

# Improving the Training of Support Teachers in Italy: The Results of a Research on Attitudes Aimed at Students with Intellectual Disabilities

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**Abstract:** *This paper aims to bring research findings on the curricular teacher's and curricular support teacher's attitude toward students with intellectual disabilities. The results bring to imagine possible changes in the current training system that, deepening intellectual disability in discipline and laboratory terms, not necessarily and intentionally get a suitable space to evaluate and work on initial placements. The exercise of reflective competence, necessary to feed a mature self-awareness, is also essential to withstand the possible involutions experienced in school contexts, still far from the inclusive dimension.*

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## Introduction

**I**N recent years, the teacher's profile specialized in support activities has been the subject of reflection in national and international policies, cultures, and research (Cottini, 2017; De Anna et al., 2015; Ianes, 2016; Pavone, 2017). The OECD report "Teachers matter. Attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers" (OECD, 2005) and subsequently the Communication to the Council and the European Parliament "Improving the quality of teacher training" (2007) have strongly emphasized the need to decline a profile ready to recognize the complexity of today's pupils, encourage the appropriation of cultural forms in their nuances, welcome the challenge of more excellent innovative teaching, as well as openness to collegiality both inside and outside the school, in addition to recovering an authentic and constant observational attitude.

In 2012, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education identified values and areas of competence of teachers in inclusive school environments, focusing on enhancing each pupil's diversity and supporting it, working with others, and encouraging continuous development along with professional updating. In particular, the former competence stresses the importance of initial and ongoing training, which targets reflective professionalism in teachers.

Article 12 of Legislative Decree No 96/2019 Supplementary and corrective provisions to Legislative Decree No 66/2017, laying down: "Rules for the promotion of school inclusion of students with disabilities, according to Article 1, paragraphs 180 and 181 (c) of Law No 107/2015" establishes an annual Specialization Course for teaching support activities in kindergarten and primary schools, which provides for the acquisition of 60 university credits, including at least 300 hours of the traineeship, equal to 12 university credits. The Decree states that only applicants in possession of a single cycle Master's degree in Primary Education who have obtained an additional 60 university credits related to inclusion didactics and those already provided for the degree course may participate.

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As for initial training of special-education teachers in lower and upper secondary schools, after the abolition of FIT (Initial training and traineeship), Legislative Decree No 59/2017, it is sufficient to have acquired a master's degree with 24 university credits within the anthropo-psycho-pedagogical field as well as in teaching methodologies and technologies in addition to accessing the annual post-graduate course, typical to all grades of primary and secondary schools.

The didactic system of the Specialization Course, which continues to be the current training course at this time of legislative interregnum, regulated by Decree No 30/2011, corresponds to a total of 60 university credits consisting in lectures and laboratories, intended to thoroughly prepare the enrolled students in the psycho-pedagogical, didactic and regulatory fields. There are direct traineeship activities worth six university credits and six university credits of indirect traineeship activities involving the re-laboration of the experience with a coordinating tutor appointed by the university, and a trainee tutor, designated by the host school.

Initial training in specialized school staff is currently open to questions and calls for essential reflections (Caldin & Zappaterra, 2016; Zorzi et al., 2019).

According to the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, the profile of the inclusive teacher firstly emphasizes the need to recognize, appoint and question personal beliefs on school integration and inclusion and learning differences, to focus on self-awareness and individual positions regarding the vast array of inclusion along with pedagogical skills and didactics. Moreover, The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health places among environmental factors, with the possibility of being barrier or facilitator, the attitudes of people who revolve around the person with the conviction that they can “motivate positive, honorary or negative and discriminating practices (e.g. stigmatization, stereotyping and marginalization, or, abandonment of the person)” (World Health Organization, 2001, pp153).

Opinions and attitudes are considered ways of losing oneself in social realities. If they are linked to social representations as they grow and feed themselves in mechanisms of objectification and anchorage (Farr & Moscovici, 1989), they are an individual expression. However, still observable consequences of customs, practices, ideologies, norms, and rational convictions.

