability' related. Discussing the reform I further analysed the role of support teachers, and its possible new configuration, that in that norm are the main reference to the institutional commitment in order to improve inclusion in schools.

CHAPTER THREE

Teachers, attitudes and the challenge of inclusion

Theory sometimes seems to be local and abstract, because of too often focusing directly on the mechanism, without defining the real questions to be solved.

Serge Moscovici, 1963

Considering inclusion in education as a never-ending process, involves continuous changes, resetting previous stated conditions in order to find new forms of interaction and adaptation between all the elements belonging to a context. This constant evolution addresses also people's ideas, making necessary a recurrent reflection about what is thought and felt, since these two aspects inevitably influence what is consequently done or behaved by individuals (Ianes, 2011, p. 23). This relation is often expressed through people's attitudes towards a certain object, considered highly influential of someone's behaviour and revealing the way through which the world is perceived by that person (Oskamp, Schultz, 2004, p. 5).

Regarding inclusion and inclusive education, research in education has paid a particular attention to teachers' attitudes towards students with disabilities in mainstream school settings, considering this dimension as "critical in ensuring the success of inclusive practices" (Avradimis, Norwich, 2002, p. 130). In fact, as teachers' attitudes are considered a crucial element for the development of an inclusive educational context, research on this topic is considerably increasing in many parts of the World (Avradimis, Norwich, 2002).

Setting on this field, the core of this chapter addresses the matter of teachers' inclusive attitudes through a questioning lens that emphasizes the educational/pedagogical implications of studying this subject. Concentrating on understanding of the relations

between the underlying values and what is (expressed to be) done in practice, this investigative approach, as it will be explained throughout the chapter, takes a different direction compared to other research on this topic, usually more oriented to the measurement and classification of teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of students with disabilities.

The first section concerns the subject of attitudes and illustrates how this construct has been assumed within social science, drawing connections with values and practice. Then, the attention will be focused on the literature review on teachers' attitudes and inclusion, reflecting on related factors, such as teacher education, and main trends in researching this topic.

The third section will complete the rationale framework proposed within this work, regarding the definition of inclusive attitudes and proposing a new theoretical model developed during this study that offers a different perspective on understanding inclusion, combining the dimensions of values and practice.

3.1. Why attitudes matter

The way individuals perceive the world, what they think about something and how they behave in its respect, are expressions of subjective *postures* towards a certain object, commonly identified with the term attitudes. This term is widely used in everyday life and it is interpreted in various ways, depending on the situations, contexts and what individuals think about something.

According to Oskamp and Schultz (2005, p. 7), the term attitude⁴⁸ originally referred to “a person's bodily position or posture”, mainly used as a technical term in art and painting in order to imply some mental state. Over time, the term attitude has been assumed in social science as a “posture of the mind” (Oskamp, Schultz, 2005, p. 8), but always related to a further, possible, action.

Primarily, attitudes have been chiefly developed and studied in social psychology research (Moscovici, 1963; Oskamp, Schultz, 2005), but a consistent interest on this topic can be found also in educational field (Ianes et al., 2010). According to Bertolini (1996,

⁴⁸ As illustrated by Allport (1935), the term attitude derives from the Latin *aptus* meaning “fitness” or “readiness” and *aptitude* that indicates a “subjective or mental state of preparation for action” (p. 799) Originally the term was used in art referring to the posture of a figure in a statue or painting, then used in Psychology to describe a state of mind regarding an object, connoted as “a neuropsychic state of readiness for mental or physical activity” (*idibem*).

p. 35), attitudes⁴⁹ are “a very important clue about a person’s view of the world”, revealing also which values and beliefs guide someone’s verbal or behavioural expressions towards something, although this correlation is not always consistent (Mariani, 2010).

Since this study concerns the dimension of teachers’ attitudes, it is unavoidable to defining from the beginning how the construct of attitude is assumed within our theoretical framework. In order to set up a broader connection between this study and previous research on teachers’ attitudes and inclusion/inclusive education, I chose the adoption of this psychological construct as a starting point for further developments of the rationale framework of this work, that will be formulated on a pedagogical perspective later in this chapter.

Defining attitudes

The term *attitude* has been deeply investigated in psychological research field within several approaches. Oskamp and Schultz (2005, p. 5) identify five different research approaches to study attitudes: description, measurement, polls, theories and experiment. Accordingly with the aims of this doctoral research, especially regarding the understanding of inclusion, I refer to the descriptive approach of studying attitudes, that is explained by the authors as the “study of the views held by a single interesting group of people [...]” by researchers that are less oriented towards quantification or measurement, but rather interested in understanding concepts or situations. This means tackling this topic with a hermeneutic approach.

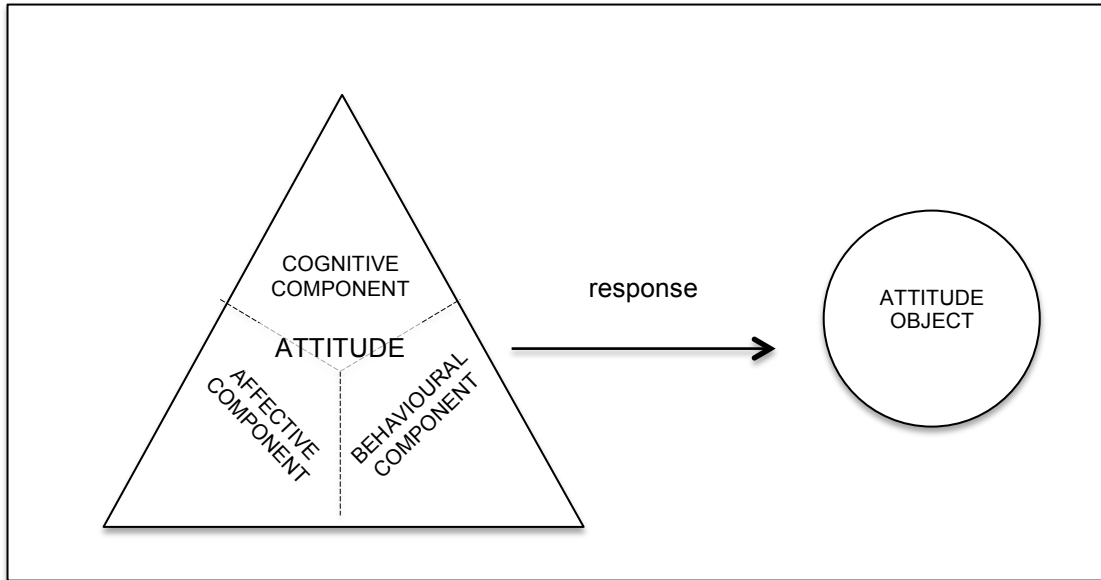
As well as research approaches, the concept of attitude is described by multiple theoretical viewpoints and related definitions. Since there are several theories within attitudes’ literature, I adopted in this work the tri-componential model (Eagly, Chaiken, 2007; 1993; Oskamp, Schultz 2005; Ianes et al., 2010; Fiorucci; 2014), the most used in educational research on teachers’ attitudes, in order to establish possible links with other studies on this topic.

According to Eagly and Chaiken, an attitude is “a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour” (1993, p. 1) formed by three different component identified as cognitive, affective and behavioural (Ianes et al., 2010, p. 31). Within the tripartite model, the cognitive aspect of

⁴⁹ In Italian there is some ambiguity between *attitudine* and *atteggiamento*, two terms that are often used interchangeably and can cause some confusion when translating the English term attitude (See Mariani, 2010 for a deeper analysis). In this work, the term attitude is translated with *atteggiamento* and its respective definition (Galimberti, 1992, p. 103).

attitudes is associated with the attributions that people ascribe to an attitude object, that can be concrete, abstract, individual or collective (Eagly, Chaiken, 2007, 583), as shown in the Figure 1.

Figure 3 – The tripartite model of attitudes



Referring to this model, the cognitive component refers to what an individual thinks about an object, depending on the knowledge, beliefs, opinions possessed by that person (Janis et al., 2010, p. 31). Feelings and emotions are related to the affective dimension of attitudes, and the behavioural aspect is connected to overt actions and intentions to act towards the attitude object (Eagly, Chaiken, 2007, p. 591). Moreover, Eagly and Chaiken specify that “attitudes can be formed or expressed primarily on the basis of any one of the three types of processes or some mix of these processes” (Eagly, Chaiken, 2007, p. 592), demonstrating a dynamic interaction between the different aspects. From this perspective, the three components, cognitive, affective and behavioural, can be mutually influential and interconnected during the formation or expression of attitudes. Following this view, although the expression of attitudes is an evaluating response directed to some entity (attitude object) by an individual or a group, attitudes can be explicit or implicit, and individuals can be aware of their attitudes or not. For this reason, attitudes cannot be directly observed themselves but can just be inferred on the base of what is observable: responses that are cognitive, affective or behavioural (Eagly, Chaiken, 2007, p. 12) and that can also be expressed through the usage of the language (Eiser, 1986, p. 12). Through the study of these responses it is possible to infer which attitudes underlie them,

eventually formulating an interpretation based on the inferences produced.

Among different approaches and theories, scholars usually agree that attitudes are not behaviour per se, but constitute the predictors of a potential or future behaviour, thus they are also related to practice (Eiser, 1986, p. 52; Oskamp, Schultz 2005, p. 12; Mariani, 2010). This predictability is seen as filling ‘the gap between the goals pursued and the action chosen in order to reach them’ (Bonvin, 2003, p. 281).

However, considering the link between attitudes and behaviour, research demonstrates that there is often a discrepancy between what is said and what is done (Eiser, 1986, p. 52). Wondering the relationship between attitudes and behaviour, Oskamp and Schultz (2005, p. 265) recognise that some kind of inconsistency can occur when implying a certain action from an expressed attitude, depending on many factors (i.e. personal beliefs, experience, and so on).

The link attitude-behaviour has received attention also in studying attitude changes, assuming that change in attitudes reflect also on behavioural change (Maio, Haddock, 2009, Ch.3). In this regard, attitude transformability has been one of the most studied aspect within the social psychology and, in some extent, it is also crucial for educational research; in fact, as it is shown by the Learning Approach (Oskamp, Schultz 2005, p. 207), educational programmes and activities, i.e. teacher education, can modify former attitudes towards certain objects (Loreman, et. al, 2005).

Other terms, such as value, belief, opinion, habit and trait, have strong links to attitudes, and although they have different definitions, are sometimes used synonymously (Oskamp, Schultz, 2005, p. 13).

As the interest of this research is understanding the relations between values and practice expressed through teachers’ attitudes, it is important to underling that attitudes cannot be misinterpreted with neither values nor practice, but are closely related with both this dimensions. Regarding the effect of values on attitudes, Oskamp and Schultz (2005) says that “individuals will have strong positive attitudes toward the values they hold” (p.15), and vice versa, strong and positive values are more likely to influence positive attitudes. In other words, it seems to mean that certain values while influencing attitudes reinforce, at the same time, that values system itself.

Furthermore, as stated by Ianes, Demo and Zambotti (2010, pp. 32-33), values function as a foundational basis of attitudes, influencing each component (cognitive, affective and behavioural) both in a direct and indirect way. From this assumption, considering values while studying attitudes is important not only because they are closely connected, but also because depending on certain values and attitudes it is conceivable to expect respective

practice.

An interesting aspect for our work is that values are a strong basis for attitudes, that can predict what people do in action (practice), putting this three dimensions in connection. Moreover, what is crucial from the pedagogical perspective assumed here, is that through specific interventions, such as education, training and so on, attitudes can change, possibly influencing also consequent changes in practice. Additionally, the possibility of discrepancy generated by an attitudinal change without an equivalent modification in practice give us the prompt to wonder which aspect to consider while approaching this topic in education, challenging at the same time the “what works” vision on inclusion and inclusive education (Boyle, Topping, 2012).

3.2. Teachers’ attitudes and inclusion: a panoramic screenshot

Attitudes have been receiving large attention not only within social psychology, but also within educational research field. Concerning inclusion and inclusive education, teachers’ attitudes have been recognised to be a crucial element in determining an inclusive climate in schools (Fiorucci, 2014) and an inclusive society (Beacham, Rouse, 2012), as well as a significant factor in influencing inclusive practices (Mastropieri, Scruggs, 2012, p. 153). According to Avradimis and Norwich (2002, p. 129), the interests on attitudes towards integration and inclusion have considerably increased in the two last decades and many studies have been conducted on this topic within educational research (Cornoldi et al., 1998; Avradimis et al., 2000; Cook, 2002; Forlin et al., 2011; Ianes et al., 2010, p. 33). However, Scrugg and Mastropieri (1995, p. 59) report that information about teachers’ attitudes⁵⁰ towards teaching students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms can be found at least from 1958, confirming that scholars’ interests on this topic is not just a recent trend. It seems reasonable to wonder if the increasing interests on this topic could be also seen as a result of the gradual promotion and implementation of inclusive policies in many European countries and at a global level, especially due to direction given by international organisations, such as UNESCO, UN, OECD and so forth, presented in the Chapter One.

⁵⁰ The paper authored by Scrugg and Mastropieri, titled *Teacher perceptions of mainstreaming/inclusion 1958-1995: a research syntesis* (1995), is a literature review that considers only research providing data on teachers’ attitudes toward teaching students with disabilities in general education classes. This syntesis, regardless is based only on few American studies, and quite dated, is one of the most quoted reference on teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion, followed by the one conducted by Avradimis and Norwich (2002).

Considering this view, the role of an attitudinal change towards inclusion and inclusive education is actually recognised by UNESCO (2009) as a precursor for the development of inclusive societies. In fact, as expressed by the *Policies Guidelines on Inclusion in Education*: “inclusion often requires a shift in people’s attitudes and values”⁵¹ (UNESCO 2009), in order to change not only conceptions among people but also school practice (Rambla, 2014, p. 90). Therefore, this raises awareness should involve a better understanding of inclusive education not only related to what is thought about inclusion but also what is done in practice.

Surely, all the actors involved in educational settings are seen as a valuable resource for the inclusive process, but some, such as teachers, parents and communities, are recognised having an essential role “in supporting all aspects of the inclusion process” (UNESCO 2009, p. 18). Teachers’ role as a factor of change is recognised as crucial regarding the development and implementation of inclusive education (Opertti, Brady, 2011). In fact, as addressed by Ainscow and Miles (2008, p. 21) “teachers are the key to the development of more inclusive forms of education.

Their beliefs, attitudes and actions are what create the context in which children and young people are required to learn”⁵². Assuming that every individual involved in the inclusive process play an important role, what is here suggested is that teachers can be both actors and directors of educational settings and can generate changes both at a micro level and more broadly, depending however on a synergic interaction with the other elements involved in the inclusive process.

Regarding factors influencing teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion scholars have listed some recurrent and interrelated elements that are ascribable to three main dimensions: student-related, teacher-related and educational environment-related variables (Avradimis, Norwich, 2002; Ianes et al., 2010). Student-related variable depends on the nature/typology of disability, showing that teachers deal more easily with students with physical and sensory impairments rather than emotional-behavioural difficulties. Within the teacher-related variables, is possible to find characteristics ascribable to gender, level of education, experience of interaction with people with disabilities, training, beliefs and socio-political views. Finally, some elements have been linked to the educational context, indicating the influence of availability of support in the classroom where students with disabilities are included, such as physical and human resource.

⁵¹ UNESCO (2009), *Policy Guidelines on Inclusive Education*, France.

⁵² Ainscow, Miles (2008), *Making Education for All inclusive: where next?*, Prospects, 38:15-34.

The role of teacher education in implementing inclusion in schools has been largely claimed by research on attitudes and beliefs of pre and in-service teachers (Vianello et al., 1999; Avradimis et al., 2000; Balboni, Pedrabissi, 2000; Forlin, 2010; Hwang, Evans, 2011).

Teachers are directly involved in the everyday school life, they design, plan and organise learning activities choosing approaches and strategies. Thus, it has been also argued that positive attitudes towards inclusion, developed during teacher preparation, allow teachers to better respond to students' differences in learning (Forlin et al., 2011, p. 51; Campbell et al., 2003, p. 370), easing the implementation of strategies that are suitable for all the learners in a classroom (Florian, 2014, p. 224).

Teacher education and the development of positive attitudes

Research on teachers' attitudes within the field of inclusion/inclusive education is massive and one of the most recent literature reviews (Avradimis, Norwich 2002), although it is a remarkable work, covers just research between 1984 and 2000. This accurate review⁵³ is a significant map to understand, at least until 2000, the main trend in researching teachers' attitudes regarding inclusion and inclusive education. During the last decades, the attention has also been gradually concentrated on pre-service teachers' attitudes (Campbell et al., 2003; Ryan, 2009; Forlin et al., 2011; Beacham, Rouse, 2012), both primary (Varcoe, Boyle, 2014) and secondary level (Costello, Boyle, 2013). The increasing amount of studies conducted on pre-service teachers demonstrate researchers' interests in studying factors that can help improving positive attitudes towards inclusion during teacher education programmes, as these courses have "the responsibility to ensure that teaching graduates not only acquire knowledge and skills but also develop attitudes that are necessary prerequisites for creating inclusive classrooms" (Sharma, Nuttal, 2016, p. 144).

Teacher education is seen as an essential way to develop inclusive attitudes (Avradimis et al., 2000; Operti, Brady, 2011), as well as specific training in special/inclusive education is recognised to be a significant predictor of positive attitudes (Sharma et al., 2008; Beacham, Rouse, 2012; Sharma, Nuttal, 2016). Regarding specific training, Sharma, Forlin and Foreman (2008) argue that a disability centred programme can positively influence teachers' positive attitudes to inclusion, since research suggests a correlation "between the amount of disability education and educators' positive attitudes" (Sharma et

⁵³ The literature review conducted by Avradimis and Norwich considered studies that were focused on integration and inclusion, in order to comprise earlier research in which the term used was integration.

al., 2008, p. 774). Moreover, it has been shown that student teachers', having attended courses on special/inclusive education, show more positive attitudes than in-service teachers regarding teaching students with special educational needs (Hastings, Oakford, 2003). The attitudinal difference between in-service and pre-service teachers reinforced the idea that teacher education is influential to the development of inclusive attitudes, becoming a key factor in "ensuring the success of inclusive practices" (Avradimis, Norwich, 2002), also from a policy implementation perspective (Norwich, 1994).

Others report a very little impact of training courses upon student teachers' attitudes towards student with special needs (Hastings, Oakford, 2003, p. 93), although the vast majority of studies demonstrate that teacher education concerning special education and inclusive education is positively effective in changing pre-service teachers' attitudes (Sharma et.al, 2008). In this respect, it is also argued that often teachers do not feel enough prepared to "deal with matters of diversity in their classrooms" (Beacham, Rouse, 2012, p. 3), reinforcing the idea that teacher education is fundamental in order to achieve knowledge, skills, attitudes needed to be inclusive teachers (EADSNE, 2012).

So far, research on pre-service teachers' attitudes concerning inclusion, carried alongside research on in-service teachers, has been primarily centred on attitudinal measurement and classification (pre/post training courses), showing an improvement in respect of the acceptance, or willingness, in teaching students with disabilities/SEN (Avradimis et al., 2000; Ryan, 2009; Sharma et al., 2008).

However, the discourse about teachers' attitudes and inclusion, also related to teacher preparation, seems to focus chiefly on a disability/SEN perspective, narrowing the issue of inclusive education and reinforcing the duo inclusion-disability/SEN (Camedda, Santi, 2016).

Attitudes towards inclusion

Interests in studying in-service and pre-service teachers' attitudes have shown many noteworthy aspects regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities and SEN within mainstream classrooms, especially related to factors that are influential to the development of positive attitudes, as teacher education (Forlin et al., 2011). Considering that, research literature on this topic is mainly focused on the measurement of teachers' attitudes in order to distinguish and classify, most often through quantitative approach (i.e. scales, questionnaires, and so on), the grade of acceptance or rejection towards inclusion and, consequently, of teaching students that have been diagnosed as having disability or special educational needs (Avradimis, Norwich, 2002).

Since the concept of attitude is chiefly a psychological construct, we find that educational research on attitudes towards inclusion, of both pre-service and in-service teachers, has a general psychological approach and mainly refers to a disability/SEN-related framework (Ianes et al., 2010). Among the myriad of research conducted on this topic, most of the studies were focused on the investigation of *attitudes towards inclusion* (Avradimis, Norwich, 2002; Burke, Sutherland, 2004; Ianes et al., 2010; Canevaro et al., 2011; Beacham, Rouse, 2012) referring to inclusion as a framework related to students having disabilities/SEN. Others pieces of research refer instead about *inclusive attitudes* but still meaning attitudes towards inclusion (Ryan, 2009; Cook, 2002, 2004), thus the level of acceptance/rejection of teaching students with disabilities/SEN within regular classrooms. These studies seem to investigate the range of attitudes shown by teachers' using interchangeably the two expressions: inclusive attitudes and attitudes towards inclusion.

Considering that in Italy the *integrazione scolastica* of student with disabilities is active since 1977, recent studies conducted on perceptions and opinions of subject teachers and support teachers about this established model (Ianes et al., 2010; Treelle et al., 2011; Canevaro et al., 2011) demonstrate a general positive attitude, also due to the fact that this condition has been the norm for more than thirty years. Despite there is not a complete agreement among teachers on the benefits for certain students with disabilities to be included in regular classroom (Ianes et al., 2010, p. 59), the *integrazione scolastica* seems to be largely accepted as a core of the Italian educational model. Foreasmuch as the concept, and history, of *integrazione scolastica* was described in the last chapter, Italian research finds its place within the international literature of attitudes towards inclusion, thus mostly concerning students with disabilities/SEN (Cornoldi et al., 1998).

In respect of the factors influencing more positive attitudes, research conducted in Italy shown that support teachers demonstrate more positive attitudes than their colleagues teaching subjects (Ianes et al., 2010, p. 95); this confirms that specific training courses and the experience in working with students with disabilities effect positively teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of those students (Sharma et al., 2008; Avradimis, Norwich, 2002).

Internationally, when talking of teachers' attitudes and inclusion the discourse seems to deal mainly with the category of students with disabilities/SEN, also regarding teacher education. Although broader meanings of inclusion and inclusive education are shared among countries through international documents (UNESCO, UN, OECD), research on teachers' attitudes keeps being linked to a framework disability/problem-centred, reinforcing the association of the concept of inclusive attitudes just towards some

students, those who are identified having disabilities/SEN.

In order to broaden the view of teachers' attitudes and inclusion, not just concerning specific categories of students, the intent of this study is to offer a theoretical frame that implies a conceptualization of inclusion as a matter of all (and every) students, as well as teachers, parents, and other persons involved in the educational setting.

3.3. Understanding inclusion

Inclusive attitudes: a different perspective and a proposal

The concept of inclusion and inclusive education embraced within the theoretical framework of this study do not concern just students with disabilities or identified as 'problematic'. Reaffirming the assumptions expressed in Chapter One, inclusion and inclusive education regard more broadly every individual involved in an educational system, and the interaction between the elements of that system (Santi, 2014b). Since the words we choose to use within our language express and shape the concepts, views, principles we hold, the question Austin (1975) posed about the factual implication of uttering certain words, is here of an absolute relevance.

