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# ALL IN EDUCATION



## Inclusive Teaching Methodologies

Analysis and best practices from Italy, Finland, The Netherlands, Greece and Spain





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## Introduction

### The role of inclusive teaching methodologies

This report is part of the ALL IN EDUCATION project (Erasmus+ KA2, project n°2024-1-IT02-KA220-SCH-000256430), which aims to promote inclusive education through the analysis, dissemination, and implementation of innovative pedagogical methodologies across European educational systems. The report specifically focuses on inclusive teaching practices and policies in five partner countries—Italy, Finland, The Netherlands, Greece, and Spain—highlighting their respective national strategies, critical challenges, and effective approaches to inclusion.

Inclusive education has increasingly become a guiding principle across Europe, grounded in both international human rights frameworks and educational policy agendas (UNESCO, 1994; European Commission, 2017). Central to this paradigm is the recognition that diversity among learners—whether related to disability, linguistic background, socio-economic status, or other individual differences—should be seen not as an obstacle to overcome, but as a strength to be embraced. In this context, inclusive teaching methodologies offer a means to design flexible, equitable, and participatory learning environments in which all students can thrive.

Drawing from national analyses, legislative frameworks, and documented best practices, this report explores the evolution of inclusive strategies, such as co-teaching, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), the use of assistive technology, and culturally responsive pedagogy. It also outlines key systemic enablers and barriers, providing both a comparative and in-depth look at how inclusion is operationalised in the partner countries. The work builds on extensive pedagogical research and empirical data, and serves as a valuable resource for educators, school leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders committed to building more inclusive schools in Europe.

In the evolving landscape of contemporary education, inclusive teaching methodologies have emerged as a central pillar in the pursuit of equitable and high-quality learning experiences for all students. Inclusion, as a foundational principle, challenges traditional paradigms of education by advocating for systemic changes that recognize learner diversity not as a deviation from the norm, but as an inherent and enriching characteristic of every classroom. As such, inclusive pedagogy is concerned with creating responsive, flexible, and participatory learning environments that actively accommodate students with a wide range of abilities, linguistic backgrounds, socio-economic statuses, and cultural identities (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

The conceptual shift from integration to inclusion has been pivotal. Whereas integration focuses on the placement of students with special educational needs within mainstream settings, inclusion emphasizes the transformation of educational systems and teaching practices to ensure full participation and access to learning for all learners (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006). The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) marked a critical turning point, calling on governments to adopt inclusive education as a matter of policy and practice, asserting that “regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.” From a pedagogical perspective, inclusive methodologies encompass a range of evidence-based strategies aimed at responding to learner variability. Among these, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) offers a proactive framework that emphasizes the provision of multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression to address the diversity of learners (CAST, 2018). Differentiated instruction, as elaborated by Tomlinson (2014), advocates for the flexible adaptation of content, process, and product based on students’ readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles. Furthermore, collaborative learning, formative assessment, and culturally responsive pedagogy are increasingly recognized as integral components of inclusive practice, fostering peer interaction, feedback-rich environments, and cultural affirmation (Gay, 2010; Black & Wiliam, 2009).

Importantly, inclusion must not be reduced to a set of technical strategies but understood as a deep ethical commitment and a continuous process of reflection and transformation. As Booth and Ainscow (2011) note in the Index for Inclusion, “Inclusion is not about a particular group of pupils; it is an approach to education that minimises barriers and maximises participation for all learners.” This perspective aligns with a broader vision of social justice in education, wherein schools



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serve not only as sites of academic instruction but also as communities of belonging and agency.

The present report aims to examine inclusive teaching methodologies through a multidimensional lens, exploring theoretical foundations, pedagogical models, and empirical evidence. Special attention is given to how teachers can implement inclusive strategies in practice, and how institutional structures and policy frameworks can support or hinder these efforts. By doing so, the report contributes to the ongoing dialogue on how education systems can become more inclusive, democratic, and equitable in the face of growing diversity and complexity.



## Italian National Context and Inclusive Teaching Methodologies

### Apro Formazione- Alba (ITALY)

#### Italian Education and Training System

The Italian education and training system is organised according to the **principles of subsidiarity<sup>1</sup> and autonomy<sup>2</sup> of school institutions.**

The State has exclusive legislative competence for the 'general rules on education' and for determining the essential levels of services that must be guaranteed throughout the national territory.

The State also defines the fundamental principles that the regions must respect when exercising their specific competences. 6

The regions have concurrent legislative powers in certain areas of education (e.g. organisation of the integrated 0-3 system, school calendar, school network, right to study for higher education).

The regions have exclusive legislative power with regard to the vocational education and training system (IeFP).

The **education system** is organised as follows:

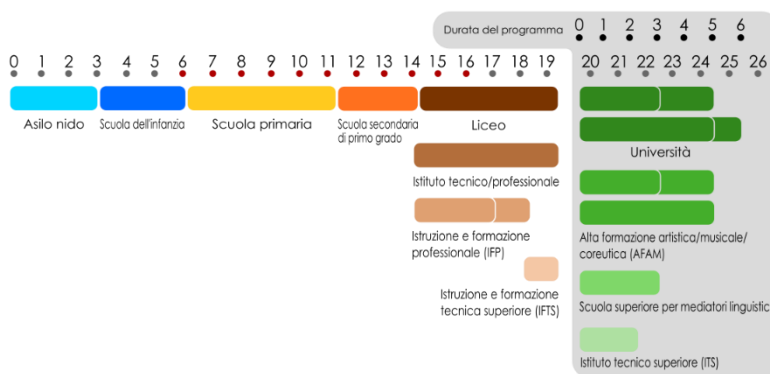
- **integrated zero-to-six-year system**, non-compulsory, with a total duration of six years, divided into
  - **educational services for children**, managed by local authorities, directly or through conventions, by other public bodies or by private individuals, which take in children between three and thirty-six months;
  - **pre-school**, which may be run by the state, by local authorities, directly or through agreements, by other public bodies or by private individuals, and which accommodates children between the ages of three and six;
- **first cycle of education**, with a total duration of eight years, divided into
  - **primary school**, lasting five years, for pupils aged 6 to 11;
  - three-year **secondary school** for pupils aged 11 to 14;
- **second cycle of education** divided into two types of pathways:
  - **secondary school**, lasting five years, for students who have successfully completed the first cycle of education. Schools organise high school, technical college and vocational college courses for students aged 14 to 19;
  - three- and four-year **vocational education and training (VET)** courses under regional responsibility, also aimed at students who have successfully completed the first cycle of education.
- higher **education** offered by the universities, the Alta Formazione Artistica, Musicale e Coreutica (AFAM) and the Istituti Tecnici Superiori (ITS), which have statutory, didactic and organisational autonomy.

Compulsory education in Italy lasts ten years, from 6 to 16 years of age, and includes the entire first cycle (primary school of five years and secondary school of three years) and the first two years of the second cycle. After the first cycle, the last two years of compulsory education can be completed in the secondary school, through lyceums, technical or vocational institutes, or in regional vocational education and training courses. In addition, there is a right to education and training of at least 12 years or, alternatively, until the attainment of a three-year vocational qualification by the age of 18.

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of education, the principle of subsidiarity means that decisions on the management of schools should be taken at the local level, by school councils or steering committees. This allows education to be adapted to the specific needs of communities

<sup>2</sup> Although they are part of the national school system, educational institutions have their own administrative, didactic and organisational autonomy, i.e. they have their own resources and the right to receive funds also from entities other than local ones, but private ones; they have decision-making spaces inherent to teaching and learning processes and can act in a flexible and diversified manner, in the implementation of integration and in the use of resources and facilities.



## Inclusion

Education at all levels must be open to all, Italian citizens and foreign EU and non-EU children. Compulsory education is free.

The principle of inclusion and the right to support also applies to students with disabilities and those with economic or social disadvantages.

In these cases, inclusion measures focus on personalisation and didactic flexibility and, in the case of immigrant pupils with little knowledge of Italian, on language support.

The state also guarantees the right to education for pupils/students who cannot attend school because they are hospitalised, or housebound due to a long illness, or detained, if they are students over 14.

## Adult Education

**Adult education** comprises all activities aimed at the cultural enrichment, retraining and professional mobility of adults. Within this broad sector, the area of adult education (IDA) refers exclusively to activities aimed at acquiring a qualification in the education system and at literacy courses and learning the Italian language. Adult education is offered by adult education centres (CPIA) and secondary schools.

## SCHOOL INCLUSION IN ITALY

The evolution of school inclusion in Italy is the result of a long historical and regulatory pathway rooted in the **1948 Constitution**, which sanctions the **right to education for all, including those with disabilities**. The first concrete step in this direction was taken **in 1971 with Law 118**, which allowed for the inclusion of pupils with non-serious disabilities in ordinary classes, although without completely abolishing special classes.

A decisive change came with **Law 517 of 1977**, which introduced the concept of **school integration** and provided for **the inclusion of support teachers** and the participation of the class council. However, the full right to school inclusion in all school orders was affirmed with the historic Constitutional Court ruling no. 215/1987 and the subsequent **Ministerial Circular 262/1988**, considered the true "Magna Charta" of integration.

**In 1992, Law 104** was enacted, representing the first organic regulatory framework for the protection of persons with disabilities, encompassing educational, employment and social aspects. It definitively abolished differential classes and introduced fundamental principles such as 'educational care'.

Inclusion is also extended to the private sector with Law 62/2000, which obliges paritarian schools to accept students with disabilities. In the years that followed, the concept of educational need expanded: in 2010, Law 170 recognised the rights of pupils with Specific Learning Disorders (DSA), providing compensatory tools and Personalised Learning Plans (PDP), while the 2012 Directive introduced the concept of Special Educational Needs (BES), even in the absence of health certificates.

A cultural and methodological turning point occurs with Law 107/2015 and Legislative Decrees 66/2017 and 96/2019, which, drawing inspiration from the UN Convention and the ICF model, shift the focus from deficits to the enhancement



of individual potential, involving the entire educational community in the inclusive process. The PEI is reformed, collaboration with families is strengthened, the role of working groups for inclusion is regulated and new standards for evaluation and training of school staff are introduced.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, inclusion was put to the test: Distance Learning (DAD) revealed structural limitations, especially for students with intellectual disabilities, but also stimulated the use of technology as an integrative tool. Schools have continued to update PEIs, implement psychological support measures and strengthen collaboration with families. Despite the critical issues, awareness of the urgency of organisational renewal of the school system has grown.

Finally, between 2020 and 2023, new provisions such as Law 178/2020 and Interministerial Decree 182/2020 helped consolidate the principles of inclusion, increasing resources for support, promoting teacher training and establishing a single model for drafting the PEI. This legislative process, which is still evolving, bears witness to Italy's commitment to an increasingly inclusive school that is attentive to diversity.

## KEY INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN REGULATORY REFERENCES ON INCLUSION

At the international and European level, there are many conventions, declarations, assertions and decisions on disability, integration and special education that support all national policies and provide a framework.

Presented below are the main references that constitute the body of law that has inspired and regulated the actions of current Italian institutional systems, as well as those of EU member states, in relation to BES and inclusion processes.

**Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 1948):** in Article 26, education is recognised as a right that must be directed towards the full development of the personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

**Declaration of the Rights of the Mentally Disabled (UN 1971):** equates the rights of people with mental retardation with the rights accorded to all human beings, with particular emphasis on the need for protection against the risks of exploitation, to be protected by appropriate legal procedures.

**Declaration of the Rights of Persons with Motor and Sensory Disabilities (UN 1975):** proclaims equal civil and political rights for persons with disabilities; enshrines equal treatment in access to services, which promote the development of the capabilities of persons with disabilities and their social integration.

**International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (WHO 1976):** defines and proposes to address the three distinct terms of impairment, disability and handicap.

- **Impairment** denotes the absence, loss or alteration of a structure or function (anatomical, physiological or psychological) and may be the result of an illness, accident, or the adverse conditions of an individual's growth and developmental environment.

- **Disability** is a complex of functional limitations caused by physical, intellectual or sensory impairments or conditions of health, environment or mental illness. These conditions or illnesses may be permanent or temporary, reversible or irreversible, progressive or regressive.

- **Handicap** refers to social hardship, the loss or limitation of a person's opportunities to actively participate in community life on an equal level with other members. Handicap occurs when a person encounters cultural, material, social barriers that prevent access to the various systems of society available to other citizens.

**Warnock Report (United Kingdom 1978):** a document launching a new system of classifying pupils with learning difficulties, until then identified as handicapped, and for the first time referring to 'Special Educational Needs', emphasising the need for greater support from the educational body. Educational needs are defined for each subject according to the degree of deficit relative to five fundamental dimensions of development: physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional.

**Declaration of the Rights of the Visually and Hearing Impaired (UN 1979):** the right of every deaf-blind person to enjoy the same principles guaranteed to all people by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the recognition of their own aspirations and abilities is recognised.

**Standard Rules for the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (UN 1993):** a non-legally binding instrument but entailing a significant moral and political commitment for member states to act and cooperate in the



development of equal opportunities strategies for people with disabilities.

**Salamanca Declaration** (UNESCO 1994): on principles, policies and practices in education and special educational needs

**Luxembourg Charter** (EU 1996): entitled 'A school for all and for everyone' because of the underlying concept of the three parts into which it is divided:

- **The principles**, i.e. the fundamental concepts to be taken into account when we talk about school integration;
- The **strategies**, which concern the concrete aspects and activities to be implemented when applying the general principles;
- **The proposals**, which deal with perspectives and changes to be implemented in the future.

**International Standard Classification of Education - ISCED** (UNESCO 1997 and 2011): broadens the notion of Special Educational Needs, still strongly anchored to the idea of individual deficits, specifies the reasons for BES and includes physical, behavioural, intellectual, social and emotional, economic, linguistic disadvantages

**Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union** (EU 2000): Article 1 that "human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected." Article 21 states that any form of discrimination on the grounds of disability is prohibited. Article 26 states that 'the Union recognises and respects the right of persons with disabilities to benefit from measures designed to ensure their independence, social and occupational integration and participation in the life of the community'.

**International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health - ICF** (WHO 2001): Functioning and disability are seen as a complex interaction between an individual's health conditions and environmental and personal factors. The classification considers them to be dynamic and interacting aspects that can be modified over the course of an individual's life and are therefore never the same. Since disability is understood as an interaction between a person with a health condition and the context, the descriptive model proposed by the ICF is applicable to all people with some health condition. Special Educational Needs (BES) are defined by the ICF as "any permanent or transient developmental difficulty in functioning in education or learning that is due to the interaction of various health factors and requires special, individualised education". They can be seen as a paradigm for interpreting the complexity and variety of learning difficulties. Such a vision requires broadening one's gaze towards the educational needs of each individual, going beyond just certifiable deficits.

**International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (UN 2006): Article 24 recognises the right of persons with disabilities to education, which must aim at the realisation of the development of human potential, a sense of dignity and self-esteem, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity. People with disabilities must be enabled to participate effectively in a free society.

**Inclusive Education: The Way Forward** - 48th International Conference on Education (UNESCO 2008): affirms as a fundamental principle the need to promote inclusive education at all levels.

**Guidelines for Integration Policies in Education** (UNESCO 2009): defines inclusive education as a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach all students; a general principle, which should guide all educational policies and practices, starting from the fact that education is an inalienable human right and fundamental to laying the foundations for a more just and equitable society.

**Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union - TFEU** (EU 2009): stipulates in Art. 10 that the Union must combat discrimination on the grounds of disability in the definition and implementation of its policies and actions and in Art. 19 gives it the power to legislate in order to combat such discrimination.

**European Disability Strategy 2010-2020. A Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe** (EC 2010): identifies eight main areas for action such as accessibility, participation, equality, employment, education and training, social protection, health and external actions in order to remove barriers and enable people with disabilities to exercise all their rights and benefit from full participation in European society and economy.

**United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training** (UN 2011): Article 2 states that human rights must constitute, at the same time, the essential content (human rights education), methodological tool (education through human rights) and ultimate goal (education for human rights) of educational programmes that wish to fully respect and fulfil the right to education. It links human rights education to the right to education.

**Profile of the Inclusive Teacher** (EASIE 2012): presents the values and areas of competence needed by teachers to work in an inclusive school environment.

## REGIONAL VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND THE INCLUSION OF PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS<sup>3</sup> : THE PIEDMONT REGION

In Italy, the education system provides for compulsory education of **at least 10 years**, valid until the age of 16, and compulsory training until the age of 18, which requires at least a professional qualification. After secondary school (baccalaureate), students can choose between two main routes: upper secondary school (licei, technical and vocational institutes) or regional **Education and Vocational Training (IeFP)** courses. The three-year IeFP courses deliver a nationally valid professional qualification and can be followed by a fourth year to obtain a technical diploma.

The IeFP system is managed by the regions, which define the organisation of courses and the modalities of inclusion of students with special educational needs.

In this context, **the Piedmont Region** represents a case of special attention to school inclusion. With Regional Law 28/2007 and subsequent resolutions (including DGR 18-10723 and DGR 13-10889 of 2009), Piedmont introduced the category of **Special Educational Needs (EES)**, anticipating the national legislation on **Special Educational Needs (BES)**. With DGR 20-7246 of 2014, EES were brought back within the national definition of BES, promoting greater consistency between regional and national regulations.

Today, in Piedmont's IeFP courses, there is a strong focus on inclusion. The regulations (Decree no. 485 of 27 August 2021) regulate the participation of three main categories of students:

- with disabilities with a 'mild functioning debt'.
- with Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- with other BES, excluding cases of DSA for which no school support is provided but only the activation of a PDP (Personalised Learning Project).

### - Students with 'mild' disabilities

Students with mild disabilities are identified as having a disability according to current legislation (DGR 15 of 2013) and must have a mild 'functioning debt', as established by Interministerial Decree No 182 of 2020. This debt is assessed according to four dimensions: socialisation and interaction, communication and language, autonomy and orientation, and cognitive and learning area.

For inclusion in IeFP courses, it is required:

- suitability for attendance issued by the Child Neuropsychiatry Service (NPI) or the training agency's doctor;
- participation in school activities, workshops and internships;
- compliance with the attendance requirement (at least 75 per cent of the course hours);
- participation in examinations in the ordinary way, identical to that of able-bodied peers;
- the allocation of a maximum number of support **hours of 170 hours per year**.

The support teacher has the task of accompanying the pupil during the course, without replacing him/her in the final tests. If a vocational qualification is not achieved, a certificate is issued to validate the skills acquired.

### - Students with EES / other BES

IeFP courses can also accommodate students with Special Educational Needs (according to DGR no. 20/2014) and students belonging to the 'other BES' category (as per Ministerial Directive of 27 December 2012). The latter include, for example:

- students with ADHD or hyperkinetic syndromes;
- students with a borderline intellectual level
- subjects with specific developmental disorders of language and motor skills (e.g. F.80, F.82);
- hikikomori' students, i.e. young people in voluntary social isolation;
- foreign or migrant students with integration difficulties;
- adopted students with psychological or social problems;

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.regione.piemonte.it/web/temi/istruzione-formazione-lavoro/formazione-professionale/opportunita-formative/percorsi-qualifica-diploma-professionale-per-allievi-disabilita-ees>



- young people with emotional-relational distress or in risk situations.

In these cases, attendance may be subject to the issuing of a fitness certificate by the competent doctor of the training provider. For students with EES, support of **50 hours per year** is provided.

#### - Students with DSA

Law 170/2010 protects students with Specific Learning Disorders (DSA - Disturbi specifici dell'apprendimento), such as dyslexia, dysorthography, dysgraphia and dyscalculia. For them, **no support hours are envisaged** in IeFP courses, but it is compulsory to draw up a **PDP**, which indicates dispensatory measures (e.g. exemption from certain performances) and compensatory tools (e.g. use of computers, conceptual maps). Personalisation is also envisaged for comorbid DSAs

#### FORMS FOR PUPILS WITH DISABILITIES, EES, BES AND DSA

For each pupil with a disability, EES, BES or DSA, arrangements must be made:

- an Educational Pact shared with the family;
- an PEI (Individualised Learning Plan) for students with mild disabilities;
- a PDP (Personalised Learning Plan) for students with EES, BES and DSA.

All these documents must be sent to the relevant regional offices by the end of the first four months of the training year.

Within the same class it is possible to include up to 5 pupils with disabilities and/or with EES (max 3 pupils with disabilities), as well as pupils with Specific Learning Disorders for whom L. 170/2010 does not, however, provide support, but only a 'Personalised Learning Project' (PDP), where the necessary 'dispensatory measures and/or compensatory tools' are indicated. Finally, it is important that environmental factors, understood both as obstacles and facilitators, related to the training location, the type of course chosen and the composition of the class, are already assessed at the pre-enrolment stage.

## **PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN ITALIAN SCHOOLS**

The acronym BES stands for Bisogni Educativi Specili (Special Educational Needs), i.e. special educational needs that may be manifested, even for short periods, by pupils at school for physical, biological, physiological or even psychological, social reasons, in respect of which schools must provide an adequate and customised response.

The concept of Special Educational Needs (BES) is therefore inspired by a global vision of the person and thus indicates a vast area of pupils, for whom the principle of personalisation of teaching must be applied with particular attention as to peculiarities and duration. This is in order to remove what hinders learning pathways and bend them to each individual's potential, with a view to an increasingly equitable and inclusive school, committed to guaranteeing the best possible learning and relational functioning, i.e. educational success.

Three major sub-categories fall under the broader definition of BES:

- that of disability;
- that of specific developmental disorders;
- that of socio-economic, linguistic, cultural disadvantage.

The following is a summary of some of the main characteristics of vulnerabilities that are included among Special Educational Needs, as described by Italian and regional legislation and the international reference classifications mentioned above.

### **Disability**

According to Law 104/1992, disability includes physical, psychic or sensory impairments, whether stabilised or progressive, which cause learning or relational difficulties that result in social disadvantage or marginalisation. The social model of disability, implemented by the UN Convention (2006) and MIUR note 4274/2009, emphasises that disability is the result of the interaction between impairment and a non-inclusive environment. The school is obliged to draw up an Individualised Educational Plan (PEI) that enhances the pupil's abilities, addresses learning difficulties and includes facilitators and remedial strategies.

### **Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)**

The disorder affects neurodevelopment and is manifested by persistent difficulties in social communication and behaviour/interests. Symptoms include:



- Problems initiating and maintaining social interactions, with little interest in the communication of others.
- Reduced integration between verbal and non-verbal language.
- Inability to adapt to the social context and understand others' emotions.
- Repetitive behaviour, narrow interests and rigidity, with possible sensory hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity.

The severity and combination of symptoms vary widely, creating a broad spectrum of clinical manifestations.

### **Specific Learning Disorders (DSA)**

They are neurodevelopmental disorders that affect specific school skills in reading, writing and calculation, in the absence of intellectual retardation or other pathologies (Law 170/2010). Diagnosis is only possible after the end of the second year of primary school, after applying a skill-building intervention, to distinguish between temporary difficulties and full-blown disorder. DSAs include:

- **Dyslexia:** difficulty in reading letters, words or passages correctly and quickly. It does not concern text comprehension but decoding.
- **Dysgraphia:** problems with motor control and graphic quality of writing, linked to visual-perceptual and motor deficits.
- **Dysorthografia:** spelling errors related to written coding, such as omissions or interchanges of letters, illegal joining or separating of words.
- **Dyscalculia:** difficulties in recognising and manipulating numbers, in mental and written calculation, and in retrieving arithmetic facts.

### **Language Disorder**

Neurodevelopmental disorder affecting the acquisition, comprehension and production of spoken or written language. It may involve phonological, lexical, morphosyntactic or pragmatic aspects. It is manifested by poor language, simple or incorrect sentences and difficulties in discourse skills. An early sign is the delay in the emergence of first words, although not all late learners develop a disorder.

### **Motor Coordination Disorder (DCM)**

Involves difficulty in executing coarse and fine movements, with clumsiness and slowness. Makes it difficult to coordinate complex motor actions to achieve a goal.

### **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**

Neurobiological disorder with difficulties in maintaining attention, motor hyperactivity and impulsivity.

Three sub-types can be distinguished:

- Inattentive (difficulty concentrating).
- Hyperactive-impulsive (uncontrolled movements and actions).
- Combined (presence of both types of symptoms).

It often coexists with other developmental disorders such as ASD, oppositional defiant disorder, anxiety or mood disorders.

### **Limited Intellectual Functioning (FIL)**

Condition characterised by an Intelligence Quotient (IQ) between 70 and 85, below average but not low enough for a diagnosis of intellectual disability. Pupils with IQD show slow and less adaptive learning, but with appropriate stimulation can progress effectively. There are no marked specific cognitive deficits.

### **Socio-economic, linguistic and cultural disadvantage**

A condition that affects many students due to environmental, economic or language difficulties. It requires attention to the whole person, as these conditions affect learning and inclusion.

### **Giftedness**

It refers to individuals with significantly above-average intellectual, creative or artistic abilities. Gifted children show precocity, creativity, learning speed and emotional and sensory sensitivity. However, they may suffer from emotional disharmonies or relational difficulties. It is important to offer them customised school programmes with appropriate challenges (MIUR note 562/2019), recognised for those with  $IQ \geq 130$ . Giftedness is not a disorder and has no diagnostic category.

## THE PRESENCE OF PUPILS AND STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE ITALIAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

Recent data from ISTAT, published in March 2025, offers an in-depth picture of the current state of inclusion for pupils with disabilities in Italian schools. The statistics reveal both progress and persistent challenges across various domains of educational inclusion.