If opinions are subjective and circumscribed knowledge, attitudes are authentic assessments given by themselves, others, events, issues, and material goods, accompanied by some degree of advantage/disadvantage (Cavazza, 2005). Scientific literature supports the idea of a multidimensional construct of the attitude (Olson & Zanna, 1993). The tripartite model identifies three components of attitude: cognitive - related to perceptions, memories, and thoughts on the object - affective - which refers to emotions and feelings aroused, and behavioral, that intervenes on intentions and actions (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960). In the formation of attitudes, different components are involved: direct experience with the object or the socially mediated one, the need for coherence that, to economize mental energies, avoid situations of dissonance and foster true self-preservation, intervenes as appropriate, hindering or facilitating change.

Evidence in literature confirms that there are, with different outcomes in inclusive terms, very well-defined attitudes towards disability (Davis & Layton, 2011; De Boer et al., 2011; Forlin, 2012; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Taylor & Ringlaben, 2012). The severity and type of disability would strongly influence recruitment in terms of reluctance and inadequacy (Aiello et al., 2018; Dias & Cadime, 2016; Fiorucci, 2014; 2019; Odongo & Davidson, 2016). Intellectual disabilities have a significant standing among these (Cumming & Dickson, 2013; Rae et al., 2010).

In the last diagnostic manual, intellectual disability (ID) is defined as “an onset disorder in the period of development that includes both intellectual and adaptive functioning deficits in the conceptual, social and practical fields” (APA, 2013, pp37). The two criteria that contribute to its definition and the onset within 18 years of age are cognitive deficits identified with an intelligence quotient (IQ) lower than 70. In addition to a deficit and limitations in adaptive functioning understood as the set of social and practical skills learned for everyday life (home, school, working environment, community), with particular attention to communication, social participation, and autonomous life (Schalock et al., 2007; Vianello, 2015, 2018). The weight assumed by the second criterion is evidenced by the fact that the various levels of severity are defined based on adaptive operation and not IQ scores hence determining the need for aid and support. The last report published by MIUR (Ministero dell’Istruzione, dell’Università e della Ricerca - Ministry for Instruction, University, and Research) in 2018, and related to the academic year 2016/2017, reports that 96.1% of the total number of pupils with disabilities attending state and non-state schools, of every order and degree, bear a psychophysical disability: precisely, 67.9% have an intellectual disability (MIUR, 2018). The number of students with ID is significant and requires increased attention.

## **Materials and Methods**

Data in literature (Findler et al., 2007; Lau & Cheung, 1999; Morin et al., 2013a; 2013b) have identified increasingly clear associations between attitudes towards people with ID and socio-demographic variables in the respondent participants.

It has been observed that previous positive experiences with people with ID are associated with teachers’ attitudes, especially in the affective and behavioral dimensions (Sermier Dessemontet & Bless, 2013, 2014). Specifically, the frequency and type of contact appear to affect teachers’ attitudes indirectly and predict how teachers are likely to repeat positive experiences. This confirms the practice’s usefulness, demonstrated by the fact that a period of traineeship carried out in the presence of people with ID is associated with a more in-depth knowledge of their rights and skills (Yazbeck et al., 2004).

In the studies mentioned, the attitudes of the respondent participants are associated with the level of operation of the target with ID. More hostile attitudes are associated at a lower level of function or in more severe ID.

This work arises from the need to have tools for measuring attitudes and, in particular, those related to the world of ID, to better understand how these can affect educators' teaching.

A first reconnaissance on the instruments for measuring attitudes showed that most of the available questionnaires have a one-dimensional idea of attitudes (Nowicki & Sandieson, 2002) and, as such, are subject to bias, therefore, providing measures that are not representative of the entire concept (Antonak & Livneh, 2000; Findler et al., 2007). On the other hand, it should be remembered that the majority of available questionnaires are not explicitly built for the assessment of attitudes towards ID but address disability in general (Morin et al., 2013a).