Following this view, this study is specifically focused on teachers' *inclusive attitudes*, distinguishing this term from the other one mostly used in literature: attitudes towards inclusion. The distinction between the two terms can be operated at different levels. Firstly, in the common expression 'attitudes towards inclusion' the preposition *towards* implies a movement, a direction that covers a range of different grades of acceptance/favour or rejection/disfavour towards an object (inclusion). Then, this movement also reflects a conceptual view: if we refer to attitudes towards inclusion, we include both those positive and negative, possibly distinguishing them through a sort of classification that demarcates the boundaries between the two poles (Sharma et al., 2008). The two ends of this range, complete acceptance or complete rejection, delimitate a continuum where single attitudes can be operationalised and measured: in fact, this conceptual and operative approach is usually combined with quantitative measurement (Forlin et al., 2011).

It seems that research, so far, approached this topic following this mechanism of investigation: identifying which kind of attitudes that teachers express, in regard of students with disabilities in mainstream educational settings. This approach allowed us to have a lot of studies interrogating, and displaying, the factors correlated to the formation,

development and change of positive and negative attitudes, giving indispensable information for carrying research on this topic. Yet, since the purpose of this research was not to measure or classify which type of attitudes teachers have (positive/negative), but rather to understand factors implicated in the transformation of inclusive values into practice, the focus has been put just on those attitudes definable as *inclusive*.

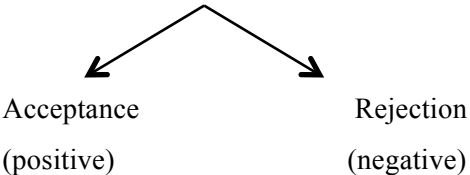
Assuming the importance of attitudes, in which further direction, inclusion-wise, can this topic be further developed?

Trying to answer this question, the proposal presented in this work starts from the definition of inclusive attitudes, that is not a synonymous term of attitudes towards inclusion, as it will be explained soon after.

From a linguistic point of view, the use of the adjective 'inclusive' regarding attitudes, says clearly that the attitudes we are taking in account have certain (positive) traits, and are not just referring to students with disabilities and mainstream settings. In this respect, the word 'inclusive' indicates the qualifications attributed to attitudes, corresponding to a set of characteristics expressed by individuals that are ascribable to the theoretical assumption of inclusion adopted in this work. In other words, if teachers express inclusive attitudes do not mean they are just pro-inclusion (Beacham, Rouse, 2012) of students with disabilities/SEN in mainstream settings, but also something more.

As illustrated in the next page, Figure 4, and following the new perspective offered in this work, I suggest that when teachers have inclusive attitudes they manifest a deep understanding of inclusion (not just related to disability), showing inclusive values and referring to practice that have been indicated in literature as inclusive (Booth, Ainscow, 2011). Moreover, it is possible also to draw another distinction between the two conceptual expressions: when talking about attitudes towards inclusion the object is disability-related, while when considering inclusive attitudes the object is diversity-related.

Figure 4 – Distinction between attitudes towards inclusion and inclusive attitudes

Attitudes towards inclusion	Inclusive attitudes
 <p data-bbox="316 622 456 707">Acceptance (positive)</p> <p data-bbox="660 622 788 707">Rejection (negative)</p>	<p data-bbox="842 367 1350 555">Show a deep understanding of inclusion (explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy, self-knowledge, Wiggins, McTighe, 2005)</p>
	<p data-bbox="842 620 1350 808">Express inclusive value (i.e. respect for diversity, community belonging, participation, valuing learners diversity, equality and justice)</p>
	<p data-bbox="842 826 1350 965">Refer to inclusive practice (i.e. practice that involves active participation, collaboration)</p>
Disability-related object	Diversity/difference-related object
<p data-bbox="316 1032 817 1220">Mainly referred to students who are identified as <i>diverse</i> (i.e. with disabilities, special educational needs). Problematic students view.</p>	<p data-bbox="842 1032 1350 1220">The focus is on diversity as a normal component of every person and on inclusion as a process for valuing differences among persons.</p>

As shown in the Figure 4, this conceptual framework proposes a shift not only from a linguistic perspective, but it also gives insights for a change of the focal point, that in this respect concerns diversity as a intrinsic and extrinsic aspect of every person (Camedda, Santi, 2016). This point is crucial and what is here suggested regards more generally the conceptual meaning of inclusion and inclusive education, as argued in Chapter One. Since this work assumes inclusion and inclusive education as regarding all and everyone, considering diversity as a common pattern and at the same time as a element of uniqueness, this view is taken also in regard of inclusive attitudes. In other words, inclusive attitudes are not just towards those students that are identified as problematic or in need of additional support, but should characterise a fundamental teachers' approach to everyone involved in the educational system, including students, parents, colleagues and other professionals. Sharpening this view on teaching, what outlines teachers' inclusive attitudes is the view of inclusion not just related to students with disabilities/SEN, but regarding the educational response to the diverse student population in their classrooms

and the interaction of individuals belonging to a community. Diversity and differences are seen, from this perspective, as distinctive patterns of every student, and consequently of every person, not just concerning some that are labelled as different from the norm.

A design for understanding

Reaffirming the pedagogical perspective of this work in understanding teachers' inclusive attitudes and eventually interpret their view on inclusion as a thought and acted concept, our structural rationale of inclusive attitudes includes the model of *Understanding*, developed by Wiggins and McTighe (2005) within the backward design approach⁵⁴. This model, although created as an educational/instructional tool for teachers, has been adapted for research, purposes guiding the formation of the rationale framework here suggested.

In order to define teachers' understanding of inclusion as expression of inclusive attitudes, something not yet present in literature, the model of understanding proposed by Wiggins and McTighe⁵⁵ has been used to define this concept.

What is here proposed is that understanding, as a mental construct, concerns all the three attitudes' components and can be assumed as an expression of attitude as it is "an abstraction made by the human mind to make sense of many distinct pieces of knowledge" (2005, p. 37). Understanding, as stated by Wiggins and McTighe, means both showing what it is known and what can be done (practice), recalling the idea of how an individual sees the world and the resulting actions.

Following this approach, understanding is seen as a multidimensional and complex construct composed by overlapped and integrated aspects. In order to clarify this complexity, Wiggins and McTighe identified six facets that constitute a deep understanding: explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy, self-knowledge. Resuming, for Wiggins and McTighe, (truly) understanding is possible only if these dimensions are fulfilled, thus if we (see next page):

⁵⁴ A further explanation of the backward design will be given in the Chapter Four when presenting the research methodology.

⁵⁵ For a more detailed description of the six facets of understanding in their original conceptualization see Wiggins, G. P., McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design*. Ascd.

- *Can explain*—via generalizations or principles, providing justified and systematic accounts of phenomena, facts, and data; make insightful connections and provide illuminating examples or illustrations.
- *Can interpret*—tell meaningful stories; offer apt translations; provide a revealing historical or personal dimension to ideas and events; make the object of understanding personal or accessible through images, anecdotes, analogies, and models.
- *Can apply*—effectively use and adapt what we know in diverse and real contexts—we can “do” the subject.
- *Have perspective*—see and hear points of view through critical eyes and ears; see the big picture.
- *Can empathize*—find value in what others might find odd, alien, or implausible; perceive sensitively on the basis of prior direct experience.
- *Have self-knowledge*—show metacognitive awareness; perceive the personal style, prejudices, projections, and habits of mind that both shape and impede our own understanding; are aware of what we do not understand; reflect on the meaning of learning and experience.

Figure 5 – From Wiggins, McTighe (2005, p. 84): Understanding, six facets explanation

Considering that this model was originally conceived for teaching, it was not possible to utilise this frame within the theoretical framework of this study without making some adaptations, that should be seen just as an initial stage of a possible way to approach, pedagogically, teachers’ attitudes. In fact, the intention of this research is not just to study teachers’ inclusive attitudes, but also to offer some reflection about how carrying research on this topic that could open new views, both theoretical and empirical, through the pedagogical perspective, rather than the psychological one.

As the model created by Wiggins and McTighe gives a structured and functional tool to understand understanding, it has been used to dealing with attitudes from a different viewpoint. In order to apply this model within the framework of inclusive attitudes, the six facets of understanding have been tailored to the concept of inclusion, providing some indication about what a person should be able to express when deeply understanding inclusion, as shown in Figure 6 (see the following page).

Figure 6 – Adaptation of the model of Understanding

Six facets of Understanding – Inclusion	
Explanation	Can explain what is inclusion
Interpretation	Can interpret and describe an inclusive process
Application	Can give examples of inclusive practice
Perspective	Can give critical points of view about what happen/could happen in an inclusive context
Empathy	Can express the feeling of being included
Self-knowledge	Can reflect on facilitations and limits to be inclusive

Following this view, it is arguable that teachers’ understanding of inclusion is related to attitudes, suggesting that a deep understanding supports and influences the development of inclusive attitudes, as they have been previously described.

This structure supports a more systematic framing of the concept of understanding within the rationale of inclusive attitudes, but is not a definite one. In fact, in line with the exploratory asset of this study, it would be possible to enrich, modify and rethink this first attempt of a new theoretical configuration through information gathered during empirical investigation.

Values

Reaffirming that values can be seen as foundational elements of attitudes, when we talk about inclusive attitude we refer consequently to certain values. Given the complexity of values-related discourse, depending on personal, cultural, historical, contextual differences (Ianes et al., 2010), it is hardly conceivable to establish a normative set of values that can be ascribed to inclusion, but some clarification on this matter is necessarily required. Although it is not my intention to give a definite list of values to be identified as ‘inclusive’, it is important to indicate at this point some values that can be considered within the rationale of this study, in order to have further reference points for the fieldwork.

Education is based on an axiological dimension that permeates and influences beliefs, attitudes and practice. Sharing the idea expressed by Booth (2011, p. 304) that “inclusion is about putting particular values into action”, what I argue is that values are expressed

through attitudes. Thus, depending on which values underlie teachers' views it is possible to identify inclusive attitudes and expect a correspondent inclusive practice, recognising values, and attitudes, "as prompts to action" (Booth, 2011, p. 308). Framing which values can be identified as supportive of an inclusive perspective, Booth indicates, among others⁵⁶, *equality* (including equity, fairness and justice), *participation*, *respect for diversity*, *community*. Having identified these values as crucial for an inclusive perspective, they are shared within the theoretical framework here proposed, as shown in Figure 4 .

These values are constitutive of our inclusive perspective, although they can be integrated or discussed depending on other points of view on inclusion and inclusive education. Moreover, as suggested by Booth (2011) it is important to consider the matter of values regarding teacher education, especially if we want to develop a view of inclusive education not just related to student categorised as having disability/SEN, but more broadly for all the students and the other individuals involved in the educational process.

Practice

Completing the view on inclusion, related to inclusive attitudes, practice is the result of values put in action (Booth, 2011). Moreover, within a social theory of learning (Wenger, 1998) practice is intended as a "complex process of participation" (1998, p. 49) that implies a negotiation of meaning between individuals. Following this view, Wenger explains the concept of practice as "doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do", connoting practice always as a social experience of individuals' involvement, better identified as community of practice. For Wenger, this concept of practice includes both the explicit than the tacit, the said and the unsaid of what is the common sense shared by people through mutual engagement.

Embracing this perspective, practice is interpreted in this study as the actions taken by and within a community, expression of the values and attitudes held by individuals mutually engaged in an educational context. Thus, practice does not just concern curriculum, activities and so forth, but more it regards what is done in relation with what is thought, by an individual or a group, always considering the educational context as a spiral system where all the elements are in connection. In this respect, practice can be seen as a process of engagement that "involves the whole person, both acting and knowing at once" (Wenger, 1998, pp. 47-48). Applying the theoretical view formulated in

⁵⁶ For the full list of values, see Booth, Tony. (2011). The Name of the Rose: Inclusive Values into Action in Teacher Education. *Prospects: Quarterly Review of Comparative Education*, 41(3), 303-318.

this study, practice can be identified as a community process of active participation involving acting and understanding, rather than just knowing.

Concerning inclusion, this perspective of practice needs to be integrated with the concept of inclusive education, in order to outline considerations regarding an inclusive educational practice. As Slee (2001b, p. 113) points out, this issue is not a simple one and a concept of inclusive practice cannot be separated from a theoretical assumption of inclusion and inclusive education. Again, as also remarked by Wenger (1998), theory and practice are not two poles, detached one from the other, but are integrated elements mutually influential, that should be equally considered when approaching discourse, in our case, regarding inclusion. From a certain understanding of inclusion it will depend a certain practice, and vice-versa. This reciprocal aspect, held within the concept of community of practice, supports a holistic view of inclusion and inclusive education, where cultures, policies and practice are equally important and mutually influential.

If we assume inclusion as a perspective that requires change, educational practice should reflect the commitment for a change, transforming in action what is theoretically assumed.

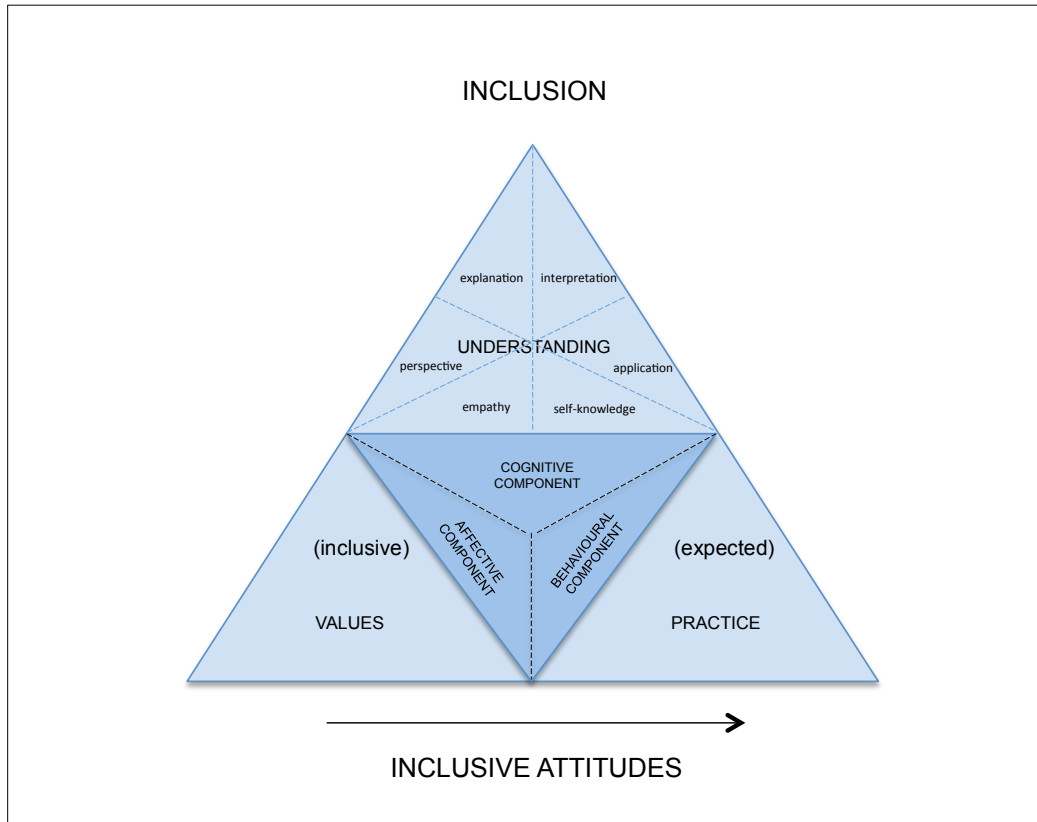
Completing the puzzle: inclusive attitudes, from values to practice?

We have seen that, from an axiological perspective, values function as a scaffold for attitudes and are thus related to practice. Evidence suggests that teacher education can be influential in changing attitudes (Avradimis, Norwich, 2002) developing a more inclusive teaching approach for all the students in a classroom, considering their differences as potential instead of limitation.

Considering pedagogical implications, it seems necessary to explain and further investigate the relations between values, attitudes and practice, considering the model of understanding here proposed as a possible tool for inquiring the topic of inclusion and inclusive education.

Trying to configure the integration of the aspects so far considered, the connection between values, inclusive attitudes, practice and the understanding of inclusion can be visualise through a systemic model that put these dimensions together, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7 – Theoretical model configuration



The theoretical model here proposed through this visual configuration, represents a triangular figure combining the four dimensions considered in this study. Looking at the central triangle (Figure 7), it is possible to see the three components of attitude, leaning on the axiological dimension (values) and the practical one (practice). According to Loreman, Deppeler and Harvey (2005, p. 41) the system of values underlie our attitudes and, through them, guides our behaviours. Following this view, what is argued is that “the more we know about a person’s attitudes the more we can predict how he or she will behave in relevant situations” (Loreman et al., 2005, p. 41). This ‘predictive’ aspect of attitudes on behaviour, however, is not always confirmed, as suggested by Eiser, (1986), and for this reason I suggest to refer to “expected behaviour”, thus expected practice, rather than predicted. Resuming, if we have inclusive values, they will be expressed through inclusive attitudes that should lead to an inclusive practice. Moreover, looking at the top triangle, inclusive attitudes are identifiable as such if they express an understanding of inclusion, as previously explained in this chapter. This perspective adopts a more pedagogical view, as it does not aim to measure and classify teachers’ attitudes (positive/negative), but it rather seeks understanding how teachers’ inclusive

attitudes are expressed through the relations between values and practice.

The model here proposed is not to be intended as fixed or finished; in fact, being a starting point for further reflections on this topic, it would be desirable to share this view within the educational scientific community so as to identify criticisms and potentials that can foster its development.

Conclusion

The matter of attitudes has been analysed and discussed throughout this chapter in order to complete the theoretical framework that underpins this study. Initially, I presented the concept of attitude in its psychological formulation, since this notion has been largely developed and studied in social psychology for almost a century. Starting from the interpretation of attitude as a tripartite model that involves cognitive, affective, and behavioural areas, I successively presented a literature's overview on attitudes and inclusion in educational research. Highlighting some of the most significant themes emerged from research in this area, I discussed the importance of positive attitudes in fostering an inclusive perspective in education, especially the role regarding teacher education in developing attitudes that can be defined as inclusive. Regarding this aspect, I argued that previous research on this topic has focused primarily on the classification of negative or positive attitudes, discussing some conceptual and linguistic implications about what we can intend for inclusive attitudes. From this view, I then processed a deep reflection on that concept proposing a new theoretical approach that distinguish inclusive attitudes from what in general has been the focus of studies in this area, thus attitudes towards inclusion. Introducing an adapted design for understanding of inclusion, originally formulated for teaching planning (Wiggins, McTighe, 2005), I discussed the role of values and practice relatively to the formation of inclusive attitudes.

Then, I developed a theoretical proposal configuring the integration of the tripartite model of attitude with six dimensions of understanding, values and practice. This systemic model is the theoretical basis I adopted during the study, guiding research planning and data collection, as well as the analysis and interpretation of results that will be discussed in the next chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR

An exploratory study on teachers' inclusive attitudes

Methodology should not be a fixed track to a fixed destination but a conversation about everything that could be made to happen. The language of this conversation must bridge the logical gap between the past and the future but in doing so it should not limit the variety of possible futures that are discussed nor should it force the choice of a future that is unfree.

J.C. Jones, 1992

Conducting research in education, as well as in other fields, can be metaphorically seen as a journey towards a new place of which we have just some information. It is not about only discovery itself, although educational researchers are like explorers seeking something new, but it is more about developing the knowledge of that which is already known, often questioning topics that are really close to personal experience or reflecting the researcher's interests. This aspect is not of little significance because it can deeply influence the choices the researcher makes regarding both the theoretical assumptions and the methodology chosen to conduct the study. Recognising the researcher's subjectivity as a potential for their research is possible when this aspect is taken into account in the first place and critically considered, in order to avoid a non-professional approach to research (Peshkin, 1988). There is something in common between the researcher and the explorer, here meant more as a traveller, and this is related to the capacity of planning, doing and documenting the journey. The journey aims to move from the known to the unknown, but surely engaging not only the person who is conducting the research and having an impact at a social level.

According to Schostak (2002, p. 2), this 'adventure' entails "a double structure: one track

is the life of bodily engagement with the world; the other track is the life of reflection in order to re-present textually, through images, through signs of all kinds, the experience of the journey”.

In this chapter I will discuss the methodological part of the research, considering the issues related to the research design, data collection and analysis.

The first section will illustrate the research design, particularly focusing on the choice of the topic, the aims and main questions of the study; then, a discussion about methodological issues encountered will introduce the new data collection tool, developed from the theoretical framework adopted in this research.

The attention will then be concentrated on the fieldwork, considering the selection of participants, discussing ethical consideration related to the study and giving a descriptive account of data collection in its significant aspects.

The third part of this chapter is dedicated to data-analysis; in this section I will present the analysis process in its main stages, giving insights about the methodological approach applied and showing data representation that have been successively used for the results interpretation.

Considering the new theoretical approach adopted for this research, and remarking its exploratory purpose, the methodology presented in this chapter embraces a qualitative approach offering a diverse form of data collection that is configurable as non conventional and aims to reflect the inclusive values that, ethically, guided all this work.

4.1. Research Design: purpose, questions and methodology

From where to where?

As travellers prepare their journey being moved by some kind of interest, the researcher identify the topic of a research on the basis of many factors (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 105) that can be related to their previous experience in a certain field or be guided by other motivations, such as topical concerns or dilemmas that are being analysed in literature, local problems, and so forth. Regarding education, the implications at a practical level, even when the research is purely theoretic, are an important aspect to be considered from the very beginning of a research design-

The doctoral research discussed in this thesis started from my personal interests about the concept of inclusion and its development at a local (Italy) and international level. This interest was cultivated during more than a decade of professional practice as a support

teacher and formerly teaching assistant in schools (K13).

Due to previously research on disability and cultural difference (Camedda, 2015), through which I investigated the perceptions of teachers and teaching assistants towards the overlapping of diversities and the overrepresentation of ethnic minority within students with disabilities in Italian schools, I started questioning the paradigm of inclusion and inclusive education adopted in my country. My personal experience as a teacher, working mainly with students with disabilities within a common classroom, but also in individualised settings, allowed me to touch in practice what concept of inclusive education was acted in the everyday school life, at least at a local level in the schools where I worked. There I perceived and saw a discrepancy between what was said through official documents and what was done in practice, considering the issue not just as a teacher, but also through the results of the research I conducted prior to the Doctoral programme.

What I could experience as a teacher, and researching on the field of education, was that the “Italian model” of *integrazione scolastica*, broadened towards an inclusive perspective, was still perpetuating an homeostatic paradigm of inclusion (Camedda, Santi, 2016) as if it was a discourse concerning just some student, those whom were identified as having some kind of problems (disability/special educational needs). Starting from these considerations I developed an increasing interest on the topic of teachers’ attitudes, as they are recognised in literature to be a crucial element for the development of inclusive education, as discussed in Chapter Three. Having considered the historical and cultural dimension that supported the *integrazione scolastica* in Italy, and results from research on attitudes towards inclusion, I was interested in understanding which concept of inclusion was held by teachers and, from an attitudinal point of view, which relations were implicated between the transformation of values into practice.

I did not decide the final destination of this research, but when I was in my first year of the PhD programme I surely took a direction towards a new land. In doing so, I had to map my journey, drawing a research project that helped me identifying the steps necessary to be orientated in exploring new territories, being aware that “there is no safe and secure journey through what is essentially the unknown” (Schostak, 2002, p. 3).

This operation was sustained and included within the work conducted by the research group on inclusive education, coordinated by my supervisor, that investigates inclusion and its development in educational contexts.

Aims and research questions

Considering the complexity of the topic that I decided to investigate, the aims of this study are several. Firstly, this research aims to contribute to the field of inclusive education offering a new perspective on the topic of inclusive attitudes. On one hand, as I already disclosed in the Chapter Three, I propose a different conceptual framework and meaning of “inclusive attitudes”, compared to other studies on this topic.