### A Growing Population with Diverse Needs

The number of pupils with disabilities continues to rise, reaching nearly 359,000—4.5% of the total student body. This marks a 6% increase from the previous year and a 26% rise over five years. Boys significantly outnumber girls, with 228 males for every 100 females, a pattern consistent with the higher prevalence of certain neurodevelopmental disorders among boys. The most common disability remains intellectual disability, affecting 40% of students and peaking in secondary schools. Disorders of psychological development are also prevalent, especially among younger children. Learning and attention disorders are widespread among secondary students, while motor, visual, and hearing impairments are less frequent. Many students face more than one condition, and 28% struggle with basic autonomy, particularly communication and toileting. Nearly all pupils (98%) have official certification entitling them to educational support, but a small group (1.3%) receive help even without certification—often as they await formal diagnosis.

### Support Teaching: Improvements and Ongoing Shortages

Italy employs about 246,000 support teachers, the majority in state schools. The pupil-to-support teacher ratio generally meets legal requirements, but quality remains an issue: 27% of teachers lack specific training, and many are assigned late—some as little as a month before school begins. However, there has been progress: the proportion of non-specialist support teachers has declined over four years. Teacher continuity remains a concern. Over half of pupils with disabilities change support teachers each year, and some even mid-year, affecting the stability of support. On average, pupils receive 15.6 support hours per week, highest in pre-schools and lowest in secondary schools.

### Autonomy and Communication Assistance: Still Insufficient

Autonomy and communication assistants—vital in promoting interaction and independence—are growing in number (about 80,000), yet unevenly distributed across the country. For example, in Campania, there are 7.5 pupils per assistant, compared to a national average of 4. Only 4.2% of assistants know Italian Sign Language (LIS), and regional disparities are particularly sharp when it comes to pupils with severe disabilities. Many students who need these assistants (4.2%) still go without.

### Technology and Inclusive Education

Technology offers valuable tools for inclusive teaching, from speech synthesis to tactile maps. Yet, only 75% of schools have adapted computer workstations for students with disabilities—and almost half of these feel under-equipped. Particularly in the South, dissatisfaction is higher. Placement of these tools inside classrooms has increased (from 37% to 49% over five years), allowing greater peer interaction. Still, teacher training lags: only 23% of schools report that all support teachers have received tech-specific training, and just 7% of schools report that all mainstream teachers use accessible materials. The digital divide remains a barrier to full inclusion.

### Classroom Inclusion and Teaching Practices

Inclusive teaching emphasizes learning alongside peers. Most pupils with disabilities spend nearly all school hours in the classroom (29 hours/week), with limited time (2.9 hours) in one-on-one instruction. However, students with more severe conditions spend significantly more time outside the classroom—especially in pre-school settings. Only a third of pupils benefit from support that involves the entire class, which is the model most aligned with inclusive principles. For half the students, support remains focused primarily on the individual.

### Participation Beyond the Classroom

School trips, workshops, and extracurriculars are crucial for social integration. While 90% of pupils with disabilities take part in day trips, only half join overnight outings. Participation is markedly lower in the South, often due to the nature of the disability or a lack of organisational support. In-school extracurriculars also see varied participation. While 60% of



nursery students join, this drops to 43% in secondary school. Participation in sports is high overall (93%), but drops sharply when it comes to competitive or extracurricular sports, with only 21% participation nationwide.

### **Individualised Education Plans and Family Involvement**

The Individualised Educational Plan (PEI) is central to tailored teaching. Nearly all students have one, but the timing and quality vary. For 19% of students, the PEI wasn't ready by the end of October—a problem particularly acute in secondary schools and the central regions. Three distinct educational paths emerge: standard, personalized with equivalent testing, and differentiated (the latter often leads to no final qualification and is used mostly in secondary schools). While families are involved in 91% of cases, student participation—especially among older students—is still limited.

Regular communication with families is uneven. Though meetings with support teachers are frequent, 21% of families report no regular contact with mainstream teachers. Notably, southern Italy reports stronger family engagement.

### **Bridging School and Work**

Path for Transversal Skills and Orientation (PCTO) is widely implemented in secondary schools, with 87% of students participating. In-company experiences are more common in the North, while southern schools rely more on school-based projects. These programs offer essential exposure to workplace settings and help build autonomy.

### **Workshops and Practical Learning**

Workshop-based learning fosters hands-on experience and inclusion. More than half of students with disabilities attend schools that offer such activities, and of those, 70% participate—mostly with their peers, although some follow individual projects.

### **Physical Accessibility: Still a Major Challenge**

Only 41% of school buildings are physically accessible. The North fares slightly better than the South, but nationwide, issues like lack of lifts, non-adapted toilets, and absence of tactile signage persist. Accessibility for sensory impairments is even more neglected: only 17% of schools have visual signs for hearing-impaired students, and just 1% offer tactile paths for visually impaired students. Only 12% of schools carried out improvement works in the past year. Parking remains a problem too—only 44% of schools have accessible parking spaces.

### **Special Educational Needs Beyond Disability**

Beyond students with disabilities, many others fall under the umbrella of "Special Educational Needs" (BES). These include students with learning disorders (DSA, ~6%), ADHD (3–5%), and borderline intellectual functioning (~2.5%). A third group includes pupils facing socio-economic, linguistic, or cultural disadvantages—many of them foreign-born or second-generation immigrants. In 2022–2023, students without Italian citizenship made up 11.2% of the school population. Notably, two-thirds were born in Italy, indicating the growing importance of long-term inclusion policies.

With reference to **foreign pupils**, we currently have data for the school year 2022-2023<sup>4</sup> published by MIM. The report analyses the participation of children and young people of migrant origin in the Italian school system and presents interesting indicators to assess school integration and inclusion policies.

These data show that at a national level, pupils with non-Italian citizenship represent 11.2% of the total school population; among these, it should be noted that 65.4% of pupils with non-Italian citizenship are second generations, i.e. pupils born in Italy.

For the first time, there was a **decrease in the percentage of second-generation admissions**, whose steady growth had characterised previous years.

44.4% of students with non-Italian citizenship are of European origin, followed by students from Africa (27.25%) and Asia (20.27%). Much smaller but slightly increasing is the share of students from America (8.02%), while that of students from Oceania remains stable (0.03%).

A central aspect of the school inclusion process of pupils with non-Italian citizenship is their distribution within schools and, within schools, between classes.

In order to avoid the concentration of pupils with a migrant background in certain schools and to favour their balanced

<sup>4</sup> Source: [Gli alunni con cittadinanza non italiana anno scolastico 2022/2023 - MIM](#)



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distribution, the Ministry of Education and Merit has set certain organisational criteria regarding their distribution among schools and in individual classes. According to the provisions, the number of pupils with non-Italian citizenship with reduced knowledge of the Italian language must not normally exceed 30% of those enrolled in each class and in each school. Regional School Offices are required to facilitate a balanced distribution of pupils with non-Italian citizenship among schools through the promotion of local agreements and understandings between schools and local authorities.

There are, however, some exceptions in specific cases.

The 30% limit may be raised - by determination of the Director General of the Regional School Office - in the presence of pupils with non-Italian citizenship who already possess adequate language skills (as in the case of students born in Italy).

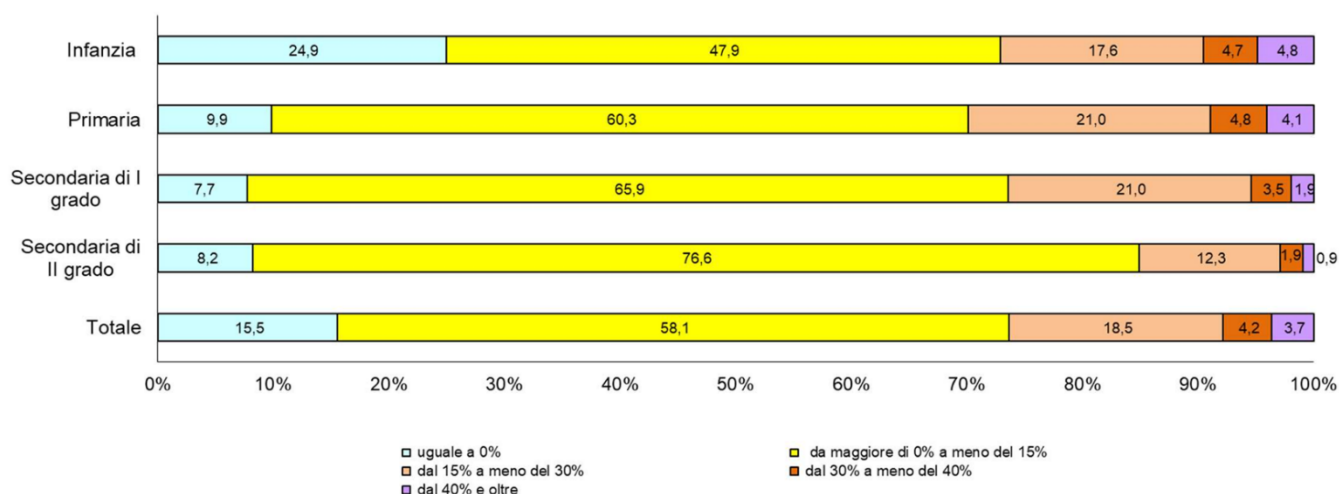
On the other hand, the 30% limit may be reduced, again by decision of the Director General of the Regional School Office, in the case of pupils with non-Italian citizenship who, at the time of enrolment, are not yet proficient in Italian for full participation in teaching activities and, in any case, in the case of particular and documented complexities.

Under no circumstances, however, may schools refuse to enrol a child because of exceeding a certain percentage of enrolment of migrant origin.

These indications are pointed out every year in the circular that the Ministry of Education and Merit issues on the occasion of enrolment in the first year of school.

The data collected in 2022/2023 show a decrease in the total number of schools where there are no pupils with non-Italian citizenship (15.5%). The variation by school order can be seen in the graph below. [Chart1].

Chart 1 - Schools by presence of pupils with non-Italian citizenship and order of school (percentage composition) - A.S. 2022/2023



As far as the choice of secondary school is concerned, for the A.S. 2022-2023, the data indicate that 84.0% of students with non-Italian citizenship took Secondary School courses, while 8.8% headed for Regional Vocational Training.

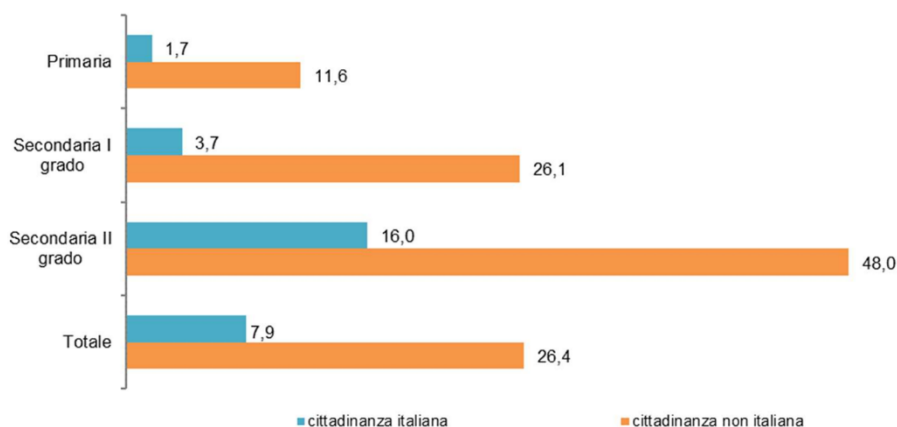
Students with non-Italian citizenship born in Italy are more inclined towards Technical Institutes and then Licei, whereas students born abroad after Technical Institutes choose Vocational Institutes.

The regularity of the school career is one of the dimensions of analysis through which to assess the educational and social integration of students of immigrant origin. Information on personal age and class attended makes it possible to observe



how, over the five years of secondary school, students in order go from 68.1% to 47.0%.

The distances between Italian students and those of immigrant origin are still considerable. In A.S. 2022-2023, Italian



students who are late are 7.9% compared to 26.4% of students with non-Italian citizenship. The greatest gap is found in secondary school where the percentages of tardiness become 16% for Italian students and 48% for students of immigrant origin respectively. [Chart 2]

Chart 2 - Pupils with non-Italian and Italian citizenship in school delay by school order (percentage values per 100 pupils) - A.S. 2022/2023

### Unaccompanied foreign minors (MSNA)

Unaccompanied foreign minors (unaccompanied minors) are among the most vulnerable segments of the youth population in Italy. These young people, often far from their families and with traumatic migration experiences behind them, face challenges and difficulties in accessing an education that could offer them opportunities for a more secure and inclusive future.

When we speak of unaccompanied foreign minors we are referring, according to the provisions of Article 2 of Law 47/2017 to any "(...) minor not having Italian or European Union citizenship who is for any reason in the territory of the State or who is otherwise subject to Italian jurisdiction, lacking the assistance and representation of parents or other adults legally responsible for him."

In recent years, this phenomenon has reappeared more and more consistently, as a conspicuous 'collateral' effect of particularly bloody conflicts that have taken place in various geo-political areas, more or less bordering on Western European countries. These minors must be ensured full recognition and implementation of their rights: an adequate reception but also the fulfilment of their needs in terms of social inclusion and the right to study, which include the activation of measures that favour their intercultural dialogue and access to education.

Data updated to June 2024 collected in the new "Six-monthly in-depth report on the presence of unaccompanied foreign minors (MSNA) in Italy"<sup>5</sup>, tell us that there were **20 unaccompanied foreign minors** registered in Italy on **30 June 2024.206**, are **mostly male** (88.4%) and are aged **17** (49.8%), **16** (25.1%) and **15** (13.7%); they come mainly from **Egypt** (3,924 minors), **Ukraine** (3,811), **Gambia** (2,274), **Tunisia** (2,145) and **Guinea** (1,679).

The largest proportion of MSNAs are enrolled in Italian L2 language literacy courses held at their host institutions (for more than 45% of the sample) or, to a slightly lesser extent, at local CPIAs (40%). In ordinary education, the presence of MSNAs is decidedly lower than in the other learning programmes considered.

**Among the MSNA surveyed, in fact, only one minor in five is integrated in the Italian school system (21%),** i.e. in courses attended by native peers and offering the possibility of acquiring a qualification. Even considering first/second level

<sup>5</sup> Source: <https://integrazioneimmigranti.gov.it/it-it/>



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courses at CPIAs, only 18% are in this condition. Finally, not negligible (9%) is the share of MSM not involved in any of the educational/training activities, being out of any kind of learning programme.

A 2024 study carried out by Fondazione ISMU ETS on behalf of MIM, the results of which are presented in the volume *"Unaccompanied Foreign Minors at School. Se l'improbabile diventa possibile"*<sup>6</sup>, it emerges that the individual choices of MSM with respect to their life projects, including those at school, depend not only on the material and immaterial resources they have at their disposal, but also on the ways in which interpersonal contacts (with family members, friends, fellow travellers, educators or teachers) shape information about the new country or influence the social practices that can be implemented in the new territory, shaping their learning.

## National challenges in implementing inclusive teaching methods

### CHALLENGES AND CRITICAL ISSUES OF THE INCLUSIVE SCHOOL SYSTEM IN ITALY: DOING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive education requires schools to become the privileged place where this principle is realised through **specific educational-didactic actions and organisational forms capable of transforming any environment into an inclusive school context**. Talking about inclusive education means coming to terms with differences, understanding how to deal with them in school, in the classroom and in the curriculum.

The provision of schools and classes capable of welcoming everyone, as is the logic of inclusion, requires precise and, at the same time, flexible organisation and coordination between the various actors involved, both inside and outside the school.

All pedagogical and didactic standards and reference texts speak of them and emphasise their importance, even if, in practice, these alliances do not always materialise and develop in the most appropriate manner.

Coordination is played out, first and foremost, in the planning related to the classroom context, which is developed within the teaching team or class council and concerns the sharing of the teaching approach, assessment procedures, and organisational setting.

**Inclusive education is not a set of specific contents, but is characterised by a methodological orientation, an operational style to be adopted in daily practice. That is, it is about managing all the subject curricula with an approach that facilitates participation and positive results for each pupil.**

The inclusive approach poses challenges in terms of new structural organisations, curriculum redesign, attention to the emotional needs of pupils and the need for specific training for teachers.

Inclusive education and, more specifically, inclusive teaching, proposes to teachers a different approach to teaching that offers rich and specific learning opportunities for all, considering individual differences as a given from which to start and not exceptional cases to solve. The aim is to foster the highest possible degree of learning for all by valuing not only the individual differences of each pupil, but also of each individual teacher with his or her own teaching style.

**Inclusion does not mean asking what is wrong with the pupil, but what is wrong with his or her context, in this specific case the school.**

The focus shifts to the context and no longer to the shortcomings, difficulties and disabilities of pupils. Promoting and realising inclusion at school does not mean, therefore, focusing on the student with his difficulties, diversity, disabilities, but changing the contexts so that they become inclusive and accessible to all. Before, we used to talk about integrated teaching as a methodology to involve children with disabilities, who had to adapt to the school environment. Now, on the other hand, inclusion refers to strategies aimed at the participation of all students, with the objective of making the most of the potential and characteristics of each one. In this case, therefore, **it is the school that adapts to the students**.

The concept of BES on an ICF basis, therefore, represents a step forward towards greater *equity*, which is one of the building blocks of an inclusive school and concerns every teacher, specialised and curricular, impartially, because it addresses the

<sup>6</sup> Source: Foundation Initiatives and Studies on Multiethnicity



entire class group indiscriminately and not only the pupils with disabilities within them.

It therefore entails greater *pedagogical-didactical responsibility* than a biomedical delegation. The class council and teachers are given a pedagogical-didactic task that is fundamental for a modern teaching profession: that of detecting subjects with a BES situation that is not clinically detected.

The ministerial provisions say that, even in the absence of specific documents, the class council/team, based on psycho-pedagogical and didactic considerations, assesses and understands the difficulties and expresses its opinion on the problematic functioning of the pupil and any personalisation necessary for the educational pathway.

The result is a **greater co-responsibility of curricular** teachers, as opposed to the tendency to delegate to support teachers, in designing and implementing generally more inclusive teaching and specific forms of personalisation. This is a crucial issue that has been debated in Italy for years: the delegating approach of special interventions to support teachers alone is one of the chronic ills of Italian integration and must be overcome with a radical evolution of the role of support teachers. This is undoubtedly the most challenging point for teachers, especially for those who have for years adopted frontal and transmissive teaching formats, structurally ill-suited to personalisation and individualisation (which are the majority especially in the two secondary school levels). The critical nodes highlight how the Italian model is still too closely linked to the rigid binomial 'pupil with disabilities-support teacher', assigned by the school administration according to hourly quantification criteria resulting from medical certification. The evolution that is hoped for is the **transformation of the current specialised teachers into tutors**, i.e. into resources that, through the co-presence in the classroom of the support hours, are an active and constant presence capable of promoting and enhancing, together with the curricular teacher, effective inclusive teaching methods for all pupils and marked by the values of justice as equity (giving everyone what they need).

Starting from the contents of the document "*Five messages for inclusive education*" presented by the European Agency for Special Educational Needs and Inclusive Education<sup>7</sup>, in the context of studies and research in the pedagogical and didactic field in Italy, **three lines of work** have been identified to promote an inclusive school, capable of combining the perspective of recognising diversity as a richness and as a value with the pursuit of equity and equal opportunities set out above.<sup>8</sup>

These **three operational guidelines** refer to the following factors:

- **the organisation of the context** as a favourable, motivating and welcoming learning environment;
- the use of a **didactic approach aimed at promoting inclusion** during all normal educational activities, including those of a purely disciplinary nature;
- **the attention to be paid to the special needs of certain pupils**, with reference to the area of disabilities, specific learning disorders and other special educational needs.

These factors then lead to a reflection on the outlining of the profile and training paths for the inclusive teacher.

## SEN AT SCHOOL: THE 7 KEY POINTS FOR INCLUSIVE TEACHING

### TEACHING

The perspective of inclusion for all learners passes through a refinement of teaching procedures, which must promote the active role of each learner, facilitating the participation of all, as well as stimulating interactive and mutually supportive relationships.

Research in this area provides teachers with a number of very interesting strategies and approaches that can be implemented with reference to specific curriculum topics. This is intended to emphasise the fact that inclusive teaching is not represented by a set of specific contents, but is characterised by a methodological orientation, an operational style to be adopted in daily practice:

On the basis of forty years of experience in the field of scientific and methodological research on education, didactics and

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.european-agency.org/italiano/publications>

<sup>8</sup> Cottini L., *Does the dimension of school inclusion still require special education?* in *L'integrazione scolastica e sociale*, Vol.17, No.1, February 2018, pp.11-19



social inclusion, the Erickson Study Centre<sup>9</sup>, a point of reference in Italy for those who deal with disabilities, schooling, support and inclusion, has drawn up a methodological guide that illustrates the **seven key points**, understood as principles, **of inclusive didactics aimed at improving the learning conditions of pupils with any kind of Special Educational Need. These are seven broad dimensions through which the teacher can promote inclusion within the classroom by making the most of the different styles, ways of working and even materials that enter the classroom every day.**

### 1. The classmate resource

Classmates are the most valuable resource for activating inclusive processes and to date the least utilised.

The focus on the collaborative construction of knowledge has appropriately led to an emphasis on the role that peer interactions can play in fostering learning, even with learners with special educational needs. Learning is never a solitary process, but is profoundly influenced by peer relationships, stimuli and contexts.

From day one, collaboration, cooperation and the classroom climate must be encouraged and worked on. In particular, strategies for collaborative work in pairs or small groups should be emphasised.

The main teaching strategies based on these principles are *peer tutoring* and *cooperative learning*.

### 2. Adaptation as an inclusive strategy

Responding to the special educational needs present in a class group means **adapting the materials, the objectives, the programming**; in order to **value individual differences**, it is necessary to be aware of and adapt communication styles, lesson forms and learning spaces.

Materials should be adapted to the different ability levels and **cognitive styles** present in the classroom. The most functional adaptation is based on materials capable of activating multiple channels of information processing, giving additional aids and activities of gradual difficulty.

The adaptation of objectives and materials is an integral part of the PEI and LDP.

### 3. Logico-visual strategies, maps, diagrams and visual aids

In order to activate inclusive dynamics, it is essential to **strengthen logical-visual strategies**, in particular through the use of **mind maps** and **concept maps**. Due to their characteristic of combining visual code with a few written words, they make learning quicker and more effective and facilitate the retrieval of information during written and oral examinations, help make logical connections, extract key words and fundamental concepts and order the presentation of topics.

For pupils with greater difficulties, all forms of schematisation and advance organisation of knowledge are of great help and, in particular, diagrams, timelines, meaningful illustrations and flashcards of rules, as well as the exploitation of iconographic resources, textual indices and the analysis of visual sources.

They are, however, tools that facilitate learning, but are not necessarily linked to remedial or support intervention and for this reason, although they are one of the most powerful compensatory strategies available to pupils with DSA, they lend themselves well to teaching the whole class.

### 4. Cognitive processes and learning styles

In order to facilitate learning while facilitating the work of everyone within the class group, it is also essential to strengthen and consolidate cognitive processes: memory, attention, concentration, visual-spatial-temporal relations, logic and cognitive-motivational processes. Cognitive processes and executive functions enable the **development of psychological, behavioural and operational skills** necessary for processing information and constructing learning.

Didactic interventions that fit this type of objective are, for example, *problem solving*, *project based learning*, *problem based learning*, *phenomenon based learning*, *debate*.

At the same time, **a truly inclusive didactics** must **value the different cognitive styles** present in the classroom and the **different forms of intelligence**, both in terms of pupils and forms of teaching.

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Erickson Research and Development (ed.), *BES at school. I 7 punti chiave per una didattica inclusiva*, Trento, Edizioni Erickson, 2015



From the teacher's point of view, **knowledge of learning styles** is a tool not to be underestimated. In fact, learning styles have their counterpart in **teaching styles**, i.e. the teacher's preferences in the choice and presentation of class material and activities.

The teaching style of the teacher may be based on his or her learning style, or on imitation of observed student models, but what matters is that a discrepancy may occur between the teaching style and the learning style of some, or many, students. As a result, teaching may lose considerable effectiveness.

### 5. Metacognition and study method

It is a transversal objective of every teaching activity to accompany the pupil **in developing awareness of his or her own cognitive processes**. The teacher acts to develop self-regulation strategies and cognitive and emotional mediation, to structure a personalised and effective study method, which is often lacking in pupils with difficulties. It means stimulating and involving the ability to actively monitor, control and regulate one's own cognitive processes. The teacher assumes the role of facilitator of critical thinking, encouraging students to reflect on their own study methods, to identify strengths and areas for improvement and to experiment with different approaches to optimise their school performance.

Inclusive teaching strategies that foster more conscious and effective learning include, for example, the *flipped classroom*, along with the aforementioned cooperative learning and problem solving, which encourage critical reflection and autonomous thinking while enabling students to develop the ability to regulate their own cognitive processes.

### 6. Emotions and psychological variables in learning

Emotions play a key role in learning and participation. It is central to developing a positive self-image and thus **good levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy** and a positive internal attribution style. **Motivation to learn** is strongly influenced by these factors, as are emotions related to belonging to the peer group and class group. **Education in the recognition and management of one's own emotions and affective sphere** is indispensable for developing self-awareness. It is essential to create and design **learning experiences** through which students can **gain awareness of themselves and their emotions**, foster balanced emotional reactions appropriate to different everyday situations, and **achieve personal and social well-being**.

Significant proposals are those coming from *social-emotional education* or *social emotional learning* (SEL) and *prosociality*, which are developed from a theoretical and practical reference framework inspired by the work of Daniel Goleman and in particular his book "Emotional Intelligence" (1995). Tools and teaching strategies that favour this type of acquisition are, for example, circle time, storytelling, role playing, laboratory teaching on *life skills*.

At the international level, one of the first cognitive-behavioural preventive approaches in schools was that of *Emotional Rational Education (ERE)*: a preventive strategy that aims to foster the emotional well-being of children and adolescents, intervening both before forms of distress appear and on the initial manifestations of malaise.