For this reason, the chosen instrument was the Attitudes Toward Intellectual Disability Questionnaire (ATTID; Morin et al., 2015), a self-report questionnaire, addressed to ID, composed of 67 items using the 5-point Likert scale, with the possibility to evaluate the item from (1) totally agree to (5) totally disagree and not to express an attitude (9) cannot answer or do not know or represent a neutral attitude (3) neither in agreement nor in disagreement. The questionnaire is divided into three sections:

- Cognitive (30 items),
- Affective (18 items),
- Behavioral (19 items),

which are equivalent to the three dimensions of the attitude and are represented by five factors organized in as many subscales:

- Knowledge of causes,
- Knowledge of capacity and rights,
- Discomfort,
- Sensitivity or tenderness,
- Interactions,

According to the tripartite model of attitude theory, the cognitive component is represented by knowledge of capacity, rights, and ID knowledge. The affective component draws on two factors: Discomfort and sensitivity/tenderness. Finally, the behavioral part emerges as a single factor (**Table 1**).

The questionnaire was translated into Italian, subjected to field test, and validated (Arcangeli et al. 2020). Specific questions related to the Italian school context were added to the original version. They include initial and ongoing training on the subject, years of service, relationship with other social and health services, knowledge of ID, and any school experiences with students diagnosed with ID.

The survey has aimed to analyze attitudes towards ID in mainstream and special education teachers (positive, neutral, or negative), monitoring whether the scores obtained in the various dimensions of the attitudes differ according to the type of teachers considered (mainstream or special education). Plus, one thing needs to be checked is the presence of relationships between quantity and quality of contact and the various dimensions of the attitude towards ID in mainstream and special-education teachers. All to identify which variables represent predictors of the multiple dimensions of teachers' attitude towards ID.

**Table 1. Grouping of the Five Dimensions Investigated by the ATTID Questionnaire According to the Tripartite Model.**

<b>The Three-Factor Model of Attitudes</b>	<b>Dimensions</b>
Cognitive	Knowledge of capacity and rights
	Knowledge of causes of ID
Affective	Discomfort
	Sensitivity/Tenderness
Behavioural	Interaction

*From Rosenberg & Hovland 1960; Zanna & Rempel 1988.*

**Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviations Scores of Mainstream and Special-Education Teachers in the Five Dimensions of the ATTID for Likert Scores from 1 to 5 Points.**

<b>The Five ATTID Dimensions</b>	<b>Mainstream Teachers</b>		<b>Special-Education Teachers</b>	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Knowledge of causes of ID	2.36	0.59	2.30	0.52
Knowledge of capacity and rights	2.28	0.46	2.19	0.48
Discomfort	1.93	0.58	1.77	0.48
Sensitivity/Tenderness	2.90	0.72	2.80	0.68
Interaction	1.96	0.48	1.81	0.43

The research was conducted by disseminating the questionnaire on a national scale, which saw 544 teachers of all levels, counting 307 mainstream and 237 special-education teachers. The ATTID questionnaire was sent to schools both in paper and online via a shared link that allowed the completion utilizing a Google form.

The collected data were then processed with descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), which allowed to classify the scores of the five dimensions of attitudes that emerged in mainstream and special education teachers as positive, neutral or negative.

## Results

As described in the previous paragraph, ATTID proposes a five-factor structure overlapping the tripartite model of attitudes: knowledge of capacity and rights and knowledge of causes of ID (the cognitive component), discomfort and sensitivity/tenderness (affective component), and the behavioral part.

In the ATTID, for each dimension, the lower the score is and the more positive the attitude towards ID, and vice versa. Likert scale scores of 1 and 2 represent positive attitudes, score three neutral, and scores 4 and 5 negative attitudes towards ID. These results show that both mainstream and special-education teachers are favorably inclined to positive attitudes in all dimensions, particularly in Discomfort and Interaction (**Table 2**).

The data show that special-education teachers seem to have more positive attitudes than mainstream teachers.

Despite a relatively large number of variables correlated with the ATTID dimensions in both groups, a limited number of these are statistically significant predictors of scores of specific dimensions. However, although there are a smaller number of variables that correlate with the various ATTID dimensions in special-education compared to mainstream teachers, most of these associated variables turn out to be predictors of attitude towards ID (except for the knowledge of capacity and rights dimension), while almost none appear to be for mainstream teachers (especially variables that represent teacher-specific characteristics).