Secondly, using a critical approach I argue that the latest Italian ministerial norms, as they have been discussed in the Chapter Two, are perpetuating a policy of inclusion that is still disability centred. In this respect, this study aspires to offer a critical reflection about the direction Italy is taking inclusion-wise and which effects are consequently implicated for education, concerning teachers’ inclusive attitudes, values and practice. Moreover, having focused the attention also on teacher education, one of the purposes of this research on inclusive attitudes is to give some insights for further and possible implementations for teacher preparation and training, concerning inclusion discourse, currently focused within a disability/SEN perspective.

For this reason, the perspective adopted in this study seeks to be further developed in the future in order to foster research, from a cross-cultural point of view, involving other international realities that are facing the challenge of inclusive education.

To sum up, the contribution this study wishes to bring to the field of inclusive education responds to various purposes: at a national level, it aims to increase the knowledge about inclusion and reflects on implementations in initial and ongoing teachers education. At an European level, or even within a broader international context, the outcomes of this research could be taken as a starting point for further research, valuing the Italian experience on this topic but also putting it in connection with other scenarios where inclusive education has been developed as well.

Having these goals in mind, three main research questions were identified, in order to investigate inclusive teachers’ attitudes and the relations between values and practice.

The first question is about how teachers (in service and training at the same time) *understand* inclusion. As explained in Chapter Three, understanding is here intended with a broader meaning, referring both to teachers’ knowledge and what they do or experience in practice. This question underpins the assumption that it is primarily important to define *how* teachers understand inclusion in order to identify inclusive attitudes. Yet, since understanding is a multidimensional and complex process a specific approach inspired by the Backward Design (Wiggins, McTighe, 2005) has been adopted in order to identify six facets that constitute a deep understanding (explanation, interpretation, application,

perspective, empathy and self-knowledge).

The second main question formulated for this study asks which are the relations between teachers' values and practice expressed by inclusive attitudes? Given that values are significant for attitudes but not always do they correspond to a certain teaching practice (Bertolini, Caronia, 1996). On the other hand, practice can be seen as the behavioural expression of attitudes. The exploratory intention of this study seeks to understand if there is a correspondence in what is expressed by inclusive teachers' attitudes and what they experience in their real practice in schools, trying to point out critical factors that substantially facilitate or impede the transferability of inclusive values into practice.

The last main question raises the issue of teacher preparation. Given that education is a significant factor in developing positive attitudes, as the literature on teachers' attitudes shows, the third research question is intended to investigate the role of training in empowering teachers' inclusive attitudes. Since in Italy issues related to inclusion are chiefly taught during teacher education for support teaching of students with disabilities, this question is further articulated to understand the role of these particular courses mainly centred on special education topics.

In conclusion, these three main questions touch three aspects that were considered as fundamental at the early stage of this research: the dimension of understanding, the relations between values and practice through the expressions of inclusive attitudes, the role of (specific) teacher education.

Methodological approach

Conducting research in education and questioning the research process itself consents a meta-thinking that involves the ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological dimensions. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 3), following Hitchcock and Hughes (1995), the "ontological assumptions (assumptions about the nature of reality and the nature of things) give rise to epistemological assumptions (ways of researching and inquiring); these in turn, give rise to methodological considerations" generating related issues, from an empirical perspective, to data collection. The axiological dimension is important as well, as it informs our understanding of the world and guides that understanding through our values and principals.

Regarding this research the ontological dimension of inclusion, related to inclusive attitudes, generated epistemological issues not easily solvable, if intending research in education not just a reproduction of methods developed within other social sciences.

According to the stance of Nobile (2014, p. 257), the educational researcher does not transform the reality while researching it, but seeks to generate knowledge that will eventually be the base from which it will be possible to transform or enhance the practice. Hoping to contribute to this advancement I developed the theoretical framework presented in the last chapter, consequently taking an exploratory and interpretative methodological perspective (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 17).

Identifying which approach (qualitative-quantitative) to adopt for the empirical investigation caused many difficulties because of the new theoretical proposal developed at the beginning of this study. First of all, there was no other study embracing this perspective, as it had been formulated within this study, thus it was not possible to use an established method for the data collection. Moreover, the vast majority of studies on teachers' attitudes, for the reasons explained in the last chapter, were based on quantitative approaches of data collection, using primarily scales for attitudes measurement (Forlin et al., 2011; Avramidis, Norwich, 2002; Cornoldi et al., 1998). It was hardly feasible to match a quantitative approach to the type of research I was conducting, and considering the interpretative scope of this study, the qualitative method seemed to be more suitable for the research purposes (Litchman, 2010). In fact, according to Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p. 8):

The word *qualitative* implies an emphasis on processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined, or measured (if measured at all), in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what it is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning.

Having decided to adopt the qualitative approach, the next step was the identification of the tool for data collection. Additional time for reflection and discussion with my supervisor, allowed me to reach a turning point for this research phase; following the model derived from the theoretical framework of understanding (Wiggins, McTighe 2005) I structured interviews (Baldacci, Frabboni, 2013, p. 245) based on the six facets explained in the Chapter Three. Adopting a qualitative method through interviews, both well established within research in education (Litchman, 2010; Sorzio, 2005), the empirical investigation moved from a known approach but taking new directions regarding the typology of instrument utilised for the interviews.

Taking inspiration from an original instrument developed by Santi and Zorzi (2016) within a study on teachers as improvisers⁵⁷, I elaborated a version of the interview based on two boards to be used with participants. The instrument was art-based, multisensory, interactive, semi-structured, facilitating a more informal and spontaneous interview setting (Atkins, Wallace, 2012). The interview construction was guided by the values identified and embraced within the theoretical framework, assuming an inclusive approach of interaction with participants.

Moreover, the questions were based on the facets of understanding (explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy, self-knowledge), composing a six-question interview that was built. The tool was structured on two boards: a question board and a visual one, to be displayed at the same time during the interview.

– Question board

A board reported the questions in sequence (1 to 6) with embossed numbering for tactile stimulation to show to each participant at the moment of the interview, as it is shown in Figure 8

Each question was formulated following the theoretical framework of understanding of inclusion, previously built, without expressing a defined conceptualization of inclusion but leaving the participants free to express their own views.

This approach was discussed and chosen with my supervisor, also through a review of the questions from other researchers of the University that works on the topic of inclusion. The final version of the interview, shown these six questions:

- 1) *Explanation* – How would you define ‘inclusion’ in education?
- 2) *Interpretation* – From what do you recognise an inclusive process?
- 3) *Application* – How would you apply inclusion in your practice?
- 4) *Perspective* – What do you expect it could happen in a inclusive classroom?
- 5) *Empathy* – What does ‘feel included’ mean to you?
- 6) *Self-knowledge* – What facilitates or impedes you in being inclusive?

Every question intends to investigate one specific aspect of Understanding, giving a global view of the attitudes expressed by the interviewees. Moreover, the method of inquiry on inclusive attitudes, chosen for this study, belongs to the indirect and implicit

⁵⁷ Santi and Zorzi (2015, 2016) explore improvisational skills, mainly derived from an interpretation of improvisation belonging to Jazz and performative arts, as key features for a profile of teachers that can face the challenges of schools and classrooms in continuous change. From this perspective, teachers improviser have a solid expertise and creative problem solving skills that deal with the unexpected events occurring in the everyday school-life.

strategy that allows the researcher reaching information about attitudes without using indirect questions, not thus related to any sort of evaluation (Oskamp, Schultz 2005).

Considering some linguistic differences between Italian, the language used for data collection, and English there could be some slight alterations due to the translation from one language to the other.

– Visual board

The visual board shows a painting by Kandinskij (Circles in a circle, 1923) and consists of a base and a circular cover (representing the same picture) composed of six pieces (one for each question). On the backside of each piece there was an embossed number for visual and tactile mediation.

Figure 8 – The questions and visual boards used for interviews



The combination of the two boards aimed to reduce the surprise impact to interviewees and helped me in conducting the interview through an informal style. This method, semi-structured, combined set questions with a flexible order depending not on the researcher's guide but on each participant's choice.

Designing a visual mediation

This interview instrument was designed thinking carefully about the role of visual materials as an interface between information and experience, taking into account that images “offer very particular visions of social categories such as class, gender, race, able-bodiedness, and so on” (Rose, 2012). The participatory potential of visual methods can be seen as a facilitating media for interaction with and between people, an additional way of communication that integrates spoken and written language in a complimentary way. According to Mannay (2014, p. 2) “the use of visual methods in social science research has become popular, and creative techniques are widely recognised as having the potential to evoke more nuanced understanding of the ways in which other people experience their worlds”. In my study, the use of the Kandinskij's painting had interactive and participatory intentions, being a non-formal way to conduct the interview and seeking to stimulate a more relaxed interview setting. In other words, the image was not data itself, and the participation was not intended for producing data (Moss, 2013), but more as a way for gathering them taking advantage of the potential of visual materials as a media.

Regarding which painting to use for the visual board, after considering different options, I decided for an abstract painting in order stimulate the participation without giving realistic images that could have too great an influence on the answer of the interviewees. Then, I thought about the word ‘inclusion’ and its configuration, for instance in set theory, often displayed as a circle where elements are inside. Etymologically, inclusion derives from *includere*, a Latin verb originally meaning ‘closing inside’ that recalls the image of a circle (Camedda, 2015, p. 160). Yet, respecting the theoretical assumptions held in this study, inclusion is not a fixed and determined concept, or space, and the elements included always interact between each other. Starting from these considerations, I looked for a picture that could represent all these aspects and, since Kandinskij is an artist that I admire, I focused on his paintings. After a bit of research I found ‘Circles in a circle’ (1923), a painting that corresponds to my criteria. Furthermore, considering that Kandinskij was also used in the original version of the instrument (Santi, Zorzi, 2016), this choice seemed doubly appropriate.

The selection of the image was followed by the design of the visual board and the way this instrument would be used by participants. The creation of the tool required many attempts that resulted in the final version used during data collection. The base of the visual board was a laminated picture of the painting covered by a selection of the painting, the main circle, that was divided in six pieces, one for each question and laminated as well. Moreover, the cover of the visual board was decorated with black velvet adding a tactile effect, a further way of interaction between the participants and the instrument of interview.

During the preparation of the visual board the interview setting and the conduction were planned as well. Maintaining a non-formal and semi-structured approach, the order of the questions was left to the participants' choice of which piece to pick up time to time. The plan for the interview was set as follow in Figure 9:

Figure 9 – Interview plan

– A little introduction explains how the interview will be conducted, informing the interviewees that they have the choice to auto-conduct the interview or let the researcher ask the questions.
– The two interview boards are presented at the same time letting the participant read the questions beforehand, so to avoid the ‘unexpected upcoming question’ that could be a bit unsettling.
– The participant can choose which piece to pick up and which order to follow, knowing in advance the questions but without knowing which one is linked with the piece they will choose to pick up.
– After have turned round the piece and discovered which number was attached to it the interviewee reads themselves, or let the researcher read the correspondent question from the questions board.
– The interviewee continues to pick up pieces until they answer to all the questions.

The interview was rehearsed with some colleagues within the Ph.D. programme before the real data collection in order to check the practicality of such instrument. The feedback was positive and no issue arose, so the interview boards were ultimately ready to be used with participants.

4.2. Fieldwork

Participants

This doctoral research focuses on teachers' attitudes seeking relations between values and practice but also investigating the potential role of teacher education. Within the literature on attitudes and inclusion some studies investigated the role of teacher preparation on special education for the development of positive attitudes (Campbell, Gilmore, 2003; Beacham, Rouse, 2012;), showing that being prepared on disability related topic increases the level of teachers' acceptance towards students who were identified as having disabilities but also for the rest of the class. This was confirmed also by Italian research, where support teachers, who had a specific training in support teaching, show more positive attitudes than their colleagues teaching subjects (Ianes et al., p. 95).

In Italy, as described in the Chapter Two, teacher education for support teaching does not suppose, or at least not yet, a separated preparation or career and, as I experienced myself, those teachers that are qualified as support teachers, are first of all qualified as teachers (pre-school, primary, secondary 1st /2nd level). Elsewhere (Camedda, Santi, 2016) it has been discussed that one of the strengths of the Italian experience in an inclusive perspective is related to the importance given to the role of support teachers that are, first of all, teacher of all and everybody in a classroom, at least as it is officially claimed within official documents.

What is interesting, referring to the Italian background is that during their career, sometimes to obtain quicker a permanent position or to increase their expertise, teachers of subjects decide to attend courses in order to qualify for support teaching. In many cases, however, some non-qualified teachers already work as support teachers without having been prepared in any subject related to special education or inclusion. Others, graduated for Primary Teaching (pre-school and primary school), have attended some special education and disability related modules, during their preparation, but want also to get the qualification as support teachers.

The cohort for this study was a selection of this particular typology of teachers: in service and in training at the same time attending a Specialization Course for Support Teaching, hereafter CSAS. Given the exploratory intention of the study and the qualitative approach adopted, the cohort needed was a small one and in order to facilitate access to the sample it was decided to involve teachers that were attending the CSAS at the University of Padova in 2014.

The participant recruitment was conducted through a call announced on the course

website and on a forum used by attendees of the course, explaining the purpose of the research and giving basic information. Teachers attending the CSAS at that time were over 200, those who voluntarily responded were 26, covering K13 schools⁵⁸ as follows:

- Pre-school= 5 participants
- Primary school= 6 participants
- Secondary school 1st level= 9 participants
- Secondary school 2nd level= 6 participants

There were 9 of the participants working as support teachers, 1 in pre-school, 6 at secondary school 1st level, and 2 secondary 2nd level respectively.

Classroom teachers participating in the study were 17 working: 4 in pre-school, 6 in primary school, 3 in secondary 1st level and 4 in secondary 2nd.

The age of participants was from 32 to 49:

- 14 participants between 32-39
- 12 participants between 40-49

Female teachers were 20: 4 for pre-school, 6 for primary school, 8 for secondary school 1st level and 2 for secondary 2nd level.

Male teachers were 6: 1 for pre-school, 1 for secondary school 1st level and 4 for secondary 2nd level.

I personally organised the interview with each participant via email and set a suitable date for them, conducting data collection in spaces at the University of Padova.

Ethical considerations

One of the most delicate aspects of conducting research concerns ethical implications when interacting with contexts and persons (individuals or groups). This matter, although it is just now mentioned, has guided all the research process not only regarding procedural issues, but more broadly ethics mattered since the first draft of the research design. Being guided by the values adopted in this study I promptly considered “how the research purposes, contents, methods, reporting and outcome abide by ethical principles

⁵⁸ Italian school system is composed by:

Pre-school (scuola dell'infanzia)= 3 years for children 3-6 aged (optional)

Primary school (scuola primaria)= 5 years for pupils 6-11 aged (compulsory)

Secondary school 1st level (scuola secondaria di primo grado)= 3 years for students 11-14 aged (compulsory)

Secondary school 2nd level (scuola secondaria di secondo grado)= 5 years for students 14-18 aged (compulsory until 16)

University, after secondary school, is not counted as school, but as an academic institution.

and practices” (Cohen et al., 2011). Since the type of research and the sample selected for interviews did not involve vulnerable groups, i.e. children, it was not necessary to obtain an approval from the ethical committee of the University of Padova for conducting the study, a procedure that was in this case not compulsory. With my supervisor we carefully discussed the ethical implications of the research and wrote a consensus form to be signed by every participant where information about the study (i.e. purpose, general description) and about the researcher (myself) were given.

The participants, signing this form in two copies, one for them and one to keep with the research documents, gave their informed consent to be interviewed and recorded, consenting also the listening of their audio recording for research purposes and textual transcription by the researcher. Also, there was a clause for the use of the data within written publications, including this thesis, conference presentations, seminars and so on, only for research or formative purposes. This consensus was adapted from the one used by default by the University of Padova, in respect of the Italian law on privacy subject. All the interviews were made anonymous and any detail regarding names, places or information about other person were managed and modified to respect the anonymity. However, considering the limit of conducting a research within an institution, and even more in just a course, “it is often impossible to guarantee the anonymity of a person or of an institution, as people can reassemble or combine data” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 93). Aware of this limit, it was really important that participants were sensibly informed beforehand not just via the consent form but also verbally on the day of the interview.

Also for data storing, recordings and participants information are kept safely on a protected file and not shared with anyone else before being analysed, under the responsibility of the researcher.

Data collection

Conducting interviews it is not a simple task. It could be thought that everybody is able to ask questions, but in research, the interview is more than a chat and it requires planning and preparation (Powney, Watts, 1987, p. 9). In fact, the interviewer can be an influential element, making facial expressions, using the body language or verbal comments that can easily influence the answers given by the interviewees. The interviewer has to pay attention to all these aspects, and while planning questions they should be aware of the inevitably subjectivity that could influence the interviewing process. According to Pring (2015, p. 53) the “good interviewer is able to draw out from the person interviewed the deeper significance of the event, so much that it seems ever more difficult to generalize”.

The purpose of this study, in fact, was not to offer generalisable results, but rather reflecting through the outcomes to further develop possible conceptualizations of inclusive attitudes, especially regarding teacher education. Moreover, my personal experience on interviewing, and also for interview data analysis, has been developed during previous research (Camedda, 2015), so I was well trained and conscious about this data gathering. Another issue taken in consideration was the social desirability factor (Collins et al., 2005), a behavioural tendency of the participants, mainly related to quantitative self-report instruments, to misrepresent personal views in order to agree to what they suppose are the dominant social norms. In other words, participants could tend not to be honest about their thoughts, giving answers they think are the correct ones the interviewer expects from them. Given that it is not possible to avoid completely the possibility of having such behaviour, qualitative approaches, such as interviews seem to be more intimate and confidential and for this reason can produce “tendencies to make a positive impression or please the investigator” (Collins et al., 2005), as well as self-report questionnaires.

This aspect was considered with the others related to qualitative methods and data collection also during the formulation of the interviews questions that were carefully prepared in order to reduce the possibility of the social desirability effect. Also for this reason, the interview setting and conduction were as informal as possible, to let each participant relax and to facilitate more spontaneous answers, constantly trying to control my personal facial, postural and verbal communication in order to be welcoming but not to influence the answers during the interviews.

The 26 interviews were conducted at the University of Padova, and scheduled during three months. To ease the procedure and the eventual analysis every interview was recorded with a dictaphone, a device that saves digitally audio recordings. Before starting the interview, participants were informed about the conducting of the interview and were asked to sign the consent form and make questions if something was not clear. Overall the interviews were around 30 minutes each, even if some participants were less talkative than others, and no issues arose during the data collection.

Participants often expressed spontaneous positive comments on the interview process, referring both to the visual board and the type of questions that were said to be, by one interviewee “a deep reflection on inclusion”. Those comments, although several, were not considered during data analysis but were collected during the transcription.

4.3. Data analysis

As a first step of the analysis, I transcribed the 26 interviews in full length, resulting in many hours spent for this long, but at the same time indispensable procedure. Although the full transcription is not always used in educational research (Cohen et al., 2011), for the purpose of this study it was necessary to have the whole spoken interview transformed as a text for data analysis. The analysis followed a plan structured in 3 stages:

- Transcription and first manual detection (paper and pencil)
- Content Analysis using ATLAS.ti (software for social sciences qualitative data)
- Network representation of the coding and respective tables

This structure allowed me to organise the analysis process meticulously through different levels, starting from a more superficial text analysis to a in depth theme text coding, resulting in networks configuration.

Transcription and first manual data detection

Since data have been collected through audio recording, the first step for the analysis was the transcription of each interview in order to have a written text format of data. Although this procedure is often overlooked in qualitative research, this methodological step plays an important role for data analysis and needs to be guided by the researcher's awareness on transcription types, related to research purposes (Oliver et al., 2005).

Considering the purposes of this study, I decided to transcribe the interviews in their full length, listening to the recordings and using a word processor to have both a printed text version for the first manual data analysis and a digital one for the computer assisted in depth analysis.

The transcription phase is a very time consuming one, but it is also a significant moment for the researcher that starts familiarising with collected data. According to Sidnell (2010, p. 23) “the actual process of working from recordings, replaying them sometimes hundreds of times in an attempt to hear precisely what is being said”. For time-saving reasons new forms of transcription are increasingly being used within social sciences, for instance using software that automatically transform an audio file into a text file (Moore, 2015). From this perspective “automatic speech recognition (ASR) offers a means to reduce the amount of labour required for the transcription of audio recordings of talk. These technologies use statistical methods to recognize spoken words and transcribe them

mechanically” (More, 2015, p. 254).

Although those systems can apparently seem useful in terms of the time reduction in transcribing interviews, the manual approach (using a word processor) involves the researcher in a careful listening of the data, allowing them to build a deeper familiarity with the data before the actual analysis (Bolden, 2015).

Sharing this perspective, I preferred to manually transcribe all the interviews, adopting for a denaturalised transcription (Oliver et al., 2005), thus avoiding the full textual report of depicting accents or involuntary vocalisation recorded during the interviews, but considering primarily the words used by the interviewees.

Surely, this approach has some limits, as it concentrates mainly on words and does not report all the other elements that constitute the participants’ answers, such as non-verbal communication, pace, pauses and so on. Those elements were not counted because the main focus of the analysis was to recognise elements in teachers’ verbal responses, being aware of the fact that all the elements existed at the interview time, but choosing not to take them in consideration for the kind of text analysis I decided to adopt. During the transcription I took notes of some interesting elements (words used, statements etc.) to be integrated later on during the first manual analysis. While transcribing, I also indicated what the order of questions was from each interview, as every participant picked up the pieces of the visual boards in a personalised way. What resulted was that, apart from two interviews, all the others presented a different order of questions, adding value to the differences between participants and confirming the flexibility of such a semi-structured tool of interview.

After the transcription a first data detection was conducted on a printed version of the texts, in order to catch significant expressions and become more familiar with the written form of the oral interviews. Notes, in this regard, were taken using a ‘paper and pencil’ approach directly on the sheets of paper. This transition, from oral to textual, is central within the analysis process because it helps the connection between what the researcher experienced interacting with the interviewees and a following ‘in solitude’ analysis of that interaction, chiefly concentrating on the contents of participants discourses.

Content analysis

In order to follow a more systematic approach to content analysis, I used ATLAS.ti (1.0.43 version), a program that belongs to the Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) genre. Since I had already had training and previous research experience with this software, I decided to use it also for this study.

Using a CAQDAS program for content analysis has several advantages; according to Friese (2014, p. 1):

Software frees you from all those tasks that a machine can do much more effectively, like modifying code words and coded segments, retrieving data based on various criteria, searching for words, integrating material in one place, attaching notes and finding them again, counting the numbers of coded incidences, offering overviews at various stages of a project and so on.