In Italy, it was Mario Di Pietro, in the 1980s, who started with his collaborators to adapt ERE to the school context.<sup>10</sup>

Although a little later than in other countries, in Italy, between 2006 and 2018, *La Didattica delle Emozioni® (The Didactics of Emotions®)* was experimented in some schools: a prevention methodology, scientifically developed and tested by Italian psychologists before being proposed to teachers, aimed at promoting and building well-being at school.<sup>11</sup>

In 2023, a three-year experiment on Emotional Education for pupils aged between 6 and 16 was launched in a number of schools, in accordance with the criteria laid down in Law 2782/2022, to teach knowledge and management of emotions. The project, on a voluntary basis, does not provide additional school hours, but requires a review of teaching methods, with the aim of developing methodologies based on emotional intelligence, and envisages that the first year is dedicated to preparing teachers and the last two to working with pupils. The approval of Law 2782/2022 represents an important step to officially integrate emotional education in the Italian institutes, as already in 1993 the World Health Organisation (WHO) included emotional competence in the list of soft skills, understood as the ability to read, interpret and manage one's own

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ereitalia.org/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gruppola scuola.it/didattica-delle-emozioni>



and others' emotions to establish healthy, deep and enriching relationships. A competence that, according to the WHO, enables improved educational success, preventing functional illiteracy, educational poverty and early school leaving.

### 7. Evaluation, verification and feedback

The topic of assessment is of crucial importance for inclusive curriculum design. In an inclusive perspective, **assessment** must always be **formative**, aimed at **improving learning and teaching processes**.

An inclusive assessment must take into account the starting levels of pupils, their progress and not only the final goal they have reached, respecting their needs and diversity, which does not only involve pupils with certification.

There are three aspects to be considered simultaneously throughout the evaluation process:

- **the personalisation of forms of verification** in the formulation of requests and forms of processing by the pupil;
- moments of autonomous self-assessment, since **assessment must develop metacognitive processes in the**
- **feedback must be continuous, formative and motivating and not punitive or censorious.**

Returning to the aforementioned UDL model, an important place within the framework is held by feedback and self-assessment as tools that guide learning, emphasising the role of effort and process towards achievement. In order to design inclusive evaluation processes inspired by the UDL research framework, CAST drew up a vademecum (2020) aimed at stimulating reflective processes in teachers that can accompany them in the evaluation process.<sup>12</sup>

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education itself has developed outcome indicators for inclusive assessment, with particular reference to pupils with disabilities attending mainstream classes, and a set of preconditions to be pursued in order to use these indicators.<sup>13</sup>

### Technologies for Inclusion (ICT)

**New information and communication technologies (ICT)** can also play an important role as a support for inclusive teaching.

These can fulfil a variety of functions: from those enabling basic activities for the school experience, which could not otherwise be performed by some pupils with disabilities, to those supporting advanced didactic planning for the whole class, through the use of educational software and the didactic use of software, hardware and the potential of the network.

Their use in schools can be a win-win situation, with a view to promoting truly inclusive education, which does not end with trying to do things the same way as everyone else, but rather trying to offer the opportunity to do things with others.

Indeed, technologies applied to education have great **potential**. They make it possible to innovate **teaching methods** by **emphasising**

- **the protagonism** of male and female students;
- **active learning**;
- the customisation of educational pathways according to the specificities and **special educational needs** of the class (BES).

Inclusion **is the strength** of digital education.

### 3. CUSTOMISED TEACHING AS ATTENTION TO THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF CERTAIN LEARNERS

The third operational guideline we mentioned for promoting an inclusive school emphasises the attention to be paid to the special needs of certain pupils, with reference to the area of disabilities, DSA and other BES.

All the methodological procedures aimed at creating increasingly inclusive classes described in the previous points certainly do not obviate the need to **also design and implement teaching strategies that directly address pupils' special needs**.

This means all those interventions aimed at the individual learner, even to be promoted on a one-to-one basis and perhaps in separate contexts, up to the ability to respond to specific learning needs, with actions to be developed in a collective

<sup>12</sup> Sasanelli L.D., *Inclusive assessment in Universal Design for Learning: emerging perspectives and practices*, IUL Research -Open Journal of IUL University, Vol. 5, No. 9, 2024, available at

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.european-agency.org/file/11740/download?token=Pfn2zHDV>



setting, in small groups, in tutoring experiences, etc.

At this level, the intervention strategies that appear to be most significant and developable in schools from studies on this subject<sup>14</sup>, are those aimed at facilitating meaningful learning even in pupils with severe impairments, strategies to support communication and those to contain behavioural problems. Examples include strategies derived from *applied behavioural analysis*, *video modelling*, *structured teaching and visualisation strategies*, *verbal behaviour and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) procedures* and, finally, approaches for dealing with problematic pupil behaviour.

## THE STATE OF SCHOOL INCLUSION IN ITALY: LIMITATIONS AND CRITICAL ISSUES

Although Italy is, at least in terms of legislation, among the most advanced countries in terms of school inclusion, the concrete reality in schools tells a much more complex story. The Italian education system is based on principles of equity and inclusion, but translating these values into effective daily practices is far from simple. In many schools in our country, the inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs (BES) still remains a goal yet to be fully achieved. Analysing and monitoring school inclusion means dealing with a plurality of elements, ranging from structural and organisational to cultural and educational aspects.

### Limited resources

One of the main difficulties concerns the scarcity of resources - economic, human and material - available to schools. Ensuring a truly inclusive school environment requires significant investment: we need more qualified support teachers, appropriate teaching aids, assistive technology, continuous training for staff and accessible environments. However, many schools are operating on shoestring budgets that do not allow them to offer the necessary support to students with special needs. It is clear, therefore, how urgent it is to increase investment, both public and private, to strengthen the infrastructure of inclusion.

### Inadequate school facilities

Not all Italian schools are truly accessible. School buildings are often dated and have architectural barriers that hinder the participation of students with physical disabilities. But the problem is not only physical: even the layout of spaces and the organisation of classrooms still reflect a traditional vision of the school, hardly compatible with the needs of inclusive teaching, which requires flexible, modular and participatory environments.

### Insufficient training of support teachers

Another critical issue concerns support teachers. In many schools, the number of specialised teachers is still insufficient compared to the growing demand. Moreover, it often happens that support teachers are assigned late, or change frequently during the school year, compromising educational continuity. Even today, not all support teachers have been adequately trained to deal with the different types of disabilities present in the classroom.

### Curricular teacher training still lacking

The responsibility for inclusion cannot fall only on support teachers. All teachers, regardless of their discipline or school order, must be adequately trained to manage diversity in the classroom. Unfortunately, especially in secondary schools, specific training on BES and inclusive teaching methods is still not widespread. We need to promote a culture of co-responsibility, in which each teacher feels involved in the education of all pupils, especially the most fragile ones.

### Cultural resistance to change

An often underestimated obstacle is cultural barriers. In many schools, a traditional didactic approach remains, centred on frontal teaching and one-way transmission of knowledge. This approach is ill-suited to the needs of students with BES, who would need more active, participative and personalised methodologies. Changing mindsets and established practices requires time, training and strong institutional support.

### Overcrowded classrooms

Class size is a well-known problem. When there are too many students, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to provide individual attention to each one. Under these conditions, students with BES risk going unnoticed or not receiving the

<sup>14</sup> Cottini L., *Special education and school inclusion*, Rome, Carocci, 2017



necessary support. Reducing the number of pupils per class would be an important measure to foster inclusion.

### **Insufficient external specialist support**

School inclusion cannot be a school's task alone: it requires the collaboration of external figures, such as speech therapists, psychologists, educators and communication assistants. However, the availability of these professionals is often limited, especially in some geographical areas. The participation of the ASL in drawing up PEIs (Individualised Educational Plans) is also often marginal, reducing the effectiveness of integrated interventions.

### **Complex bureaucratic procedures**

The identification of BES and the definition of customised pathways go through often slow and complicated procedures. Delays in diagnoses, authorisations and the preparation of educational plans can seriously compromise the effectiveness of interventions. Simplifying procedures and streamlining bureaucracy would be a big step forward.

### **Territorial disparities**

The quality of inclusion varies greatly by territory. Schools in urban or wealthier areas often have access to more resources than those in rural or disadvantaged settings. This disparity generates profound educational injustices and undermines the principle of equality of opportunity on which our education system should be based.

### **Family involvement**

Effective inclusion also depends on the active involvement of families. However, parents of students with BES are not always listened to or involved in decision-making processes. They sometimes lack clear information, effective communication tools or opportunities for real participation. Building an educational alliance with families is instead crucial.

### **Difficult school transitions**

The transition from one school grade to another - e.g. from primary to secondary - can be a source of stress and difficulties for many students with BES. Environments, teachers, teaching methods change. Without adequate accompaniment, these transitions can turn into critical moments that compromise the continuity of inclusion.

### **Absence of tools to assess the quality of inclusion**

Finally, a limitation that has not yet been addressed is the lack of systematic tools to assess the quality of inclusive processes. Without monitoring, it is not possible to identify critical points and activate improvement strategies. Evaluation must become an integral part of school culture, not as a form of control, but as a tool to grow, reflect and improve practices. In the light of this, school inclusion in Italy is still a partially realised objective. Good regulatory intentions must be translated into concrete actions, supported by adequate resources, continuous training, methodological innovation and a true collaboration between school, family, territory and institutions.

## **Inclusive teaching methodologies: Co-Teaching and Storytelling**

### **1) CO - TEACHING**

**Co-teaching** is a teaching method aimed at **inclusion in** which two or more teachers, specifically curricular and support teachers, **collaborate** in the same school setting and thus share the same environment. Co - Teaching originated in **the United States**, where it first appeared, and developed in the 1990s with the aim of inclusive education for all students. Between 1993 and 1996, it was **Friend Marilyn** and **Lynne Cook** who formalised the good practice of teamwork between teachers as a genuine pedagogical model.

In **Italy** Co - Teaching began to spread in the 2000s, thanks to **Law 170/2010**, the subsequent **Guidelines for school inclusion** and the contribution of other important scholars, such as **Dario Ianes**.

#### **Co - Teaching: Dario Ianes' clear definition and contribution**

**Ianes**, pedagogue and university professor, one of the most authoritative figures on the Italian scene with regard to special pedagogy and school inclusion, helps us to clearly define Co - Teaching, understanding it as:

- a **well-structured collaboration** between the curricular teacher and the support teacher ;
- collaboration based on a **clear definition of roles**;



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- **shared planning**;
- **continuous reflection** on educational outcomes.

Ianes has elaborated an operational model of Co - Teaching specifically designed for the Italian school context, integrating theoretical reflections, experiences and practical methodological tools. Among Ianes' contributions is that he has also thought of 'novice' teachers by providing them with concrete aids (such as planning formats, check-lists, observation grids and documentation models), useful for all teachers, schools and for making Co - Teaching feasible, sustainable and replicable. The pedagogist considers **teacher training** and the **collaborative climate** to be essential elements for the success of Co - Teaching, to be understood as a strategy oriented towards improving the quality of teaching for *all* students and not exclusively for pupils with special educational needs, going beyond mere individual support to achieve real inclusion.

As pointed out by Ianes himself, Co - Teaching, therefore, goes beyond mere co-presence as it is based on teamwork characterised by a **conscious division of roles** that one must be able to share and negotiate, sometimes to acquire new ones. The relationship does not remain circumscribed, moreover, between the teachers, but extends and includes the students themselves, in a perspective and context where Co - Teaching, if well structured, brings **benefits** to both parties.

### Benefits of Co - Teaching

According to recent data collected by Ianes, through Co-Teaching experiences carried out within Italian school contexts (Erikson, 2022), it emerges how teachers draw important benefits in terms of professional collaboration. In the realities in which Co-Teaching is well structured and applied on an ongoing basis, in fact, teachers are found to have: a decrease in the individual teaching load, an increase in their ability to differentiate teaching, an improvement in classroom management and a wider sharing of inclusive strategies.

All this, on the other hand, improves academic success: by experiencing a collaborative and cooperative model of their teachers, students themselves learn to become more cooperative. From a pedagogical point of view, **Jerome Bruner**, in fact, developed the concept of "**SCAFFOLDING**", according to which a student receives temporary help to learn something that he or she would not be able to accomplish alone. In Co - Teaching, the figure of the support teacher, in conjunction with that of the curricular teacher, acts as a *scaffold*: through an entirely new environment that is created, the student learns through interaction and mediation.

**Lev Vygotsky** himself, on the other hand, emphasised how learning only reaches an **INTRAPERSONAL LEVEL** after passing through an **INTERPERSONAL LEVEL** and thus 'between people'.

It is clear, therefore, that students learn best when their teachers collaborate and that the latter, on the other hand, grow in terms of experience, competence and relationship with others.



Benefits for students	Benefits for teachers	Benefits for the school
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- enrichment opportunities</li> <li>- teaching flexibility in the classroom</li> <li>- access to a variety of teaching strategies supported by two highly qualified teachers</li> <li>- a support system for teachers that addresses student needs</li> <li>- opportunities for peer interaction</li> <li>- 'reasonable accommodations' (UN convention, 2006), shared compensatory/dispensatory methods for all students</li> <li>- reduction of exclusion for students with disabilities</li> <li>- exposure to positive social models of teaching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- shared responsibility, which lightens the workload of both teachers</li> <li>- combined properties of educational and teaching environments</li> <li>- greater collaboration in lesson development and delivery</li> <li>- common objectives</li> <li>- less teacher isolation</li> <li>- greater teacher effectiveness</li> <li>- shared responsibility for academic success</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- establishment of a school culture based on collaboration</li> <li>- establishment of a support system for all teachers</li> <li>- decrease in student/teacher ratio</li> </ul>

### Benefits of Co - Teaching

To promote Co - Teaching, therefore, becomes essential:

### The three dimensions of Co - Teaching

#### 1) Co - Design

This is to be considered as an essential moment of the whole process as it is an initial phase involving several specific elements and tasks.

First and foremost, it is desirable that curricular and support teachers devote time to **dialogue** and a deeper mutual understanding, as this is the phase in which they share, understand and define mutual aspects such as:

- educational methods / techniques / personal teaching methods and approaches,
- visions and philosophies,
- expectations and working tools,
- awareness of professional characteristics, understood as strengths and weaknesses,
- meanings,
- thoughts,
- roles,
- common language.

Obviously, dialogue is an essential working tool at every stage and determines another important task for teachers: that of knowing how to choose and adopt the most appropriate and coherent type of dialogue for the specific project phase in

progress/moment.



Type of Dialogue	Initial Situation	Objective of the Dialogue	Participants' Objective	Outcome
Persuasion	Conflicting opinions	Persuading the other	Proving your thesis	Acceptance/rejection of the thesis
Search	Need for proof	Finding the best hypothesis	Verifying evidence	Best supported hypothesis
Discovery	Need to find an explanation of the facts	Clarifying the issue	Information exchange	Agreement
Negotiation	Interest or conflict	Reaching a compromise	Getting what you want	Agreement
Information gathering	Lack of information	Obtaining information	Asking for or giving information	Information exchange
Resolution	Dilemma or practical problem	Making a Decision	Coordinating actions	Decision to allow action
Eristic	Personal conflict	Revealing the deep roots of conflict	Defeating the opponent	Unlikely outcome

*Types of Dialogue and Benefits of Co - Teaching (Walton & Krabbe, 1995)*

Generally speaking, there are three main and indispensable aspects that must then be discussed before starting the next, central phase:

- objectives,
- the needs/aspirations of the students,
- teaching techniques.

We can summarise Co-Design as a 'dialogical' and '*relational*' activity.

## 2) Co- Teaching

Cook and Friend, in 1995, identified **six models of co-teaching** to which we can still refer today:

**1. One teacher teaches / the other observes (One Teaching / One Observing):** The key to this strategy is observation. While one teacher leads the lesson, the other carefully observes specific behaviours of both the teacher lecturing and the students as well as collects data on behaviour and learning.

**2. One Teaching / One Assisting:** This is the most common strategy in classrooms and is where one teacher explains while the other moves around the classroom in order to individually support those who need help.

**3. Station Teaching:** Each teacher runs a 'station' as students are divided into groups and perform different tasks.

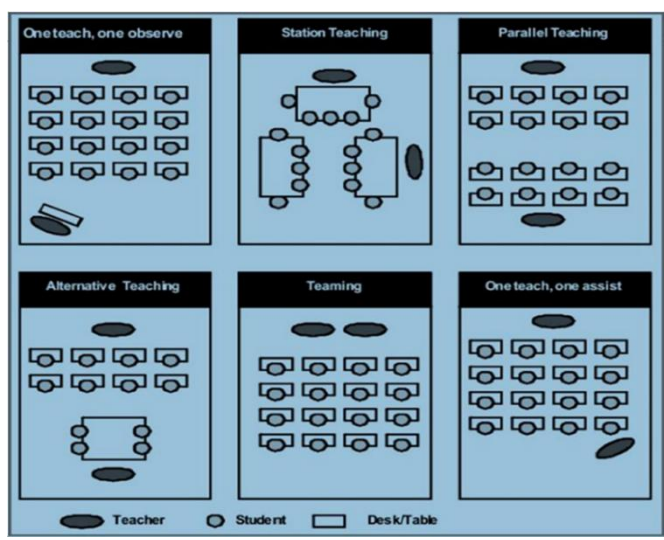
**4. Parallel Teaching:** This is the strategy that is generally chosen when the interaction between a student and teacher is to be facilitated as the class group is divided into two sub-groups, thus reducing the student/teacher ratio. Each teacher teaches the same content independently.



**5. Alternative Teaching:** One teacher works with a larger group while the other works with a smaller group that has specific needs. This is an effective strategy to facilitate 'differentiated instruction'.

**6. Team Teaching:** This strategy represents the most difficult since both teachers are simultaneously and actively involved in the lesson. The success of this model is closely linked to the teachers' ability to provide instruction simultaneously. What needs to be emphasised is that both can intervene and make themselves available to the pupils, (e.g. by answering their questions). By completely sharing the teaching action, there is no leader in the eyes of the students.

At this stage, one can recall **Vygotsky** again, with his theory on the **PROSPECTIVE DEVELOPMENT ZONE (ZSP)**. For the scholar, this is the space/distance between what an individual can do alone or with the help of a more experienced adult/subject. In this framework, therefore, Co - Teaching fits well with this theory in that it allows all students, including and especially those with greater difficulties, to learn even gradually more complex content, thanks to the constant and direct help of teachers. These are placed exactly in their zone of proximal development.



*Illustrative diagram - Six modes of Co - Teaching*

### 3) Co - Evaluation

Co-evaluation represents the last phase and consists of teachers' reflection on the results obtained. Also in this last step, dialogue is a key element, through where observations can be shared. This phase concerns total/final evaluation and may include, for example, the choice of shared rubrics.

#### Co - Teaching: obstacles

It becomes clear at this point how Co-teaching is an effective practice to promote an inclusive culture in school education; to contribute to making the school itself and its environment as welcoming and inclusive for all students; to improve not only their academic success but also the effectiveness of teaching itself and the positive behaviour of teachers.

On the other hand, Co - Teaching is based on the combination of many elements, primarily related to the **teachers' own skills and experience**, to a **move away from the more traditional frontal lecture** in favour of an **appreciation of the needs all students** in a **climate of sharing and dialogue**.

This is how Co-Teaching, while being a teaching method that wants to spread more and more, may encounter several **obstacles**, some related to organisational constraints that may compromise its effectiveness, (timetables or lack of space), others linked to a **difficulty to change**, a **lack of training** and/or **discomfort in role management**.

The OECD, in 2009, pointed out that:

- **Teachers who have a more in-depth training** also appear **more willing to** collaborate with colleagues, recognising professional support as an enhancement to teaching;
- **Those who, on the contrary, have longer experience,** are **more rigid** and reluctant in adopting new teaching methods because they are more unfamiliar with inclusive/collaborative educational practices; a **fear of losing control of the class** or a **lack of trust their colleagues** arises in them.

Co - Teaching in fact requires:

- **Specific knowledge and skills**, closely related to communication;
- a certain **flexibility** that can be traced back to the necessary steps for effective co - teaching, starting with co - planning. Lastly, the roles, indicated above as essential elements, must be clearly defined on the basis of mutual respect as otherwise there is a risk of one of the two teachers 'in play' being marginalised.

It then becomes useful to ask the question: who, then, is the inclusive teacher?

### The profile of the inclusive teacher

Based on the 2002 Index for Inclusion, (**Booth and Ainscow**), a significant document for school inclusion, the four core values held by the inclusive teacher have been encapsulated:

**1. Valuing pupils'** diversity means knowing that difference is an asset and that school integration is never negotiable; being aware that the teacher, as well as the school itself, has a great impact on the pupils' **self-esteem**. An inclusive teacher knows that diversity cannot be seen as a static idea and that it must be supported using didactic approaches that are effective for these purposes.

**2. Supporting all pupils** implies having expectations of them and an idea of learning that is not only academic but also practical, social and emotional. The areas of competence concern the perception of each student's family as an integral and fundamental resource for promoting autonomy and self-determination. An inclusive teacher is aware that he/she is responsible for his/her pupils' learning and it is his/her responsibility to facilitate it, adapting, if necessary, specific study and teaching methods.

**3. Working in teams** is what exactly embodies Co - Teaching and that school integration itself requires. It is therefore an indispensable skill for an inclusive teacher to know how to work in a team and to recognise collaboration as an essential approach.

**4. Ensuring continuous professional development for oneself** is, finally, the fourth value of an inclusive teacher. Change is constant, pupils' demands change, and it is crucial to have the right skills to be able to respond and manage them. Teaching is, itself, a learning activity.

Knowing how to recognise the uniqueness of each student; fostering group work; enhancing the entire learning process (without reducing it to a mere end product); using pathways that are sometimes differentiated, in which *cooperative learning/technologies/laboratory activities* can be included, are, not surprisingly, the foundations of what can be defined as a truly inclusive didactics as well as the principles elaborated by **Ianes**.

### An example of Co - Teaching in a Secondary School

Although Co - Teaching is a teaching method in Italy that is in the process of being consolidated, there are inspiring, emblematic and benchmark examples.



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A significant experience was carried out in a **Secondary School in the province of Verona**, specifically in a State Technical Institute, with a project financed by the European Social Fund.

This was published internally by the institute and included in a collection of good practices on school inclusion in 2022 by Ianes.

**Co - Teaching interventions** were implemented:

- thanks to the collaboration of a curricular teacher and a support teacher,
- within a third class,
- using an **alternating application of** all six Co - Teaching modes,
- inviting students to assess the quality of co-teaching on a weekly basis through anonymous **questionnaires**.

The same interventions led to the following **conclusions**:

- greater involvement on the part of students, with participation and greater motivation recorded for those at risk of **dropping out**;
- spirit of **collaboration and cooperation** between students, with easier classroom management by teachers;
- improvements in the **methodological flexibility** of the teachers involved.

This experience, some highlights of which have been specifically highlighted, offers different food **for thought**.

The reported and positive outcomes are in fact the result of well-structured teamwork, starting from the **co-design** phase, (as evidenced by the particularity of implementing all the Co-teaching modalities, foreseen by the project itself) and ending with the **evaluation phase**.

With respect to the latter, in fact, for successful Co - Teaching it is important to systematically adopt **specific operational tools**, such as shared design formats of teaching units, logbooks, check-lists for monitoring the roles and strategies adopted or, as in this case, **questionnaires** addressed to students to assess their perceived effectiveness.

## Co-teaching in Apro Formazione

### Analysis and description of the applied co-teaching model

#### Model adopted

The didactic intervention described is mainly framed within the co-teaching model called Alternative Teaching, supplemented by elements from the One Teach/One Observe and One Teach/One Assist models. This configuration allowed for an effective differentiation of teaching strategies, calibrated to the specific educational needs of the students involved, while guaranteeing personalised and targeted attention.

#### Implementation modalities

The experience was carried out at the APRO Vocational Training School, located in Alba (CN), within the 1st class of the Aesthetics course, comprising 21 students, some of whom have Special Educational Needs (BES). Co-teaching took place in collaboration with the curricular English teacher.

The initial activity, proposed by the curricular teacher, consisted of the preparation of 36 guiding questions intended to prepare the students for a scheduled oral test, to be carried out as an individual exercise at home. However, difficulties quickly became apparent among some students in their ability to independently retrieve information, understand it and organise their answers effectively.

In response to these critical issues, a process of educational co-design was initiated, which led to the joint reworking of the original activity with the following modifications:

- Computerised transcription of the 36 questions in a question-answer format, with appropriate spaces to facilitate consultation and structuring of the content.



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- Division of the class into two distinct groups: the curricular teacher followed the majority group, while the support teacher supported a small group consisting of the students with the most difficulties.
- Conduct of guided activities in small groups, which included translation of questions into Italian to facilitate linguistic comprehension, accompaniment in reading and synthesising reference texts, and support in drafting written answers, with a focus on language simplification and cognitive mediation.

### Resources deployed

The implementation of this co-teaching model required the following resources:

- Personal: the simultaneous presence of two teachers (curricular and support) with specific skills in didactic co-design and collaborative classroom management.
- Materials and teaching methods: use of digitised materials, adapted handouts and language mediation tools to facilitate access to content.
- Organisational: articulation of working space and time to allow work in subgroups and the delivery of customised interventions.
- Documentary: collection and archiving of photographic and written evidence to support the qualitative and shared evaluation of the intervention.

### Results obtained

The implementation of the model produced relevant outcomes:

- Increased active participation by female students with greater difficulties, improving their involvement.
- Improved understanding of subject content and increased perception of self-efficacy in individual study.
- Consolidation of the educational relationship through the creation of a climate of trust and mutual support.
- Recognition of the value of the intervention as replicable good practice by the teaching team.
- Dissemination of the experience to other teachers, promoting a professional culture oriented towards collaboration and inclusion.