Considering the individual variables that are predictors, the influence of more predictors associated with specific ATTID dimensions are observed in special-education teachers compared to mainstream ones. Those related to teachers' characteristics, i.e., vocational training, teaching experience, perception of effectiveness in own knowledge regarding ID, perceived support, promotion of positive attitudes towards ID.

Analyzed as a group, variables related to teacher-specific characteristics statistically increase the prediction of all ATTID dimension scores significantly only in special-education teachers compared to only two components (Knowledge of capacity and rights and Interaction) in mainstream teachers.

When attention is paid to variables traditionally studied in association with attitudes towards ID, compared to the amount of contact, the quality of the connection influences a more significant number of ATTID dimensions in both groups of teachers but especially in special-education teachers (for which it affects all ATTID dimensions except knowledge of capacity and rights). The quality of contact affects only the Discomfort, Interaction, and Sensitivity/Tenderness dimensions in mainstream teachers. Moreover, only in mainstream teachers, the quantity of contact allows predicting the scores of Discomfort.

However, there are significant differences between the two groups with regards to each ATTID dimension.

## ***Cognitive Factor***

### **Knowledge of Capacity and Rights**

The data indicate that in mainstream teachers, there is a positive effect concerning age (that is, an older age predicts more negative attitudes) and a negative impact concerning the school level taught (i.e., mainstream teachers who teach at higher school levels have

more positive attitudes). In special-education teachers, there is no single effect specific to any of the areas but, considering the characteristics of teachers globally, they can contribute to the accuracy of predicting the score of special-education teachers in this dimension in a statistically meaningful way regarding teaching experience in both pupils without and with ID, and in pupils with severe ID, perceived support and promotion of positive attitudes towards ID.

This suggests that the years of experience in class, if not in contact with pupils with ID, can even lead, with time, to consolidate teachers' negative attitudes. On the other hand, these data may instruct us to think that the functional characteristics of individuals with ID can, over time, lead to a natural compensation, making attitudes towards them progressively more benevolent. In general, the time factor tells us that the number of in-service years of a mainstream teacher, who teaches in classes where pupils with disabilities are present, increases positive attitudes.

Although some shortcomings created by initial training do not favor a positive attitude on behalf of teachers, the data suggest the importance of teachers' hands-on experience.

## Knowledge of Causes of ID

About the knowledge of the causes of ID, the findings produced in the questionnaire show that there is a negative effect of the promotion of positive attitudes towards ID in both mainstream and special-education teachers. In support of teachers, this is especially true about the type of contact relationship, which, for this dimension, turns out to be a negative variable. Namely, more negative attitudes are predicted in a distant relationship with individuals with ID, which is the contrary in special-education teachers within the Sensitivity/Tenderness dimension.

Hence, it is not necessarily true that the more intellectually disabled individuals known, the more accepted and appreciated they are. On the other hand, it can be said that the greater the contact with them, the more one learns to comprehend ID. However, it should be remembered that the knowledge of the condition of disability in which the pupil lives is the result of the knowledge of several factors: the intertwined functioning of body functions and structures, activities, social participation, personal and environmental factors (WHO, 2001). If one circumscribes the person's identity to only one of these aspects, the knowledge produced is minimal.

## *Affective Factor*

### Discomfort

The findings reveal significant differences between the two groups, mainly concerning the negative effect of both the quantity and quality of contact with an individual with ID by the mainstream teacher (particularly in the variable "Quality of the contact relationship"), indicating that more positive attitudes are present in this category of teachers who have had a greater quantity and quality contact with ID. However, in special-



education teachers, there is only the negative effect of the quality of connection and the perception of the effectiveness of knowledge of ID. This indicates that more positive attitudes are present in special-education teachers who have a higher quality of contact with individuals with ID and a more excellent perception of the effectiveness of their knowledge regarding ID.

These data lead us to believe that contact with intellectually disabled persons reduces the feeling of Discomfort that teachers feel. Often the first experiences of contact occur in the family or a friendly environment. As the data show, the number of connections is not only the quality that makes the difference: quality is given above all by the knowledge regarding ID.