From an organizational point of view, using this kind of software allows the management of a consistent amount of data, helping me at different levels of coding. Regarding this research, the content analysis has been conducted through a thematic coding guided by the six facets of understanding adopted within the theoretical framework and for the interviews. The first step in using a CAQDAS is preparing texts to be imported in the software, giving names to documents that allows better organisation of all the documents at the same time. In this passage, I denominated each interview with a name and a number in order to identify them, and created a notebook to use during the analysis. Then, after the creation of a hermeneutic unit, I imported all the documents and started the coding. In order to clarify the terminology used in ATLAS.ti, the main terms also utilised in this chapter are displayed in a table developed by Paulus and Lester (2015), as follow:

Term	Definition
Hermeneutic unit (HU)	The main project file
Primary documents (PD)	Data files or data sources (e.g. transcripts, media files, field notes, etc.)
Families and filters	A group of related concepts being used in analysis (document families, code families, memo families) that allows you to limit the amount of information that is seen on the screen in order to better focus on your analysis
Quotation	A segment of the data that is of interest to the analyst
Memo	A researcher-generated note that captures the analyst's thinking about the research project as a whole (free memo) or a segment of the data (linked memo)
Merge	Combining the work of two or more researchers on a team into one new project file
Time stamp	Points at which the transcript is linked to the recorded data file, enabling synchronized listening and/or viewing of the recording with the reading of the transcript
Code	A label used to mark, identify, or classify single words, phrases, or longer segments of the data. A code can be a priori, in vivo, or developed as the data is being analyzed (open-coding)
Output	A report of the analysis that can be extracted from the software into a text file, spreadsheet or other file formats
Hyperlinking and network views	Tools that allow relationships in the data to be created and represented in a visual manner
Query tool	A way to retrieve quotations, codes or combination of codes that help to answer the research question

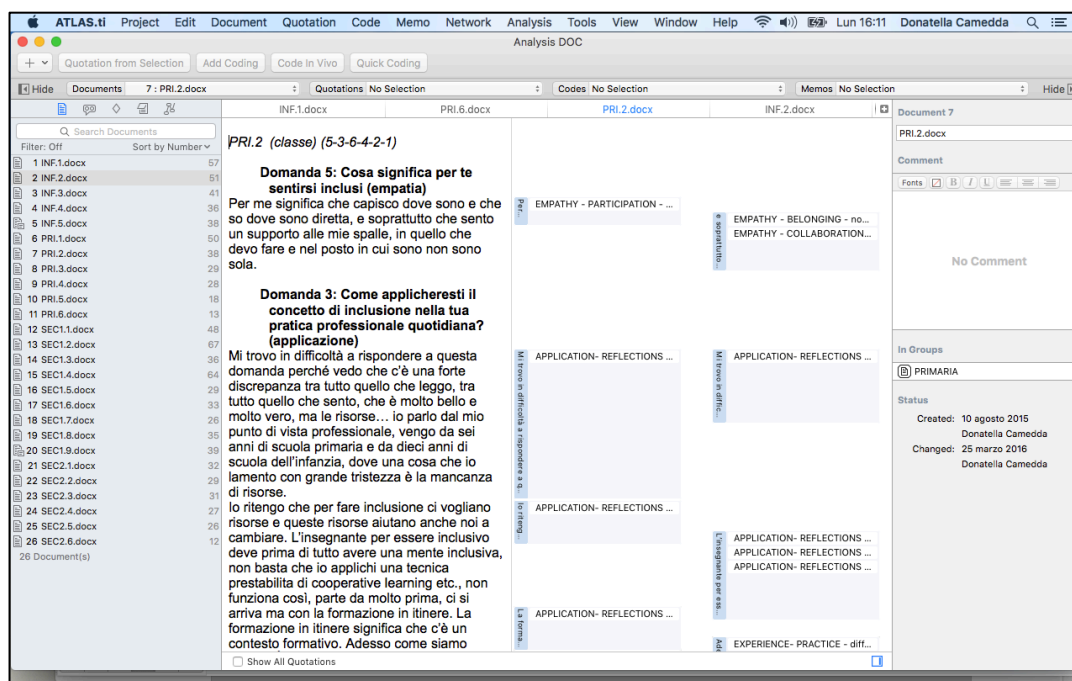
Figure 10 – Key ATLAS.ti terminology by Paulus and Lester (2015, p. 6)

Through a first textual open coding I assigned codes to quotations trying to underlie everything significant that emerged from teachers' interviews. This process required an in depth reading of the texts, minimizing at this stage the exclusion of textual parts that could be possible recognised as non useful for the outcomes. It was my choice not to exclude anything at the beginning of the analysis, but rather leave this procedure for the next step. Parts of the texts were selected and a code was assigned to each of them depending on the content reported in the quotation. Around a thousand codes resulted from this coding, a massive amount that have been reduced through code merging and, eventually, creating code groups (called families in previous version of the software) for each facet of understanding: explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy and self-knowledge.

Moreover, other code groups were created for those segments of text that I found interesting but that did not refer specifically to the six dimension given. This kind of analysis reflects a combined top-down (six-facets of understanding) bottom-up approach, using a guiding framework for the analysis but also valuing other elements that were not conceived in the first place.

An example of an ATLAS.ti text coding work page is displayed by the Figure 11: the list of documents is on the left side of the page, the text and assigned codes are central and on the right side there is a space for comments.

Figure 11 – Example of a text coding page



A name was assigned to each single code, providing a hierarchical classification of three grades. The pre-name (1st grade) referred to the facet of each question, as illustrated in the example in Figure 11, another name (2nd grade) was consequently assigned on the base of the code group identified as pertinent, then (3rd grade) every code was supported by a description of what was said by the interviewee in the quotation selected for that code. Code names (1st and 2nd grade) were given in English but the description was left in Italian because, at this stage of analysis was easier to have the original language used during the study for a quicker reading by myself.

Figure 12 – Example of classification

In Group:	
◇ APPLICATION - COLLABORATION - cercare collaborazione dei colleghi	1
◇ APPLICATION- COLLABORATION - attenzione al gruppo ma anche al singolo	1
◇ APPLICATION- COLLABORATION - attività progettate in team	1
◇ APPLICATION- COLLABORATION - collaborazione con colleghi	2
◇ APPLICATION- COLLABORATION - collaborazione fra studenti (con disabilità e non)	1
◇ APPLICATION- COLLABORATION - compartecipazione dell'ins sostegno alle attività di classe	1
◇ APPLICATION- COLLABORATION - condivisione obiettivi	1
◇ APPLICATION- COLLABORATION - cooperative learning	4
◇ APPLICATION- COLLABORATION - cooperazione con genitori	1

During this procedure, that was not so linear as it is being described here, but more complex and changeable, code groups were then organised in main dimensions in order to give a more readable format for data interpretation and description of the outcomes.

Considering the complexity and the methodology used for this qualitative analysis, such an organization, despite flexible during the process, was indispensable and allowed the management of the vast amount of data in a structured way, easing the reading of data step by step. Without using a software for qualitative data analysis, every stage of this procedure would have been much more difficult and surely more time-consuming (Paulus, Lester, 2015).

According to Powney and Watts (1987, p. 161):

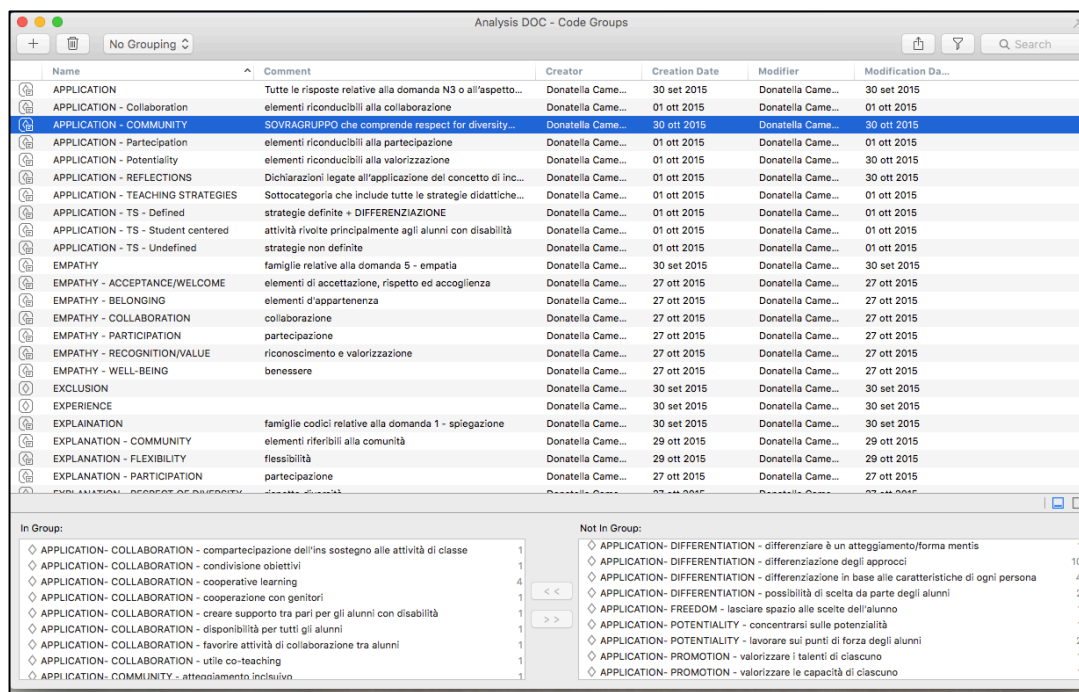
An analyst of interviews does not merely recognise facts and phenomena present in the responses of the interview. Rather, on the basis that we perceive things form a point of view, our intentions inform our attention. That is, analysis is a reconstructive and not reproductive process.

Following this view, the organisational structure of significant dimensions and code

groups intended to recreate a space for data understanding that is, undeniably, dependent on the theoretical framework underpinned in this study, thus the capacity of the researcher to manage and interpret data.

Figure 12 shows an example of the Code Group Manager operational window, where it is possible to see the organisation of code groups that were created by myself in a dimensional way.

Figure 13 – Example of the codes group manager



At the end of this stage of analysis, there were six main dimensions, explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy and self-knowledge, each including code groups that were previously organised. Moreover, other unplanned dimensions emerged from the analysis and were organised in: inclusion, exclusion, reflection, and experience. This grouping was operated towards those expressions that did not were referred to the question formulated. These further dimensions were considered during the interpretative phase of the results as additional information.

Using ATLAS.ti, it was possible to rescue every quotation from a single code or quotations linked to a certain code group, and then identify which extracts from the interview to include in this thesis, checking also manually the printed version of the interviews. The texts used during the analysis were in Italian and only the selected extracts were later translated in English.

After the coding phase, a word tag cloud of codes was elaborated in order to see, visually, the predominance of certain words among others within the coding process, as the Figure 13 illustrates.

Figure 14- Example of coding tag cloud (1st page, of four)



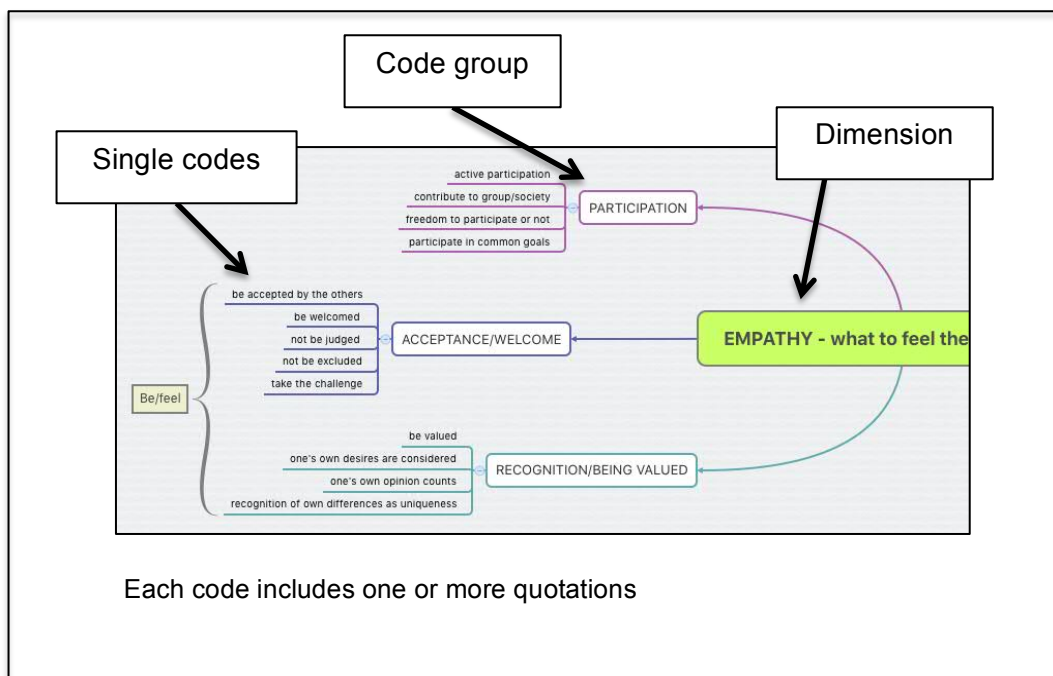
Although this configuration, without being contextualised, is not sufficient to make any assumption, it gives, at the same time, the possibility to reflect on the frequency of certain words, such as disability and diversity that are the most quoted within the coding, reflecting the importance to these themes given by the interviewees.

Networks representation and tables

After the completion of the coding and the creation of the significant dimensions, I proceeded to organise each thematic area using a network representation. The organisation of the code group dimensions was structured in networks, through an application offered by ATLAS.ti, that shown in a visual way the connection and the relations of elements emerged from the analysis. After the networks elaboration, these documents have been organised and designed with another mapping program in order to give a clear and readable layout.

As illustrated in Figure 14, the core dimension is in the middle of each network map, and starting from this the code groups are related with single elements (codes).

Figure 15 – Network maps arrangement



The network maps were created just for the six dimensions of understanding, whether the other dimensions – inclusion, exclusion, reflection, and experience – were just consulted through their code list during the interpretation phase.

After mapping all the six dimensions a further visual organisation has been elaborated, through the creation of tables that will be illustrated in the next chapter, where every dimension will be considered and discussed.

In order to give an overview of the network mapping, the six networks are fully shown in the Appendix.

Methodological reflections

Methodologically, this research seeks to follow a new conceptualisation of attitudes' investigation, according to the theoretical frame embraced in the whole work. Considering this, I proposed a different methodological approach of conducting interviews that does not aspire to be perfect, but rather aims to offer a new perspective in finding different and significant ways to conduct research in education. In fact, even within qualitative research, the predominant discourse of validity and reliability (Cohen et al., p. 179) is still challenging the quality of studies, reinforcing the positivistic paradigm, where these two concepts were formulated in order to guarantee the effectiveness and generalisability of the research itself and of the results. Since this perspective belongs originally to the quantitative methodology, some scholars, such as Guba and Lincoln, tried to modify those concepts for qualitative research according to a constructivist paradigm (Denzin, Lincoln, 1998, pp. 186-187). From this perspective:

Constructivism, as presented by Guba and Lincoln, adopts a relativist (relativism) ontology, a transactional epistemology, and a hermeneutic, dialectical methodology. The inquiry aims of this paradigm are oriented to the production of reconstructed understandings, wherein the traditional positivistic criteria of internal and external validity are replaced by the terms *trustworthiness* and *authenticity*.

Following this view, I surely questioned about these aspects while designing and conducting this study and tried to fulfill these features through a rigorous and structured methodology, even if the approach was introducing some novelty. However, there are several issues that still concern me about the application of certain criteria to qualitative research, without a real deconstruction and reconstruction of the epistemological base that should guide this methodology. According to Shenton (2003) there are many strategies to ensure trustworthiness, and authenticity, in qualitative research that have been

incorporated by qualitative researchers. The main adaptation model of positivistic criteria for qualitative research was developed by Guba and Lincoln (1985) and proposes a different lexicon and description of research criteria, but still confirming the supremacy of the positivistic (quantitative) paradigm even on qualitative research.

My stance in this regard questions whether the adaptation of certain criteria, derived from the positivistic paradigm, can be sufficient to guarantee an internal coherence of qualitative approach. In fact, I question this view that seems to permeate also educational research (Sorzio, 2005) where the scientific coherence of research is determined by a positivistic camouflage. It seems to me that, according to the adaptation of quantitative principles to qualitative research, the so-called 'constructivist' adaptation is in fact not sufficient to the real 'construction' of new research criteria for qualitative inquiry.

Conducting this study did not answer all those issues but increased my critical view on the matter of research in education and new forms of inquiry that try not to depend from paradigms that originally belong to other disciplines, i.e. psychology.

Being a researcher is not just conducting research, but it should also be questioning about the whole dimension of research, that includes epistemological, ontological and methodological discourses.

In this regard, what really matters, especially for a young researcher that is completing their Ph. D. journey, is the attitude towards one's own study. According to Nobile (2014, p. 212), the researcher's attitudes should be critical and determined, in order to critically recognise and show the controversial aspects of the study conducted, but at the same time, demonstrating determination in evolving the study through further investigation.

Embracing this view, I consider this study as a first step of a long walk through a path that resembles a labyrinth, rather than a linear track. The direction taken could not lead to a final destination but maybe it would redirect towards new lands, or backwards to what was known. My attitude is comparable to the one of the explorer, critical and determined to discover the new, that sometimes means just see what is known from a different perspective.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on research methodology. In the first section I presented the research design in terms of aims and research questions, methodological approach and the formulation of the tool for data collection. In this regard, I introduced an approach of conducting qualitative research through visual boards for a semi-structured interview that sought to engage participants in a more interactive and informal way.

Then, in the second section, I described the sample of participants, taking in consideration ethical aspects related to the type of data collection chosen, and illustrating the process of data gathering.

The third section was completely dedicated to data analysis, depicting each stage I went through during this complex procedure that was carried using a CAQDAS tool. Some examples of data analysis, conducted through different coding phases, have been presented and discussed in this chapter, giving also space for some methodological reflections.

Having focused on the methodology and explained analysis process, outcomes presented in the next two chapters will respond to the research questions presented in these pages, completing the argumentation on the topic investigated.

CHAPTER FIVE

Teachers' understanding of inclusion

When each of us thinks about what we can do in life, chances are, we can do it because of a teacher. Behind every exceptional person, there is an exceptional teacher. Today, we need great teachers more than ever.

Stephen Hawking, 2016

Teachers' role in developing inclusion in schools is an important factor of change. In this respect, it is necessary to investigate how teachers understand inclusion in order to clarify which axiological, conceptual, and practical meanings they hold.

Recalling the first research question of this study, data analysis offered the possibility to figure out how teachers understand inclusion through six dimensions of understanding that allow us to identify inclusive attitudes, as they were described in our theoretical framework.

In this chapter, the six dimensions –explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy and self-knowledge– will be presented and discussed, showing the most significant elements derived from data interpretation. These outcomes will serve to have an overview of teachers' understanding of inclusion in order to further identify inclusive attitudes, while relations between values and practice and the role of teacher preparation will be examined in the next chapter.

The tables here included, reconfiguring the networks resulted from the data analysis, are organised in a non-hierarchical order. Moreover, the sequence of the groups was arranged following argumentative purposes for outcomes discussion.

5.1. Explanation: what is inclusion in education

As a result of data analysis of the questions asked to participants during the interview, the configuration of the explanation's dimension, depicted in Figure 16, shows 8 clusters of elements: values, well-being, transformability, teacher expertise, participation, community, social skills and respect for diversity. Every cluster is composed of features that emerged from teachers' responses, representing here an expression that depends on many factors such as personal views, experience and, as it has been spontaneously recalled through the interviews, teacher education.

Figure 16- Explanation: what is inclusion in education for interviewed teachers

EXPLANATION - what is inclusion in education 🏡	
VALUES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> full access importance of inclusive values solidarity freedom potentiality rights for all and everybody
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY → <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognition of differences education towards diversity freedom of uniqueness
WELL-BEING	feeling comfortable
TRANSFORMABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> constant change dynamic process flexibility
TEACHERS EXPERTISE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> facilitators accessible achievements academic and social achievement teachers as model for students and school community competences and experience
PARTICIPATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> active participation of everybody everybody has a role
COMMUNITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> community belonging shared vision
SOCIAL SKILLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> respect for the others co-operation welcome

} INDIVIDUAL/SOCIAL

The first feature regards values. Under this group were included those elements related to the axiological dimension: full access, inclusive values, solidarity, freedom, potentiality, and rights for all and everybody. These elements resulted to be important for the teachers interviewed and appeared many times also in other points of the conversation; for this reason some elements will be recurrent all throughout the six dimensions, and sometimes even within the same dimension.

For instance, participation is mentioned both regarding the elimination of barriers (full access), than an indispensable characteristic of inclusion (participation).

In this respect a teacher refers to the actual possibility for every individual for students, to access the classroom, concerning both the curriculum discourse than the spatial issue:

Inclusion is to actively participate in everything that is done in the classroom, eliminating all barriers that are there.

Support teacher. Pre-school. F

The values dimension is felt as fundamental. In fact, as defined by a teacher, the basis for an effectively inclusive education is based on values that regard everyone's diversity as a resource:

Inclusion ... promoting inclusive values that foster an ideal of community, school, where everyone is accepted, we are all somewhat different, normality does not exist [...]. We are extraordinarily diverse, acceptance and respect of this diversity is a value that needs to be pursued with practice, by example, I do not limit myself only to preach, and this is the hardest part, but then I try to act in that way, being the example of that educational model.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 1st level. F

In such a frame, respect for diversity becomes central, and highlights the values relevance in . As it is expressed by this teacher that sees inclusion as:

Teaching the respect for others, guaranteeing the participation of all and in any case, no matter of health conditions, while respecting the individual personalities [...] allowing everyone to understand that we do not function all the same way and we therefore need different ways to express ourselves and have to accept this as a normal thing.

Support teacher. Secondary school 2nd level. F.

Surely, the connection between the values basis and its application in practice is set out very clearly, giving a confirmation that teachers themselves see that as an indispensable

characteristic of inclusion.

Well-being is also considered important, the way we feel in a group, in a context, not just from the students' point of view but also from the point of view of teachers:

Inclusion is to allow all (emphasis on all) to be comfortable in that setting, where you can feel valued, where your differences are considered as valuable.

Classroom teacher. Secondary School 2nd level. M.

Inclusion, from this perspective, is seen as an expression of positive feelings between students and teachers. Yet this does not mean the absence of challenging situations, or problematic circumstances, but it rather refers to the attitude through which to face issues that are normally part of every educational context. Teachers see this as an expression of constant change, dynamicity and flexibility as characteristics of the inclusive perspective.

Inclusion is a dynamic system of people who are ready to change together and to compose themselves in different forms.

Support teacher. Secondary school 1st level. F.

This view of inclusion is related to teachers' expertise, including knowledge, skills and strategies in facilitating teaching-learning contexts where every individual is valued as important and actively participate as a part of the evolving system.

Participation, in terms of a constituent of inclusion, is intended by teachers as an active involvement of individual that are not just 'inside' the classroom but that also have a role, can make decision, can bring their own contribution as valuable for the others belonging to that community.

To involve all the people in the class [...] and making this participation significant for all.

Support teacher. Secondary school 1st level. F.

I would define it (inclusion) as the possibility of participation by individuals, but not only as participation itself, participation as possibility to contribute to community, in which each person brings their own contribution to the others, in a personal way.

Classroom teacher. Primary School. F

The concept of classroom as a community is permeating teachers' responses and reflects a vision of school as a social place where students not only learn contents but learn to be part of the society, developing social skills.

Inclusion means, I think, to recognise the "talent" that everyone can bring to the group, and this is educational in the sense that the whole class becomes a group of people that are better than what they could be individually [...] each of them brings a bit of their experience, as well as problems, and we can also say that, overall, the class grows emotionally and socially as a community.

Classroom teacher. Secondary School 1st level. F.

