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an Exploratory Survey**

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**ABSTRACT**

*In school contexts, the narrative paradigm assumes great relevance, especially in the educational relationship with pupils with special educational needs, representing a fundamental reference in the promotion of inclusive and participatory pathways and fostering the development of reflective, metacognitive and social skills and the maturation of an awareness of one's emotional experiences. In this sense, the development of a narrative model of intervention in the school setting fits well among the possible itineraries in the framework of inclusive education, to identify pedagogical solutions capable of designing effective teaching for pupils with disabilities. The hypothesis to be investigated relates to the use in school settings of narrative tool as a vicarious tool; therefore, the research presented aimed to understand what level of awareness teachers have regarding the importance of such tools and what, if any, degree of mastery they have. The paper, which is part, therefore, of a larger research project involving the adoption of narrative tools to facilitate inclusive design, reports the preliminary results obtained from an exploratory survey carried out through the administration of a quantitative questionnaire, filled out by 768 teachers in training, regarding the quantity and quality of information possessed by teachers about the life of the student with disabilities and the way in which it was collected.*

**Keywords:** *vicariance, narrative tool, inclusion, action-research*

## **Introduction**

In school contexts, the narrative paradigm assumes great relevance, especially in the educational relationship with pupils with special educational needs (Demetrio, 2000; Gaspari, 2008; Ruggerini, 2013), representing a fundamental reference in the promotion of inclusive and participatory pathways and fostering the development of reflective, metacognitive and social skills and the maturation of an awareness of one's emotional experiences. In the multiple places of disabilities and difficulties, there is a need to increase the margins of understanding of individual life stories (, restoring to the subject the possibility of connecting events, emotions, choices. In this sense, the development of a narrative model of intervention in the school setting fits well among the possible itineraries in the framework of inclusive education, to identify pedagogical solutions capable of designing effective teaching for pupils with disabilities. The telling or writing of the personal life story (Bruner, 1984) are, in fact, fundamental tools in a training path aimed at inclusion, particularly in the school setting, since they can take on a double value, as training and inclusive design devices

The complexity of the teaching-learning process somehow requires aligning teaching action to the special needs of each pupil, tracing that potential for educability that arises from the intertwining of biological and socio-cultural identity and that allows for the direction of educational action. It becomes necessary for the teacher to be able to adapt the teaching system, understood as an "adaptive complex system" (Sibilio, 2017) to individual differences, so as to ensure the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process; the diversities, the cases that cannot be traced back to parameters, human types or previously catalogued social behaviors, represent a useful incentive for the continuous revision of cognitive premises and styles, as well as the starting point for identifying those non-linear trajectories that allow the individual, the subjective, the different point of view to find a place and recognition in teaching. The hypothesis to be investigated relates to the use in school settings of narrative tool as a vicarious tool); therefore, the research presented aimed to understand what level of awareness teachers have regarding the importance of such tools and what, if any, degree of mastery they have.

The paper, which is part, therefore, of a larger research project involving the adoption of narrative tools to facilitate inclusive design, reports the preliminary results obtained from an exploratory survey carried out through the administration of a quantitative questionnaire, filled out by 768 teachers in training, regarding the quantity and quality of information possessed by teachers about the life of the student with disabilities and the way in which it was collected.

The results of this first phase of the research will be further investigated through a Focus Group, conducted according to the logic of Appreciative Inquiry, which, by focusing attention on the positive aspects and potentialities emerging in the narratives collected, should offer teachers the opportunity to carry out a more consciously oriented planning action that is more responsive to the demands of personalization and individualization of pupils with special needs.

## The Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks of this research are the constructivist and phenomenological-hermeneutical one. The main focus of this research is about the reality observation, understood as a social construction, and understanding the experience's meaning according to the subjects involved in this research. In this perspective, Vicariance recalls a vision of didactics where the individual, the subjective and different points of view should find a place and be recognized.

The complexity of the teaching-learning process (Damiano, 2006; Rivoltella & Rossi, 2012;) sometimes requires adjusting the didactic action to each student's special needs, defining the *educability potential*, arisen from linking biological and socio-cultural identity (Frauenfelder 2002; Frauenfelder, Rivoltella, Rossi, Sibilio, 2013), which allows to orient the educational action.