In this respect, traineeship for mainstream teachers must be carried out within classes where pupils with disabilities are also present. Suppose one considers the study pathways of university graduates in Primary Education or Teachers' Training Colleges/Institutes. In that case, no later than 2001/2002-qualification per the arrangements set out in the Italian legislation, entitling enrolment in the second tier of school rankings - it is clear that these encounters have not always been experienced.

## Sensitivity and Tenderness

Data that emerged about this dimension show that a negative effect in total support and ID training can be found (indicating that a longer duration of training predicts more positive attitudes). In special-education teachers, a positive effect in the type of relationship contact is also existent (i.e., more negative attitudes are indicated by a close contact relationship with a person with ID). In mainstream teachers, a negative effect on the quality of relationship contact (i.e., more positive attitudes are present in mainstream teachers who have better relationships with intellectually disabled individuals).

Special-education teachers who have had more contact experience with pupils with disabilities and, in most cases, specific training manifest more positive attitudes of sensitivity and tenderness. In our sample, 39% of the special-education teachers earned a master's degree, which means that many teachers engaged in support activities have not carried out specific training courses. According to the data, their attitudes towards pupils with intellectual disabilities could be influenced by positive and negative personal life experiences. When the training has been provided, the attitudes manifested are more optimistic.

## ***Behavioral Factor***

### Interaction

A further interesting finding is that, in both mainstream and special-education teachers, an adverse effect of the quality of contact (specifically, the variable "Quality of the contact relationship") and the perceived support is reported. This indicates that teachers with higher contact qualities and higher perceived support levels also have more positive attitudes towards ID.

**Table 3. Summary Table of Main Results for Each Dimension.**

Factor	Dimensions	Results
Cognitive	Knowledge of capacity and rights	Quantity of contacts. Prolonged and informed contact produces greater knowledge
	Knowledge of causes of ID	Quality of contacts. Closest contacts produce more knowledge
Affective	Discomfort	Increased quantity and quality of contacts decreases the feeling of discomfort
	Sensitivity/Tenderness	Increased quantity and quality of contacts increases the feeling of sensitivity and tenderness
Behavioural	Interaction	Higher contact quality and higher levels of perceived support produce more positive attitudes

**Table 4. Summary Table of the Main Results for Each Dimension Related to the Characteristic Elements of the Current Training of Teachers.**

Factor	Dimensions	Results	Current Training
Cognitive	Knowledge of capacity and rights	Quantity of contacts	Teaching pedagogical, medical and legal disciplines
	Knowledge of causes of ID	Quality of contacts	
Affective	Discomfort	Quantity and quality of contacts	Indirect traineeship
	Sensitivity/Tenderness	Quantity and quality of contacts	
Behavioural	Interaction	Quality of contact	Direct traineeship

The resulting reflection is linked to the importance of the quality of the contact relationship. One of the elements that may significantly contribute to making a quality relationship reflects the practices, allowing observed reshaping behaviors.

Being in the relationship in an informed way promotes a greater understanding of the other and, consequently, a more positive attitude. The indirect traineeship that accompanies the specialized teacher’s training path for support activities pursues precisely this purpose (**Table 3**).

## Discussion

The data collected suggests some reflections on the elements already present and missing that characterize, or should describe, teacher training to promote positive attitudes towards people with ID and disabilities in general.

## ***Survey Results and Contents of Current Training***

The tripartite model of attitudes, together with the data emerging from this study, suggests essential content that should not be lacking in special-education teacher training in support activities for pupils and students with disabilities and teachers in general. The three components of the tripartite model of attitudes are presented below. We observed how the data emerged, propose an analysis of the already-existing elements in credited training pathways, and aim to enhance aspects that need strengthening (**Table 4**).

### **The Cognitive Component**

The Italian Decree No 30/2011 “Criteria and modalities for conducting training courses for specializations in support activities” (GU General Series n.78 of 02-04-2012) establishes a total of 288 hours of lessons (36 university credits) consisting of core courses related to different disciplinary fields. Accordingly, allowing participants to acquire psycho-pedagogical skills (M-PED/03, M-PED/01, M-PSI/04) as well as legal (IUS/09) and medical (MED/39) ones.