Comparing the outcomes related to this dimension with the framework of inclusion embraced within the theoretical assumptions of this study, what is noticeable is that teachers mainly refer to inclusion in its broader meaning, concerning diversity as common pattern of every individual and something to be valued, rather than to be marked as 'problematic'. This is an important feature emerging from this research, considering that the participants were completing a course about support teaching for students with disabilities. In fact, despite the focus of the course is to prepare teachers specifically for working with students with disabilities, the core assumptions underpinning this academic preparation seem to correspond to a view of inclusion that is not just disability/SEN related.






5.2. Interpretation: recognising an inclusive process

The second dimension generated from data regards the facet of interpretation and shows a more articulated structure of elements involved in teachers' understanding of inclusion in terms of recognition of an inclusive process.

As it is shown in Figure 16, this dimension shares some thematic clusters with the explanation's one, i.e. participation, teaching related elements, well-being, respect for diversity and values. Since some themes are recurrent in teachers' responses, what is interesting here is to see how teachers, answering to the question related to the facet of interpretation, refer more often to practical examples in order to describe elements that make, in their view, a process 'inclusive'.

The first cluster we will take in consideration reports reference expressed by teachers about values that they recall in order to define a process as an inclusive one. The willingness of everybody in being inclusive themselves, respecting one's own freedom through a community perspective (Wenger, 1998) can be interpreted as an application of inclusive principles that are not just for some but for all and everybody.

Figure 17 – Interpretation: how teachers interpret inclusion

INTERPRETATION - recognising an inclusive process 	
VALUES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> will to be inclusive freedom to be inter-subjectivity and exchange community values application of inclusive principles inclusive process is for everybody solidarity <p>RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY  diversity as natural human aspect  teachers take account of students' differences</p>
ATTITUDES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> positive attitudes towards everybody every student is valued and considered teachers availability for every students no charity approach for student with disabilities no underestimation of students' potential
WELL-BEING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> feeling good positive relationships between individuals positive mood smiling faces
SPACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> how people are located in space flexible spaces/stations work-stations coloured environment
PARTICIPATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> everybody participates actively students are motivated to participate collaboration
TEACHING SKILLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improvisation problem-solving clear goals decision-making planning and design
TEACHING STRATEGIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> activities that promote inclusion full-access activities co-operative learning observations multisensorial approaches inclusion monitoring networking sociograms visual contact with everybody differentiation  strategies  materials/tools <p>TEACHING EXPERTISE</p>
DISABILITY - CENTERED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to include students with disabilities no 'one-to-one' teaching approach level of participation of students with disabilities involving other students in working with those with disabilities

The relationship between elements is seen as influential of both the individuals as well as the group, here intended as an inter-subjective system where people interact and change each other giving to the group, as a community, a constant evolving configuration.

Each member of the group can redefine themselves according to the contribution of the others, if you can take this dynamism, but not excluding anyone, each person moulds according to the contribution of others, changing, transforming himself or herself.

Classroom teacher. Primary school. F.

There should be favourable initial conditions for a process to happen, first of all, there should be from all persons an awareness of participating in such a process and then, of course, taking one's own responsibility... I mean, it is my duty to carry this process on in the most successful way. Planning, ability to proceed, interest from all, that is, the development of a common interest, and attention to community values.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 2nd level. M.

Some participants, in respect of the idea of group, recall the contemplation of diversity as a natural aspect. What is here interesting is that diversity is not ascribed only as an individual pattern but more broadly as a characteristic of the group itself. This shows a significant insight regarding people involved in an educational process/context, expressing the double dimension of being single individual, as parts of a group but also recognising the existence of the group as a system that is more than the addition of the parts that compose it (Santi, 2014b, p.19).

The way diversity is experienced as natural, belonging to the group, is what makes me feel that inclusion is taking place.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 2nd level. F.

In this respect, according to Santi (2014b), the idea of community as a system of relationships reflects a vision of an inclusive process as an exchange and reciprocal interaction that values diversity among people. This is, school-wise, a crucial element emerging from the interviews collected during this study, especially considering how teachers can positively influence the context they are involved in, for instance assuming diversity as a potential to be valued.

A teacher while answering to the interpretation question describes certain attitudes towards diversity of students:

You see, in my opinion, you can recognise an inclusive process, or a non inclusive one,

also from the words teachers use when a child proposes something, if this child is evaluated or immediately demoralized [...] (inclusion) it is not to undermine the child's enthusiasm. It is, I repeat, to give voice to their needs without criticizing them or make them feel guilty for something that is perceived as different.

Support teacher. Pre-school. F.

Participants refer many times to attitudes when depicting elements that make an inclusive process recognisable, as it is possible to see in this extract:

I would recognise it from its the naturalness, I mean, if a process is truly inclusive you immediately see it, you see it when you walk into a classroom, you do not even ask yourself if it is inclusive or not, if you see that there are those human attitudes of which I told you before... the real involvement of all without too protectionist attitudes ... I think about group activities, sometimes they are so well structured that is not necessary to give out too much information because students organise themselves.

Support teacher. Secondary school 1st level. F.

The teacher here denote how attitudes can determinate the inclusivity of a context, in terms of spontaneity of behaviour between students, and teachers as well, that feel difficulties as normal part of their school experience and face them in a positive way.

Again, the interviewees perceive the climate of a classroom as an important element for the recognition of inclusive processes; in fact, they see positive relationships and feelings (smiley faces) as indicators of an inclusive environment. Despite that, those aspects cannot constitute evidence of inclusivity themselves (Florian, 2014a), as inclusion is a more complex process and cannot be reduced just in terms of positive feelings, but needs to be enacted through practice. On the other hand, a positive climate within the classroom could surely express by happiness (Nodding, 2009, p. 240) but, possibly, hiding forms of exclusion that are not recognised and thus, interpreted as something else from what they are in reality. Assuming that a positive climate is significantly relevant in schools and classrooms (Frabboni, 2014), I claim that this is just an element that does not constitute itself an inclusive context.

Keeping on considering elements related to inclusion, many interviewees describe space as an important representative one. The spatial organisation in an inclusive setting, in their views, should have characteristics that are not those of traditional classroom, but more flexible, with group of desks or stations that can be combined in different ways, allowing students and teachers to move within the classroom without being confined in

fixed or constraining positions. A teacher describe this aspect in a detailed way, linking also the possibility to move within the space with positive feeling and sensation:

I have an image, even from the position of people in a class... the way they are seated, their posture but also the degree of involvement, such as if they are all still positioned for lectures or you see that there is a capacity of moving within the class. In fact, what could be a factor if I were to observe an inclusive process would be the position of people in the class and maybe even on the level of ... how they smile, if they are feeling good.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 2nd level. M.

The matter of space is here intended not only in terms of ‘place’ where people are situated, but more referring to the social activities that a physical setting enables to do (D’Alessio, 2012b). In this respect, participation is facilitated by a space that reflects certain values and principles, such as those we defined as inclusive, considering that “from the analysis of the spatial organisation of an institutional setting it is possible to detect the underlying values and pedagogical, curricular and assessment procedures occurring within it” (D’Alessio, 2012b, p. 523).

Connected to the spatial organisation, teaching skills and strategies become central for an inclusive perspective; the elements recollected by teachers in this respect refer to an idea of teacher as a designer and an improviser (Santi, Zorzi, 2016), able to plan clearly but also to respond creatively to situations that are unplanned or unexpected, engaging their own expertise as well as their students.

There is attention, planning conditions but also the ability to improvise when you are confronted with the difficulties that can arise, emerging difficulties, but also the emerging potential, the ability to understand that at that time there is something interesting to be developed.

When describing elements for the recognition of an inclusive process, some teachers refer to it from a disability-centered view, relating this concept more to students with disabilities in a classroom, rather than to everybody. This teacher says that she would recognise an inclusive process from:

The degree of participation that the child with difficulties, or disabilities, has within the classroom... precisely if the classroom is structured for him, this is an inclusive process.

Support teacher, Pre-school, F.

Another pre-school teacher refers to an inclusive process exclusively considering it for students with disabilities. Here is reported the full answer to the question, with some cuts due to translation:

So ... I'm thinking about an educational intervention in the field of inclusion, I can recognize it if it considers not only the person for whom this process is planned, but rather it aims at the entire context, to the whole environment in which we want to include this person. The other thing... perhaps, I would recognize an inclusive process if that person is never alone but with an operator... always in company of someone else, so he or she can have important relationships in every moment.

Researcher- *You mean adults or peers?*

For example I always think of the situation of the pre-school, I mean that there should be other children. Surely it is important that there is an adult, however, is more important that there are other children.

Classroom teacher. Pre-school. F.

Giving importance to the whole context, the answer of this teacher also reveals an interpretation of inclusion as a matter of students with disabilities, and consequently, it is interpreted as an *ad hoc* intervention made on purpose for those students. While the relationship between classmates is claimed as important, this is seen in respect of the student with disabilities that should not be alone, but always in company of an adult, here not specified if a support teacher, classroom teacher or a teaching assistant, and with 'other' classmates.

As we will see through the outcomes presented in this chapter, a perspective based on a disability-related discourse emerges many times, allowing us to reflect on the perpetuation of the duo inclusion-disability and broader forms of understanding of inclusion, emerging from interviews, that are not necessarily associated with disability.

5.3. Application: inclusion in school practice

In the previous two dimensions some interesting elements regarding explanation and interpretation of inclusion emerged from data. Since the order of the questions changed almost for every interview, depending on the choice of each interviewee, some elements returned various times in different answers. However, every dimension shows some peculiarity of these recurrent features, i.e. participation, highlighting time by time a

connection with a more conceptual framework or, as the case of the application dimension, referring to a practical perspective linked to teaching experience.

In this dimension, data show that the central elements about inclusion, considered by teachers, refer to teaching strategies, community, and barriers/facilitation, as it is displayed in Figure 17 on the following page. These clusters will be discussed giving examples of teachers' answers.

Regarding school practice, teachers identify teaching strategies as particularly relevant for the application of the concept of inclusion. The cluster of teaching strategies indicated by teachers has been organised in three main subgroups: defined, undefined and disability-centered strategies. Within the first group there are specific strategies indicated by teachers such as differentiation, co-operative learning, peer-tutoring and so on. These strategies were grouped as 'defined' as they were explicitly named by teachers, as it possible to see in the following extracts:

I am thinking about of co-operative learning or peer-tutoring that are very helpful for the kids, and not only for those who have difficulties but they are useful for all, in order to be able to help and maybe reach the goal we want to achieve, as teachers in education, or in social practice, in the development of social skills, helping each other.

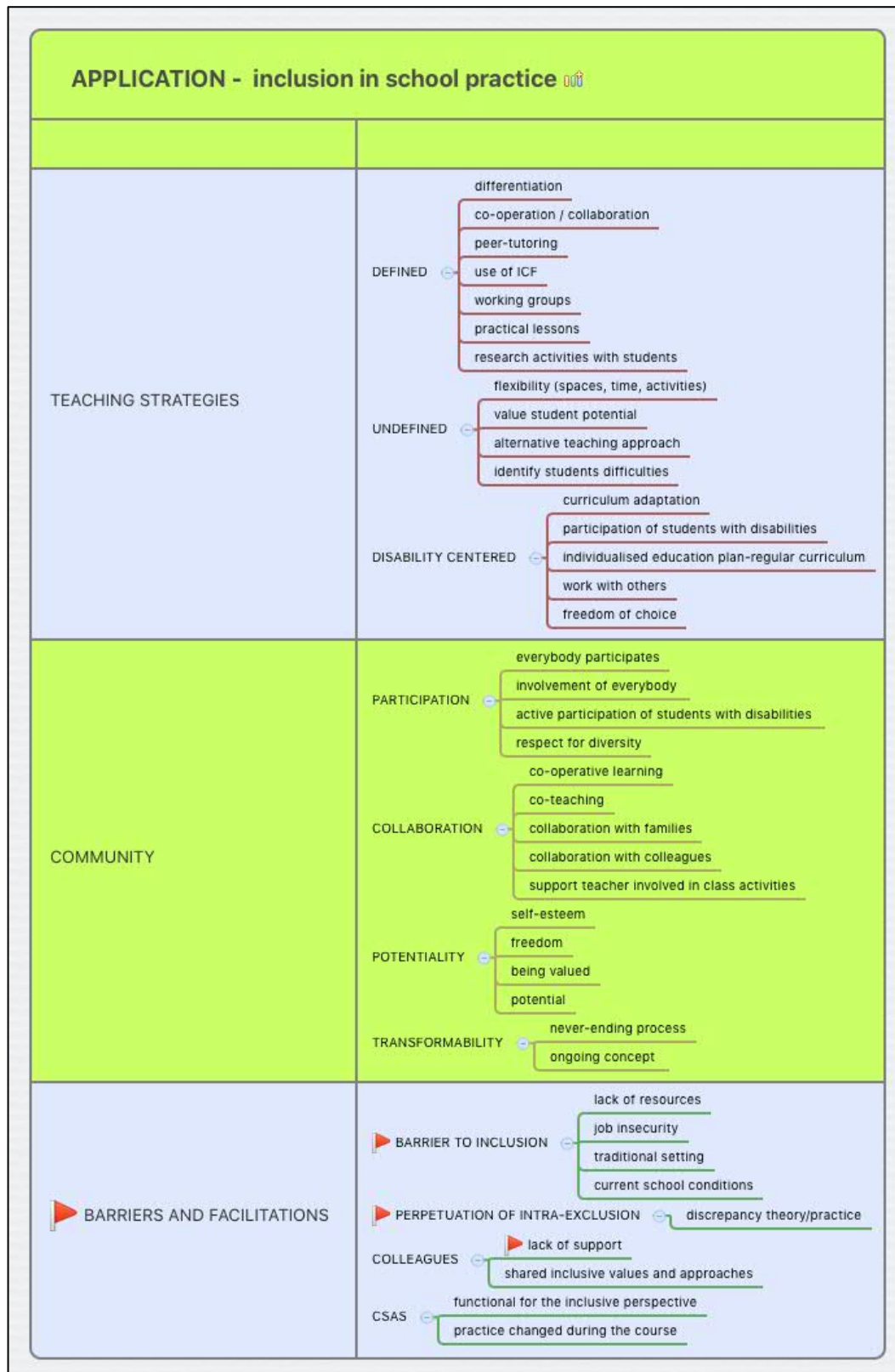
Classroom teacher. Primary school. F.

To do this we put together different skills that each student may have, in this way you can enhance and create inclusion because, obviously, everyone has capacity: there is who can draw, those who may perform better on a text, who does the installation of video, those who think about the music ... not everyone thinks the same thing but there you can create a group cohesion which then allows you to experience the inclusion.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 2nd level. M.

Those examples show practically how teacher would apply, or already apply the inclusive approach in their daily practice. The former refers to ways of learning/teaching, such as co-operative learning and peer-tutoring, pointing out the potential of collaboration between students. The latter seems more to focus on differentiated ways of instruction (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 4), engaging students in vary activities in order to achieve a certain learning, and giving them multiple opportunities and learning approaches. In this sense, differentiation is not to be understood as an adaptation just for 'some student', while the rest of the class follow a main, or different activity.

Figure 18 – Application: inclusion in school practice



Arguably, the perspective of differentiation in Tomlinson could be seen as similar to the inclusive pedagogical approach that “advocates an approach whereby the teacher provides a range of options that are available to everybody in the class rather than a set of differentiated options only for some” (Florian, Spratt, 2013, p. 122).

Following this view, teachers interviewed make also reference to strategies and teaching approaches that do not indicate a specific technique or activity but rather consider some characteristics that teaching strategies should have to be inclusive, such as flexibility of space and time, identification of students difficulties but in order to foster the potential, rather than focusing on what students cannot do. This is possible, in teachers’ view, using alternative teaching approaches that are not comparable with the traditional ones where the passive learning of contents predominates curriculum and teaching style.

Although the majority of teachers refer to the application of inclusion for all the students, some of them recall the disability-centered view. In reporting teaching strategies, some teachers link them to students with disabilities that ‘need’ to be more involved in classroom activities, participating with the other classmates but also through individualised activities and curriculum adaptation depending on the functioning of the student:

In practice I follow mainly the classroom activities, and when it is required we create small groups in which the child becomes the spokesman of what the group has to do. Certainly, on the base of the kind of disability or problems of the pupil, however, my concept of inclusion in education is about the involvement of the child, when possible by changing the mode, but always allowing his participation.

Support teacher. Pre-school. F.

Considering this specific excerpt, it has to be said that the disability-centered perspective permeates this teacher’s view in every dimension, showing that she chiefly perceives inclusion as a disability-related discourse. Her role as a support teacher, before and during the qualification, could had influenced her understanding of inclusion, as well as personal experience and so on. However, not all support teachers interviewed refer to inclusion as a disability-related topic, so it is no possible to make assumptions on this single aspect.

As it is possible to see in another support teacher’s answer, here linking the application of inclusion with a community perspective, the concept of inclusion as related to ‘all’ students is clearly expressed:

When I am in the classroom, even as a support teacher, I always consider, in any case, the whole class and I try to understand the needs of all children, to be ready to listen to everyone. When I plan activities, I do it in a way that everyone can give their contribution, so that it is possible for everyone to participate, without expecting to be all at the same level, but according to their potential and abilities. So, this is an attitude of attention to the group but also to individuals, towards each member of the group.

Support teacher. Secondary school 2nd level. F.

Again, participation seems to be central in teachers' answer, as well as other elements such as collaboration, individual/communal potentiality and transformability of contexts and processes.

A teacher gives an insight about parents' engagement, broadening the inclusion discourse over the classroom setting, mainly inhabited by students and teachers and school professionals.

It is surely important to have a certain harmony and cooperation with the parents, if we talk about inclusion in schools we have to include parents... because if the parents feel involved and feel included at school level, this reflects on the child and the child feels included and involved themselves.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 2nd level. F.

The concept of inclusion as a process involving all the persons who interact inward and outward an educational system is also expressed concerning barriers and facilitation to its application. In fact, teachers indicate that certain barriers, such as lack of resources, job insecurity, traditional settings and so on, impede or limit the practical application of inclusive education. This results in a discrepancy between theory and practice, as said by this teacher:

I find myself in difficulty answering this question because I see that there is a strong discrepancy between everything I read, including all I hear, which is very nice and very true, but then the resources are missing... I speak from my professional point of view I come from six years of primary school and ten years of pre-school, and the thing that I lament with great sadness is the lack of resources.

Classroom teacher. Primary school. F.

From the words of this teacher is perceivable her will to enact inclusion, but at the same time the difficulties in pursuing this goal in practice reveal a gap between the aims

(theory) and the real possibilities (practice) in everyday school life.

One of the recurrent elements perceived both as barrier or facilitation, as we will keep on seeing especially in the last dimension about self-knowledge, is the role of other teachers. Colleagues are seen as a determinant factor in an inclusive educational perspective. They can act as barriers when do not support inclusive approaches, as reported by this teacher:

I refer to the experience of teaching in classes with the presence of children with disabilities, sometimes colleagues undermine ideas that can be alternative or a little creative, creating barriers because maybe (other teachers) do not understand or do not know about certain tools or methods and therefore it seems a waste of time for them [...].

Classroom teacher. Primary school. F.

On the other hand, the role of colleagues can be seen as supportive of inclusion, especially when certain values are shared among teachers that work collaboratively for the enhancement of practice.

The first step is to recreate a climate of trust with colleagues through my attitude, behaviour and proposals [...] then it reflects positively on my personal initiatives but also on those that are proposed by my colleagues, who feel themselves called into question. In this way, I would not be alone.

Support teacher. Secondary school 1st level. F.

The last point taken in consideration in this dimension concerns teachers' perceptions about the influence of the preparation gained through the CSAS. Since the intention of this study was not to evaluate the efficacy of the course, we can just consider these reflections from a hermeneutic point of view, trying to pick up interesting aspects that could be further investigated in a possible next study. A secondary school teacher reports how his practice changed when he applied an approach suggested during the course:

Meanwhile along with the attention to the children, for example, as a result of this course (CSAS) I also applied something in class especially in the last hours, the guys are tired and have little attention, I said "well, now you can get up and not necessarily have to stand still "because the goal is learning, is not sit still in class, at the end of the lesson the guys have told me," it is the first time I follow the last lesson of the day because I was obliged to sit " ... that already implies an effort, energy, so we did some experiments as well.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 2nd level. M.

A further discussion about the role of the CSAS in changing teachers' attitudes, from a conceptual and a practical perspective will take place in the next chapter, where some considerations about this issue will be examined more in depth.

The outcomes linked to application show the importance of teaching strategies applied and applying conceptual assumptions of inclusion as a matter of all students, and more broadly of all teachers, parents and so on, drawing a vision of schools as communities. However, a correspondence between the inclusion discourse and students with disabilities emerged from teachers' responses, pointing out a persistence of the predominant paradigm inclusion-disability that typifies the *integrazione scolastica* model.

Furthermore, the interviewees indicate barriers and facilitation related to application of inclusion that will return in the self-knowledge dimension where an extended articulation of significant elements will be confronted and discussed.

5.4. Perspective: imaging an inclusive classroom

The fourth dimension illustrates teachers' views on what could happen in an inclusive classroom. Answering to the question on what do they expect to happen in such a context, they were invited to describe hypothetical situations that often resulted in examples related to their daily experience in schools.

Many clusters derived from data analysis confirming the relevance of some recurrent aspects. Groups of elements, as it is shown in Figure 19 on the next page, are very articulated and give an overview of what teachers' would expect to find in an inclusive classroom.

Teachers, again, recall values as significant elements for an inclusive environment. In particular, teachers indicate some core values that are grouped under two core principles of reciprocity and respect for diversity. The former refers to a mutual listening, authentic dialogue and relationships, solidarity, and so on. In terms of an inclusive classroom, a teacher expresses his expectations:

I think of a class where there is a lot of dialogue and then any tension, or problem that may arise can be managed independently [...] students also know how to manage issues in autonomy through dialogue, recognition of the other, students are not self-centered, and then the teacher can supervise the situation carefully.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 2nd level. M.

Figure 19 – Perspective: imagining an inclusive classroom

PERSPECTIVE - imaging an inclusive classroom 🏡	
VALUES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reciprocity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> mutual listening dialogue authentic relationships solidarity mutual help no hierarchical roles no individualism RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> acceptance of all learning styles respect different relational modalities respect for everybody's uniqueness considering every point of view recognition and respect of diversity and similarity diversity is a resource
ATTITUDES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> positive attitudes towards the school teachers should care about every students
WELL-BEING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> feeling comfortable friendly context serenity and armony
SPACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> accessible spaces flexibility of spaces and furniture flexibility of time no physical barriers group-work stations
TEACHING STRATEGIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TEACHING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> co-teaching teachers as facilitators empathetic teaching approach differentiation workshops practical activities/lessons LEARNING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> co-operative learning stimulating different learning approaches peer-tutoring
PARTICIPATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> opportunity to participate active participation of everybody everyone is protagonist
COLLABORATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> opportunity to collaborate spontaneous collaboration among students
COMMITMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> responsibility and consciousness everybody takes the challenge
DISABILITY CENTERED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> students with disabilities should be more involved in class activities working inside the classroom is important not forcing the presence of students with disabilities inside the classroom

Here the accent is posed on the ability of students to manage (difficult) situations through dialogue that is seen not just as a strategy to solve problems but more as a common approach used also in situations that can be perceived as problematic. Another teacher, points out the reciprocal help between individuals, not specifying if students or teachers, but using the first person to express her view:

Everyone can help and be helped, so there will be times when I can be helpful, and there will be times when I will be helped and this I think it is important also with a view, really, of life project [...] it is not obvious is the fact of being able to get help from the others.