### Target group

The intervention was aimed at students attending vocational training courses, specifically the first class of the Aesthetics course. The group consisted mainly of female adolescents, with a significant presence of female students with disabilities or recognised Special Educational Needs, in particular with difficulties in interpreting texts, synthesising information and organising study independently. Specific attention was paid to the subgroup with greater cognitive and linguistic criticalities, which benefited from a customised and intensified teaching intervention.

### Conclusions

The experience described constitutes a tangible example of how co-teaching, if designed and implemented with an inclusive and collaborative approach, can be an effective pedagogical lever to foster meaningful learning and overcome educational barriers. The synergy between teachers highlighted the importance of methodological flexibility, coherence in teaching strategies and the sharing of a common educational vision, which are indispensable elements for achieving an equitable, inclusive and student-centred school.

## 2) STORYTELLING

Storytelling is the art of conveying content through storytelling. It is not simply 'telling stories', but structuring experiences, emotions and meanings in narrative forms that can engage, inspire and leave a mark. In the educational field, storytelling is a valuable pedagogical and communicative tool.

Applied to the school context, storytelling makes it possible to

- improve individual and collective learning paths;
- promote the identity and culture of the institute;
- strengthening the sense of belonging to the school community;
- facilitate dialogue with the territory and with national and international partners.



"Narrating the school" means giving visibility to what is experienced on a daily basis: projects, relationships and transformations. It means focusing not only on results, but on the journey, the challenges, the choices made and the skills developed. In this project, storytelling also takes on a fundamental function of sharing good practices, disseminating results and building a collective memory that can inspire other schools and educational contexts.

School storytelling can be conveyed through different languages and tools: written texts, videos, podcasts, images and first-hand accounts. Its effectiveness lies in its ability to make educational content alive and accessible, translating the school experience into an authentic, coherent and meaningful narrative.

In short, storytelling is a bridge between the school and the world, a tool to tell who we are, where we are headed and what values guide us in our educational journey.

In 20th century literature, narrative has been studied in various disciplines, such as psychology, anthropology, pedagogy and communication.

Jerome Bruner, psychologist and educationalist, was among the first to speak of 'narrative thinking' (as opposed to logical thinking). In *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (1986), he emphasised how stories are a natural way of understanding the world.<sup>15</sup> Walter Fisher introduced the narrative paradigm, according to which human beings are essentially *homo narrans*: people orient themselves in the world through stories rather than through abstract logic.<sup>16</sup> Howard Gardner, in the context of the theory of multiple intelligences, values narrative intelligence as a fundamental component of human thought.<sup>17</sup> Paul Ricoeur, French philosopher, in *Temps et récit* (1983-1985) explores the relationship between time and narration, showing how narration organises human experience.<sup>18</sup> Joseph Campbell, author of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), identifies an archetypal narrative model ('*the hero's journey*') that has also influenced pedagogy and communication.<sup>19</sup>

Storytelling in education began to take shape in the 1970s and 1980s in Anglo-Saxon countries, especially in the United States and England. Here are some examples: the Storytelling Movement in the Anglo-American context emphasised oral storytelling as a tool for linguistic and emotional learning. Vivian Gussin Paley, an American educator who pioneered the use of pre-school storytelling, used the 'child's story' as a tool for listening and growth.<sup>20</sup> Project Zero (Harvard University), a programme founded by H. Gardner and other scholars of , explored the potential of narratives in students' cognitive and creative processes.

In Italy, school storytelling spread late but mainly thanks to:

- *theatre and creative writing workshops*
- *Narrative methodologies in citizenship education pathways*
- *teaching practices related to inclusion and remembrance (e.g. Remembrance Day projects, local histories, intercultural storytelling).*

Today, with digital, storytelling has taken on new forms: digital storytelling, video storytelling, educational podcasts, becoming a transversal and interactive pedagogical language.

### **School storytelling in Italy: context, practices and perspectives**

In Italy, school storytelling has experienced significant growth over the last two decades, thanks to the spread of active and

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J. Bruner argues that human action develops through three modes of representation: action, image and language. These different types of representation allow us to organise experience and process information from the environment.

<sup>16</sup>This paradigm holds that all human communication occurs through the telling or narration of events. This theory suggests that all human beings are storytellers and that a good story is more persuasive than an argument.

<sup>17</sup>H. Gardner believes in the existence of nine forms of intelligence, which he refuses to consider as a unitary phenomenon

<sup>18</sup>For P. Ricoeur, the experience of narration is fundamental in constructing our identity, as it allows us to interpret discontinuous events. Identity is not defined by fixed characteristics, but by the story the subject tells about himself.

<sup>19</sup>This 'journey' is a path of transformation and personal growth that the hero undertakes, which is divided into several stages: the ordinary world, the call to adventure, the rejection of the call, the meeting with the mentor, the crossing of the threshold, the trials, the encounter with the shadow, the apotheosis, the reward, the return, the new world. It is therefore the journey to achieve self-realisation and represents substantial change.

<sup>20</sup>This practice involves an adult sitting in the middle of the group of children and writing down every word of their story, listening to their stories. Once the stories are written down, the guide allows the child to recite them. This approach allows the child's creativity and language to be assessed.



inclusive teaching methodologies. Although storytelling has always been an integral part of teaching, its formalisation as an educational method is more recent and is influenced by international pedagogical influences, adapted to the Italian cultural context.

Storytelling is used today in many school contexts, at various levels:

*In autobiographical and identity narration:*

- Projects such as 'My diary' or 'I as I am' promote personal narrative as a form of self-knowledge and inclusion.
- It is often used in multicultural contexts to highlight students' backgrounds and histories.<sup>21</sup>

It is interesting to delve into Autobiographical Narration as an inclusive method and practice, since according to the *National Observatory for the Integration of Foreign Pupils and Interculturality* (MIUR, 2015) the "universalistic approach of our school must today measure itself and combine with the specificities and stories of those who live there and with the transformations of the school population that have occurred in recent years". This also includes a cultural and linguistic transformation. For the other to be recognised as a "friend", it is necessary to provide him/her with the tools to "speak about oneself", both through a personal story and through an "objective" story, rich in real references, in which everyone can recognise themselves. *The Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters*, according to the Council of Europe, goes in this direction; it is a tool that can be an inclusive solution in every school and training context. Through self-narrative practice the learner can develop awareness of his or her own identity and self. The four elements of autobiography are structured as follows:

- *Knowledge and skills.* Discovering one's own knowledge and skills when confronted with people, asking questions and seeking information; becoming aware of one's own prejudices and ideas.
- *Behaviour.* Adapting one's behaviour to new situations and different people, being sensitive to different ways of communicating.
- *Attitudes and feelings.* Being able to assume another person's point of view, to imagine their feelings and thoughts.
- *Action.* As a consequence of this, being able to interact with other people to change things and relate to other people.

Those who use *Autobiography* have the opportunity to engage in useful skills to understand their own reactions to the diversity brought about by encounters with new cultures. *The IEA* can be used in schools and all other educational environments, is a tool that promotes self-assessment and personal development and is available in a version for younger students, up to 11 years of age, and in a standard version for all others.<sup>22</sup>

Storytelling in disciplinary didactics and school subjects:

- in History, to reconstruct events from the point of view of the protagonists;
- in science, to explain concepts through stories (e.g. 'the life of a drop of water');
- in Italian and foreign languages, as a tool to develop linguistic and narrative skills.

*Citizenship education and memory:*

- Italian schools have developed numerous narrative projects related to remembrance, legality and civic education.<sup>23</sup>
- Initiatives related to Remembrance Day, Anti-Mafia Day or PON projects often include true stories or narrative reconstructions.<sup>24</sup>

*Digital storytelling:*

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<sup>21</sup>It is a pedagogical methodology that uses writing and self-narration to promote personal growth, self-awareness and improved communication skills. It is based on the idea that telling one's story helps to better understand oneself and the world around us. It is part of a broader context of self-care and memory.

<sup>22</sup>D. Cuccurullo, 'Autobiographical storytelling and intercultural inclusion' in BRICKS, year 8, issue 4.

<sup>23</sup>Some examples: Project "Legality" includes visits and trips to social enterprises, cooperatives and associations that promote legality and active citizenship; Project "Memory and Active Citizenship" of the Liceo "B. Zucchi" in Monza, for the development of student storytelling on historical facts concerning the Italian past, with spaces for discussion and reflection.

<sup>24</sup>PON, acronym for National Operational Programmes: these are initiatives financed by the EU and the Italian state to support and improve the national education system.



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- Growing popularity in secondary schools, thanks to simple tools such as PowerPoint, Canva, Padlet, or more structured apps (WeVideo, Book Creator).
- It is used to narrate school experiences, document Erasmus+ and create narrative videos.<sup>25</sup>

In the Italian context, storytelling is supported by established pedagogical approaches:

- Mario Lodi, storytelling as a tool to give children a voice (thinking of his book *Cipì*, written collectively with his students);<sup>26</sup>
- Bruno Ciari and the Educational *Cooperation Movement* using storytelling to build participatory learning.<sup>27</sup>
- Daniele Novara (Centro PsicoPedagogico) who values the narration of conflict and experience in order to grow.<sup>28</sup>
- *The National Curriculum Directions* (MIUR) promote the use of storytelling in primary and secondary schools as a cross-curricular learning tool.

### A project for APRO Formazione: “*Storie intrecciate - Intertwined stories*”.

The 'Storie Intrecciate' project originated within Apro Formazione, a vocational institute with a strong educational vocation towards young people and adults, which aims not only to prepare its students for work, but also for their personal, social and cultural growth.

The project will be implemented in the future second class of the Waiters and Bar Operator course in the school year 2025/2026. The class consists of 12 male and female students from different cultural backgrounds and with different personal experiences. This context lends itself particularly well to narrative and inclusive work.

The route consists of five main stages:

#### *Introduction and activation*

Reflection on key concepts such as memory, place, identity, through guided discussions and shared mind maps

Output: Shared mind map of keywords.

Tools: Post-it notes, Posters

#### *2. Exploring the Territory - The History of Alba*

Guided tours of significant sites in the city and the telling of legends, anecdotes and stories related to historical figures in the city. These visits can also include natural sites and sites related to more scientific topics, as emotional significance can also be attached to a landscape or to the link between man and nature.

Output: Notes and photographs.

Intercultural focus: comparison between the history of Alba and the historical elements of the foreign students' home cities.

#### *Our stories*

Workshops for the creation of videos or autobiographical oral stories, with the possibility of also using native languages other than Italian with translation.

#### *4. Interweaving narratives*

Mixed groups construct a **collective narrative in which local history and personal stories are interwoven** in different possible formats: video, short film, exhibition. In the planning phase, one could imagine the creation of a short film in which an imaginary character meets the students at various places in the city of Alba and tells them (true) stories. Each stage then becomes a crossroads between the city's past and the present experienced by the students. It is therefore an opportunity for the students to expose the different meanings they attach to the places in the city in order to arrive at a deeper reading of

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<sup>25</sup>One example is the documentary film 'The Erasmus Generation', which tells the story of Roberto, one of the 15 million young people who have participated in the programme over the past 35 years.

<sup>26</sup>"Cipì teaches in a completely new way, using teaching techniques known and cherished only by an exceptional minority. In this new school, democratic to the core, Cipì was born... it is the story of a family of sparrows that the children observed on a gutter... But it is at the same time the story of every child who comes into the world, of the choices that life imposes on him, of the feelings and ideas that he matures with experience' G. Rodari on Mario Lodi and the publication of Cipì.

<sup>27</sup>According to B. Ciari, the daily narrative should be used at the beginning of the lesson to collect and recount one's own experiences, the teacher should then listen and provide new insights.

<sup>28</sup>The PPC pays special attention to conflict management and pedagogical dynamics.



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the stories that brought them to these places.

Output: a final multimedia or exhibition product

### 5. Public Presentation

Presentation of the project and the products produced in Apro, with the aim of enhancing the work carried out and strengthening the interest in participatory and collaborative production, as well as the link between the school and the local area, for feedback from the community.

The entire course is designed as an opportunity to reflect on oneself, one's own history and that of others, to build together a more cohesive and aware group.

### What resources it requires

To realise the project, several professionals are involved: the course teachers, educators, a cultural mediator present daily in the classroom (already active since September 2024), external experts for the storytelling workshops.

Educational and multimedia materials and tools are also needed, such as:

- creative writing media (post-its, posters, narrative notebooks),
- digital devices (smartphones, recorders, cameras),
- space for workshops and for a possible final exhibition.

In addition, educational outings to the local area and moments of collective discussion in the classroom are planned.

### Expected Results

The project, which will start in the next school year, aims to

- strengthening the sense of personal and group identity,
- promote not only linguistic and cultural, but also emotional and relational inclusion,
- improve narrative skills, oral and written, in Italian and in mother tongues,
- stimulate a sense of belonging to the area and knowledge of local history,
- offer tools to better manage peer relationships and conflicts.

The deeper objective is to create a class group that recognises itself as such, in which each student can feel welcomed, valued, an active part of a shared journey.

The final product - which may be a video, an exhibition or a multimedia story - will be the visible symbol of a journey made together, a 'common memory' built step by step.

### Target group

The group chosen for the experiment is extremely heterogeneous. The class consists of 12 male and female students aged between 15 and 17, from different countries around the world (Egypt, Morocco, Peru, Macedonia, Philippines, Italy).

It is a complex group with many fragilities:

- students with little knowledge of Italian, some of whom are unaccompanied minors;
- children with relational or family difficulties and with personal histories marked by suffering and isolation;
- students with specific learning disorders, hyperactivity or a constant need for attention;
- young people with strong difficulties in relationships with peers, or with closed and uncooperative attitudes.

In this context, the project represents a concrete possibility to turn diversity into a resource, working on mutual recognition and the value of personal stories as a bridge between differences.

### Conclusions

The idea of realising a project through the method of storytelling opens up the possibility for us to get to know others, to value their history, their presence and to enrich our culture with new, innovative and necessary elements for the future.

Storytelling is also a 'reading' of the past, a way to recall concepts, characters, actions and teachings from the past, to appropriate them and allow us to re-read them in a modern key. Storytelling is thus a method, supported by various good practices, that creates proximity, breaks down boundaries. What about the occasions when it is used in the cultural and museum context: here, history, art and archaeology (interesting but distant disciplines) become 'stories' through the skilful



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use of storytelling. In this case, academic knowledge can become accessible and even inclusive and this allows people to develop interests, curiosity, questions and at the same time increases the sense of belonging and community. Storytelling is therefore a tool that should increasingly convey our messages, because it invites us to reflect, build and share thoughts; it requires us to listen, to build a network of relationships and to respect others, thus enabling us to learn something about ourselves as well.



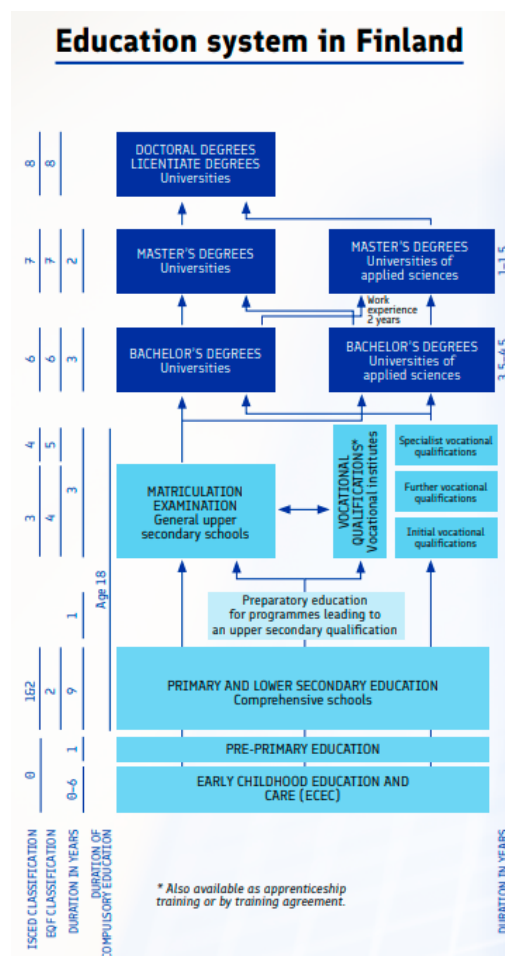
# Finnish National Context and Inclusive Teaching Methodologies

Keski-Pohjanmaan koulutusyhtymä – Kokkola (Finland)

## Finnish Education And Training System

All 6–18-year-olds participate in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary and upper secondary education. The Finnish education system has no dead-ends. Students can always continue their studies on any level of education as long as they meet the admission requirements of the level in question.<sup>29</sup>

Finland's education system is internationally recognized for its equity, quality, and inclusivity. Key features include: Nine-year comprehensive basic education (grades 1–9) is compulsory and publicly funded. In 2021, compulsory education was extended to the age of 18, requiring students to complete either general upper secondary education or vocational education and training (VET). This reform aims to improve equity and ensure that all young people obtain a secondary-level qualification. Education is free of charge, including textbooks, meals, transportation (if needed), and in most cases, even devices (e.g., laptops).



[https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/Finnish\\_education\\_in\\_a\\_nutshell\\_1.pdf](https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/Finnish_education_in_a_nutshell_1.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> [https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/Finnish\\_education\\_in\\_a\\_nutshell\\_1.pdf](https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/Finnish_education_in_a_nutshell_1.pdf)



## ALL IN EDUCATION

Structure and Objectives of the Finnish Comprehensive School is there are grade levels: 1st–9th grades (ages 7–16). In compulsory education all children in Finland must attend comprehensive school. The primary goal is to support the student's development into a responsible member of society, providing the necessary knowledge and skills for life. Content is Finnish, Mathematics, Environmental studies, History, Social studies, Religion/Ethics, Languages, Physical education, Art, Handicrafts, and Home Economics.

Municipalities are responsible for organizing the comprehensive education in their regions. The government supports municipalities with central government transfer. Students are generally allowed to attend the local school, but they can choose a different one with certain limitations.

Compulsory Subjects: Finnish, Mathematics, Environmental studies, History, Social studies, Religion/Ethics, Foreign languages, Physical education, Art, Handicrafts, and Home Economics.

Students receive support as soon as they need it, including small group teaching, individual guidance, and special education. 37

Foreign Languages: The first foreign language is usually taught starting from 3rd grade, and the second official language (Finnish or Swedish) starts from 7th grade.

Official languages are Finnish and Swedish. In certain regions, education may also be provided in the Sámi languages. Students may choose up to six different languages during their schooling.

All teachers in Finland must have at least a Master's degree, including extensive pedagogical training. Teaching Methods are emphasis on student-centered, creative, and collaborative learning approaches. Students are provided with free meals, health care, school transportation, and additional tutoring when needed.<sup>30</sup>

### Vocational Education and Training System in Finland

Finnish VET is competence-based and customer-oriented Vocational education and training covers 8 fields of education, made of more than 150 vocational upper secondary and further and specialist vocational qualifications.

The nominal duration of vocational qualifications is 3 years but can vary depending on the individual personal competence development plan. Each qualification includes workplace learning. All qualifications are competence based. Representatives of working life and businesses play an important role in planning, implementing and assessing these qualifications.

A specific benefit of the competence-based qualification system is that completing a qualification does not depend on where competences have been acquired or whether they have been acquired through studies, work experience, or other activities. Studies are based on a personal competence development plan made for each student.

The plan recognises the students' existing skills, outlines what kind of competences they still need for the qualification and explains how to acquire them – by studying in a vocational school or by learning in a workplace, for example.

The plan includes both compulsory and optional study modules. Students' learning 13 and acquired competences are assessed throughout the period of study. The assessment is based on the criteria defined in the national qualification requirements. One of the main assessment methods is the vocational competence demonstration. The demonstrations are work assignments relevant to the vocational skill requirements and are given in authentic settings. They are planned, implemented and assessed together with working life representatives. Vocational education and training in cooperation with the working life Training is provided according to the same set of principles to young people completing their first qualification as well as to adults who supplement or update their skills or change fields.

There are three levels of competence-based qualifications: vocational qualifications, further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications. The national qualification requirements are based on a learning-outcome approach. Vocational qualifications are developed with representatives of working life. This will ensure that qualifications support a smooth and efficient transition to the labor market, as well as professional development and career change. In addition to the needs of working life, development of vocational education and training as well as vocational qualifications take into account the link of qualifications to lifelong learning skills. Individual needs and opportunities to complete qualifications

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<sup>30</sup> <https://okm.fi/en/education-system>



flexibly to suit the student's own circumstances are also taken into account.<sup>31</sup>

b. Legal and Policy Framework Supporting Inclusion:

Inclusion is embedded in the Basic Education Act (1998), which states that education must be organized to support every student's development and learning regardless of their background or abilities.<sup>32</sup>

The Finnish National Core Curriculum (revised in 2014 and implemented in 2016) emphasizes inclusive values, individual learning paths, and flexible teaching arrangements.<sup>33</sup>

## Comprehensive School

### Educational support and welfare services

Every child, pupil and student has the right to educational support and welfare services Equity also means that the potential of each child should be maximised. Teachers and other school staff are required to treat children and young people as individuals and help them proceed according to their own capabilities. Learners should be able to experience success and joy of learning.

All children, pupils and students have the right to student welfare services. They support students' physical health and mental well-being. In addition to free school meals as well as free school transportation for those living far from school also healthcare and welfare services are free for all pupils and students in pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education. School nurses, dentists, school psychologists and social workers are available through schools. In addition, educational guidance is essential.

The purpose of guidance and counselling is to support, help and guide pupils and students so that they can all perform as well as possible in their studies and be able to make decisions Equity in education concerning their education and careers that are suitable and appropriate for them. Guidance and counselling connect the school to society and the working life. Also HE institutions offer study and career guidance to students. The personnel support the student in drawing up a personal study plan and progress in studies. In addition, students are offered health and welfare services, subsidised meals, accommodation and public transport.

Support and special education

Upper secondary level students are entitled to support Students in general upper secondary schools and vocational institutions are also entitled to support and special education. The need for support is defined according to individual needs and several forms of support measures are available for the student.

Levels and Forms of Support

To identify the need for support at an early stage, the pupil's situation must be monitored, and support should begin as soon as a need arises. Cooperation with the pupil and their guardian is essential for identifying needs, planning support, and ensuring its successful implementation. The support provided to the pupil should be flexible, planned with long-term goals in mind, and adaptable according to the changing needs. Forms of support can be used individually or in combination to complement each other. Support is provided for as long and at the level that it is needed.

There are three levels of support for learning and school attendance: general support, intensified support, and special support. A pupil can receive only one level of support at a time. Forms of support include, for example, remedial teaching, part-time special education, assistant services, and special aids. All forms of support can be used at each level, except for special education based on a special support decision. In addition, alongside the support for learning and school attendance as defined in the Basic Education Act, a pupil may receive individual student welfare services as defined in the Student

<sup>31</sup> [https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/Finnish\\_education\\_in\\_a\\_nutshell\\_1.pdf](https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/Finnish_education_in_a_nutshell_1.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> <https://splash->

[db.eu/?tx\\_perfar\\_policydocument\[action\]=show&tx\\_perfar\\_policydocument\[controller\]=Policydocument&tx\\_perfar\\_policydocument\[policydocument\]=347&cHash=5db143421a4fbb849380cf4a42ef08a0](https://splash-db.eu/?tx_perfar_policydocument[action]=show&tx_perfar_policydocument[controller]=Policydocument&tx_perfar_policydocument[policydocument]=347&cHash=5db143421a4fbb849380cf4a42ef08a0)

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.oph.fi/en/education-and-qualifications/national-core-curriculum-primary-and-lower-secondary-basic-education>



## General Support

General support is the first means of responding to a pupil's need for support. This usually involves individual pedagogical solutions and guidance or support measures that are implemented as early as possible as part of everyday school life. General support is provided immediately when a need arises and does not require special assessments or decisions. If the need for support increases, the pupil should receive intensified support.

### Intensified Support

Intensified support involves more continuous, stronger, and more individualized assistance for the pupil's learning and school attendance. The pupil may require several forms of support. The initiation, organization, and possible return to general support are handled based on a pedagogical assessment in multidisciplinary cooperation with student welfare professionals. Intensified support is provided according to a learning plan prepared for the pupil. Cooperation and systematic planning are essential for the implementation of intensified support.

### Special Support

If intensified support is not sufficient to help the pupil manage schoolwork, an administrative decision on special support is made based on a pedagogical report. An individual education plan (IEP) is prepared for the pupil, which must specify the teaching and other support provided in accordance with the special support decision. Special support consists of special education and other support required by the pupil under the Basic Education Act. Special education and the other support form a systematic whole. Support from guardians, multidisciplinary cooperation, and individualized guidance are important.

<https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/oppimisen-ja-koulunkaynnin-tuki>

## Support and special education in vocational school

In Finland, student welfare services in vocational education and training (VET) are an essential part of ensuring students' well-being, learning capacity, and equal opportunities to succeed. These services are governed by the Student Welfare Act and are integrated into the everyday life of educational institutions.

### Key Components of Student Welfare Services in VET

1. Psychological and Counseling Services
  - a. Support for mental health, stress management, and personal development.
  - b. Guidance for study-related and personal challenges.
2. School Health Services
  - a. Regular health check-ups and vaccinations.
  - b. Support for physical well-being and referrals to specialized care if needed.
3. Social Work Services
  - a. Help with social challenges, family issues, or financial difficulties.
  - b. Collaboration with external social services when necessary.
4. Preventive and Community-Based Support
  - a. Promoting a safe and inclusive learning environment.
  - b. Anti-bullying programs and well-being initiatives.
5. Individual Support Plans
  - a. Tailored support for students with special educational needs or life challenges.
  - b. Multidisciplinary collaboration between teachers, counselors, and healthcare professionals.
6. Free Services
  - a. All student welfare services are provided free of charge and are confidential.