The cognitive component that underlies attitudes is represented in the ATTID questionnaire by two factors: knowledge of capacity and rights and knowledge of ID causes.

Teachers attending the special-education specialization course study the rights of disabled persons in conjunction with addressing primary and secondary legislation on school inclusion (IUS/09). About the knowledge of the causes of a particular disability, the study of Child Neuropsychiatry (MED/39) is investigated.

All within a psycho-pedagogical framework allow for understanding the state of health of individuals concerning their environments that is conducive to seizing positive skills and performance and the role of mediation of contextual factors and possible barriers (WHO, 2001).

Thereupon, it is of importance of acquiring a pedagogical overview to embrace the complexity of the situations and elements that characterize them.

Alongside the latter, embodied are the practices that allow, through appropriate reflective activities, to seize theoretical knowledge that guides and nourishes educational action.

The Decree, which establishes the means for conducting training courses within the specialization in support activities, provides the operational dimension (direct traineeship), moments dedicated to re-elaborating personal experience and organization of professional skills (indirect traineeship).

### **The Affective Component**

Two factors draw on the affective component: Discomfort and sensitivity/tenderness.

The feeling of Discomfort or feelings of tenderness, which, in some cases, may result in compassion, are elements that strongly characterize the type of attitude towards a person with an intellectual disability.

Studies show how the feeling of Discomfort may increase with the greater severity of the disorder (Sermier Dessemontet & Bless, 2013) or how particular physical and relational characteristics, typical in Down syndrome, may induce feelings of tenderness (Vicari, 2007).

In this respect, the role and importance of re-elaborating the professional experience, both from a personal and psycho-motivational point of view, play a fundamental role in forming future teachers and their attitudes.

People's actions result from an interaction between personal dispositions and conditioning posed by situations (Canevaro & Chierigatti, 1999). They are often driven by feelings of solidarity and altruism and are not always successful in understanding how the helping relationship is carried out within a rapport, precisely, a relationship (Haddock & Zanna, 1993).

The unexpressed desire to "feel useful" or "do good" may sometimes be concealed behind the desire to help someone. However, these two factors may not produce positive effects on the person to whom the help is directed. There is the possibility of meeting closure and even endanger the person's self-esteem by triggering attitudes of rejection and hostility (Canevaro, 2018).

On the other hand, it is vital to become aware of stereotypes and prejudices and have the courage to evaluate, size, and overcome them. One must remain inside a co-evolutionary relationship that keeps everyone inside.

"It is not enough to help or teach: the time has come to co-develop, to create and change together, each while remaining in our sphere and preserving our roots" (Canevaro & Chierigatti, 1999, pp197).

## The Behavioral Component

In the ATTID questionnaire, the behavioral component emerges as a single factor.

Behavior can be defined as the mirror of attitude, which is revealed precisely in action.

Analyzing educational processes in the complexity of classroom contexts enables clarifying a series of acts involving teachers and students and permits teachers to observe and reflect on the attitude that produced a given action. Subsequently, orienting choices and decisions, which have in the meantime, become increasingly more conscious, creates, over time, an improvement of the practice itself. The teacher's awareness of the effectiveness of mediations put in place induces her/him to consider them, especially in subsequent courses.

Decree No 30/2011 focuses on practice, proposing laboratory activities favoring cooperative and collaborative learning methods, research-action, and metacognitive learning. The teacher is thus placed to experiment through: group work, simulations, insights, applied experiences in actual or simulated situations, and related to training activities in critical disciplinary areas and class management.

The use of new technologies applied to special education (TIC) is used in professional practice, although, if ill-employed, it can become an amplifier for any possible

stigmatizing behaviors. To optimize teaching and learning processes, understanding positive elements that strengthen, and critical ones that require improvement, becomes fundamental.

## ***Proposals for Improving Current Training***

As is shown by research, attitudes have a significant impact in terms of bearings and applied practices (De Boer et al., 2011).