Classroom teacher. Primary school. F.

A matter of solidarity seems to emerge from teachers' words and a general reference to a non-individualistic approach, describes a classroom where there is not a hierarchical structure among teachers and learners.

Respect for diversity returns here as central, considering positively differences among persons:

The inclusive classroom is where differences are accepted and valued.

Support teacher. Secondary school 1st level. F.

But also, differences are seen as important as similarities, supporting the idea of diversity/unity (Morin, 2011) as it was presented in Chapter One. In this respect, a secondary school teacher describes an inclusive classroom as:

A system which is based on differences [...] but also on similarities because often we talk about differences but also... for me it is also important what these students have in common.

Support teacher. Secondary school 1st level. M.

This attitudes towards diversity, seen as a valuable element of uniqueness of every individual, and towards equality are examples of inclusivity that potentially can make a change when applied to the school practice and teaching.

In fact, teachers express the importance of positive attitudes of teachers towards every student, but also between students and teachers themselves, reflecting a common attitude towards the 'other'.

An inclusive class ... I expect there is an inclusive attitude, students being inclusive towards each other, as well as teachers, and teachers being inclusive towards their students and vice versa.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 2nd level. M.

In such a context, participants expect to find a positive and friendly climate, where students and teachers feel comfortable and serene. Many teachers refer to the necessity to feel accepted and considered by colleagues, especially when joining a team. An interviewee report a personal experience as an example of inclusive classroom, where the inclusivity was, first of all, expressed through other teachers' attitudes, making her feel supported in her choices despite she was just 'there' for a short time.

Where, as a teacher, I felt included in the team in which I entered for a period; they never hindered me, in fact they have supported me and supported my choices, even if I could not always tell if my choices were right, if they had had an outcome as it was expected, but they (colleagues) made me feel good and for me this is inclusion: wellness, wellbeing.

Classroom teacher. Primary school. F.

Teachers indicate, again, space as an important aspect to be considered in terms of flexibility of space organisation (i.e. desks, furniture that can be easily changed and reassigned), as well as flexibility of time, where physical barriers to learning are eliminated.

Well, I expect ... that there are not barriers, or at least they are reduced, with regard to all children, so if there is a child who has movement difficulties there will not be steps or things like that, if there is a child who has hearing difficulties there will be appropriate tools so he can feel part and included in an activity, or in a game. The same is for other kinds of difficulties that there may be, for example, a left-handed child who may have a free space on the left side so that they can move and write quite easily.

Classroom teacher. Pre-school. F.

As previously emerged as fundamental for other dimensions, teaching strategies seem to be relevant also as a representative of an inclusive classroom. Teachers indicate a more interactive and participative teaching approach as typical element of an inclusive classroom (i.e. co-teaching, differentiation, practical activities), including learning strategies that involve students' co-operation (i.e. co-operative learning, peer-tutoring).

In this sense, participation and collaboration return as strong elements in determining an

ideal inclusive classroom, where personal and social commitment are part of the sense of belonging of the educational environment.

In an inclusive classroom everyone should feel responsible of their school.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 2nd level. M.

From the interviewees' point of view, engaging every student's consciousness and responsibility, as well as teachers, parents and so on, means also to increase the participation of students with disabilities. This aspect, reported by many teachers, may be interpreted as something that is missing in their current experience.

A support teacher, in this respect, narrates her experience as an example of a non-inclusive classroom, expressing her wishes, more than expectations, for a more inclusive approach both for the student with disabilities and for herself.

I would expect to be allowed to stay longer in the class with the student I have this year, at least a few more hours, I would like not being out (from the classroom), preparing activities of each subject for him [...] I realize that this is the way I am working this year, I have to think about all the materials for the student, I would rather like he was a bit more inside the class.

Support teacher. Secondary school 1st level. F.

Many considerations can be made from this single extract. First of all, this teacher is expressing the desire of changing the current situation for the student for whom probably she feels the only responsible as she literally says 'the student I have'. This appears to be true also for the teacher herself as she seems to be excluded from the classroom too when she declares 'I would like not being out'. Secondly, there is another element that can be inferred from the words of this teacher: the lack of collaboration with other teachers in terms of activities planning for the student that is withdrawn from the class. In fact, she says that she prepares the activities for each subject to be done outside the classroom, suggesting that the educational plan is her own responsibility, instead of being a team preparation. Moreover, from the very beginning of this extract, the teacher implies that being out from the classroom with the student with disabilities is not her choice, or of the student's. Saying that she would like to be 'allowed' to stay more time inside the classroom she seems to indicate that the decision to be withdrawn from the lesson is passive, even if she does not specify who is not allowing the student and her to stay in class.

On the other end, some teachers denote how the mere presence in a classroom, especially if it is perceived as compulsory and not beneficial for the student with disabilities, does not represent an element of inclusivity but rather reduce the freedom to choose if taking part to certain activities or not.

Regarding these interesting aspects, other examples will be given in the next chapter when discussing what emerged from the interviews about inclusion and exclusion.

5.5. Empathy: what feeling included means

Addressing the model of understanding adopted in this study, the facet of empathy regards teachers' ability of walking in someone else's shoes as a reflective and inclusive skill. According to Wiggins and McTighe (2005, p. 98):

When we try to understand another person, people, or culture, we strive for empathy. It is not simply an affective response or sympathy over which we have little control, but the disciplined attempt to feel as others feel, to see as others see. [...] Empathy is different from seeing in perspective, which is to see from a critical distance, to detach ourselves in order to see more objectively.

Regarding inclusion, the question asked to teachers intended to explore their ideas about feeling included. The question was deliberately open, intending to give the participants the opportunity to express more freely their ideas about the meaning of being included. If teachers, and their attitudes, are seen as actors of change towards an inclusive education, empathy becomes a central aspect as it gets close individuals but letting them maintain their subjectivity. To feel close to other people it is not a spatial issue, at least not in the first place, but it is more an affective and emotional connection, allowing feeling something that is felt, in first person, by someone else. This aspect helps also individual in reflecting what they would wish for themselves, or what they would suffer from, stimulating self-awareness about situations even if not experienced.

When asking a teacher what feeling included means, the focus of the question can be posed, at least, on two different perspectives: one is the self-centered perspective, where the interviewee thinks what for themselves feeling included means in the present, had meant in the past or would mean in an hypothetical future situation. In this case, the one's own experience becomes the basis to imagine someone else's feeling.


The other perspective is other-centered and works the opposite. Trying to feel others' real

or hypothetical feelings allows a reflection on one's own experience in same or similar situations. Both points of view could establish an affective connection with other persons through reflections about oneself.

Moreover, the choice of not defying 'who' was the subject of the question intended to see the free interpretation of every teacher, leaving space for personal examples or identification.

The table below represents elements recollected from participants' answers to this dimension.

Figure 20 – Empathy: what feeling included means

EMPATHY - what feeling included means 	
RECOGNITION/BEING VALUED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> being valued one's own desires are considered one's own opinion counts recognition of one's own differences as uniqueness
ACCEPTANCE/WELCOME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> being accepted by the others being welcomed not being judged not being excluded taking the challenge
COMMUNITY BELONGING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not being alone feeling 'normal' being part of the school/classroom/group good social relationships
WELL-BEING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> feeling comfortable with the group and with oneself
PARTICIPATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> active participation contributing to group/society freedom to participate or not participating in common goals
COLLABORATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> doing things together being supported/support being helped/help collaborating perceiving solidarity

The first cluster of empathy concerns elements of recognition and of being valued. For teachers it is important to be recognised as unique individual, with one's own characteristics and differences that should be valued, by the others but also by oneself.

For me feeling included is to feel that people recognise my characteristics, positive or negative they are, and they take them into account when interacting with me.

Classroom teacher. Pre-school. F.

Being valued as a person, with desires and opinions is also important in terms of recognition. While expressing what is feeling included for oneself, the elements taken in account could allow considering what can be also for other people, tracing connection between what 'I' feel and what 'others' feel.

Being or feeling accepted by the others, through a welcoming and not judgemental approach, seems to be an intrinsic element of inclusivity.

Feeling welcomed, accepted for what you are and what you can improve. I think inclusion is welcome.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 1st level. F.

Feeling included is to feel valued and accepted, not to feel judged, feel free to participate and express oneself. It basically means being understood, because if I do not understand you I cannot neither understand your needs and the strategies that you need to be included. First of all, inclusion mean understanding [...] when you are understood by the others you are included as well.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 2nd level. M.

Being part of a group, of a community, is another element recalled by interviewees, that also refer to well-being as a status of the person who feels themselves included.

For me to feel included means feeling welcomed, perceive oneself as a significant part of a group.

Support teacher. Pre-school. F.

All these elements are then related to participation and collaboration with others within the community, not only from a student perspective, but also referring to a teacher's point of view:

As a teacher, when I find a colleague that saying "look what a good job you did," I feel that my participation in that project is valued, when they (colleagues) ask you "how would you carry out this project?" you feel you can give your contribution based on your skills, thus you feel you are important.

Classroom teacher. Pre-school. F.

From the answers given by teachers in this respect, it emerges that being considered by colleagues, and by students is important to determinate the recognition of teachers as persons, not just for the role they have in schools and classrooms. For instance, a pre-school teacher explains what feeling included means for her referring to how students consider her as a person to interact with:

With the children, I feel included when they invite me to play with them, that is when they do not see me only as a teacher but also as a person who takes their input and builds a game with them and this is something that I really like and I think that thanks to inner children's inclusive approaches wonderful things can happen at school.

Classroom teacher. Pre-school. F.

The sense of community, in doing things together collaboratively and through an active participation, is expressed by many teachers that indicate the reciprocal value of collaboration, interpreted also as mutual help.

Overall, what emerges in this dimension is matching with the former, confirming a certain understanding of inclusion oriented to classroom and schools as communities, where people are valued for their diversity and the contribution that everyone can bring to the group.

5.6. Self-knowledge: facilitation and barriers to being inclusive

The last dimension of understanding is about self-knowledge. This facet regards the reflectivity of teachers in respect of facilitation and barriers to their inclusivity. According to Wiggins and McTighe (2005, p. 101) "in daily life, our capacity to accurately self-assess and self-regulate reflects understanding". Being a key facet, this dimension concerns two important aspects of teachers' inclusivity, giving an overview on what could be developed (facilitation) and, on the other hand, what should be changed (barriers). Moreover, through the answers teachers gave to the question related to this dimension it is possible to draw a map of elements concerning teacher education that

should be considered in the school reform that Italy is implementing. Elsewhere (Camedda, Santi, 2016), outcomes from this study regarding teacher education have been presented and discussed, aiming to contribute to the Italian educational debate about school reform, controversially disputed among scholars, teachers, parents and other educational professionals.

In this section I will examine elements related to teachers' views on what facilitates and impedes their inclusivity. Specifically, the question asked during interviews did not aim to investigate facilitation and barriers to inclusion, but was oriented to what is influential, on both sides, for the teachers' own capacity of being inclusive. This interest stems from a reflexive approach, where "self-knowledge is a key facet of understanding because it demands that we self-consciously question on our ways of seeing the world if we are to become more understanding-better able to see beyond our selves" (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005, p. 102). In other words, teachers are invited to reflect on their own views about facilitation and barriers to being inclusive, addressing the idea that "to understand the world we must understand ourselves" (p. 100). Moreover, following our theoretical framework, focusing on teachers' own inclusivity also means questioning about the expected behaviour that, as we discussed in Chapter Three, should eventually derive from certain (inclusive) attitudes.

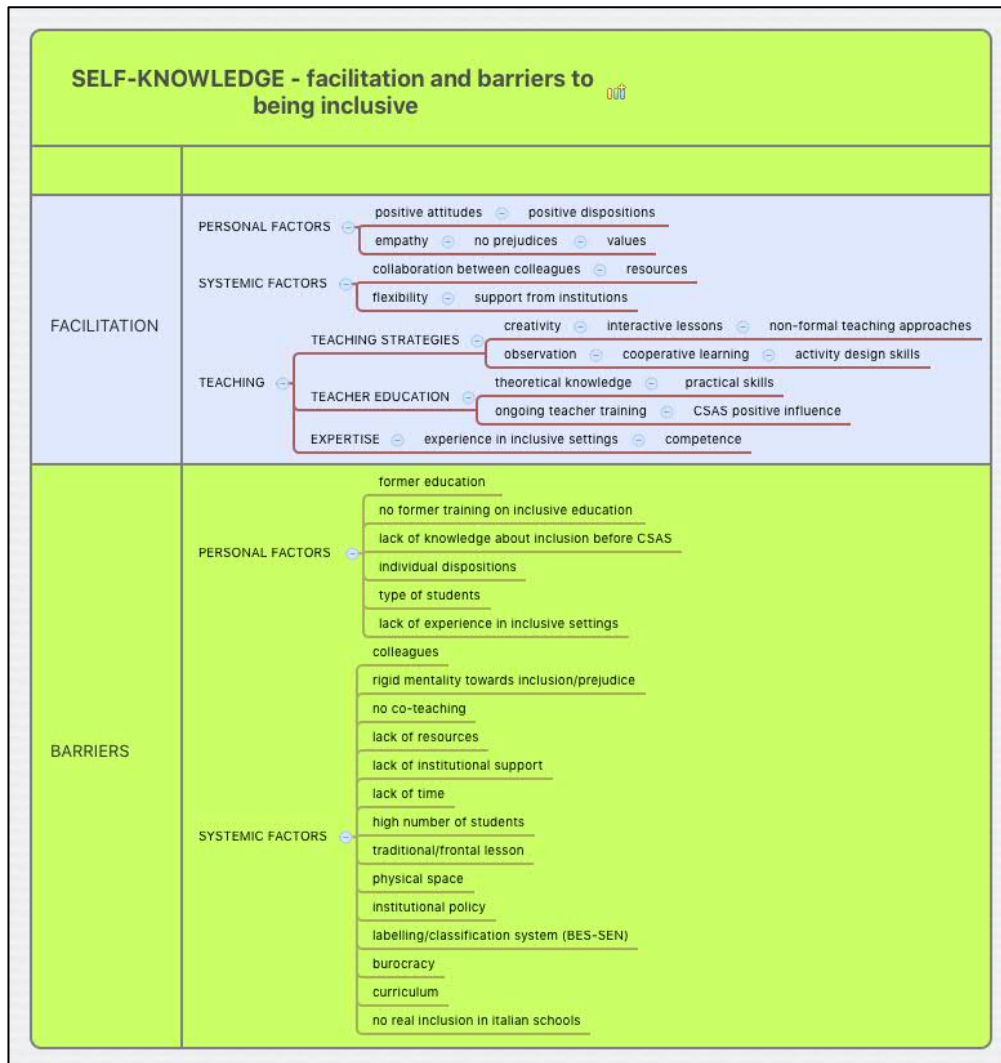
Figure 21 on the next page shows two clusters, facilitation and barriers, including three main significant groups: personal factors, systemic factors and (just for facilitation) teaching.

Looking at the figure on the next page it is possible to see that what facilitates teachers' inclusivity, from their perspective, are personal and systemic factors and teaching related elements. Personal factors concern elements depending by personal characteristics, attitudes, dispositions, values and an empathetic approach to others.

What does facilitates it? I think, my sensitivity, the fact of having sensitivity, which is not obvious for everyone, and the ability to feel empathy because if I put myself in someone else's shoes I can try to figure out what the other feel. Without empathy, and many teachers do not have it... if you have no empathy you cannot really consider everyone, but just the students who are good at school, but the good ones are a small part.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 1st level. F.

Figure 21 – Self-knowledge: facilitation and barriers to being inclusive



For this teacher what is facilitating is an inner empathetic approach that, as she says, does not belong to everyone. Personal dispositions are considered as important, and another teacher gives an example of her approach to the ‘other’ through the metaphor of the artist:

I think, what I am, what I feel facilitates me in being inclusive. If every educator works with consciousness they are like an artist, in the sense that through their work and their art can stimulate other’s potential, and every individual becomes a masterpiece.

Classroom teacher. Pre-school. F.

Alongside personal factors teachers identified systemic elements that positively influence their inclusivity. Collaboration with colleagues and availability of resources are seen as important as well as flexibility of time, curriculum and space, and support from

institutions. All these elements are indicated both regarding facilitation and barriers, as the presence or absence of them can lead to be more or less inclusive, from interviewees' point of view.

All this, (the presence) of people who have commitment towards an inclusive perspective, although probably we do not succeed at first, when you enter in the space of inclusion you no longer come out. Because it should be a type of education that is valid for those who can, for those who cannot and who might do, there is a philosophy that binds the whole.

Classroom teacher. Pre-school. M.

It is interesting to notice that in this extract, despite this teacher is saying that inclusion is for everyone, there is an implicit reference to the within-the child paradigm. In fact, he refers to students who can, cannot and might do. Considering the perspective adopted in this study, this is revealing the persistence of a static view, even if at a first glance it can appear as 'inclusive', expressed through the language used by the teacher. In fact, he is categorising students depending on their ability, or capacity to do something. Probably his intention was to enlighten an education that is aware of differences of students, but if we consider the language used to express this idea we cannot ignore the reference to labelling. Said that, this inference can be useful in denoting that, although an inclusive approach shown by this teacher some critical considerations about a persistent language can be made. As it will be discussed in the next chapter, the use of a certain language emerges various times in many interviews, showing that while teachers are adopting an inclusive perspective they keep on using linguistic expressions that belong to the special-education approach (Corbett, 1996).

Regarding teaching factors, facilitating elements have been grouped in teaching strategies, teacher education and teachers' expertise.

Teaching strategies, such as cooperative learning, are indicated by teachers as facilitating their inclusivity.

Facilitating aspects are both organisational, i.e. bringing an open teaching, I often use cooperative learning, then I divide the class into small groups, each group faces a text and then reports it to the class, in this way you have the opportunity to talk to students who generally are always quiet [...] the learning can be inclusive, then facilitation is given by choosing a participatory methodology that fosters participation.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 2nd level. M.

An important feature recalled by interviewees is teacher education. In this respect, many teachers reported how the attendance of the CSAS positively influenced their change towards a more inclusive approach considering the combination of theoretical knowledge and practical skills, through an internship of 200 hours in schools with the supervision of qualified and experienced support teachers.

I was already working as a support teacher with no specialisation, I must say this course facilitated me in being inclusive, both in practice and especially in theory, as having a theoretical framework helped me a lot.

Support teacher. Secondary school 2nd level. M

So ... I can tell you, after the course (CSAS) my way to be inclusive is completely different, that is, before it was more a matter of placement, and above all of pity, compassion for each other that was different from me, but now my being inclusive has no limit, that is, I feel ready to be able to ensure it to all.

Classroom teacher. Primary school. F.

One year ago I could act on common sense, I could say I do this because I think rightly so, now thankfully I have the knowledge, I feel confident and therefore can be more inclusive.

I have the theoretical reference I needed, thanks to the course.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 1st level. F.

Another secondary school teacher points out the pioneering role of new qualified teachers in support teaching to foster the inclusive perspective in schools levels where it is more difficult to find positive attitudes (Fiorucci, 2014) and an inclusive approach (Vianello, Moalli, 2001).

We somehow are called to be somehow the pioneers of inclusion, compared with primary schools where certain approaches are more common, in relation to the experiences we have in this course we should be the ones who will create the inclusive environments even in secondary schools of first and second level.

Support teacher. Secondary school 1st level. F.

Moreover, ongoing teacher training is also called as important, after the initial teacher preparation or the specialisation course in support teaching, as educational context are always changing, through a constant evolution, and are fundamental to improve the

teacher expertise.

Despite how much experience you have there is always a chance to improve [...] so if I do not have experience I can more easily make a lot of mistakes.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 1st level. F.

Being inclusive can also be facilitated by our preparation, experience in inclusive settings, the knowledge you have, the tools that you know you can use and so on.

Classroom teacher. Primary school. F.

After considered what facilitates teachers in being inclusive I will discuss now which elements they consider as barriers, basically divided in personal and systemic factors.

The first group presents elements that are ascribable to former teacher education, intended as traditional and not about an inclusive approach, individual dispositions, type of students (i.e. with severe disabilities, intellectual impairment and so on), lack of experience in inclusive settings.

Knowledge, preparation in an inclusive perspective are seen as important, if missing they are seen by teachers as barriers to inclusion.

On one hand also the lack of knowledge about an inclusive perspective, what it means, the theoretical framework, and so on.

Classroom teacher. Pre-school. F.

So, I think one aspect that limited my inclusivity was the issue of not having inclusion experience. If I have ideas, I also have a cultural horizon, I imagine possible things, I have a sense of justice, I love the students I work with, but I do not have the experience, then it is much more difficult being inclusive.

Support teacher. Secondary school 1st level. F.

The lack of preparation of teachers, and of administrators, has been reported in literature (Devecchi and Nevin, 2010, p. 216) as an impediment to effective leadership of school that deal with a diverse student population, pointing out how the importance of an adequate preparation.

Another aspect taken in consideration by some teachers is the type of students they have to deal with. For instance, this teacher refers about an aggressive behaviour of a student (she refers here to a girl) that could contrast the efforts of classmates and teachers in being inclusive.

Of course, thinking of a young girl who has certain behaviour... obviously this hinders inclusiveness, maybe puts a strain on the inclusiveness of peers. There are behaviours adopted by others that can limit the inclusiveness. For example, I have to be inclusive with a girl who gives me a punch in the face, oh God ... I have to work a lot to make myself inclusive [...]. Well ... it is not that inclusion is all easy, that is, is beautiful in words but in practice we need to find the right strategies and the right approach.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 1st level. F.

From these words it is possible to infer that the teacher thinks to a practical/real situation where the abstract concept of inclusion has to be put in practice, revealing not always easy ways to do it. Considering the feeling of students or teachers in being rejected, or assaulted for some reasons by others, it is important in order to reflect about possible factors that could impede an inclusive approach. This point helps us reflecting both on the side of the persons who behaves in a certain way but also on the side of other people who are subjected to that behaviour. This does not deal just with some disabilities that can induce aggressive behaviours, but more with the general interaction between human beings that is not always easy, especially when we face situations that are unpleasant or harmful, such as the (hypothetical?) punch in the face mentioned above.

Also for this reason an adequate preparation for inclusive education is indispensable, in order to give spaces for knowledge but also for reflection about critical situations that could happen in a classroom independently from the presence of students with disabilities or other difficulties.

Concerning systemic factors, teachers indicate several elements that recur throughout their responses. The first element to take into account regards colleagues. Many teachers point out how not shared views on inclusion between colleagues can affect their own efforts in being inclusive:

Certainly a non positive relationship with colleagues can impede my inclusivity, when maybe one believes in inclusion and the others do not believe in it and you do not manage to find points of agreement. And also it depends on the understanding of students' needs other teachers have [...] and if they value differences, the individuality of each child.

Support teacher. Pre-school. F.

As I told you before, the attitude of some colleagues and sometimes the families, but most of colleagues, is a barrier. From a teacher's point of view, I'm sorry to say that for many teachers the boy or girl with disabilities cannot go beyond a certain limit, the proposed

activities are always too high or too low and vice versa, the assessment that in most cases ranges of 5 or 6 (out of 10), it is even hardly conceivable that the boy during certain activities can be with others or just listen to the classroom as all other classmates do.

Support teachers. Secondary school 1st level. F.

Then there is the daily confrontation with colleagues, even with some support teachers when they take the student inside and outside the classroom. The clash takes to make things better. If on one hand these pupils are sometimes accepted and put within the group, then most of the hours they are forgotten in a corner, and this also undermines the work of other teachers that want them inside the classroom.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 1st level. F.