The goals of Student Welfare in VET is to promote students' learning, health, and well-being.

Ensure equal access to education and reduce dropouts. Support students in completing their qualifications and transitioning to work or further studies. These services are part of a broader national strategy to ensure that every student has the support



they need to succeed, especially as compulsory education in Finland now extends to age 18

Support and tailored instruction provided to students with special educational needs within vocational schools or training programs. It includes individualized teaching methods, learning aids, and support services to help students succeed in acquiring vocational qualifications. <https://www.oph.fi/en/education-system/vocational-education-and-training>

## SCHOOL INCLUSION IN FINLAND

### 1960s–1980s: Early Steps Toward Inclusion

- The movement toward inclusive education began in the **1960s**, when Finland started integrating students with special needs into mainstream schools.
- During this time, the number of students identified as needing special education rose significantly, prompting reforms.
- The focus was on **part-time special education**, allowing students to remain in regular classrooms while receiving additional support

<https://finlandeducationhub.com/the-evolution-of-inclusive-education-in-the-finnish-education-system/>

### 1990s: Policy and Structural Reforms

- The **Basic Education Act of 1998** laid the foundation for a more inclusive system by emphasizing equal opportunities and support for all learners.
- The concept of "**three-tiered support**" began to take shape, which would later become a cornerstone of Finnish inclusive education.
- [https://ebrary.net/185845/education/pursuit\\_inclusive\\_school\\_case\\_finland](https://ebrary.net/185845/education/pursuit_inclusive_school_case_finland)

### 2000s: Institutionalizing Inclusion

- The **three-tiered support model** (general, intensified, and special support) was formally introduced in the **2010 amendment** to the Basic Education Act.
- This model ensures that support is provided early and adjusted according to the student's needs, promoting inclusion within mainstream education
- <https://finlandeducationhub.com/the-evolution-of-inclusive-education-in-the-finnish-education-system/>

### c. Statistics and Inclusion:

Approximately 20–25% of students receive some form of support in **Comprehensive School**

Today, **84% of special education placements** are part-time, meaning students receive support while staying in regular classrooms.

Only **15%** of placements are in special schools or classes, and **full inclusion** (no separate support) accounts for about **1%**

Around 8% of students receive special support (2023 data).

Students with special needs are increasingly placed in mainstream classrooms, with individualized support.

A **significant proportion** of students with special educational needs (SEN) in Finland pursue **vocational education and training (VET)**.

Special support in VET has been **well-established for decades**, and many SEN students begin their studies in vocational or preparatory education settings

Following a **legislative reform in 2019**, vocational institutions (and other general upper secondary schools) are **obliged to provide special support** to students who need it.

According to Statistics Finland, the most recent data includes:

In 2023, there were 347,700 students in vocational education in Finland

The statistics on special vocational education include data on students receiving special support, based on the KOSKI database and institutional reports.

### **34,900 Students Received Special Support in Vocational Education Leading to a Qualification in 2020**

In 2020, a total of **34,900 students** in vocational education leading to a qualification received special support, representing **11.2%** of all vocational education students. The majority, **87%**, studied in vocational institutions. **11.3%** of those receiving special support studied in **special vocational institutions**.

In total, **34,500 students** in **vocational upper secondary education** received special support in 2020. This accounted for **15%** of all students in vocational upper secondary education. In **further vocational qualification education**, **0.7%** of students received special support, and in **specialist vocational qualification education**, the figure was **0.1%**.

Among those receiving special support, **53% were men** and **47% were women** in 2020. Of all vocational education students, **49% were men** and **51% were women**. Among male students, **12%** received special support, compared to **10%** of female students.

Statistics Finland revised the way it reports special support in vocational education leading to a qualification starting from the **2019 statistical year**. The data on special support now covers the entire calendar year and includes **vocational upper secondary education, further vocational qualification education, and specialist vocational qualification education**.

**Source:** Education Statistics, Statistics Finland

Support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in Finnish schools is **highly individualized** and based on the **type and severity of the need**. Here's how support is tailored for each group:

#### **1. Pupils with Learning Difficulties**

- Support methods:
  - Part-time special education in small groups or one-on-one
  - Use of learning aids (e.g. audio books, visual organizers)
  - Adjusted teaching pace and methods
- Tools: Individual learning plans, remedial teaching

#### **2. Pupils with Physical or Sensory Disabilities**

- Support methods:
  - Physical accessibility (e.g. ramps, elevators)
  - Assistive technologies (e.g. screen readers, hearing aids)
  - Sign language interpretation or Braille materials
- Environment: May attend mainstream or special schools depending on need

#### **3. Pupils with Neurodevelopmental Disorders (e.g. ADHD, Autism)**

- Support methods:
  - Structured routines and clear instructions
  - Breaks and sensory-friendly environments
  - Social skills training and behavioral support
- Plans: Individual Education Plans (IEPs) with regular reviews



#### 4. Pupils with Emotional or Behavioral Challenges

- Support methods:
  - School psychologist or counselor involvement
  - Behavior support plans and positive reinforcement
  - Close collaboration with guardians and welfare services

#### 5. Pupils with Mental Health Needs

- Support methods:
  - Flexible schedules or reduced workload
  - Access to school welfare services (psychologist, nurse, social worker)
  - Safe spaces and emotional support strategies

#### 6. Pupils from Multicultural or Multilingual Backgrounds

- Support methods:
  - Preparatory education in Finnish/Swedish
  - Mother tongue instruction and bilingual support
  - Cultural sensitivity in teaching materials

#### 7. Gifted Pupils

- Support methods:
  - Enrichment activities and advanced coursework
  - Project-based learning and independent study
  - Acceleration in specific subjects

[https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-19-8241-5\\_26](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-19-8241-5_26)

#### Drop out rate

##### Dropout Rates in Vocational Education Decreased Significantly, Especially Among Men

In the academic year 2022/2023, the dropout rate in vocational education decreased by 1.2 percentage points compared to the previous year. For both genders, the dropout rate in vocational education was 9.8%. Among men, the dropout rate decreased by 1.4 percentage points, and among women by 1.0 percentage points.

When examined by gender, men and women drop out at different rates across various education sectors. Over the past five years, women have had the highest dropout rates annually in vocational education, while men have dropped out most frequently either from vocational education or from universities of applied sciences.



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Ammatillinen koulutus	
KOKO MAA	9,1
MK01 Uusimaa	11,3
MK02 Varsinais-Suomi	9,1
MK04 Satakunta	5,9
MK05 Kanta-Häme	8,9
MK06 Pirkanmaa	8,4
MK07 Päijät-Häme	10,3
MK08 Kymenlaakso	10,3
MK09 Etelä-Karjala	7,1
MK10 Etelä-Savo	8,4
MK11 Pohjois-Savo	8,0
MK12 Pohjois-Karjala	7,0
MK13 Keski-Suomi	8,2
MK14 Etelä-Pohjanmaa	7,8
MK15 Pohjanmaa	7,2
MK16 Keski-Pohjanmaa	6,3
MK17 Pohjois-Pohjanmaa	7,8
MK18 Kainuu	6,4
MK19 Lappi	7,3
MK21 Ahvenanmaa	10,2

## National Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Teaching Methods in Finland

### Resources

According to Suutarinen, E. & Tiihonen. (2023). The lack of resources is considered one of the most significant challenges in implementing inclusion. Compared to traditional schools, inclusive schools require significantly more resources (Lakkala, 2009, p. 212). According to Posti (2019), teachers found it impossible to implement inclusion without the resources required by inclusive classrooms. Teachers felt that there were not enough resources allocated to support inclusion—or none at all. While the ideology of inclusion is seen as a good approach to general education, the available resources do not sufficiently support its implementation (p. 69).

Teachers experience feelings of inadequacy and frustration because they cannot attend to every student during lessons (Kohonen, 2022, p. 41; Posti, 2019, p. 70). Time spent supporting one student often comes at the expense of others. Teachers emphasized that there is generally not enough time to give equal attention to every student (pp. 70–71). This is influenced by large class sizes, which reduce the individualization of teaching and make it more generic (Huhtanen, 2011, p. 49). Large class sizes, caused by a lack of resources, hinder equal attention to students. According to Posti (2019), the number



of students per teacher in inclusive classrooms is too high. Teachers believe that when forming classes and planning group sizes, the number of students needing support should be considered. In large groups, students requiring special support often do not receive adequate help, and early intervention may be insufficient (Posti, 2019, pp. 70–71; Huhtanen, 2011, p. 49). This can negatively affect the learning of students with special needs (Posti, 2019, p. 71).

### Teacher Preparedness

Classroom teachers' limited preparedness is a challenge for inclusive education. One requirement for successful inclusion is that teachers have sufficient knowledge and resources. Teacher education should prepare future teachers with both theoretical and practical tools for inclusive teaching. Sarlin and Koivula (2009) emphasize that improving teacher training and continuing education enhances teachers' ability to implement inclusive practices (p. 26).

Ideally, support should continue into working life. Comprehensive support is crucial for teacher well-being and attitudes toward inclusion. Inadequate teacher training is seen as a barrier to inclusion (Lakkala, 2008, p. 31). According to Vuorilehto and Åhman (2018), teachers felt that their special education training during teacher education was insufficient for real-world demands (pp. 40–43). Posti (2019) found that both newly graduated and experienced teachers considered their training inadequate. Continuing education has only been offered to some teachers, and further training has often been left to the teachers' own responsibility.

Teachers reported that they lacked concrete strategies for inclusive teaching and that the topic was mostly discussed at a theoretical level. While basic studies in special education were helpful for theory, the connection between theory and practice was weak (Posti, 2019, p. 73; Vuorilehto & Åhman, 2018, p. 41).

Effective inclusion requires that teacher education content is up-to-date, relevant, and practical (Lakkala, 2008, p. 31; Kaikkonen, 2010, p. 171; Rasku-Puttonen, 2005, p. 101). Teacher education should also promote multidisciplinary collaboration, allowing students to practice working in diverse teams (Pyhältö et al., 2007, pp. 227–228).

### Incomplete Development of Inclusive School Culture

According to Mustonen (2007), the incomplete development of inclusive school culture presents its own challenges. Finnish schools are undergoing change, with increasing emphasis on individuality and diversity. Schools are adapting to societal demands, including flexible learning environments and the use of technology.

Posti (2019) found that teachers felt the slow development of inclusive culture hindered their professional growth. They received little practical support from schools or municipalities. Sarlin and Koivula (2009) stress that inclusive education requires updated school practices and teaching methods. Support systems and structures must evolve to better serve inclusion, and teachers need access to new pedagogical tools and knowledge (p. 26). To make a school for all possible, attention must be paid to the allocation of resources.

According to Posti (2019), the incompleteness of school and operational cultures is also reflected in the lack of shared criteria for inclusive assessment. Teachers found implementing inclusive assessment challenging, as the basic structure and unified guidelines for assessment require clearer frameworks. Such frameworks would allow teachers more time to carry out fair and consistent assessments, rather than having to invent their own assessment methods (p. 80).

Huhtanen (2011) notes that the goal of inclusive assessment is to promote the learning of all students in a diverse manner, both from political and practical perspectives. Achieving this goal requires a political framework on which assessment methods and guidelines are based, while also supporting teachers in their work and in the implementation of assessment (pp. 75–77).

Teachers in Finnish schools—like in many inclusive education systems—face a variety of challenges when supporting pupils with special educational needs (SEN). These challenges can be grouped into several key areas:

#### Challenges in Implementing Inclusion

##### 1. Diverse Needs in One Classroom



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- Teachers often manage classrooms with a wide range of abilities and needs.
  - Balancing the curriculum for both SEN pupils and others can be demanding.
  - Differentiating instruction effectively requires time, training, and resources.
2. Time Constraints
    - Planning individualized support (e.g., IEPs) and adapting materials takes significant time.
    - Teachers may struggle to provide adequate one-on-one support during regular lessons.
  3. Limited Support Staff
    - Not all schools have enough special education teachers, assistants, or therapists.
    - Teachers may feel isolated in managing complex needs without sufficient collaboration.
  4. Training and Professional Development
    - General education teachers may lack specialized training in SEN strategies.
    - Continuous professional development is essential but not always accessible or prioritized.
  5. Administrative and Documentation Load
    - Teachers must document support plans, progress, and interventions thoroughly.
    - This administrative burden can detract from time spent on actual teaching and support.
  6. Behavioral and Emotional Challenges
    - Managing behavioral issues or emotional crises in inclusive settings can be stressful.
    - Teachers need skills in classroom management, trauma-informed practices, and emotional regulation techniques.
  7. School Culture and Attitudes
    - Inclusion requires a whole-school commitment.
    - If the school culture is not supportive or inclusive, teachers may face resistance or lack of understanding from colleagues or leadership.

Despite strong policies, several practical and systemic challenges hinder the full implementation of inclusive teaching methods:

### a. Variation in Local Implementation:

- Finland has a decentralized education system, and municipalities have significant autonomy. This can lead to inconsistencies in how inclusion is realized across different regions and schools.
- Resource allocation varies, affecting availability of special education teachers, assistants, and support services.

### b. Teacher Training and Support:

- Although Finnish teachers are highly educated, many general education teachers report feeling underprepared to work inclusively, especially with students who have complex needs or neuropsychiatric disorders.
- There is a growing need for in-service training on inclusive pedagogy, co-teaching, and differentiated instruction.

### c. Increasing Student Diversity and Needs:

- More students are diagnosed with learning difficulties, ADHD, autism spectrum disorders, and mental health issues.
- The rise in mental health concerns, particularly post-COVID, has increased pressure on schools to provide more holistic, individualized support.

### d. Resource Constraints:

- The demand for special education teachers and school psychologists exceeds availability in many areas.



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- Time and staffing shortages make co-teaching and small group support harder to implement consistently.
- e. Attitudinal and Structural Barriers:
- Some schools or staff may still hold traditional views about separating students with support needs.
  - Physical infrastructure in older schools may not always support inclusive practices (e.g., accessibility, flexible learning spaces).

In Finland, the extended compulsory education also supports inclusivity, as every student must be assigned a place of study after basic education to ensure that everyone completes at least upper secondary education.

One of the broad international goals of inclusion is to guarantee education that fosters the development of every learner, regardless of their support needs or other personal characteristics (Sirkko, Takala & Muukkonen, 2020). Achieving this goal requires adequate teaching and support services, as well as possible structural changes in the school system and school culture. These changes are implemented by each school within the framework of educational policy decisions and the resources allocated to schools and individual teachers (Moberg & Savolainen, 2015).

## Inclusive teaching Methodologies – Co-teaching and The "Stop" Model

### 1) CO-TEACHING

#### Operating Model:

The co-teaching model is based on addressing the diverse needs of students. In principle, all students belong to the same group. A special education teacher or professional may be present alongside the teacher to support students who need more assistance. Some students can also complete tasks independently on a learning platform. Support for students can also be provided in a separate space. For example: Small business administration group, *Hope* learning environment, *Voimavara* learning environment.

#### Identifying support needs

Through transition phase information

- In HOKS discussions
- Through observation
- Through math baseline test and digital dyslexia screening
- Through initial group info
- Information from teachers to special education teacher and vice versa
- From the student themselves
- From the guardian

#### Planning Support in General Education Subjects

Meeting between special education teacher and subject teacher

- Initial info for starting groups
- Planning for individual students and groups (observations, baseline tests, etc.)
- Highlighting student's strengths
- Initial plan for co-teaching
  - o Timing: agreed specific teaching hours
  - o Methods: directing support, observation, structure, possible aids and materials
  - o Topics: co-teaching and guidance/differentiation
  - o Division of labor: subject teaching (subject teacher), classroom management (special education teacher + subject teacher), special support (special education teacher), learning strategies (special education teacher + subject teacher)

## **Implementation**

Joint lessons > evaluation after lessons (observations, actions, successes, development)

- Follow-up actions
  - o More joint lessons (subject teacher + special education teacher)
  - o Small group teaching (subject teacher/special education teacher)
  - o Support teaching (subject teacher/special education teacher + instructor)
  - o Individual teaching (special education teacher, subject teacher)
- Learning environments:
  - o Classroom
  - o Special education teacher's small group room
  - o Hope learning environment
  - o Teacher's workspace
  - o Voimavara learning environment
  - o Student's home > distance learning

## **Collaboration**

- Listening and effective collaboration with the student (and guardian) is crucial
- Collaboration between special education teachers, responsible teachers, guidance counselors, subject teachers, and instructors
- Open, trust-based, and respectful collaboration among teaching and guidance staff
- Planning
- Communication and documentation, making support measures visible in Wilma and informing the responsible instructor

## **Evaluation**

Continuous evaluation with the student regarding the adequacy of support, effectiveness of methods, and correct targeting of support

- Continuous evaluation among teachers and guidance staff

## **Resources:**

The resources include those of the special education teacher, professionals, or staff from a separate learning environment. These roles are part of the institution's support services as structural elements, and some professionals (e.g., specialists) are flexibly available to a single group or to students from different groups according to student needs and within the limits of available resources.

## **Outcomes:**

Positive. Students receive timely support, graduate on time, and the model is agile.



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### Target Group:

Students who need support, but also others benefit through improved classroom atmosphere.



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## 2) THE "STOP" MODEL (*PYSÄKKITOIMINTAMALLI*)

### Operating Model

The special education teacher has a designated time and place where students can come without an appointment. A low-threshold meeting point. Neuropsychiatric expertise is utilized. The student discusses their concerns, which may or may not relate to studying. The goal is to remove barriers to learning. Solutions are sought together with the student, support is provided, and when needed, the student is directed to networked services. The event is not recorded in any system. Follow-up meetings can be arranged if necessary. Teachers can also be consulted.

**Walk-in Stop** is a low-threshold space where anyone can come to safely share moments from their life.

It often serves as a place for reflecting on one's own feelings – a young person might “test” how others react to their thoughts.

The approach is solution-focused.

**Every Tuesday from 9:00 to 11:00 (or 11:30)**

### Visitors:

- Students: 10–20 (average 14)
- Staff: 1–3

Visitors come from various fields, with an equal number of girls and boys. Some come alone, others with a friend. The average visit lasts 15–20 minutes.

At the **Walk-in Stop**, people are met in the midst of many different issues.

- About **30%** of the encounters relate to **executive functioning, concentration, and basic daily matters** (such as managing everyday life, sleep rhythm, eating, and school attendance).
- About **30%** relate to **anxiety, life management, mood**, and similar topics.
- The **remaining encounters** cover a variety of issues, including **relationships, life reflections, and practical matters** (like booking train tickets, planning for the future, writing job applications, etc.).

**No appointment is needed** for the Walk-in service – visitors are generally expected to just show up.

We often begin the encounter with **light conversation** about general topics. Once trust is established, it becomes easier to dive into deeper matters.

Young people also bring their friends along, often proudly introducing them or helping them share their concerns.

A **typical experience** is uncertainty about oneself – and everything:

**“I feel anxious.”**

It’s often difficult for a young person to name what exactly is wrong in their life – or sometimes, the thing that *is* wrong feels like it dominates everything.

The idea of the **Walk-in Stop** is that someone listens and helps – even just by being present.

Some young people visit the stop quite regularly, and in those cases, we “travel together”:

- We set **goals** for life
- We create **structure** for daily routines
- We **put feelings and actions into words** in a way that feels right and constructive
- We learn **techniques** (e.g., **TRT methods** for emotional regulation, **executive functioning and learning strategies** for action)
- We check in and talk about how things are going

→ What’s important is that the young person gains **clarity about their emotions**, so that those emotions – or the things behind them – can be addressed.

In adolescence, emotional regulation and executive functioning are often still developing. This means emotions can feel overwhelming, impulsivity can be strong, and self-regulation may be lacking. (In other words: the **limbic system** and the **prefrontal cortex** need to learn to work together.)

It is important to ask:

- How much does the young person sleep?
- Do they have any hobbies?
- How do they spend their free time?
- When (and what and where) do they eat?
- Do they leave the house?
- Do they have friends (and where)?

If there are concerns in these areas, they often manifest as **feelings of anxiety** in the young person. (For example: if they sleep too little, everyday life feels foggy and unmotivated, and emotions become either over- or under-stimulated, etc.)

→ When **meaning and rhythm disappear** from a young person’s daily life, they may begin to “drift through time,” and nothing feels like anything – just “anxious.”

This often also affects **concentration** (either overstimulating or understimulating the mind).

This is often a good moment to start a **concrete conversation** with the young person about their daily life:

- Explore **steps and goals** together
- Talk about **emotions using different names**
- The goal is always to give the young person **something tangible to hold on to** – and to meet again.

**Important things:**

**Scheduling**

- Take distractions into account
- In advance
- To support starting
- Consider for a moment
- Concentration
- Make it visible
- Plan and use a calendar



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- Strive for regularity - maintain a daily and weekly rhythm: wake up at the same time, cleaning day, regular hobbies, routines, etc.
- Use to-do lists. Keep the list in a visible place, in a calendar, or even in your phone's notes.
- 
- Cross off (remove) when the task is done!
- Use phone alarms as reminders.
- Plan travel times and meetings so that you also account for surprises.

### Plan!

- Schedule the start of tasks: (when I do tasks, pay bills, engage in hobbies...)
- Use a calendar.
- Start with the smallest things possible.

### Concentration

- Do tasks that require concentration when you are at your most alert.
- Break down tasks that require longer periods of concentration into smaller parts, and take breaks.
- Bring your attention back to where you were.
- Take notes.
- If you tend to over-focus, decide in advance how much time you will spend on the task, and set an alarm to signal a break.
- 

### Remove distractions

- Silence your phone and keep it out of sight, turn off email notifications, turn off the TV, etc.
- Focus on one thing at a time.
- Choose your location and company wisely - avoid situations where irrelevant things can capture your attention.

### Consider for a moment

- Think before you act.
- Allocate time for making important decisions: gather information and consider alternatives, pros, and cons.
- Identify situations where you often act impulsively (e.g., impulse purchases, cravings).
- Make principle decisions, such as "I won't buy anything over 5 euros without a 24-hour consideration period" or give up your credit card if necessary, or avoid company you know is bad for you.
- 

### Make it visible

- Use colors and underlining.
- Use sticky notes.
- Take notes (mind maps, thought maps, keywords, drawings).
- Know yourself.
- Chew gum if it helps you concentrate.
- Wiggle your feet, spin a hair tie, use a stress toy...
- Take breaks, drink water regularly, and maintain your blood sugar levels. Also, move around outside.

### Resources:

Special education teacher's resource, e.g., 2 hours per week.

### Outcomes:

The model has successfully reached students, and experiences have been very positive.

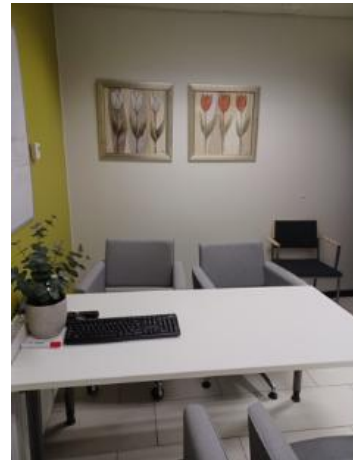


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"When we leave traces,  
we can choose  
what kind they are."

### Target Group:

Students at the institution who face barriers to learning.



## BONUS TRACK!

### Developing Learning Support in the Common Units of Vocational Education Focus on Student Well-being and Learning



#### VET Common Units in Finland:

- . Communication and interaction competence (11cr)
- . Mathematics and science competence (6cr)
- . Citizenship and working life competence (9cr)

#### 1. Identifying the Need for Support

- Transition phase information
- HOKS discussions (a personal competence development plan)
- Observation
- Mathematics baseline test and digital literacy screening
- Initial group information session
- Information exchange between teachers and special education teachers
- From the student themselves
- From guardians

#### 2. Planning Support for Common Units Subjects

- Meeting between the special education teacher and subject teacher
- Initial information sessions for starting groups
- Planning on a student and group basis
  - Highlight the student's strengths!
- Initial plan for co-teaching:
  - **Timing:** agree on specific teaching hours
  - **Methods:** targeting support, observation, structure, possible aids and materials
  - **Topics:** co-teaching/simultaneous teaching and guidance/differentiation
  - **Division of labor:** subject teaching, maintaining order, special support, learning strategies

#### 3. Implementation



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- Joint lessons > evaluation after lessons
  - Follow-up actions:
    - More joint lessons
    - Small group teaching
    - Support teaching
    - Individual teaching
  - Learning environments:
    - Classrooms
    - Special education teacher's small group room
    - HOPE learning environment
    - Teacher's workspace
    - Resource learning environment
    - Student's home > distance learning
- 

### 4. Collaboration

- Listening and effective collaboration with the student (and guardian)
  - Special education teachers, responsible teacher, guidance counselor, subject teacher, assistant
  - Open, trust- and respect-based collaboration among teaching and guidance staff
  - Planning
  - Communication and documentation
- 

### 5. Evaluation

- Continuous evaluation with the student
- Continuous evaluation among teachers and guidance staff



## Dutch National Context and Inclusive Teaching Methodologies

### Drenthe College Terra – Drenthe (The Netherlands)

#### Dutch Education And Training System

In the Netherlands, the education system is characterised by a strong emphasis on performance, standardisation and early selection, which has both benefits and challenges for inclusive education. From the age of 12, students are placed into different educational tracks (VMBO, HAVO, VWO34), which can lead to social and ethnic segregation and unequal opportunities.

Awareness around inclusion is growing steadily, especially in response to increasing student diversity. Classrooms include students from various ethnic-cultural backgrounds, religions, gender identities, neurodiverse profiles, and socio-economic situations. According to Statistics Netherlands (CBS) and the Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP), students with a migration background, LGBTQ+ youth, and students with disabilities continue to face exclusion, lower expectations, and disproportionate dropout rates. For example, CBS data from 2023 indicates that over 35% of students with a non-Western migration background attend the lowest vocational track (VMBO-basis), compared to 13% of students without a migration background. Similar disproportionalities exist for students with disabilities or neurodiverse conditions (e.g. autism, ADHD), particularly in mainstream secondary education.