In terms of professional skills, both the mainstream and special-education teacher is called to vigorously exercise the reflective dimension (Fabbri et al., 2014).

The cultural environment of every professional community consists of explicit knowledge, well declared, and socially recognizable along with a more tacit, implicit, but equally significant background that acts as a silent scene to every action and unconditionally dictates a system of instructions for understanding, meaning, and working (Polanyi, 1979; Schön, 1993; Becchi, 2005).

Explicit and implicit knowledge guides thinking and action in a cognitive economy functional to knowledge that does not need to start from scratch every time. If detailed knowledge constitutes the shared and declared knowledge of a working group, codified and expressible through a systematic and formal language, the implicit is a sort of practical unconscious (Perrenoud, 2001). An unknown universe made of “affections, tensions, dilemmas, assumptions of common sense, beliefs, naive epistemology, abductive reasoning strongly connected with the image of self and with social existence” (Perla, 2010, pp7-8).

Reflecting on the life of the declared and tacit mind, the cognitive processes of which educational professionals mean their own lives, become central in education to comprehend the weight of their singular knowledge maps and avoid forms of cognitive imprisonment.

“Understanding how an educational situation works means tracing the device that is in progress: the latent lines and trajectories of these relationships that change over time” (Palmieri, 2018, pp116).

A professional’s task is then to label their unique maps to gradually recognize the boundaries between data and information, between the subjects that accompany each other and the ideas we have of them. No teacher starts a new adventure as if it were a tabula rasa but carries an experienced and imagined warehouse of personal and professional ideas. Summoned together, they intertwine explicit and implicit individual plots. We are our thoughts, “we have in common a tangle of pre-assumptions, many of which have ancient origins” (Bateson, 1997, pp439), many are existential, professional, and cultural.

An educational relationship is, therefore, existent beyond the doing and the relationship. Quality makes it possible to imagine that communication alongside action can be placed within a reflection both in terms of self-awareness and of planning. For the past to become experiences, endowed with meaning and able to draw evolutionary

trajectories, it is necessary to be “pensively present” (Mortari, 2013, pp17), reflect on both the actions and thoughts.

Reflective practice feeds upon specific tools and moments that become necessary to avoid cognitive shortcuts that would likely show us only what we are looking for or confirm our assumptions at the expense of authenticity of identities. In this sense, reflexivity becomes a fundamental tool for formulating new, distinct questions and answers. It motivates us to gather further readings and interpretations of reality without falling into the temptation to squander and overlook, creating a virtuous circle of research and action. Since every educational relationship is composed of uniqueness, temporality, and locality, the meaning of searching is not to accumulate knowledge but admit with humility that, as others and relationships are outside us, it is not accessible to our knowledge.

To nourish the reflective dimension, the inclusive teacher is called upon to exercise observation, documentation, and collegiality skills.

Observation as a research method and technique consists of a complete description of the characteristics of behavior, event, or situation. Guided by the maps of those who practice it, both in epistemological and methodological terms, it is an emotional moment that, alone, does not have sufficient coordinates to be considered knowledge. Placing itself between the perceptual moment of looking and the hermeneutic one, it is always a selective and intentional process, guided and oriented by hypotheses, expectations, and theoretical frameworks. Beyond the choice of the method and the tools, observation is a descriptive practice, called upon later, spaced and preferably socialized, enriched with interpretative constructs. An accurate observation is aware of its partiality and perfectibility, but it is also eager to open up to as many points of view as possible, allowing selected accounts to become meaningful narratives, never complete but most certainly shared. It is the work of analysis and not synthesis, which helps to seize the positioning of the educator, the actual distinction between recorded events and impressions, evaluations, and comments. Observing is an opportunity to stop (Fontaigne, 2017): the to-do-race is suspended while proposals and activities are questioned. Do they make sense, and are they placed within a frame of thought and plan? To give oneself opportunities with not only observational attitudes, a chance to encounter students in an authentic way, in addition to a formative moment to question time and educational proposals.