These three excerpts show different aspects of the relationship with colleagues, all pointing out the importance of having common principles and approaches in order to fulfil their willingness to be inclusive and foster an inclusive education, both for students with disabilities, for whom those teachers were preparing to work with, and more generally for every student in the classroom.

Moreover, the extracts here commented are representative of many other teachers that refer to colleagues' approach as a barrier for inclusivity. Some of them refer in general to a certain attitude that perpetuates a static view on inclusion, as something that does not regard all the students or contrarily regards just students with disabilities and 'their' support teachers. As an example, two primary school teachers indicate as there is a certain previous prejudicial or static approach that impedes changing perspective and practice towards inclusion.

Ah, then, relatively to the school environment I would say that my being inclusive encounters barriers because in schools there are prejudices and rigidity of ideas and vision that are built year after year and that it is difficult to dismantle and change.

Classroom teacher. Primary school. F.

Colleagues, parents, but also pupils themselves, sometimes expect from you certain things deducted from a principle that things should go as they always went over the years, as it has always be like that in that school.

Classroom teacher. Primary school. F.

In this respect, a traditional school system where co-teaching is not potentially

implemented⁵⁹ is seen as a barrier, as well as the lack of resources (human, instrumental, spatial and time resource) and a excessively structured system that is perceived as impeding an inclusive perspective by teachers of different school levels.

However, because the school is made of rhythms, of final grading meetings, it is made of reports with prescriptive approaches, grades, it is made of INVALSI⁶⁰ that you need to do regardless if you like it or not, is difficult to being inclusive. We can give all the value to inclusion but then we depend on someone else and we cannot control what is above us, and these tight timelines in a sense, in my opinion, fossilize us.

Classroom teacher. Primary school. F.

What hinders my being inclusive ... sometimes maybe you cannot be so inclusive as you would like, for the structure of secondary education, for the time scanning which is quite rigid, every hour or couple of hours you have to change class and to be able to make some activities both in the classroom or outside the classroom, time is pretty tight.

Support teacher. Secondary school 1st level. F.

Some views on schools and support from institutions are quite radical, showing a disagreement with the current system as it is:

I think there is little support from the institutions, there really support near zero and they (the institutions), are demolishing everything that was school, historically and culturally in Italy.

[...] Moreover, if I have thirty children in a class and I am alone, I will never make it.

Classroom teacher. Pre-school. M.

The same teacher also denotes how the high number of students in a classroom is a barrier to his educational practice, reinforcing his view on the current system and pointing out the issue of being ‘alone’ teaching so many pupils.

Other elements recalled by interviewees are then ascribable to bureaucracy, curriculum, institutional policy and latest norms in terms of BES.

⁵⁹ During the last decades the ‘compresenza’, two classroom teachers at the same time in the classroom, has been drastically reduced by Ministerial regulations. This aspect is not really being improved with the Law n.107/2015, where the number of hours of ‘compresenza’, where teachers can actually co-teach, differ from a school level to another and are considerably few.

⁶⁰ The INVALSI test (or National Assessment) is a written test that is designed to evaluate the learning levels of students and is used to compare nationally, regionally and locally students’ academic records. INVALSI results are then used within the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment, OCSE). Students with disabilities are excluded from the INVALSI tests and those with DSA can be excluded depending on the teacher’s choice: i.e. if the teacher thinks that the test is not appropriate for those students.

Even now with the BES discourse, I am beginning to ask what does this practically mean? Do you always must to label? This is what I think could hinder my being inclusive, what it is imposed to me every day.

Classroom teachers. Pre-school. F.

In this case, the recently introduced special educational needs classification made by teachers is perceived as an obstacle to being inclusive, where probably inclusion is assumed in another way than labelling students to include them more, as I amply discussed throughout this work.

The last point I would like to discuss is about a single comment made by a secondary school teacher that, in a very extreme way, expresses her view on inclusion in Italy when responding to what is hindering her in being inclusive.

It is easier to find obstacles because in my opinion Italian schools have not yet reached a real inclusiveness and therefore it is important to foster an inclusive perspective now that is a great achievement for all of us.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 2nd level. F.

As it is possible to see, if on one hand this teacher is denoting a non (real) inclusive education in Italy, she is also saying something that for this study is very important: more efforts are required in order to fulfill 'inclusion' goal in Italian schools. Considering that all these teachers work in schools where the *integrazione scolastica* runs for almost forty year, these aspects are revealing a reality that sometimes is not exactly correspondent to what is thought, or claimed, to be inclusion in Italy (Operti, 2015).

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented and discussed outcomes derived from interviews regarding the six dimensions of understanding of inclusion, describing and interpreting what emerged from the coding. Considering the first research question is possible to see a certain coherence with the theoretical framework underpinning this work and the understanding of inclusion by interviewed teachers. Generally, the concept of inclusion held by participants reflects what theoretically assumed by this research. Regarding the model presented in Chapter Three (Figure 6), what appears is that teachers can explain what is inclusion in its broader meaning, interpreting and describing inclusive processes through views or personal experiences. In this regard, within the interpretation dimension while the vast majority interpret inclusion as a matter of all students, some teachers refer to it as

chiefly related to students with disabilities. This aspect recurs throughout other dimensions, such as application and practice, suggesting that when the discourse is connected to practicality some teachers take more in consideration elements regarding challenges encountered in schools by students with disabilities, rather than referring to all students.

In some cases, from what is said by teachers that refer to students with disabilities it is possible to notice how some kinds of intra-exclusion still persist in Italian schools, at various levels, despite the long tradition of *integrazione scolastica*, confirmed by literature (D'Alessio, 2011; Ianes et al., 2010).

When asked about application of inclusion, teachers give examples of inclusive practice experienced or aimed, indicating teaching strategies as well as community practice that shapes what for them is an inclusive educational context. Within this dimension they also indicate barriers and facilitation to the practical implementation of inclusion that anticipate some of the elements arisen in the last dimension of self-knowledge.

Concerning perspective, teachers' answers confirm their capacity of critically describing what happens or imagining what could happen in an inclusive classroom. Their key points regard principles and values reflected in a positive climate, adequate space organisation and teaching strategies. Again, elements concerning students with disabilities point out some criticism to non-inclusive (or not enough) classrooms, highlighting some teachers' desire of more involvement of students with disabilities that seem to be excluded from the classroom activities.

The dimension of empathy shows how teachers describe the feeling of being included, outlining two main perspectives, self-centered and other-centered, that reflect the reciprocal inter-subjectivity involved in an empathic relation, essential element to enhance inclusion.

Finally, the self-knowledge facet gives us crucial perceptions regarding what is a barrier or facilitation by teachers in order to be inclusive. Personal factors and systemic factors result particularly interesting in influencing teachers' being or not being inclusive. Especially for the legislative reform that is currently interesting Italy, what emerged from this particular dimension could give some important insights regarding teachers' inclusive attitudes and ways to improve inclusion in schools.

Concluding, the outcomes, so far, show an understanding of inclusion matching with the adapted model of Understanding presented in Chapter Three in relation to the interpretation of inclusion and inclusive education embraced in this study. In respect of the first research question, it is possible to claim that outcomes satisfactorily respond to

the query: in fact, through the discussion of every dimension of understanding, crucial elements describing how teachers understand inclusion have been analysed, allowing a further identification of inclusive attitudes, as they will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

From values to practice? Diversions on the route

“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to."

"I don't much care where –"

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go.”

Lewis Carrol, 1865

Outcomes interpretation is a crucial and delicate phase of qualitative research. In the last chapter the six dimensions of understanding deriving from data analysis have been discussed and interpreted, giving answers to the first research question.

In this last chapter, I will discuss the outcomes emerged so far considering the other two research questions. In particular, I will illustrate some crucial points that allow a reflection on relations between values and practice and the complex intersection of factors involved in transposing inclusive attitudes to a real inclusive practice.

Successively, in order to respond to the third research question, the role of teacher education as a promoter of inclusive attitudes will be debated and some perspectives on its evolution will be offered in relation to the Italian background, extendible also to other contexts.

A final section will host some critical considerations about the relevance that this study could have in stimulating an evolution of inclusion in Italy and promoting new ways of studying of inclusive attitudes.

6.1. A matter of attitude?

Inclusive values and practice

From the outcomes presented in the last chapter it is possible to highlight that teachers participating in the study demonstrate inclusive values, such as respect for diversity, equality, solidarity, reciprocity and so on and so forth.

Similarly, references and examples of inclusive practice involving participation, collaboration and so on, matches with a profile of inclusive teachers that can potentially put their values into practice, fostering inclusion in schools.

Taking into account the six dimensions of understanding, inclusive values and practice are recurrently mentioned and constitute an essential core of teachers' responses. Following the proposed framework defining inclusive attitudes, presented in Chapter Three (Figure 7), teachers' expression of inclusive values and practice integrated with a deep understanding of inclusion shows that they have inclusive attitudes, demonstrating a chief focus on diversity, rather than disability/SEN. Although this view of inclusion disability-related is present in teachers' answers it occupies a minor place.

Outcomes seem to support the theoretical framework adopted within this study, making possible to explore inclusive attitudes using a different approach that seeks to understand rather than measure.

Elsewhere (Camedda, Santi, 2016), inclusive attitudes demonstrated by participants has been discussed in relations with their significant role in terms of factor of change towards a more inclusive Italian school context. However, the highly inclusive principles expressed by teachers not always, and sometimes quite rarely, find a correspondence in their actual practice. What emerged from the study is that teachers having inclusive attitudes sometime struggle in put their inclusive values into practice due, mainly, to systemic factors or a lack of preparation on inclusion-related subjects.

If we consider the second research question, concerning the relations between values and practice, outcomes confirm that the 'predictability' (Loreman et al., 2005) of behaviour and practice depending from attitudes does not find a certain correspondence in reality. For this reason, outcomes also support the idea that 'expected' practice deriving from the expression of inclusive attitudes depends on many other factors that fall outside teachers' inclusivity. In fact, taking into account what participants reported concerning facilitation and barriers to inclusion (application and self-knowledge dimensions) we can see how systemic factors, mostly independent from teachers, influence massively the realization of an inclusive education.

Despite their willingness in being inclusive, teachers refer at many levels that inclusion is often not an achieved goal in schools. Moreover, they depict situations of exclusion of students with disabilities, called in literature pull out (Ianes et al., 2013, p. 58) that consequently implicates also the exclusion of support teachers. This is reported especially for secondary schools:

Yes, and this is true for both students and teachers, that is also for me... a serial exclusion, double, multiple, because it excludes the possibility both to take part to the classroom activities.

Support teacher. Secondary school 1st level. M.

I would tend to remain in the classroom although while I am next to the student that is certified and we do an activity, the other teacher work with the rest of the class on something else... this is not even being included, this would be that there are two monads that do not intersect, that never meet, everyone works for himself and in the end it only appears to be school integration, this is not true inclusion.

Support teacher. Secondary school 2nd level. M.

The tendency to exclude students from classroom activities, physically (pull out) taking them outside the class but also at a relational and emotional level impeding them to establish relationships with the rest of the classmates during school activities, is largely confirmed in research concerning inclusion in Italy (D'Alessio 2011, 2013; Ianes et al., 2013).

This situation occurs generally towards students with disabilities but also for other students, such as those identified having BES, that sometime join the support teacher's activities outside the classroom. In secondary schools, where the rigid structure of time schedule and curriculum is felt as a barrier to inclusion, it happens that students that 'cannot follow' the regular activities or that have certain disabilities, are perceived as distractors for the other students and often the support teacher is invited to work outside the classroom.

There is a student diagnosed with ADHD and other teachers say "take him out from the classroom because he bothers our lesson". We are far away from inclusion, for example referring to school trips or other activities they say "perhaps it is better him not taking part in it, he could perhaps disturb us". Moreover, sometimes the parents of other students protest, there are complaints even in class meetings where representatives of parents are absolutely concerned about the expletion of the curriculum [...]. All of these behaviours

are against inclusion, so these things must absolutely disappear.

Support teacher. Secondary school 2nd level. M.

While participants demonstrate inclusive values and attitudes, showing their will to change this situation, they also express their frustration in seeing a non-inclusive education that results in being exclusionary regardless of the principle of the *integrazione scolastica*. Colleagues' attitude, in this respect, seem to be highly influential in realising, or impeding, inclusion.

We are not even able to implement inclusion because when I propose to a colleague to involve the student (with disabilities) this is passed by ... because it is an additional effort, because preparing an activity for the whole class is perceived as a burden, it is a burden that they feel and that avoid the most.

Support teacher. Secondary school 1st level. F.

Mainly, those complaints are referred by support teachers that probably have a stronger perception of the exclusionary attitude of many of their colleagues.

Comparing the values expressed and the practice reported we could argue that there are situations where inclusion is fostered, through a real commitment of all the teachers, and other situations where an inclusive education seems to be impeded by non-inclusive attitudes of colleagues, curriculum structure and so on and so forth.

Not only support teachers report of non-inclusive practice, but also classroom teachers denote the existence of intra-exclusion of, mostly, students with disabilities. One teacher, for instance, says about her internship of the CSAS, where she can experience an inclusive classroom referring at the same time to other exclusionary situations she lived in schools.

There are also positive attitudes, there are colleagues who think like me, there are still those who want all pupils actively participating in all the experiences that are proposed. There are those that also involve the students (with disabilities) during the lessons, as I am experiencing during the internship of the CSAS. On the contrary there are teachers that never consider the pupils with disabilities, ignoring them most of the time.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 1st level. F.

Answering to the second research question, I argue that through the outcomes so far discussed it is possible to identify a gap between inclusive values expressed by teachers

and a real inclusive practice, although participants demonstrate inclusive attitudes. This discrepancy is not always valid, since there are many examples of inclusive school settings, but at the same time forms of intra-exclusion and a non-inclusive approach seem to be predominant in participants' schools experience.

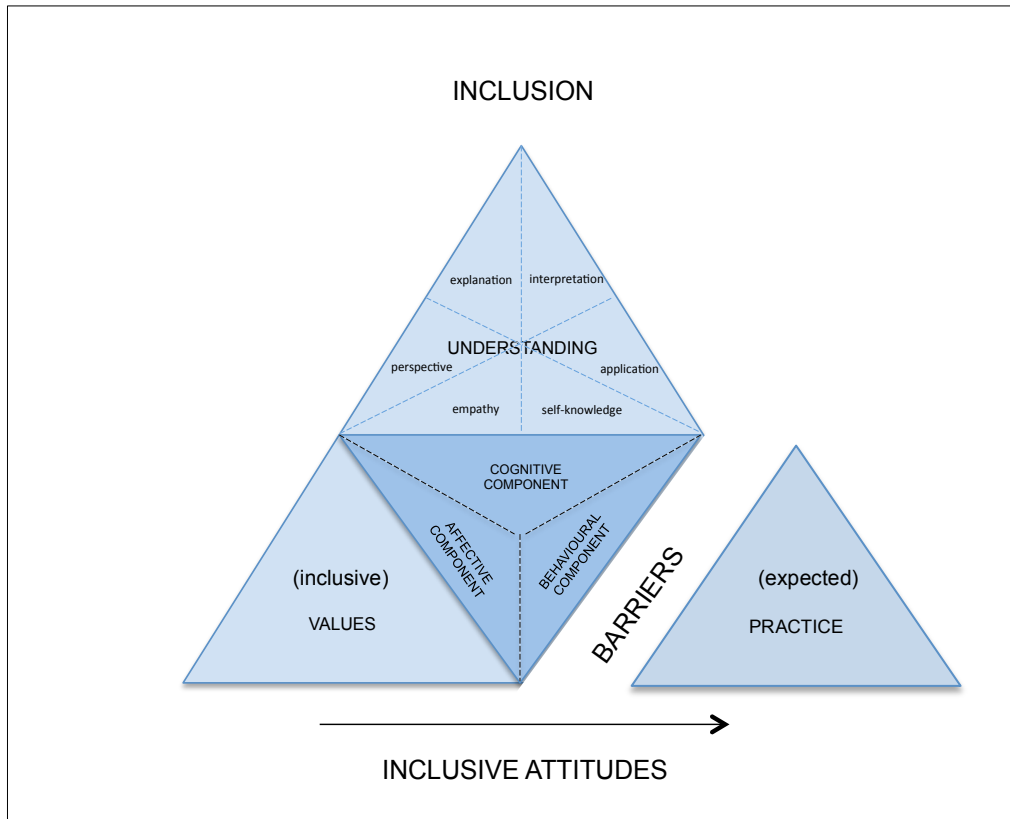
It could be assumed that inclusive values supporting inclusive attitudes have a significant role in potentially fostering and implementing an inclusive education but they are not sufficient in determine an inclusive practice. Since there are barriers that impede a complete realisation of inclusion, what emerged form this research can be used in further investigation in order to better understand how those barriers can be reduced, or ideally eliminated.

In particular, when talking about systemic barriers it is interesting seen how *integrazione scolastica*, from a legislative point of view is seemingly perceived as not properly leading to inclusive education, reiterating slight but persistent forms of intra-exclusions that do not allow a real inclusion, as already claimed by D'Alessio (2013, p. 112). Following this view, I endorse the necessity of a deeper analysis of what D'Alessio calls limitations, here presented as barriers to inclusion, that lay on the policy of *integrazione scolastica*.

Especially now that the Italian Government will have to decide about extremely delicate changes regarding schools, due to the reform introduced by the Law n. 107/2015, the outcomes of this study can offer spaces for reflection about what can be improved in term of reduction/elimination of barriers that still impede inclusion in Italian schools, despite the existence of inclusive principle and attitudes.

Taking into account the theoretical model presented in Chapter Three a possible representation of the discrepancy between values and practice is illustrated as followed (see next page).

Figure 22 – Discrepancy between values and practice



Resuming, the relations between values and practice cannot be considered as predictable or linear but rather as a complex area that requires to be further investigated. Regarding the assumption of expected practice, I argue that it is preferable to refer to a potential inclusive practice, depending on one hand on inclusive values and attitudes but also to other factors (i.e. personal, systemic factors and teacher education) that need to be critically explored through further research.

6.2. Being teachers for all

The role of teacher education

In the following pages the discussion will focus on the third research question about teacher education and its role in developing inclusive attitudes.

As already presented in Chapter Five, participants interviewed often referred to the influence of teacher preparation in general, as more specifically for the CSAS, in

empowering an inclusive approach to education.

Considering teachers' thoughts about how their views changed or found confirmation and improvement during the course attended to be qualified support teachers, the positive impact of a specific preparation on topics related to support teaching of students with disabilities allow us to make some reflections.

Elsewhere (Camedda, Santi, 2016a; 2016b) an initial analysis on this regard opened the discussion about general teacher education towards an inclusive perspective, since in Italy this topic seems to be chiefly related just to support teaching.

What emerged from this study is that teachers attending a course on support teaching, even those who already worked as support teachers without a qualification, had the opportunity to improve their knowledge about diversity and different cognitive, physical, relational and emotional functioning. Having knowledge about differences in learning, as well as difference in functioning has been reported as a key role for changing teachers' views about student with disabilities and more broadly about diverse student population in schools of all levels. On the other hand, the persistency of a specific education, especially for secondary schools, just for support teaching is seen as an obstacle to the diffusion of common views about inclusion and inclusive education.

Many teachers, in fact, talked about facing difficulties with colleagues that do not have a proper preparation on themes regarding inclusion, disability, diversity and so on. Therefore, if on one hand teacher preparation for support teaching helps teachers to develop inclusive attitudes, on the other hand the lack of preparation on these topics in general teacher education is seen as an impediment for the achievement of an inclusive perspective.

A pre-school teacher, talking about facilitation and barriers to being inclusive, refers to some colleagues that, since she was attending a specific preparation on support teaching, asked her to marking students that are seen as problematic.

Especially since I attend this course, colleagues at school usually ask me to label pupils that they see as problematic, saying for example "according to you what is wrong with this child?".

Classroom teacher. Pre-school. F.

The tendency in considering support teachers the experts of disabilities and difficulties reinforce the idea of their on responsibility on students that 'differ' from the rest of the class. In this way, the potential of a specific preparation becomes the reason for other teachers that do not have such knowledge to avoid taking responsibility of all the students

in their classroom.

What happens then if all the teachers would be prepared for working with all the students independently from disabilities and difficulties, but rather responding to individual differences between learners avoiding the marginalisation that can occur in treating some students differently (Florian, 2014, p. 289)?

Considering the possible transformation of teacher education deriving from the *Buona Scuola* reform (Law n. 107/2015), I argue that Italy could experience exactly the opposite situation. In fact, if some stances will prevail the evolution of teacher education could end up in completely separated routes for support teachers, the only ones prepared on inclusion-related themes, and classroom teachers that would not have such a preparation. This career separation could result in a further reiteration of intra-exclusion both for students that are seen as different and for support teachers that would 'have' a specialistic role centred on a vision of inclusion that would impede its development.

From an inclusive perspective, as it has been embraced and fostered throughout this work, this could result in a failure of a system that has been rewarded globally as one of the most inclusive in the World, since the introduction of *intergazione scolastica*.

The qualitative and exploratory nature of this research cannot give absolute answers on what it would be better in terms of an inclusive evolution of the Italian educational system, but it wishes to offer some elements of discussion in order to reflect about crucial changes that will interest Italy both at a national and international level.

As Italy is still an example of good practice (Ianes et al., 2014), a drastic step backwards to the 'special education' perspective could also mean a potential discrepancy with the model that internationally is being promoted in terms of inclusive education.

Moreover, apart from some sporadic references to students with disabilities, what is noticeable is that participants in this research constantly refer to common principles that share a view of inclusion as a matter of all and everybody.

I claim that these principles should be shared surely through initial teacher education for every level and in every field, but also through ongoing teacher training in order to reach also those teachers that are no longer involved in academic courses.

In this respect, the words of a classroom teacher explaining her decision in attending a course for becoming a qualified support teacher reinforce this hope:

I wanted to improve my educational skills, in order to respond to everyone in the classroom, to be teacher of all.

Classroom teacher. Secondary school 1st level. F.

I argue that if every teacher would consider himself or herself as teacher capable and responsible to teach every student in their classroom, not delegating ‘diverse students’ to the support teacher, a real and big change would happen.

This is not going to happen suddenly or without a critical analysis of what can be improved, now, in schools. This is not going to happen without teacher education and training that fosters and promotes a vision of inclusive education that concerns everybody, not just some students and some teachers.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the outcomes in relation to the two other research questions. The first section, in fact, regards the relations between values and practice that emerged from participants’ responses. Considering the nature of this study, the concept of relation was not assumed in mathematical terms, but rather as a representation of inferred connections between many aspects highly complex. What resulted from this argumentation is that practice in terms of inclusion is not predictable and does not depend just from an attitudinal predisposition towards inclusion.

The second section regarded the third question about the role of teacher education in developing inclusive attitudes. From interviewees’ answer it is possible to draw the conclusion that teacher education concerning inclusion is important in order to develop inclusive attitudes; for this reason, I argued that it is desirable that inclusion-related topics are part of initial and ongoing teacher education or training. Paraphrasing Montessori’s words, I agree and boost the idea that teacher education needs to be contemporary to the transformation of the school, meaning that it should be adequate to a diverse student population and able to face challenges that the evolution of societies implicates.

Conclusion

Utopia lies at the horizon.
When I draw nearer by two steps,
it retreats two steps.
If I proceed ten steps forward,
it swiftly slips ten steps ahead.
No matter how far I go,
I can never reach it.
What, then, is the purpose
of utopia?
It is to cause us to advance.”