The Dutch school system is also affected by teacher shortages and increasing pressure on student wellbeing. Mental health concerns among students have increased in recent years, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed underlying inequalities in access to learning, support, and digital resources.

National legislation, such as the Appropriate Education Act (Wet Passend Onderwijs), obliges schools to provide tailored support within mainstream settings whenever possible. However, many schools still struggle to fully implement inclusive practices. Inclusion is further shaped by decentralised governance: municipalities and school boards play a key role in implementing inclusion policies, which can lead to regional disparities.

The Dutch government has the target to implement inclusive education in all schools by 2035 to improve equal chances for all youngsters and the quality of the Dutch educational system. Three main subjects for the schools to work on:

- Everybody is welcome, has the opportunity to grow and belongs to the school.
- Everybody can be supported during the education.
- All youngsters participate in learning and social activities.

[Inclusief onderwijs in 2035 | Inclusief onderwijs | Rijksoverheid.nl](#)

#### National challenges in implementing inclusive teaching methods

Key challenges include:

- Limited teacher training: Many teachers lack sufficient training in inclusive pedagogy, especially regarding students

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<sup>34</sup> **VMBO** (Voortgezet Middelbaar Beroepsonderwijs): This type of secondary education is more practice-oriented and prepares students for higher professional education (MBO).

**HAVO** (Hoger Algemeen Voortgezet Onderwijs): This level prepares students for higher professional education (HBO).

**VWO** (Voorbereidend Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs): This is the highest level of secondary education in the Netherlands, preparing students for university (WO).



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with disabilities, trauma backgrounds, or complex cultural identities.

- Uncertainty about sensitive topics: Teachers often feel ill-equipped to discuss complex themes like religion, sexual orientation, racism, or war in a nuanced and safe manner. This leads to avoidance of difficult conversations.
- Time constraints and high workload: Inclusive methods often require more preparation, differentiated instruction, and one-on-one attention, which is difficult to realise within the tight schedules of Dutch schools.
- Fear of polarisation or saying 'the wrong thing': This inhibits open dialogue and reinforces silence around important identity-related themes.
- Pressure from performance-driven culture: Emphasis on testing and ranking can conflict with the values of inclusiveness, collaboration, and personal development.
- Inconsistent collaboration with care professionals: While collaboration with youth support teams, mentors, or special education staff is encouraged, it is often inconsistent or reactive rather than embedded structurally.
- The Dutch society is psychologised and medicalised within the care structure. These labels emphasise the personality of people and influences educational actions in school.

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## Inclusive teaching Methodologies - The Culture Lens and Intercultural Communication and the Five Dimensions

### 1) THE CULTURE LENS AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

This method invites students to explore their own cultural 'lens' or mental framework.

The session typically begins with a relatable explanation of culture as a form of "mental programming" (inspired by Hofstede's work).

Students reflect on their values, norms, and behavioural expectations shaped by upbringing, environment, and experience. Subsequently, key concepts such as: Stereotyping, Confirmation bias, Implicit association, Self-fulfilling prophecy, are introduced through accessible language and relatable classroom or social media examples (<https://youtu.be/QRZPw-9sJtQ>).

Students are encouraged to identify their own thinking patterns, examine moments where they made assumptions, and discuss the impact of bias in real-life situations. Teachers facilitate these conversations in small groups, ensuring a safe and respectful atmosphere.

#### Resources:

- Clear and relatable explanations about culture
- Worksheets that help students explore their own cultural identity
- Accessible explanations of bias-related concepts
- Real-life examples and supporting visual materials

#### Results:

- Increased self-awareness and critical thinking
- Greater openness to alternative perspectives
- Reduction of judgemental reactions in peer interactions
- Improved group dynamics and classroom safety

#### Target group:

MBO students

## 2) INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND THE FIVE DIMENSIONS

To address these challenges, the Netherlands has developed and tested various inclusive teaching methodologies, some of which use the concept of “cultural diversity” as an educational tool.

One such methodology focuses on the “**Five Dimensions of Diversity**,” an approach widely used in citizenship or career guidance courses. Students are introduced to five key intercultural dimensions:

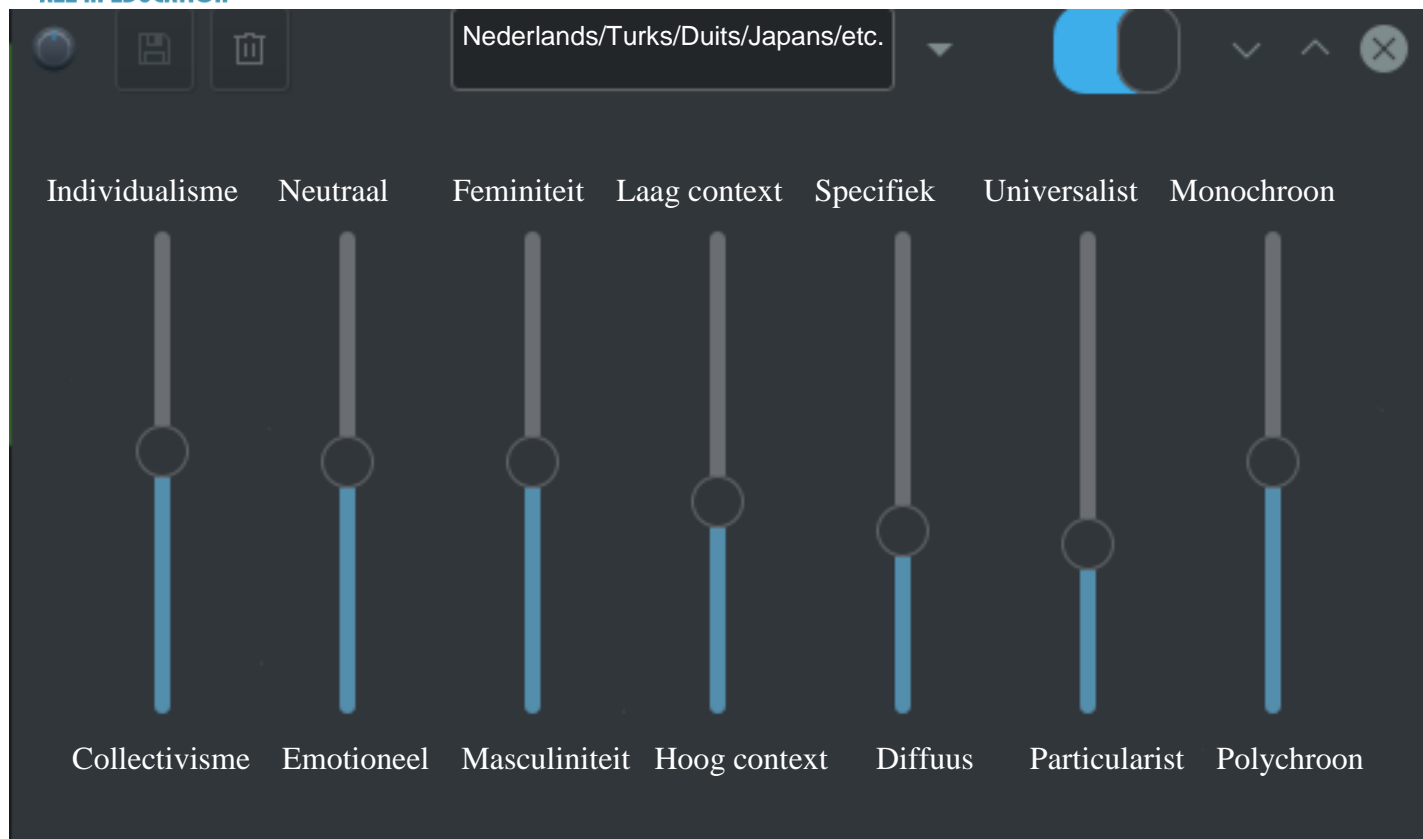
1. Individualism vs. Collectivism
2. High-context vs. Low-context communication
3. Neutral vs. Emotional expression
4. Power distance (low vs. high)
5. Masculine vs. Feminine value orientation

Through concrete cases, everyday scenarios, and visual materials, students are encouraged to reflect on their personal positioning along each of these dimensions.

This methodology is based on interactive activities such as role-playing, perspective-taking exercises, and visual models like the “Cultural Iceberg,” fostering experiential learning.

The primary objective is not to label cultures or individuals, but to highlight differences and promote mutual understanding, emphasizing how communication styles and behaviors are influenced by cultural, educational, and personal factors.

The results of this practice have been positive: students develop greater awareness of their own and others' communication styles, learn to view conflicts as mere differences in interpretation rather than personal failures, and show increased respect and curiosity toward cultural intercultural dimensions.



Each dimension is explained using real-life scenarios (e.g. group work preferences, perceptions of authority, gender expectations at work). Visual materials, such as spectrums, videos, or example dialogues, support understanding. Students are asked to locate themselves along each spectrum and discuss how their upbringing, cultural background, or personality may influence their preferences. The emphasis is not on labelling cultures, but on recognising variation within and across individuals.

LOW CONTEXT	HIGH CONTEXT
Direct	Indirect
Words, specific	Non-verbal cues, Silence
Logic	Intuition
Transparant	Unclear
Written	Spoken

Interactive exercises such as:

- Perspective-taking activities
- Role-play with misunderstandings
- Cultural iceberg models

...are used to foster experiential learning.



## Resources

- A clear explanation of the five dimensions (slides, posters)
- Case studies with intercultural misunderstandings
- Worksheets for self-reflection
- Facilitation by teachers who create a psychologically safe space

## Results

- Students gain better insight into their own and others' communication styles
- Conflicts are seen as differences in interpretation, not as personal failures
- There is increased respect and curiosity toward cultural differences
- The method helps prevent escalation in diverse group settings

## Target group:

MBO students

Most important is to change the medical individual model of inclusion into the social model of inclusion.

The medical individual model emphasise the problem of the youngster. Most of the time in school are all kind of professionals talking about these problems and give the youngster advise to manage their behavior. Learning performances are underexposed and they are supported in their problems.

The social model of inclusion emphasis the pedagogical-didactic context for the youngsters. The social enviroment of the school include teachers, classmates, parents and other employees of the school. Learning performances are emphasised and teacher, educational assistants or other professionals support the youngsters in learning.



Figure 1 Medical - individual model of inclusion



Figure 2 Social model of inclusion



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## Spanish National Context and Inclusive Teaching Methodologies

Centro San Viator – Sopuerta (Basque Countries- SPAIN)

### Spanish Education and Training System

#### EU CONTEXT

First, it is worth mentioning the first principle of the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, which emphasizes that everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to acquire and maintain skills that enable full participation in society and successful transitions in the labour market.

Based on this principle, the European Commission and the Council of the European Union have defined inclusive education, equality, equity, non-discrimination, and the promotion of civic competences as key priorities in the field of education and training.

Additionally, the European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030 seeks to promote inclusion and accessibility in areas such as employment, education and social participation. The strategy aims to ensure that all persons with disabilities in Europe, regardless of gender, ethnic or racial origin, religion or beliefs, age, or sexual orientation, enjoy their human rights, have equal opportunities to participate in society and the economy, decide how, where and with whom they live, and move freely within the EU, without discrimination, and regardless of their need for support.

In this context, the EU has implemented strategies such as the Action Plan on Social and Economic Inclusion, focusing on enhancing the inclusion of vulnerable groups. This includes specific measures to support people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and other at-risk populations.

The Action Plan for Social and Economic Inclusion (2021–2027) is part of the EU's commitment to building fairer, more equitable and cohesive societies. It not only outlines general guidelines but also defines specific actions to reduce structural inequalities and ensure universal access to fundamental rights, such as education, employment and housing. The plan places a strong focus on removing barriers faced by vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities, migrants, children at risk of exclusion, the Roma community, and other historically marginalised groups.

In the educational field, the Action Plan promotes the strengthening of inclusive educational systems from an early age, encouraging school environments that are free from discrimination and focused on the emotional and academic wellbeing of all students. It supports the exchange of best practices among Member States and the use of EU funds — such as the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) — to finance educational projects that foster inclusion, diversity and pedagogical innovation.

Moreover, the EU has launched strategic initiatives such as the European Education Area, with a target date of 2025. This project aims to eliminate barriers to educational mobility, ensure quality and equity in education systems, and facilitate cooperation between countries in areas such as access to mobility programmes (like Erasmus+) for students with disabilities, lifelong learning, and inclusive vocational education and training. The approach of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is emphasised as a flexible framework to meet the diverse needs of learners.

The EU has also strengthened the European Child Guarantee, an initiative ensuring that all children in poverty or at risk of social exclusion have free and effective access to essential services such as inclusive education, healthcare, adequate nutrition and housing. This reinforces the EU's commitment to fighting child poverty and breaking the intergenerational cycle of inequality.

The work of agencies such as the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE) is essential for advancing toward truly inclusive education. This agency works closely with national education ministries, provides



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technical guidance, and coordinates research on effective inclusive policies to offer evidence-based recommendations for policymakers.

EU inclusion laws aim to promote equality, prevent discrimination, and ensure equitable access to rights and services for all, especially persons with disabilities, migrants, minorities, women, and other vulnerable groups. Some key legal frameworks include:

### **Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)**

Articles 10 and 19: Require the EU to combat discrimination based on sex, race, ethnic origin, religion, disability, age, or sexual orientation.

### **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union**

Article 21: Prohibits all forms of discrimination.

Article 26: Recognises the right of persons with disabilities to social and professional integration.

### **Key Directives**

Directive 2000/78/EC: Establishes a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation.

Directive 2000/43/EC: Prohibits discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin in education, healthcare, social protection, employment, and housing.

### **EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030**

A comprehensive plan to improve inclusion in education, employment, accessibility, and political participation. Includes the European Disability Card, which enables mutual recognition of disability status across countries.

### **European Pillar of Social Rights**

Proclaimed in 2017. Sets out key principles such as equal opportunities, active inclusion and access to essential services.

The European Union has made inclusion a cross-cutting priority across its social, economic, and educational policies. Through a combination of legislation, dedicated funding, and intergovernmental cooperation, the EU actively works to ensure that all people — regardless of background or condition — can exercise their right to quality education in equitable, diverse and accessible contexts.

## **SPANISH NATIONAL CONTEXT**

Building on the principles laid out by the European Union, Spain has progressively embraced inclusive education as a fundamental right and an essential component of its national education policy. The commitment to equity and inclusion is now deeply embedded in the legislative and pedagogical frameworks of the Spanish educational system, aligning not only with the EU's Pillar of Social Rights, but also with international declarations such as the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

### **Legislative Foundations**

The cornerstone of the current inclusive model is the Organic Law 3/2020 (LOMLOE), which amends the earlier Organic Law of Education. This law emphasizes individualized attention, respect for student diversity, and the creation of inclusive learning environments. For the first time, inclusion is no longer seen as an optional or compensatory mechanism, but as a structural and guiding principle of the entire educational system.

The LOMLOE also mandates the incorporation of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) across all educational stages. This approach moves beyond traditional adaptations for students with disabilities, proposing instead flexible curricula and



teaching strategies that benefit all learners. By encouraging multiple forms of engagement, expression and representation, UDL ensures that the educational system proactively addresses a variety of learning needs, rather than reacting to them after barriers emerge.

### **Mainstreaming and Special Education**

One of the most notable shifts in Spain's education policy has been the preference for schooling students with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream classrooms, rather than segregated environments. This inclusive model is grounded in the idea that diversity enriches the learning process for everyone and contributes to more empathetic, just and cohesive societies.

Nonetheless, special education schools still exist and serve as a support structure for students whose needs cannot be fully met in mainstream settings. The use of this model is strictly considered an exceptional measure, contingent upon a comprehensive assessment and based on the principle of the student's best interest. Even in such cases, Spanish education authorities promote shared activities and interactions between special and mainstream schools to foster inclusion and community integration.

### **Support Measures and Professional Roles**

To implement this inclusive model effectively, Spain has developed a multi-tiered system of educational support, including:

Specialist staff: educational psychologists, therapeutic pedagogues, speech and language specialists, and support aides.

Adapted materials: technological aids, visual and communicative resources, and personalised learning materials.

Curricular adaptations:

- Access adaptations (e.g. communication devices, assistive technologies).
- Curricular modifications, which may be:
  - Significant (altering learning objectives and content).
  - Non-significant (adjusting methodology without changing core content).
- This structure allows schools to flexibly meet the wide spectrum of students' needs, whether these stem from disability, neurodivergence, socio-economic disadvantage, linguistic diversity, or cultural background.

### **Teacher Training and Early Intervention**

The role of teachers is crucial in promoting and sustaining inclusive practices. The LOMLOE underscores the need for initial and ongoing professional development in inclusive education. Teacher training programs are expected to equip educators with:

- Skills in early detection of learning difficulties.
- Familiarity with inclusive pedagogies and differentiated instruction.
- Strategies for promoting participation and emotional wellbeing in diverse classrooms.

Moreover, early identification and intervention have become strategic priorities, aimed at preventing learning gaps from escalating into long-term academic failure or social exclusion. Multidisciplinary teams within schools are responsible for evaluating students' needs and coordinating interventions.

### **Progress and Remaining Challenges**

Spain has made substantial progress in shifting from segregation to inclusion, reflecting broader societal changes in attitudes toward diversity and disability. According to the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, over 87% of students with special educational needs are currently enrolled in mainstream schools, a notable increase compared to past decades.

However, significant challenges persist, such as:



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- Inequities among autonomous communities in resource allocation and support services.
- Shortages of specialist staff in some regions and schools.
- Insufficient collaboration between education, health and social services.
- Need for greater awareness and engagement from families and the wider community.

The implementation of inclusive education in Spain is, therefore, not just a technical or administrative process, but a deeply transformative one — involving cultural change, political will, intersectoral coordination, and sustained investment.

In conclusion, while Spain's legal and policy frameworks provide a solid foundation for inclusive education, real inclusion is still a work in progress. Moving forward, strengthening systemic capacity, reinforcing teacher preparation, and ensuring equitable access to resources will be key to making inclusion a lived reality for every student.

## EUSKADI

After examining the general framework of inclusive education in Spain, it is essential to focus on how this principle is implemented within each autonomous community.

Inclusive education is not only a shared national goal but in Euskadi it has been translated into a strong commitment by the regional education administration, reflected both in recent legislation and in the pedagogical organization of schools.

### A New Legal Framework for Inclusive Education

The new educational law of the Basque Country is defined by Law 17/2023, of December 21, which for the first time establishes an integral approach to guaranteeing the right to quality education from an inclusive and equitable perspective. In line with this law, Decree 78/2024 was adopted — a regulatory standard that outlines how schools should respond to student diversity. It represents a turning point in the region's approach to special education.

### Grounded in International and National Norms

Decree 78/2024 builds upon a solid legal framework that integrates international, national, and regional regulations. Internationally, it is aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which upholds the right of all children to inclusive education on an equal basis with others. It also reflects the goals of UNESCO's Education 2030 Framework for Action, which calls for transforming education systems to ensure that no one is left behind.

At the national level, inclusive education is driven by Organic Law 3/2020 (LOMLOE), which places equity and attention to diversity at the core of the education system. It also draws on Organic Law 8/2021, for the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents, and the recent Law 2/2024 on childhood and adolescence in the Basque Country, which reinforces children's rights across all areas, including education. Additionally, Decree 13/2016 on early intervention ensures the early detection of educational needs from the earliest stages of development.

### Foundational Principles of the Basque Inclusion Model

The Basque model of inclusive education is grounded in a set of values that go beyond legal compliance. These include:

- Human dignity as the foundation of the education system.
- Empathetic recognition of difference, seeing diversity as a source of enrichment rather than a challenge.
- Active protection of the most vulnerable, ensuring their access to quality education.
- Shared responsibility among all educational agents to provide the necessary conditions for equitable participation.



This perspective sees inclusion not as a temporary or targeted measure for students with special needs, but as a structural model that shapes school organization, curricula, learning environments, and interpersonal relationships.

## Objectives and Strategic Pillars of Decree 78/2024

Decree 78/2024 marks a new stage in special education in Euskadi, redefining it through an inclusive lens focused on personalized learning. Its three main objectives are:

- To ensure the right of all students to receive an appropriate educational response, considering their cognitive, emotional, social, and contextual characteristics.
- To create accessible physical, social, and curricular environments, applying Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a core pedagogical approach. This means anticipating potential barriers and offering multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement.
- To support all learners in developing their competencies to the fullest extent, by fostering co-responsibility among teachers, school leadership, guidance teams, families, and community agents.

These goals are implemented through flexible methodologies, curricular reorganization, interdisciplinary collaboration, and integrated use of support resources in mainstream classrooms.

## From Segregation to Inclusion

Historically, special education in Spain — and Euskadi — has been associated with segregated models, where students with specific educational needs were often placed in separate classrooms or schools. Today, however, the Basque Country has made a substantial shift toward inclusion as a guiding principle.

This transformation has been driven by legal and pedagogical developments that allow for new approaches and resources. Special education is no longer seen as a parallel system but rather as a network of support services integrated into ordinary settings. Specialized professionals and support measures are now at the service of inclusion, not segregation.

There is also an increasing emphasis on inter-agency collaboration between education, health, and social services, especially for students requiring intensive or specialized care, ensuring a coordinated and person-centred response.

## A School for All

The Basque Country's commitment to inclusive education is now stronger than ever. The region's recent legislation consolidates past achievements and lays the foundation for an educational future based on equity, dignity, and personalized learning. The goal is to build a "school for all" — a place where every student can thrive, regardless of their personal, social or cultural characteristics.

This approach benefits not only students with special educational needs, but the entire educational community, fostering a culture of coexistence, respect, and cooperation. Inclusive education in Euskadi is therefore not just a legal and educational objective but also an ethical and social project aimed at transforming reality through schools.

Like in the rest of Spain, mainstream schooling is the preferred option for students with special educational needs in Euskadi. Special education centres are only considered for the most severe cases. Currently, the Basque Country has only 9 special education centres, compared to 1,302 ordinary schools, reflecting its strong commitment to inclusion.

## CENTRO SAN VIATOR

Centro San Viator is divided into two main areas. One is dedicated to technical education, offering **Basic Vocational Training, Intermediate and Higher Vocational Training, and SAT (Technical Assistance Service)**. The other area includes **Nursery School, Primary Education, Secondary Education, Upper Secondary Education (Bachillerato), and two specialized support classrooms**.



## ALL IN EDUCATION

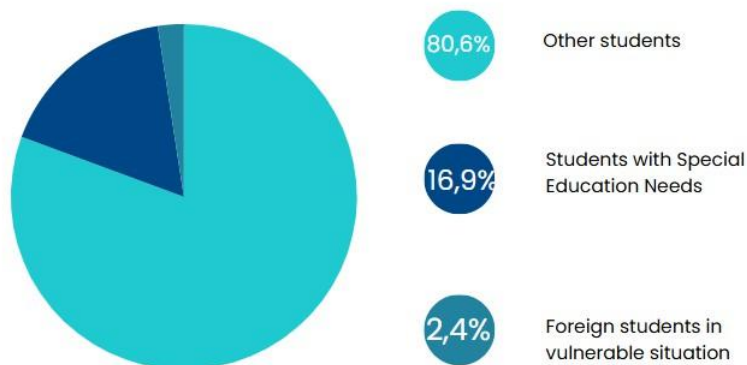
The project "All in Education" will be implemented within **Compulsory Secondary Education (Educación Secundaria Obligatoria - ESO)**, which currently has a total of **124 students aged between 11 and 14/16 years**. Among these 124 students, **18% require inclusive measures**, as there are **21 students identified as having Special Educational Needs (SEN)** and **3 foreign students in vulnerable situations**.

Out of the 21 SEN students, **11 — along with the foreign students — are integrated into mainstream classrooms**, working alongside the rest of the students. The remaining **10 students are enrolled in two self-contained classrooms**, as their diagnoses require significant and specialized support.

Protocol for Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

### CSV

Ratio of students with special needs in Compulsory Secondary Education 2024–2025



The protocol followed in schools within the Basque Autonomous Community (CAPV) for students with SEN is as follows:



Family consent required    Family consent required

1. The **first step is initiated by the teaching staff**, usually during the early stages of schooling. When a teacher detects any concerning signs, they must inform the school's guidance team.
2. This team includes a **school counsellor and teachers specialized in therapeutic pedagogy**. Once the concern is communicated, a team member enters the classroom to carry out observations.
3. If both the teacher and the specialist agree on the concern, and **with the family's consent**, the student is withdrawn from class for an initial assessment.
4. This evaluation is sent to the **Berritzegune advisor**, who is responsible for conducting a **psycho-pedagogical assessment**. If needed, the case may also be referred to **paediatrics**. To do this, the counsellor and the Berritzegune advisor must fill out a form with various data to support a referral to **Child Mental Health Services**.



## ALL IN EDUCATION

5. After the psycho-pedagogical assessment, the Berritzegune advisor meets with the family and a member of the school's guidance team to share the findings.
6. The family is then asked to sign a document acknowledging that the student will be added to the **Basque Government's official SEN register**.
7. It is the advisor's responsibility to inform the **Department of Education**, which then assesses the support measures the student will require (e.g. curricular adaptations, therapeutic pedagogy support, educational support specialists, etc.).

The **type of support depends on the student's diagnosis**. All cases are handled by teachers specialized in special education, and in more severe cases, also by educational support specialists. These students are **integrated into mainstream classrooms** and are provided with adapted materials when necessary. They **participate in all classroom activities**, albeit in an adapted format when needed.

Protocol for Foreign Students

A **different protocol** is followed for students of foreign origin:



Typically, the **family or the Department of Education** informs the school that a new foreign student will be enrolling.