Writing and documenting allows collecting data, appointing devices, accommodating paradoxes of possible different interpretations, measuring the changes in one and others (Biffi, 2014). Journal writing, in particular, is an “organizer of surprises” (Cocever & Chiantera, 1996, pp23) insofar as it assumes the characteristics of being joining, hypothetical, negotiating, and interrogative. As a daily practice, it amplifies observational and analysis skills, allowing one to label thoughts and experiences, document experience, and make it available for consequential meanings and/or reflections. Documenting is an opportunity to nourish a cognitive memory (Canevaro, 1996), allowing students to be seen, recognized, and narrated and assume the responsibility to declare the selection criteria for what is considered significant and not.

**Table 5. Summary Table of the Main Results for Each Dimension Related to the Characteristic Elements of the Current Training of Teachers and The Aspects to be Strengthened.**

Factor	Dimensions	Results	Current Training	Improvement Proposals
Cognitive	Knowledge of capacity and rights	Quantity of contacts	Teaching pedagogical, medical and legal disciplines	Reflective practice
	Knowledge of causes of ID	Quality of contacts		
Affective	Discomfort	Quantity and quality of contacts	Indirect traineeship	Documentation
	Sensitivity/Tenderness	Quantity and quality of contacts		
Behavioural	Interaction	Quality of contact	Direct traineeship	Observation

What we document is a choice among many others. The descriptions that are produced, the categories that are applied, and the interpretations attributed to meaning are impregnated with beliefs, classifications, categorizations, declared or tacit.

The possibility of counting on mature collegiality indeed nourishes a reflection that avoids some methodological slips that often produce non-authentic practices, such as the exclusivity and non-negotiation of interventions.

To be a working group, it is not sufficient to just share a pedagogical culture, often not even so sharp and conscious, but to build together “a way of acting with a method, and, at the same time, a way - contingent and changeable - to make and be part of a working team” (Palmieri, 2018, pp180). Teamwork enhances individual and unique differences; it allows those with more ample professional experience to savor the generosity of sharing. It favors the possibility of expression, tenacity towards possible and sustainable horizons, calmness, lightness, along with humor. Above all, intersubjectivity is the space of discovery that consists of many different points of view in which situations are framed. Collegiality is an expression of the necessity of a time and space to “say things,” to name them, to experience cognitive dissonance, to change one’s position, if points of view urge to do so.

Observation, writing, documentation, and collegial work are professional tools that allow us to interrogate thoughts to understand how polluted they are with predetermined or implicit ideas, which do not account for a change of outlook and practices (Table 5). They are pensive maintenance tools that prevent falling into cognitive shortcuts that do not recognize the weight of attitudes and “raw” knowledge in the encounter and relationship with each other (Dessementet & Bless, 2013).

## Conclusions

The inclusive dimension strongly requires professionals who are able to exercise reflective thinking. To recognize and acknowledge each student's singularity, the school system needs to avoid technical slip downs that seem to request the execution of tasks mainly and, in a residual, discrete way, calls for thought and planning. It is about making a fundamental choice, essential within educational contexts: to be teachers seeking answers or teachers capable of becoming explorers of queries and walk crossroads instead of beaten tracks (Manghi, 1990).

“In the context of training, it is then necessary to weaken subordination to the imperatives of our time and have the courage to make room for and enhance other unprecedented and outdated cultural practices. In practical training, to think for oneself, starting from oneself, in other words, professional experience must be recognized as the backbone of the practice. Starting from oneself implies having the courage to subtract thinking from the already known versions of the world, and from the reassuring territories of already-defined paradigms, and risk searching other scores of thoughts” (Mortari, 2011, pp21).

It is, therefore, vital to enhance laboratory experiences and indirect traineeship during training, promote self-awareness, label assumptions, ascertain adequate knowledge, and draw attention to urgency in professional terms. In terms of school policies, institutional conditions must be created to continue to question the life of the mind and the individual spaces obtained with intention and motivation by each teacher. The possibility to render collegiality opportunities more significant on the one hand and simultaneously activate contexts of supervision and pedagogical advice (Negri, 2014; Oggionni, 2013; Palma, 2017) could be possible work paths that recognize that all actors, in the construction of authentically inclusive contexts, have a responsibility starting from the ideas they express to the practices that they enact upon.

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