Eduardo Galeano

An inclusive perspective in education implicates certain values, attitudes and practice. These elements are closely connected but, as we have seen throughout this research, the relations between these elements are complex and not always predictable.

Internationally, inclusive education is promoted as one the key point in order to achieve a better and more just society. But just depending on how this concept is interpreted and promoted, the society can really change in an ameliorative way.

This requires a critical approach in order to investigate educational reality digging out issues that sometimes lay behind the surface. It is not a simple task, and a high set of principles have to be held as a guide for theoretical and practical developments.

The work presented in this thesis aimed to contribute to this critical analysis, exploring the topic of inclusive attitudes through a new theoretical and methodological perspective that could lead to knowledge advancement. Presenting and discussing chiefly the Italian background, I examined the topics of inclusive attitudes through a critical lens that sought to highlight aspects that can lead to a more inclusive schooling, or vice versa that can be a barrier to its realisation.

In fact, outcomes suggest that although teachers have inclusive attitudes they often find obstacles in implementing them through an inclusive practice. Mainly, according to the results of this study, external factors are the main cause impeding to put inclusive values into practice, such as a lack of shared principles with colleagues, non-flexible curriculum and school organisation and so on and so forth.

Furthermore, what emerged from the results is that teacher education, in terms of theoretical and teaching approach to inclusion, is confirmed in being a key for developing inclusive attitudes as well as to spread common principles that can change the current exclusionary situations that still happen. This is, of course, related to this research's backgrounds, but it can be interesting to take the outcomes of this study as a starting point for further investigation, perhaps at an international level in order to investigate how to improve teacher education, initial and ongoing, in order to promote inclusive attitudes for all the teachers, not just for those who attend specific preparation on support teaching.

In this respect, this study suggests that more training on inclusion related topics is essential in all teacher education programmes, and that a wide range of teaching strategies can be beneficial to all the students, independently by the fact of having or not disabilities or difficulties.

Regarding specifically the Italian school reform, and its uncertainty related to the possible separation of careers and training for mainstream and support teachers, the outcomes of this research demonstrate, especially considering classroom teachers' views, that a common training on inclusive approach is more than desirable. Elsewhere (Camedda, Santi, 2016), this point have been made clear and joined a discussion about future implication of the Italian school reform established with the Law n. 107/2015 in potentially separating teacher education and career instead of providing an inclusive approach and perspective for all the teachers in training, and already in service.

We have seen that inclusive attitudes can be fostered by teacher education when this is supported by an inclusive approach that sees diversity as a common pattern of every human being. This could potentially lead to an improvement of teaching in general because it is not just an approach concerned to some students but to all the individuals that belong to an educational context, such as school and classroom.

Practice, in this view is to be interpreted in a broader sense. It is not just what teachers and students do at school, but involves also values and relations between elements engaged in a community.

In order to achieve such a goal, an inclusive school environment, a supporting policy is essential as well as institutional organisation.

We have seen how, sometimes, inclusive attitudes of teachers collide with a rigid mentality, curriculum and structures (physical and educational).

I argue that from the results of this study many reflections can be formulated in order to drawing possible changes at a national level (Italy) but also for other countries that face similar situations of intra-exclusion where schools are supposed to be inclusive.

The matter is not just related to the intellectual sphere but rather in recognising that the conceptual paradox of inclusion (Santi, 2015, p. 114) cannot find its realization anywhere but in the educational practice, highlighting how the antinomic dilemma of difference can be tackled through the combination of values and practice.

Elsewhere (Camedda, 2015, p. 164), I claimed for commitment and hope, as the scaffolds to the realisation of an inclusive society, where “the pedagogical utopia keeps alive the constant research of new horizons”. According to Frabboni and Pinto Minerva (2004), the concept of utopia as a non-existent place⁶¹ can be interpreted as a possible place, where changes can lead to a better condition. Embracing this perspective, I argue that the utopia of inclusion acts as a horizon towards we can walk, more than a place that we can reach once for all.

There is no land called ‘Inclusion’, but rather the inclusive perspective is the direction, inclusive values and attitudes are the compass, while practice is the map that day by day helps us advancing a little bit more.

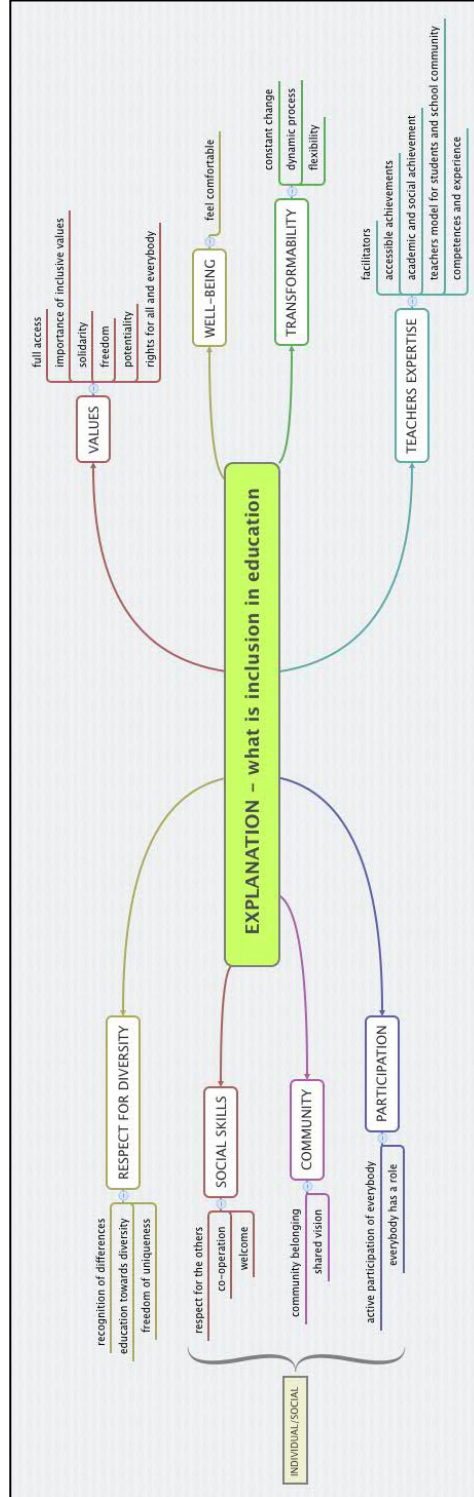
Every path leads somewhere, and sometimes the journey we take is even more important than the place we reach. The journey is experience and every step allows us to discover something more: going forward but also backwards, running frantically or staying still, being enthusiastic or discouraged, but always keeping adventuring.

This is what I experienced during this work, a long journey that began as an exploration and had become an adventure. What I discovered and discussed in this thesis is then given to the reader to open new paths, further reflections, but above all I hope this work would be the end of a journey called *Dottorato di Ricerca* (Doctorate) and the beginning of another exploration towards somewhere new, of which I cannot yet know the name.

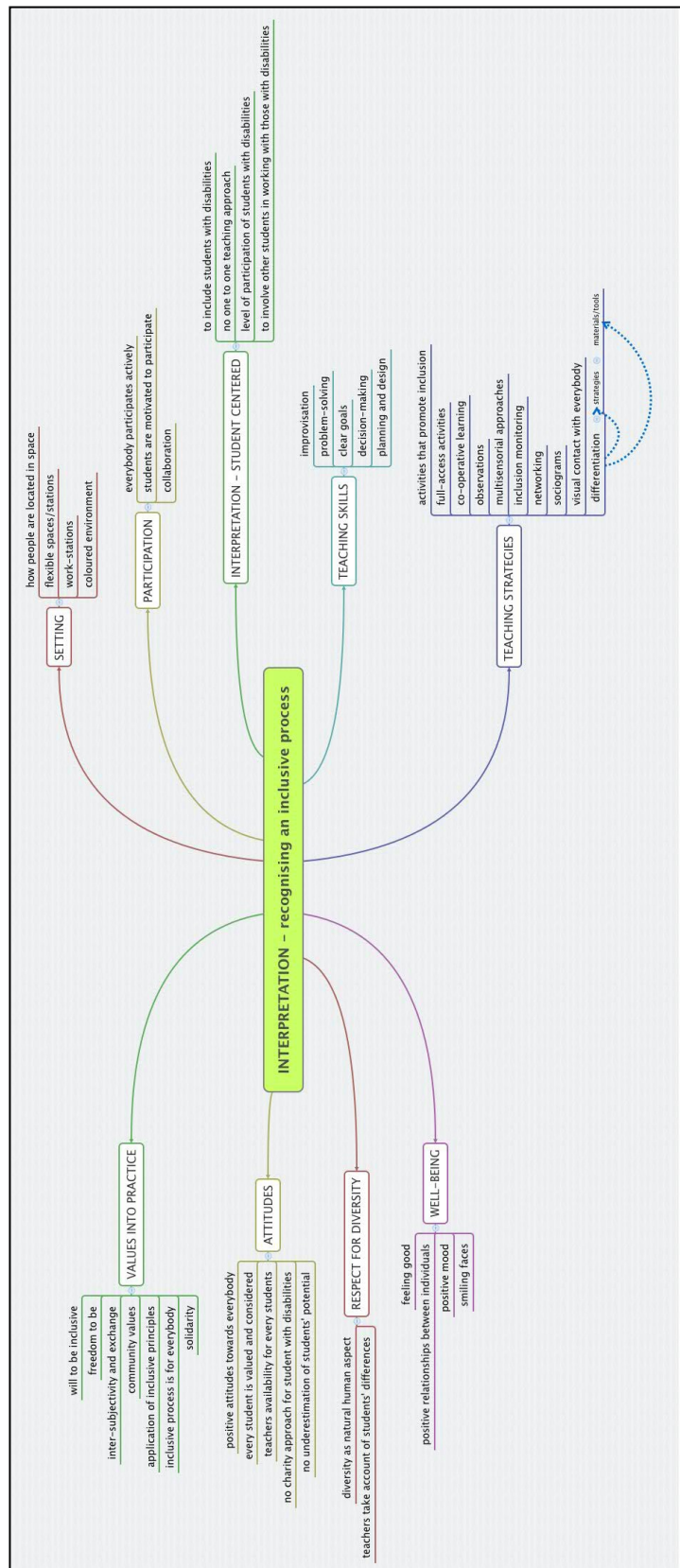
⁶¹ Originally this term was introduced by Thomas More in 1516, deriving from the Greek prefix ‘ou’ meaning “not”, and *topos* (τόπος), ‘place’, it indicated ‘nowhere’.

Appendix

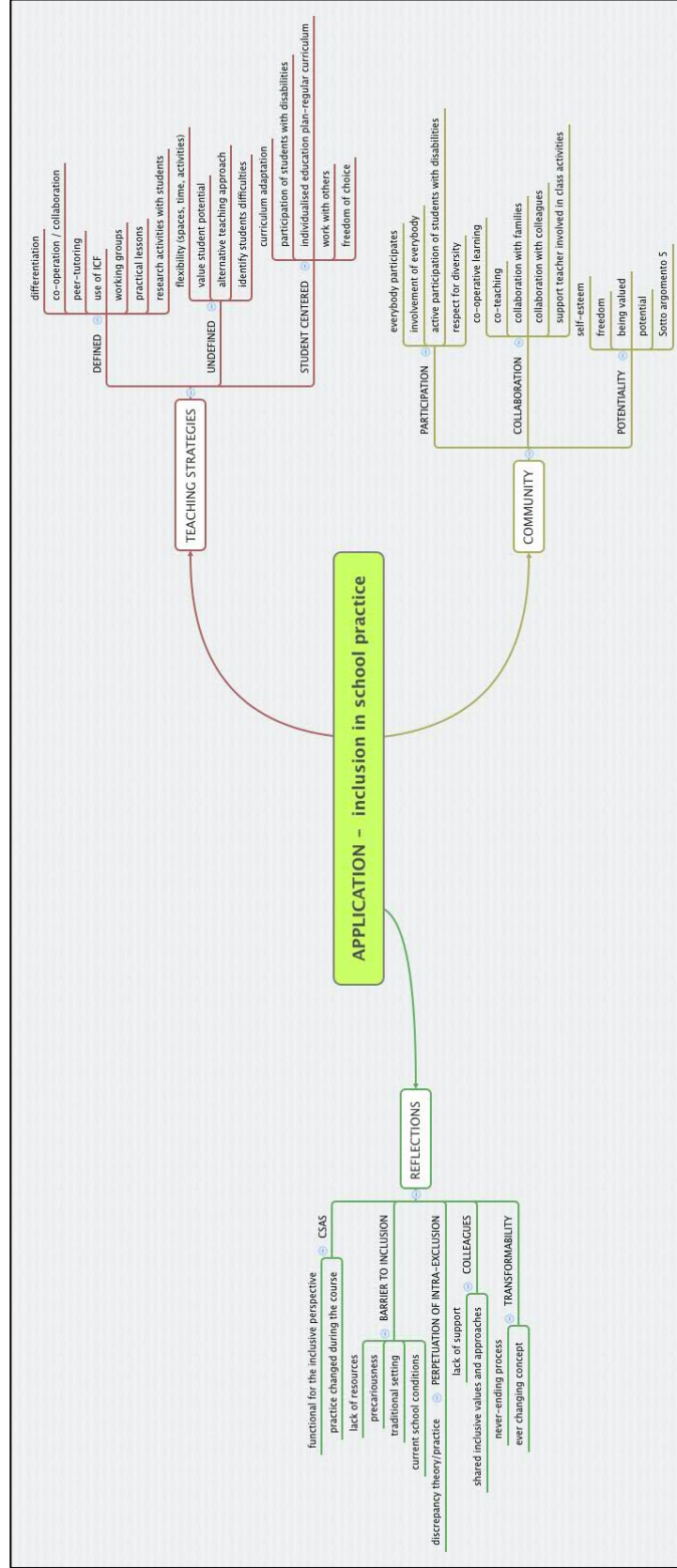
1 – Explanation dimension's network



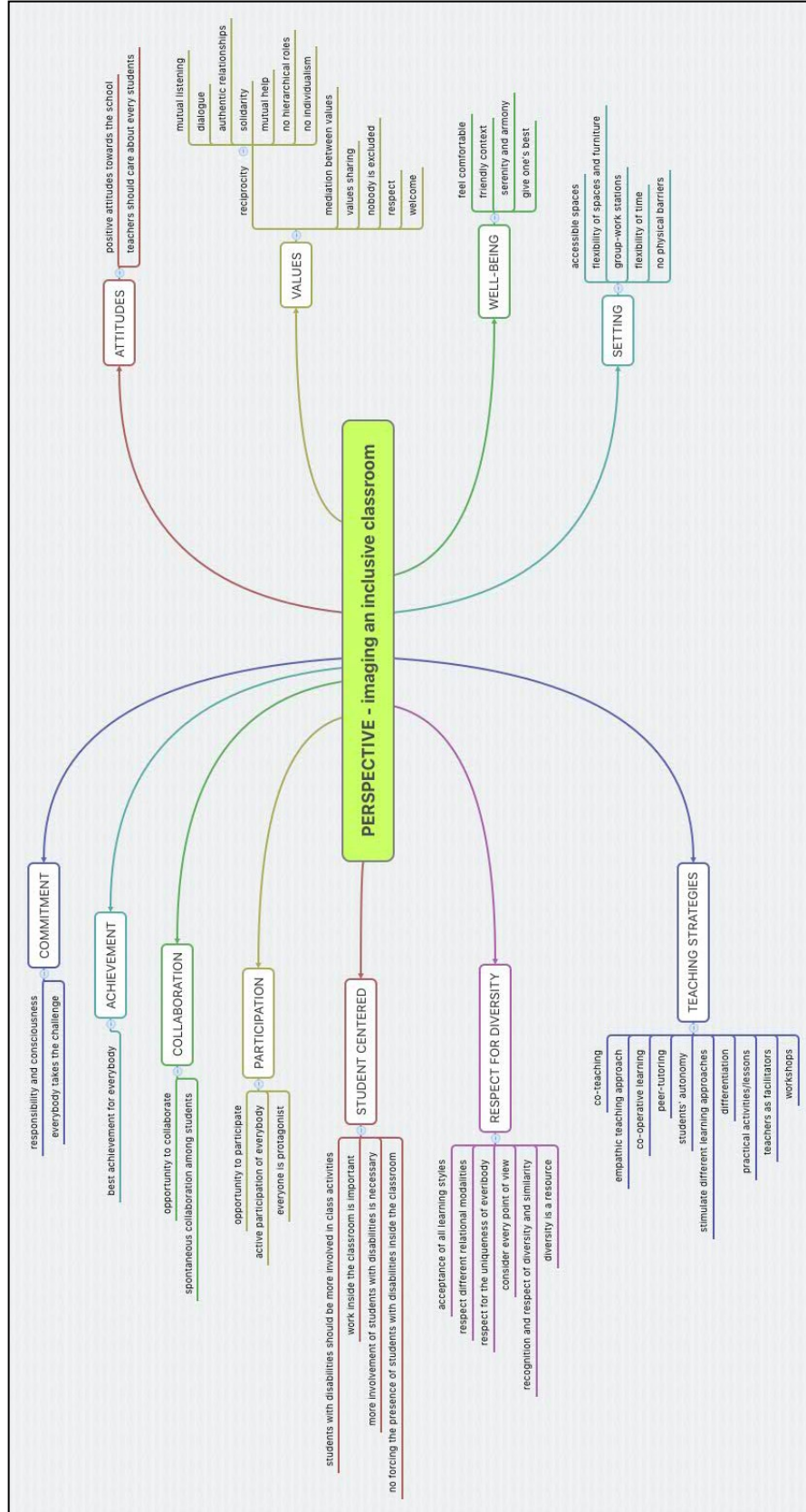
2 – Interpretation dimension's network



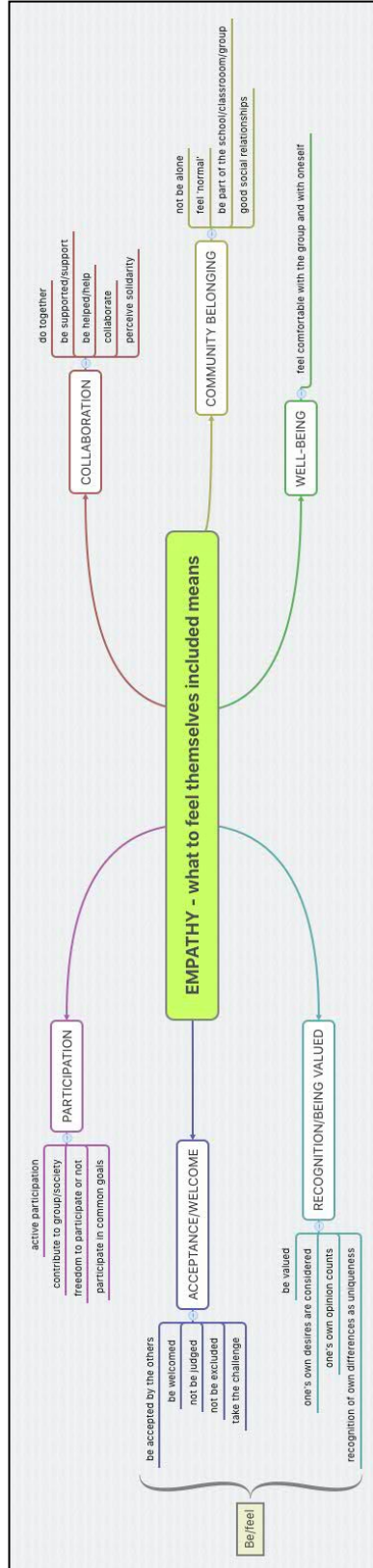
3- Application dimension's network



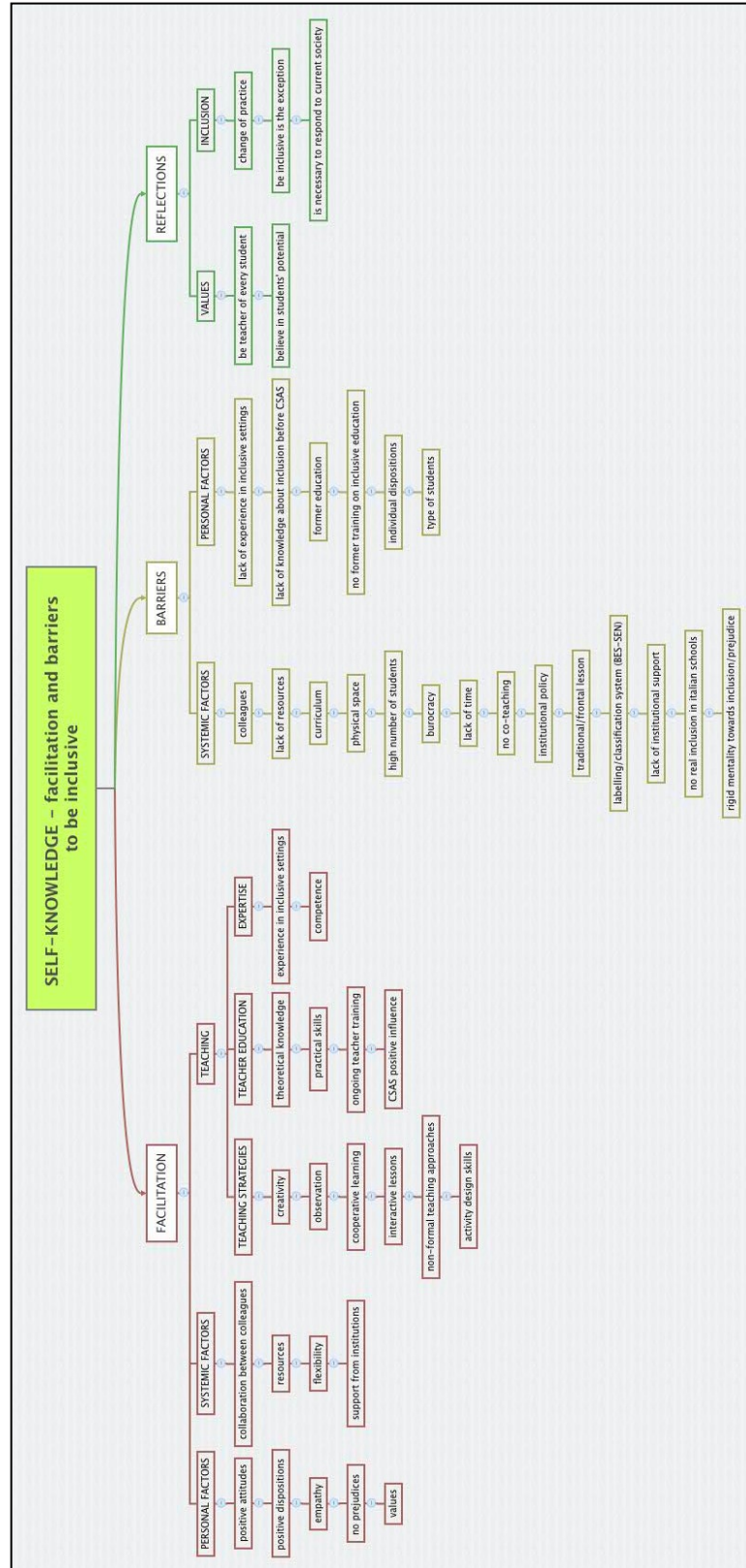
4 – Perspective dimension's network



5 – Empathy dimension's network



6 – Self-knowledge dimension's network



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