Before the student joins the classroom, the school gathers as much information as possible (background, origin, family situation, etc.). This is done through a **meeting with the family**, attended by the **Head of Studies**.

The **Department of Education determines the grade level** in which the student will be enrolled.

All relevant information is then shared with the teaching staff so they are aware of the student's arrival and context.

The student's **tutor assigns a "ikasle laguntzaile"**, a peer support student from the same class who will guide and accompany the new student during the integration process.

On the first day, **welcome activities** are held to ensure the student feels as supported and welcomed as possible.

Afterwards, **various assessments are conducted to determine the student's academic level**, and from this starting point, the school begins to work on the curriculum. **Individualized Education Plans (PIAs)** are created accordingly.

Often, the **first goal is language acquisition**, especially depending on the student's country of origin. It is also the **Department of Education** that determines the level of **support** the student will receive through their own HIPI (Hizkuntza Indartzeko Programa) Language Support Programs for Newcomers.

### Hizkuntza Indartzeko Programme (HIPI)

**The following objectives are proposed for the language support program:**



## ALL IN EDUCATION

- To facilitate the inclusion of students who are new to the Basque education system, so they can integrate into the school environment as quickly and effectively as possible.
- To provide specific support to these students so that they can acquire the linguistic and communicative skills they need to participate in teaching and learning processes, including any necessary curriculum adaptations.

### **FUNCTIONS OF HIPIs (Language Support Programs for Newcomers)**

- To design the language support program, always adapting it to the students' needs.
- To assist the tutor in creating an Individual Support Plan for these students.
- To get to know the students.
- To analyze, organize, and prepare didactic materials using an appropriate approach.

### **NUMBER OF STUDENTS PER SUPPORT GROUP**

Maximum of 8 students per group

### **HIPI TEACHER'S TIMETABLE**

Compulsory Education: 20 hours

The remaining hours will be used by the teacher for coordination with the teaching team, training, staff meetings, and individual interviews.

## **National challenges in implementing inclusive teaching methods.**

### **Teacher-Related Challenges**

- Lack of teacher training: Insufficient preparation in inclusive practices during initial training.
- Lack of specific training: Limited professional development on special education and diversity.
- Insecurity and lack of confidence: Teachers feel unprepared to address complex needs.
- Work overload: Teachers are overwhelmed by the demands of inclusion without adequate support.
- Resistance to change: Some educators are reluctant to shift from traditional teaching models.

### **Resource and Infrastructure Challenges**

- Shortage of specialized personnel: Not enough special educators, psychologists, or therapists.
- Lack of educational resources: Absence of adapted materials and assistive technologies.
- Inadequate infrastructure: Physical environments not adapted for students with disabilities.

### **Pedagogical and Curricular Challenges**

- Standardized assessments: One-size-fits-all testing doesn't reflect diverse learning needs.
- Difficulty in curricular adaptations: Limited time, training, and tools to personalize learning.
- Unclear or inconsistent policies: Inclusion policies may be vague, contradictory, or poorly implemented.

### **Cultural and Attitudinal Challenges**

- Low awareness and sensitivity: Lack of inclusive culture among educators and society.
- Prejudices and stereotypes: Biases based on disability, culture, or socio-economic status.

### **Coordination and Collaboration Challenges**

- Lack of coordination among professionals: Weak collaboration between teachers, counselors, and support staff.
- Limited collaboration with external services: Poor links with healthcare and social services.
- Lack of family involvement: Families may be uninformed or disengaged.



- Lack of coordination with public institutions: Disconnection between schools and educational authorities.

### **Socio-contextual and Systemic Challenges**

- Regional inequality: Uneven implementation between rural and urban areas.
- Language barriers: Immigrant students may struggle to access learning without language support.

## **Inclusive teaching Methodologies - Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Service-Learning (SL)**

### **1) UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING**

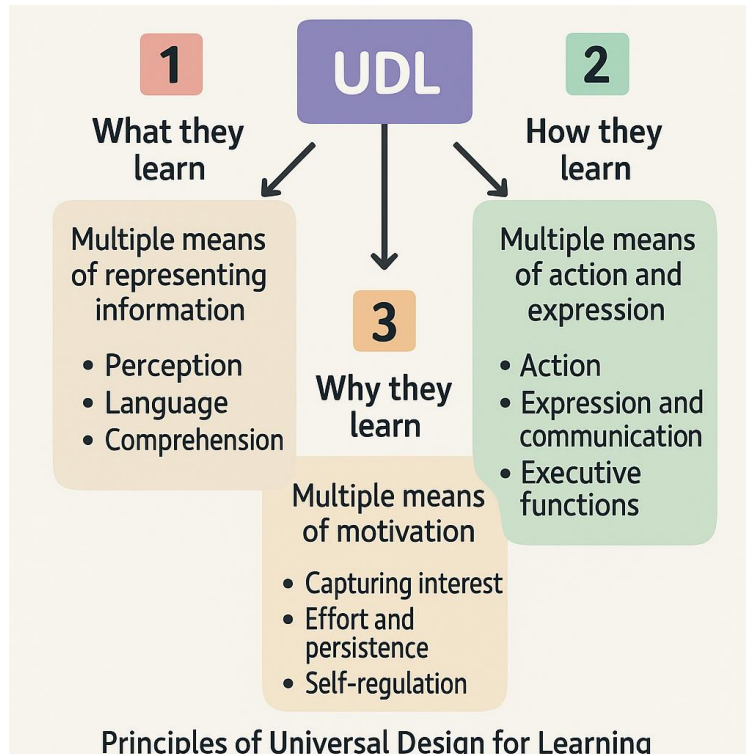
On the path toward truly inclusive education, one of the most relevant and transformative approaches adopted by the Spanish educational system—following the recommendations of international organizations and the foundations established by the LOMLOE—is Universal Design for Learning (UDL). This pedagogical model not only seeks to improve access to learning, but also redefines the way teaching is conceived by placing student diversity at the center, viewing it as an asset rather than a barrier.

UDL is based on a fundamental principle: all students learn differently, and therefore, teaching must adapt to those differences. Traditionally, education has followed a uniform model, expecting all students to understand and respond to the same content in the same way and within the same timeframe. This approach has proven ineffective and unfair, especially for students with disabilities, learning difficulties, or disadvantaged social backgrounds. UDL breaks with this logic by proposing a flexible, adaptive, and student-centered education.

This approach aims to eliminate barriers in teaching by offering different ways of accessing content, expressing learning, and engaging actively in the learning process. The goal is to design an educational environment from the outset that accounts for human variability and relies on resources, methodologies, and technologies that ensure equal opportunities and high expectations for all, without exception.

#### **How is it implemented?**

The implementation of Universal Design for Learning is structured around three core principles, which respond to students' diverse ways of learning and participating



### 1. Provide multiple means of representation:

Not all students understand information in the same way. Some need visual supports, others benefit from oral explanations, diagrams, concept maps, or practical examples. This principle proposes that content be presented in various formats: texts, images, videos, audios, interactive graphics, among others. This variety ensures that students can access information in the way that best suits their abilities and learning styles.

### 2. Offer multiple means of action and expression:

This principle recognizes that there are many ways to demonstrate learning. Not all students have the same communication or motor skills. Some express themselves better in writing, others through speech, art, digital tools, or hands-on materials. That's why different options are offered for students to choose how to show their knowledge, including projects, presentations, essays, videos, models, or digital portfolios—encouraging fairer and more personalized assessment.

### 3. Foster student engagement and participation:

The final principle focuses on motivation and active student involvement. An inclusive learning environment must be cognitively accessible and emotionally stimulating. This means creating positive, safe, and engaging environments where students feel valued and have choices that connect with their interests. It promotes self-regulation, autonomy, and a sense of belonging, which significantly improves attitudes toward learning.

#### What resources does it require?

For this approach to be effective, it is essential to have:

Appropriate resources. Adaptive technology plays a key role by enabling accessible and personalized environments. Tools like screen readers, automatic subtitles, interactive platforms, or apps designed for students with dyslexia or ADHD broaden access and expression opportunities. However, technology alone is not enough.

Specific and ongoing teacher training, to equip educators with the skills to use these tools and effectively implement UDL in the classroom.

Diverse materials (visual, auditory, tactile) adapted to different learning styles.

Flexible physical spaces that can accommodate students with reduced mobility or other physical needs. Inclusion should not rely on occasional adaptations, but be built into the very design of the educational environment.

#### What are the expected results?



## ALL IN EDUCATION

The implementation of UDL can prove to have very positive results both individually and collectively. Academically, it leads to significant improvements in the performance of students with specific needs, thanks to personalized strategies. It also encourages greater active participation in the teaching-learning process, strengthening students' self-esteem and sense of personal efficacy.

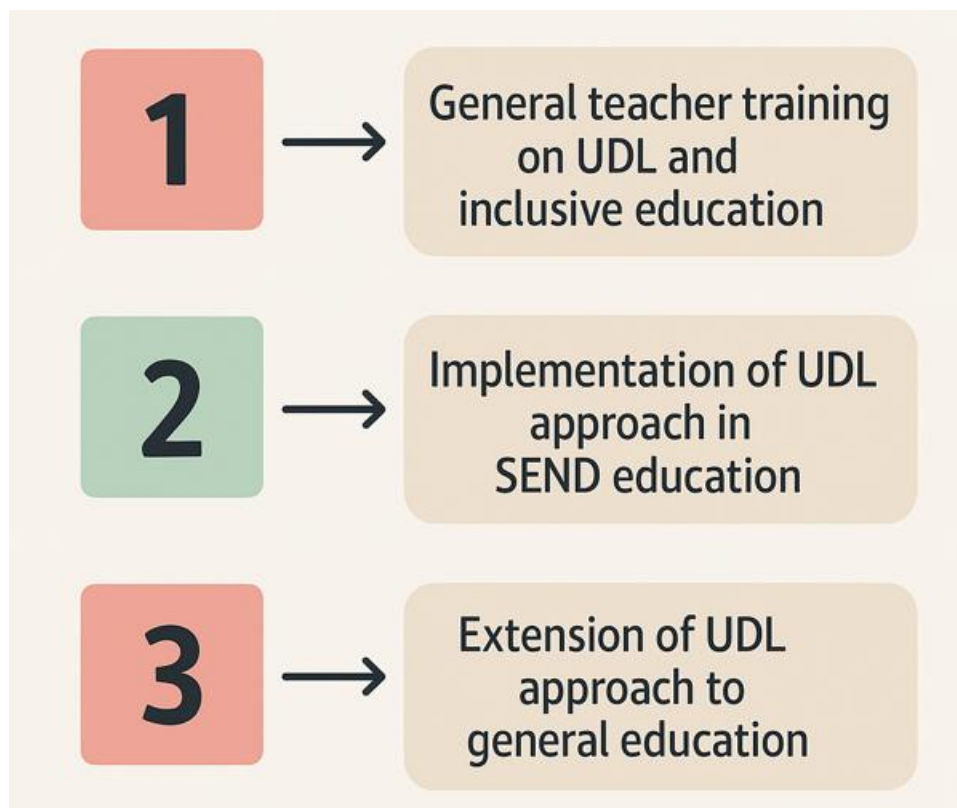
Socially, UDL reduces exclusion and stigma by avoiding labels and segregation. It recognizes diversity as the norm, fostering a more inclusive and respectful school climate where differences are valued and collaboration among students is promoted. Thus, inclusion becomes not just a pedagogical goal, but also an ethical and social commitment.

### Who is it for?

UDL benefits all students, but it is especially relevant for groups who face barriers to learning access:

- Students with disabilities (physical, intellectual, sensory).
- Students with learning disorders (dyslexia, ADHD, ASD).
- Students from vulnerable backgrounds (rural areas, migrants, low-income households).
- Students with different learning styles, paces, and interests.

### Implementation phases in Centro San Viator



### General teachers' training programme

Through different training programmes (SEND education, Digitalization, New Methodologies...) teachers and trainers in school education acquire an understanding of the UDL methodology and the benefits of inclusive education. Teachers attend regularly to training sessions where the needs of our students and the different approaches to education in the classroom are discussed, organized and agreed upon. SEND technicians at school take a leading role in these sessions, focusing on the individualization of the specific cases the school is currently facing.



### Implementation of UDL approach in SEND education.

The second stage of the implementation of the UDL methodology faces the adaptation and development of the specific materials and sessions that SEND technicians use with their students, both in the general classroom and with their face-to-face sessions. Guided by the principles of the UDL approach, and in collaboration with the teachers of each specific subject, the technicians design, coordinate and assess the materials, adaptations and sessions during the whole academic year. Moreover, during in class sessions, SEND students are accompanied by educational assistants, who help them work at their own pace. They make sure that students follow their educational programme, the materials are in accordance with their specific needs and assist with the student’s process of inclusion in the class.

### Extension of UDL approach towards general education

The third stage comes with the adaptation of the teaching materials and methodologies of the general subjects within the school system. This stage, though a long term process, implies that every teacher adapts their own teaching approach to cover the different educational needs of their students, making sure that materials, content, objectives and assessment strategies are in accordance with the principles of UDL learning and therefore will be suitable for answering the need of both current and future students.

Practical example: Applying UDL to “The Water Cycle”	
<b>1. Theoretical phase:</b>	<p>Animated video explaining the water cycle visually and audibly.</p> <p>Infographic with illustrations and key words.</p> <p>Adapted reading with easy-to-read text.</p> <p>Simple experiment: use a water-filled bag on a window to observe evaporation and condensation.</p>
<b>2. Practical phase:</b>	<p>Students can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Draw the water cycle.</li> <li>○ Record an audio explaining the process.</li> <li>○ Create a model using clay or cardboard.</li> </ul> <p>Complete an interactive digital activity.</p>
<b>3. Demonstration phase:</b>	<p>Start with a motivating question: “Why does it rain?” or “What would happen if the water cycle didn’t exist?”</p> <p>Allow students to choose how they want to show what they’ve learned.</p> <p>Propose a group challenge: create a campaign to explain the water cycle to younger students.</p>

This approach makes the classroom more inclusive, dynamic, and meaningful for everyone.

In conclusion, Universal Design for Learning is not just another methodology—it is an essential pedagogical framework for advancing toward an inclusive, fair, and high-quality education for all. It’s about designing for diversity from the



outset—not as an exception, but as a foundation of equity that ensures the right to learn on equal terms, without sacrificing educational excellence.

## 2) SERVICE-LEARNING (SL)

In an educational context that is moving toward equity, inclusion, and the formation of active and committed citizens, Service-Learning (SL) emerges as one of the most powerful and meaningful methodologies. By linking curricular learning with community-oriented action, SL positions students as active agents of their own learning and as change-makers within their communities.

Just as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) promotes teaching that is responsive to diverse styles, paces, and abilities, Service-Learning extends this logic beyond the classroom toward experiential, committed, and transformative learning. In SL, knowledge acquired in class is applied to real-life situations to improve society.

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### What is Service-Learning?

Although it lacks a single universal definition, SL can be understood as an integrative educational methodology that combines learning processes with concrete community service actions. What makes SL unique is its intentional merging of academic education and solidarity-based action, allowing both components to enrich each other: service gives meaning to learning, and learning improves the quality of service.

This methodology is not the same as volunteering or extracurricular activity. It is a structured, conscious, and planned pedagogical strategy that addresses real social needs and directly connects with curricular content. Thus, SL becomes an innovative response to current educational challenges, offering more humane, practical, and transformative learning.

### Core Characteristics of Service-Learning

According to authors like Puig and Palos (2006), SL is characterized by:

- **Educational and solidarity-based intentionality:** SL is driven by a clear learning objective and a solidarity action that responds to real social needs. It follows conscious, planned, and systematic learning processes that link service tasks with relevant curricular content and competencies across formal and non-formal education.
- **Response to real social needs:** SL understands service as a way to address community issues.
- **Active and reflective pedagogy:** Inspired by experiential learning, collaboration, cooperative work, inquiry, problem-solving, interdisciplinarity, and ongoing reflection.
- **Networked work:** SL is not done in isolation. It requires partnerships between schools, social organizations, families, and the broader community. These alliances allow schools to open up to society and community organizations to exert educational influence, aligning with the idea of the "educating city," where the entire civic fabric contributes to education.
- **Educational and social impact:** SL generates a dual transformation—students grow personally and academically, and the community benefits from useful, meaningful service.

### How is it implemented?

#### Implementation Phases of SL

- **Exploration and connection with reality:** The process begins with identifying needs in the local environment (school, neighborhood, community), encouraging active observation, critical thinking, and social analysis. This phase is essential to ensure the planned service responds to real issues and motivates students. The project also connects with curricular content, allowing learning to be relevant and applied. This can be done through brainstorming, debates, direct observation, or simple interviews.
- **Curricular connection:** After identifying some needs, educators analyze how they relate to curricular content. The goal is to find intersections where service enhances understanding of concepts, and knowledge can be used to address needs. For instance, if students are learning about environmental issues, they could organize a park cleanup.



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- **Collaborative planning:** In this phase, students—guided by the teacher—define the problem, design the actions, and establish learning and service objectives. They assign roles, identify resources, and set a timeline. This process promotes autonomy, organization, and responsibility. Key steps include: 1) **Project definition:** Define a specific and realistic service project. What concrete problem will they address? What actions will they take? What are the learning and service objectives? 2) **Roles and responsibilities:** Assign roles within the group to foster teamwork and student autonomy. Some may lead research, others handle communication or organize activities. 3) **Required resources:** Identify what materials, permissions, or contacts are needed and how to obtain them. 4) **Timeline:** Establish a realistic schedule for the different phases of the project.
- **Active learning and ongoing reflection:** As the project unfolds, students research, apply knowledge, collaborate, and address real-world problems, turning learning into a meaningful experience. Individual and group reflection allows them to internalize what they've learned, reinforce values, and develop metacognitive skills. Key elements: 1) **Curricular integration:** Ensure service activities are directly linked to curricular content. 2) **In-depth research:** Encourage students to dig deeper into the issue using books, online sources, or expert interviews. 3) **Individual and group reflection:** Include regular opportunities for reflection on their feelings, what they're learning about the issue, about themselves, and about teamwork. Use learning journals, guided discussions, presentations, etc.
- **Service implementation:** This is the phase when the planned solidarity action is carried out. Students deliver the service in a real environment, supported by teachers. Ongoing monitoring is essential, and flexibility is needed to adjust to real-world demands. Ensure students feel prepared, supported, and confident.
- **Evaluation and celebration:** Both academic learning and service impact are assessed. Tools like portfolios, rubrics, presentations, or reports can be used. Final celebrations recognize student effort and achievement, reinforce community bonds, and highlight the value of transformative learning.

### What resources does it require?

Service-Learning, like any solid educational initiative, requires a variety of resources:

- **Human resources:**

Teacher time: Educators need time to plan, coordinate with the community, monitor student progress, and support reflection—sometimes both in and outside class hours.

Support from leadership and school staff: The involvement of school leadership and colleagues is essential to integrate SL into school culture and provide logistical and problem-solving support.

Community collaboration: Maintaining ties with local organizations, experts, or volunteers is key for identifying real needs and involving students in meaningful service.

Family participation (optional): Involving families can enrich the project with additional resources, knowledge, or logistical support.

- **Organizational resources:**

Guides and support materials: Numerous online and print guides (e.g., from CLAYSS or Zerbikas) offer guidance, project examples, and planning/evaluation tools.

Planning and reflection spaces: Time and physical space are necessary for students to plan actions, reflect on experiences, and share their learning.

Communication tools: Online platforms, email, bulletin boards, or meetings help maintain smooth communication among students, teachers, and community partners.

- **Logistical and material resources:**

Depending on the type of service, physical materials, technology, transportation, or legal permissions may be required.

- **Pedagogical resources:**



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**Curricular alignment:** Ensure the SL project is well integrated with academic content and that resources support both learning and service goals.

**Reflection tools:** Learning journals, questionnaires, discussions, or presentations can foster individual and group reflection.

**Rubrics and evaluation criteria:** Use clear criteria to evaluate both academic learning and service impact.

**Presentation and celebration spaces:** Allow time and space for students to showcase achievements and celebrate their project's impact.

### ● **Financial resources:**

Not always necessary, but some projects may require funding, which can be obtained through school fundraising or external grants.

### **What have been the results?**

The impact of Service-Learning is profound and multidimensional, manifesting on various levels:

#### **1. For students:**

**More meaningful learning:** Real-world relevance gives academic content new purpose, enhancing retention and understanding.

**Key competencies:** Communication, leadership, teamwork, critical thinking, conflict resolution, planning, and evaluation skills are developed.

**Personal and social growth:** Empathy, self-esteem, resilience, civic responsibility, and social commitment are strengthened. Students feel connected to their community and develop a sense of belonging.

**Increased motivation and engagement:** Students feel useful, empowered, and involved, leading to a more positive attitude toward learning.

**Active citizenship:** SL promotes social awareness, civic engagement, and democratic values.

#### **2. For the community:**

**Response to real needs:** Services address concrete social issues.

**Social ties:** Community cohesion is strengthened through inter-institutional collaboration.

**Collective awareness:** Social issues are made visible, encouraging shared responsibility.

**Empowered organizations:** Collaborations with students bring fresh ideas, energy, and resources to community organizations, strengthening their mission.

**Social change:** In the long term, SL fosters committed, active citizens and a more just and equitable society.

#### **3. For schools:**

**Methodological innovation:** Traditional teaching models are replaced with active methodologies.

**Improved school climate:** Cooperation, respect, and mutual recognition enhance the learning environment.

**Social projection:** The school becomes a driver of social change and improves its public image.

#### **4. For social organizations and the political sphere:**

**Support for their work:** Social organizations receive assistance and greater visibility.

**Fostering responsible citizenship:** SL nurtures critical political awareness and strengthens participatory democracy.

**Educational sustainability:** Schools and communities pool their resources for social well-being.

### **Competencies Developed Through SL**

SL fosters comprehensive student development across five key competencies for 21st-century education:

**Learning to know:** Critical thinking, social analysis, understanding complex problems.

**Learning to be:** Self-awareness, self-esteem, responsibility, resilience, empowerment.



## ALL IN EDUCATION

**Learning to do:** Technical and professional skills, project planning and management, task execution.

**Learning to live together:** Teamwork, empathy, conflict resolution, civic participation.

**Learning to initiate:** Creativity, initiative, leadership, decision-making, and outcome evaluation.

### **SL and Inclusion: A Natural Bridge**

Like UDL, Service-Learning is inherently inclusive. Both approaches view diversity as an asset, not a limitation. In SL projects, students of diverse abilities, backgrounds, and contexts actively participate in meaningful roles, adapting tasks to their strengths. This creates an environment of respect, recognition, and collaboration, where everyone has something valuable to contribute.

SL aligns with the core values of inclusive education: equal opportunities, social justice, participation, and empowerment. It supports not only people with disabilities but also youth in vulnerable situations, migrants, students with learning difficulties, and others who might otherwise feel disconnected from school.

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### **Target Groups**

#### **1. Vulnerable individuals and groups:**

**Elderly people:** Residents in care homes or living alone; services may include companionship, reading, workshops, and activities.

**At-risk children and youth:** Shelters, food programs, educational support; services may include tutoring, games, or homework assistance.

**People with disabilities:** Day centers, support organizations, or individuals at home; services may include companionship, inclusive leisure, or awareness activities.

**Homeless individuals:** Food banks, shelters, aid organizations; services may include meal preparation, clothing drives, or advocacy.

**Migrants or refugees:** Shelters or support organizations; services may include language classes, help with paperwork, or intercultural activities.

**People with chronic illnesses or hospitalized:** Services may include companionship, entertainment, or family support.

#### **2. The general community:**

**Neighborhoods:** Urban improvement projects, cleaning public spaces, creating community gardens, or intercultural activities.

**Preschools and primary schools:** Younger students can benefit from activities organized by older peers (storytelling, games, workshops).

**Libraries and cultural centers:** Event organization, workshops, or administrative support.

**Parks and nature reserves:** Cleanup, reforestation, or environmental awareness activities.

#### **3. Non-profits and social organizations:**

**Project collaboration:** Event planning, fundraising, administrative tasks, or specialized volunteering.

**Raising awareness:** Creating informational materials, awareness campaigns in schools and communities.

#### **4. The school itself:**

**Improving shared spaces:** Beautifying playgrounds, creating reading areas, organizing peer activities.

**Peer support:** Tutoring, mentorship programs for new or struggling students.

### **Criteria for Selecting Beneficiaries**

**When choosing beneficiaries, consider:**

**Real needs:** The service should address genuine, identified needs in the community.



## ALL IN EDUCATION

**Curricular connection:** The project should allow students to apply and deepen classroom knowledge.

**Student interest:** Motivation and commitment increase when students connect with the cause.

**Feasibility and safety:** Projects must be realistic and ensure the safety of students and beneficiaries.

**Learning potential:** The experience should offer meaningful opportunities for learning and reflection.

**Impact:** The service should have a tangible, positive effect on the beneficiaries.



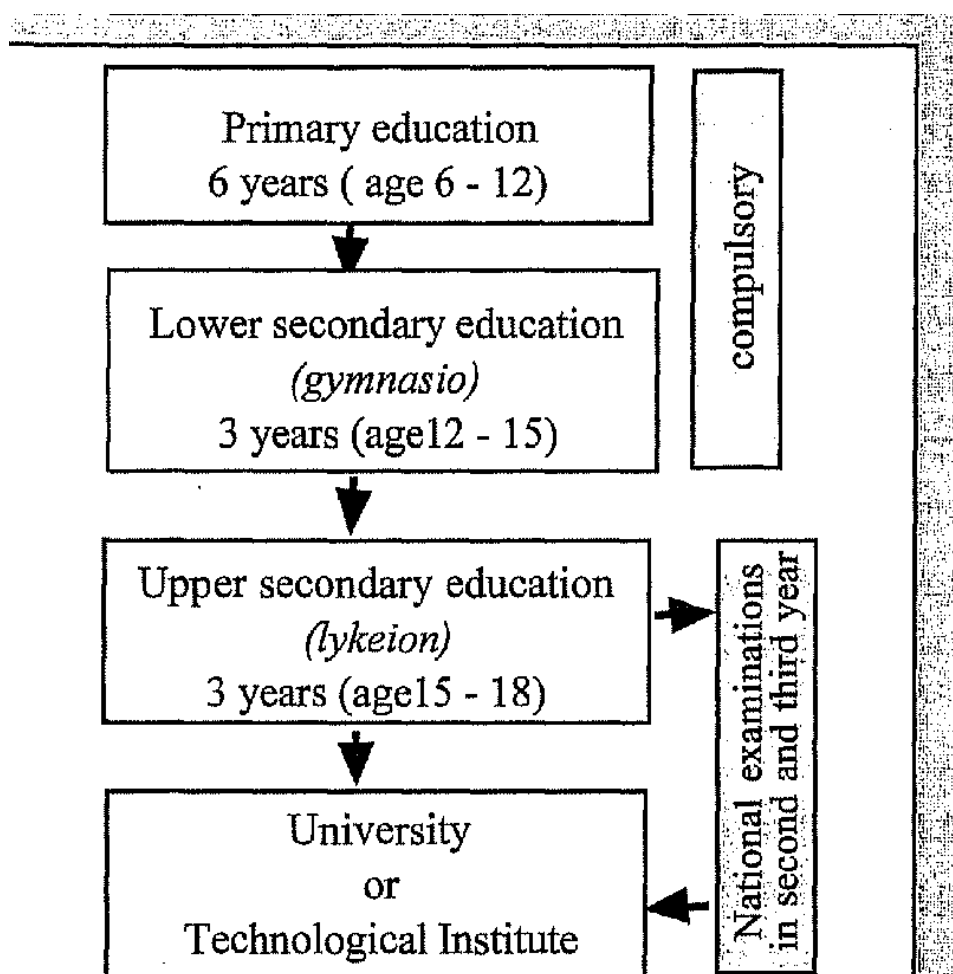
## Greek National Context and Inclusive Teaching Methodologies

### Odyssey – Athens (Greece)

#### Greek Education And Training System

The Greek education system is centralized and governed by the **Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports**. The system is divided into three main levels:

- **Pre-primary education** (Nipiagogeio): Ages 4–6 (compulsory from age 4)
- **Primary education** (Dimotiko Scholeio): Ages 6–12
- **Secondary education** (Gymnasio for lower secondary, Lykeio or EPAL for upper secondary): Ages 12–18
- **Tertiary education**: Universities and Technical Institutions



Greece has made considerable efforts to promote inclusive education in line with European and global frameworks. The national education system includes:

- Mainstream schools with integration support for students with special educational needs (SEN),
- Special education schools for students requiring more intensive support,

- Inclusion classes (Τμήματα Ένταξης), which are specialized units within mainstream schools.
- Centers for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counseling & Support" (KEDASY)

With more details:

### **Educational Support and Guidance**

Recent education reforms for improving the quality of services for all students have been explicitly oriented towards special education and intercultural education.

Following the priorities set by article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Greek educational policy emphasizes on the right of all students, including students with disabilities and/or special educational needs, for equal access to education.

Within such a framework, the equal access of students with disabilities and/or special education needs constitutes a basic pillar of the National Action Plan on the Rights of People with Disabilities, drawn up under the coordination of the Minister of State.

The aforementioned National Action Plan provides for a wide array of actions in the field of education for students with disabilities and/or special education needs aiming to promote inclusive education in line with the recommendations by the United Nations, the representative organisations of People with Disabilities, the Ombudsman and the National Human Rights Authority.

The Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports has drawn up and implements the Strategic Action Plan for the Equal Access of Students with Disabilities, which constitutes an extension of the National Action Plan on Disability in the field of Education. The Strategic Plan includes thirteen (13) Operational Objectives, which are further analysed in projects and actions, with a predefined implementation timetable, in key areas of intervention, such as:

- review of the current legislative framework,
- adequate allocation of human and material resources,
- increase of physical and digital accessibility,
- training of the staff in issues of differentiated teaching,
- upgrading of the evaluation and support services,
- promotion of integration education programmes,
- strengthening of both early educational intervention and vocational education,
- equal access to Lifelong learning and higher education,
- further organisation of the statistics collected on people with disabilities and/or special education needs,
- evaluation of the operation of the institution of the integration classes and parallel support.

The currently in force institutional framework of special education for individuals with disabilities and/or special educational needs, is laid down mainly in l. 3699/2008, as in force, and recently l. 4713/ 2020 and l. 4823/2021.

Inclusion Policy is promoted for all vulnerable groups of the student population.

In this context, intercultural education:

- concerns the structuring of relations of different cultural groups with the aim to lift inequality and social exclusion.
- sets the framework for harmonious and effective integration in the general education system of students with educational, social and cultural particularities.

The objectives of intercultural education (l. 4415/2016) are pursued by means of the following:

- 1) The registration of children from different cultural backgrounds in schools along with native children
- 2) The reinforcement of the school's democratic function based on the respect for democratic principles and children's rights
- 3) The drafting of suitable curricula, school books and teaching resources



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- 4) Tackling the discriminations caused by cultural differences, xenophobia and racism
- 5) Supporting measures and structures in favor of the educational and social inclusion of children of migrant background in a framework of equity and respect for their cultural identity
- 6) Suitable educational programmes and actions of an intercultural nature which address all members of the educational community.

Key objectives of compensatory education are:

- the re-integration of students in the learning process,
- the improvement of their progress so as to complete compulsory education,
- the reducing of early school leaving.
- to increase access rates for upper secondary education with the prospect of entering tertiary education.

A number of compensatory and supporting structures are put in place for this purpose, such as:

- the institution of intercultural schools (scholeia diapolitismikis ekpaidefsis) and minority schools (meionotika scholeia),
- reception classes (taxeis ypodothis),
- remedial teaching (enischyтики didaskalia) and additional teaching support (prosthети didaktiki stirixi),
- the school life advisor,
- measures for interschool violence
- detention centres schools
- as well as educational priority zones (zones ekpaideftikis proteraiotitas - ZEP). Educational priority zones promote equal inclusion in the education system of students from areas with low educational and socio-economic indicators.

Furthermore, refugees' children education and their smooth inclusion in school structures has been a goal of the education policy of the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports.

Under the provisions of l. 4823/2021, a Regional Council of Supervisors (PESEP) is established at the headquarters of all Regional Directorates of Primary and Secondary Education. This Council consists of Regional Supervisors of Quality in Education.

The Council is in charge of:

- issues of education planning
- issues of support of education work
- supporting training in various forms and topics
- training in various forms and topics
- the coordination and cooperation of different structures
- school executives, teachers and members of the special teaching staff and special assistance staff in their everyday work, and
- the overall planning and the self-evaluation of the work of school units.

In addition, in each Directorate of Primary and Secondary Education there is provision for:

- one Supervisor of Quality in Education
- positions of Education Advisors of various specialisations, including Advisors of Special and Inclusive Education. Advisors of Special and Inclusive Education bear the pedagogical responsibility in clusters of primary and secondary education units regarding the objective of inclusive education.

Also, l. 4823/2021 redefines the role of:

- Centres for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counseling and Support (KEDASYs)
- School Networks of Educational Support (SDEYs)
- Committees of Interdisciplinary Support (EDYs).

In higher education, the strong social dimension of the Greek national policy, primarily as a result of a series of provisions on the empowerment of the quality and internationalisation of HE and connectivity with society, (l. 4009/2011, l. 4485/2017



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and l. 4957/2022) is evident in the support that all students receive and particularly students of vulnerable social groups, throughout their studies, via a series of:

- educational and social provisions,
- benefits
- and facilities.

Finally, pursuant to l. 4763/2020 and recent l. 5082/2024 a key policy of the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports is the planning, coordination, supervision and assessment of policies, actions and programmes in the field of vocational training and lifelong learning, without discrimination and exclusions. Primarily, aiming at:

- providing human resources with qualifications, adapted to the real needs of the labour market,
- increasing employment with quality job placements, better organizing the competitiveness of the Greek economy,
- reinforcing citizens' personal development and upskilling,
- ensuring the rights and equal opportunities for all young people that will lead to their unhampered inclusion in the educative, social and economic life of the country.

### Definition of the target group(s)

Special education constitutes a number of education services for students with disabilities and/or special education needs with a medical diagnosis.

The state ensures and continually improves the compulsory nature of special education emphasizing on the fact that it constitutes an integral part of compulsory and free of charge public education, provided to disabled individuals of all ages and education level.

Pursuant to l. 3699/2008, students with disabilities and/or special educational needs are considered students manifesting significant learning difficulties during an entire or limited period of their school life due to: sensory, mental, cognitive, developmental, psychological and neuropsychological disorders, that affect school adaptation and the school learning process, and that are based on an interdisciplinary evaluation.

This category of students includes individuals presenting mental disabilities, sensory impairments in vision and hearing, mobility disabilities, chronic incurable diseases, speech disorders, special learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia, dyscalculia), attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity, diffuse developmental disorders (autism spectrum) and multiple disabilities.

Students with special education needs also include students with complex cognitive emotional and social difficulties, delinquent behaviour due to abuse, parental neglect and abandonment or due to domestic violence. The category of students with special education needs may also include students with one or more special mental skills and talents.

### Specific support measures

The national education policy on the schooling of students with disabilities and/or special education needs targets integration into mainstream schools by providing suitable support structures and services.

Students' disability and special educational needs are examined and ascertained by:

- the Disability Certification Centres (KEPA), the Supreme Health Disability Certification Committees of l. [4058/2012](#),
- the Centres for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counseling and Support (KEDASYs),
- the Community Centres for the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents,
- the Centres for Mental Health.

The Disability Certification Centres, the Supreme Health Disability Certification Committees, the Community Centres for the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents and the Mental Health Centres have no competence over education and school issues which fall exclusively within the competence area of the Centres for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counseling and Support (KEDASYs).

KEDASYs hold the exclusive responsibility for the placement, enrolment, transfer and attendance in an appropriate school



unit of students with disabilities or/and special educational needs, as well as for the suitable context of individualized support such as parallel support or attendance in a school integration class of mainstream education.

Evaluation reports are accompanied by a Personalized Education Programme, which includes key axes and general guidelines and is completed in collaboration with the parent or guardian of the student with disabilities or/and special educational needs or the students themselves, if possible. The final evaluation report and the main points of the personalized education programme are communicated to the parents or guardians. As regards the time of re-evaluation, this is determined by KEDASYs according to the type and degree of the student's identified educational needs and learning difficulties. If the re-evaluation time is not specified, the reports are permanently valid.

Based on the individual evaluation and the recommendation of KEDASYs, the education of individuals with disabilities and/or special educational needs may take place in a mainstream school, where the following schooling options are available.

Specifically, students may attend:

- An ordinary mainstream school classroom, in the case of students with mild learning difficulties. Students are supported by the classroom teacher, who cooperates on a case by case basis with KEDASYs
- A mainstream school classroom, with concurrent support-inclusive education by special education teachers, when this is imperative by the type and degree of the special educational needs.
- Specially organised and suitably staffed integration classes, operating in the general and vocational education schools. Integration classes offer two types of programmes:
  1. Combined mainstream and specialised programmes (up to 15 teaching hours weekly), as determined by the competent KEDASY for students with milder special educational needs.
  2. Specialised group or individualised programmes of extended hours, as determined by the competent KEDASY for students with more severe special educational needs, which are not addressed by separate special education schools. The specialised programme may be independent from mainstream programmes, in accordance with the students' needs.

Integration classes aim at creating a fully inclusive school environment for students with special educational needs. Teachers of integration classes support students inside their school environment, whilst working closely with classroom teachers to differentiate activities and teaching practices and introduce adjustments into the learning content and teaching environment ([1. 4386/2016](#)). This is achieved through:

- the implementation of special education programmes,
- teaching and learning content adjustments,
- the use of special equipment, including e-learning equipment, software, logistics
- other solutions provided by KEDASYs.

By virtue of [1. 4823/2021](#), the primary aim of the Centers for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counseling and Support (KEDASYs) is to support school units and the Special Vocational Education and Training Workshops in order to ensure equal access to education and to ensure social and emotional development and progress.

KEDASYs are responsible for:

- exploring and evaluating educational and psychosocial needs
- focused educational and psychosocial interventions and actions of vocational guidance
- supporting school work in total
- informing and training
- raising social awareness.

KEDASYs conduct individual evaluations and issue assessment reports – diagnoses on the following situations:

1. When relevant needs are made obvious after actions undertaken to explore educational and psychosocial needs. In these cases, students for whom there is evidence for special educational needs or students facing other kinds of



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psychosocial difficulties undergo further evaluation by KEDASYs. Especially if it is found necessary after the completion of a short supporting programme.

2. After a recommendation of the Committees of Interdisciplinary Support, when it is estimated that particular students need further evaluation and diagnosing, despite the short supporting programme having had at school.
3. At the recommendation of the students' educational support team, in school units where there are no Committees of Interdisciplinary Support, proposed after an applied short support programme.
4. At the request of a parent to the competent KEDASY.

KEDASYs also:

- examine students at the request of the teachers' board.
- support school units for the preparation and implementation of short-term intervention programs,
- assist in the specialization of the main axes of students' Personalised Education Programmes,
- support and monitor the progress of students in education and mental health

When attendance of students with disability and/or special educational needs in schools of the mainstream education system and integration classes is difficult due to the type and level of impediment, education may be provided by:

- School units of special education
- Schools or classes which operate either individually or as branches of other schools in hospitals, rehabilitation centres, youth education institutes, institutes of chronic disease or services of education of rehabilitation of mental health units, as long as there are individuals of school age with disabilities or special educational needs staying there. These educational structures are considered school units of special education, falling under the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports and the framework of special education for school age children, and deploy educational programmes supervised by the Ministry. Other private bodies or entities, officially certified, can provide education, training and advisory services equal to the services provided by the school units of special education of the Ministry, to individuals over 15 years old who suffer severe mental retardation and relevant disabilities
- Home tutoring, due to severe temporary or chronic conditions which do not allow for the displacement and attendance of these students in schools. Home tutoring is not compulsorily provided by a special education teacher unless the competent KEDASY has officially provided a different diagnosis.

Education in special schools provided to children with disabilities and special educational needs, falls within the same framework in force in mainstream education.

According to the 10th Statistical Information Bulletin titled “*Data on the Education of Students with Disabilities and/or Special Educational Needs*” by the National Confederation of Disabled People (ESAMEA), the following data are reported: There are 101,683 students with disabilities and/or special educational needs (with or without an official diagnosis) enrolled in general and special primary and secondary education, representing 7% of the country's total student population.

88% of students with disabilities and/or special educational needs attend general education schools.

During the 2019–2020 school year, 89,597 students with disabilities and/or special educational needs were enrolled in general primary and secondary education, while 12,086 students were enrolled in Special Education and Training Schools (SMEAE).

Students with disabilities and/or special educational needs who attend general education schools are supported in Inclusion Classes (Τμήματα Ένταξης) with both common and specialized programs at a rate of 42.1% (37,738 students), while a similar percentage (41.2%) receive support only from the general classroom teacher.

36.4% of the students attending Inclusion Classes do not have an official diagnosis of disability and/or special educational needs.

10.7% of students with disabilities and/or special educational needs in general education schools have been approved for Parallel Support (9,612 students).



The number of students receiving specialized support (beyond the general classroom teacher) decreases significantly as they move from primary to lower and upper secondary education, where the percentage of students supported only by general education teachers exceeds 90%.

## National challenges in implementing inclusive teaching methods

The implementation of inclusive educational practices in Greece faces significant obstacles, which are linked to the structure of the educational system, the training of teachers, and the attitudes of society and the school community. These challenges can be categorized into organizational, cognitive, and behavioral.

### Organizational Challenges

The Greek educational system is characterized by strong centralized features, which limit the autonomy of school units and their ability to adopt innovative practices. The lack of adequate funding, equipment, accessible infrastructure, and appropriate curricula hinders the equal participation of students with special educational needs. In addition, delays in staffing with specialized personnel and the absence of ongoing institutional support affect the quality of education provided. A key example of systemic inefficiency is the operation of the Centers for Educational and Counseling Support (KEDASY). There are 71 KEDASY centers in total. However, according to a report by the Court of Auditors, only 27.11% of applications were processed during the 2018–2019 school year. The following year, 26.56% of applications were processed, and in 2020–2021, the figure was only 28.32%. According to responses from KEDASY employees, the primary reasons for these delays include staff shortages (83%), lack of adequate space (62%), absence of psychometric tools (59%), and the lack of experienced personnel (59%). These systemic issues significantly delay the issuance of official assessments and educational recommendations, further hindering access to appropriate support services.

### Cognitive Challenges

Many teachers have not received the necessary training to effectively implement inclusive practices in the classroom. The lack of knowledge and appropriate pedagogical tools makes it difficult to apply differentiated teaching, resulting in the failure to meet the diverse learning needs of all students. The development of systematic and practically oriented training programs is a fundamental prerequisite for the success of inclusive education.

### Behavioral Challenges

The attitudes and perceptions of teachers, parents, and students significantly influence the effectiveness of inclusion. The lack of awareness within the school community and society as a whole creates barriers to accepting children with disabilities and/or special educational needs. Negative behaviors and prejudices often discourage the full participation of these students in the school environment. Furthermore, the lack of collaboration between parents and schools, as well as limited family support, exacerbate these challenges.

The successful implementation of inclusive education requires investment in infrastructure and human resources, changes in educational policy, and the strengthening of a culture of acceptance and collaboration at all levels of the education system. Promoting values such as equality, respect for diversity, and the rights of all children is of vital importance for creating a school that is open and accessible to everyone.

## Inclusive teaching Methodologies - Cooperative Learning (Ομαδοσυνεργατική Διδασκαλία) and Differentiated Instruction (Διαφοροποιημένη Διδασκαλία)

### 1) COOPERATIVE LEARNING (ΟΜΑΔΟΣΥΝΕΡΓΑΤΙΚΗ ΔΙΔΑΣΚΑΛΙΑ)

Cooperative Learning is an instructional approach that emphasizes collective work and active interaction among students



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within small groups. According to official Greek educational documents, this method fosters a dynamic and participatory learning environment where students collaboratively explore, solve problems, and complete tasks. It aims not only to enhance academic understanding but also to develop social skills, promote mutual respect, and encourage positive interpersonal relationships. The method is adaptable across different educational levels and is designed to engage learners of diverse abilities, ensuring inclusive and meaningful participation for all.

### How is it implemented?

Phases of the Cooperative Learning Method:

First phase: Preparation of the teaching, group formation, and task assignment

The instructor identifies the topic and objectives of the subject matter to be studied.

The instructor determines the group members by applying methods to allocate members based on criteria.

The groups are formed.

A cooperation contract is drafted and mutually accepted by all members.

### Second phase: Cooperative group work

The instructor acts as a consultant for each group, outlining the steps of the tasks for the members.

Roles are assigned to each group member

A group coordinator is appointed.

The tasks are carried out within the group.

The group work is compiled from the individual contributions of the members.

### Third phase: Presentation of group work

The group coordinator presents the results of the group's work.

Questions and observations are posed by the whole class.

The instructor organizes the conclusions.

New knowledge is highlighted.

### Fourth phase: Evaluation

Learners conduct self-assessment and peer-assessment according to the cooperation contract set at the beginning of the method, focusing on the achievement of goals and the degree of collaboration.

### Fifth phase: Recap

A recap is done of the main points, which structure the elements of learners' metacognition.

### What resources does it require?

The effective implementation of cooperative learning in the Greek educational context necessitates a range of critical resources, which can be broadly categorized as follows:

#### Qualified and Continuously Trained Educators:

Teachers must receive specialized initial training as well as ongoing professional development focused on cooperative learning methodologies, group dynamics, and inclusive pedagogy. This is essential for the design, facilitation, and assessment of collaborative learning activities. The Ministry of Education and the Institute of Educational Policy (IEΠ) offer structured programs aimed at enhancing teachers' competencies in these areas (Υπουργείο Παιδείας, 2023; IEΠ, 2022).

#### Adequate Time Allocation:

Curricula and school schedules should allow sufficient time for students to engage in group work, discussions, peer



evaluations, and presentations. Flexibility in lesson planning is necessary to accommodate the iterative and interactive nature of cooperative learning (IEΠ, 2022).

### **Appropriate Learning Environment:**

Physical classroom arrangements must support student interaction and collaboration. This includes flexible seating plans, spaces conducive to group discussions, and accessibility for all students, including those with special educational needs (Υπουργείο Παιδείας, 2023).

### **Instructional Materials and Technological Support:**

Teachers require tailored instructional resources, such as collaborative worksheets, project guidelines, and assessment rubrics specifically designed for group activities. The integration of digital tools (e.g., interactive whiteboards, tablets) further enhances the collaborative learning experience and supports differentiated learning (IEΠ, 2022).

### **Administrative and Institutional Support:**

School leadership and educational authorities must actively support the implementation of cooperative learning through policy endorsement, provision of resources, scheduling adaptations, and evaluation frameworks that recognize group work as a key pedagogical approach (Υπουργείο Παιδείας, 2023).

### **Student Preparation and Social Skills Development:**

Successful cooperative learning also depends on preparing students to work respectfully and effectively within diverse groups. Developing interpersonal skills, conflict resolution strategies, and a culture of mutual respect is crucial for fostering a positive collaborative environment (IEΠ, 2022).

### **What have been the results?**

Cooperative learning has shown significant positive impacts on promoting inclusion within educational settings:

#### **Enhanced Social Inclusion:**

Cooperative learning actively fosters the social integration of students from diverse backgrounds, including those from ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, and other vulnerable or marginalized groups. By working collaboratively in groups, students develop respect, understanding, and acceptance for differences, which helps break down social barriers and stereotypes.

#### **Increased Participation of All Students:**

This method ensures that every student, regardless of their abilities or background, is given a voice and a meaningful role within the group. It encourages equitable participation and collaboration, reducing feelings of isolation and exclusion that some students might otherwise experience.

#### **Development of Empathy and Collective Responsibility:**

Students learn to appreciate diverse perspectives and develop empathy, which fosters a classroom culture of mutual support. This social-emotional growth is key for creating inclusive classrooms where diversity is valued and students feel safe and supported.

#### **Reduction of Social Stigma and Stereotyping:**

Through regular interaction and cooperative tasks, students challenge preconceived notions and social stereotypes related to gender, ethnicity, ability, or other demographic factors. This contributes to a more tolerant and inclusive school climate.

#### **Support for Vulnerable Groups:**



Cooperative learning provides a supportive framework that encourages students from vulnerable social groups to engage actively and confidently in the learning process. It also enhances their self-esteem and sense of belonging, which are critical for their academic and social success.

Inclusion is a central outcome of cooperative learning, as it promotes equal participation, respect for diversity, and social integration. This method helps create a classroom environment where all students can thrive academically and socially, regardless of their individual differences.

### Target group?

The cooperative learning method primarily targets middle school students (Gymnasium), regardless of their varying levels of ability. This approach aims to foster increased interaction, collaboration, and active engagement among all learners. However, cooperative learning is not limited to this age group; it is also applicable to students of various ages and with diverse learning needs, emphasizing the development of social skills and the promotion of group-based learning dynamics. Furthermore, cooperative learning caters to students with different cognitive levels and learning capacities, encouraging respect, acceptance, and inclusive participation within the classroom. The method is adaptable and can be implemented across all educational stages, with appropriate modifications tailored to the specific needs and characteristics of each student group. This flexibility ensures that cooperative learning effectively supports a broad spectrum of learners, facilitating both academic and social development.

## 2) DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION (ΔΙΑΦΟΡΟΠΟΙΗΜΕΝΗ ΔΙΔΑΣΚΑΛΙΑ)

Differentiated Instruction aims at effective teaching and learning for each student, who are required to coexist in specific classes with students of approximately the same age but with very different levels of language proficiency, abilities, motivations, and needs.

### How is it implemented?

Differentiation means tailoring instruction to meet individual needs. Whether teachers differentiate content, process, products, or the learning environment,

Content – what the student needs to learn or how the student will get access to the information;

Process – activities in which the student engages in order to make sense of or master the content;

Products – culminating projects that ask the student to rehearse, apply, and extend what he or she has learned in a unit; and

Learning environment – the way the classroom works and feels.

### What resources does it require?

Implementing Differentiated Instruction requires a combination of strategic tools, planning structures, and classroom resources. Teachers need diagnostic tools to assess students' readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles—often through observations, self-assessments, and evaluation protocols. It also demands a wide range of instructional materials, such as graphic organizers, tiered activities, learning centers, multimedia content, and adapted texts. Teachers must also be supported with training and professional development to design effective differentiated lessons and manage diverse classroom needs. Additionally, collaborative planning time, formative assessment tools, and school-level support are critical to adapting lessons, reorganizing groupings, and adjusting content delivery methods effectively.

### What have been the results?

The implementation of Differentiated Instruction in Greek schools has demonstrated several positive outcomes. Research and practical applications indicate improvements in student engagement and motivation, as students experience learning activities tailored to their abilities and interests. There is also evidence of enhanced academic performance, particularly among students with learning difficulties or those requiring additional support. Furthermore, teachers report better classroom management and increased professional satisfaction due to the effectiveness of the approach in meeting individual needs. Overall, the method contributes to reducing academic failure and social exclusion.

### Target group?



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The target group of this method includes a wide range of students with diverse needs and abilities. This method particularly supports students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), such as those facing learning disabilities or difficulties, as well as students from varied linguistic backgrounds, including non-native speakers and bilingual learners. It also addresses the needs of students with different cognitive levels and learning styles within the same classroom, along with those requiring behavioral or emotional support.

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