For this aim, using storytelling an inclusive teacher is able to seize in the Life Stories some reflections about the inclusive organization and "good practises" (Canevaro & Ianes, 2002; De Angelis, Vitale 2017)) for new operational ideas. The act of documenting through storytelling in an inclusive perspective would allow teacher to guide the student in the search for new ways of inhabiting the future, towards possible and viable choice realities and trajectories.

A truly change-oriented education has the purpose of encouraging students, especially who experience a condition of difficulty, to look at reality through new interpretative filters (also as result of diversified and unknown experiences) and to think of themselves differently, where the future is no longer deterministically connected to a condition of deprivation, of disability, but to an autonomous project aimed at well-being and full self-fulfilment. In school contexts, storytelling represents an educational tool capable of promoting identity awareness of students with "special educational needs" (Canevaro & Goussot, 2000). In fact, through storytelling teacher could encourage students to develop reflective, metacognitive and social skills, which are essential for the transformative and emancipatory path of the students' education. The teacher becomes participating of the student's first-person story, which refers to his singular vision of the world (Mortari, 2005), putting it in a position of phenomenological centrality (Bertolini, 1965; Bruzzone, 2021) in the planning of his educational path.

According to that, the elaboration of a narrative model has a double value: it is both an educational tool then an inclusive planning means (Gaspari, 2008).

A critical element could be probably represented by the teacher education and the quality of his skills: the teacher has to know the student in order to act and act didactically to get to know him, recognizing his evolutionary specificity and remodulating the teaching activity on the identification of methods and tools capable to focus on student's peculiarities and natural inclinations (Aiello, Sharma & Sibilio, 2016).

Starting from these premises, the present study aims to understand what the teachers' level of awareness is regarding to the importance of storytelling tool and how much are they possibly able to keep under check it, also considering the perspective of increasing educational courses for promoting the use of Life Stories, aware of the inclusive potential of this tool. The hypothesis relates to a possible

inadequacy of the tools currently used in inclusive micro design to "narrate" the complexity that characterizes the existential trajectories and school paths of students with disabilities. At the same time, this hypothesis relates to the use of storytelling as a vicarious tool (Berthoz, 2011; Sibilio, 2016).

## **Methodology**

The objective is to present preliminary results of an exploratory survey conducted through the administration of a questionnaire to obtain quantity and quality information by the teachers about both the life of their students with disability and the way they usually get this.

For this purpose, it was administered to a teachers sample a questionnaire relating to the information possessed by them about the life of students with disabilities and the method of collecting them. Starting from these premises, we intend to understand if and how storytelling can facilitate the acquisition of useful information for teachers in order to plan the didactic action in an inclusive perspective. The questionnaire was administered via a Google form to 768 teachers who attended training courses in the region Campania. All participants who filled out the questionnaire at the start of the courses have teaching experience.

The questionnaire is divided into four sections: the first part aims at collecting background and medical history data: age and gender, permanent or fixed-term contract, regular or support teaching position, teaching experience level and if they have ever taught in a class with students with disabilities.

The second part, formed by 13 questions (1-13), aims to collect the perceptions that teachers have about the importance of information on the personal life story of the students with disability for an effective teaching planning. So, referring to our study object, the questions regarded the amount of information collected on school history, diagnosis and personal life, focusing on three-time frames: at the beginning, six months after beginning and at the end of the school year. The answer options were seven based on Likert scale (1= nothing, 7= very much).

The third section is formed by three questions (14 -16). The first one (14) regarded to how teachers collected the information about the student's history. Specifically, the question provided for multiple choice between the following seven answer options: formal meetings with the family, formal meetings with specialized support people (doctors, therapists, educators), formal meetings with teachers from previous years (vertical continuity), meetings of the class council, occasional and informal discussions with colleagues (in the corridors or during the lesson change), reading of the students' personal file, dialogue with the students on various aspects of their life. The second and the third question of this section (15 and 16) questioned teachers about how they had received the information, if formally and/or informally. In this case answers were closed-ended and provided for seven options based on Likert scale (1= nothing, 7= very much).

The last section of the questionnaire aims at studying if during their

professional training teachers have ever heard of Life Stories as storytelling tool and if they have ever used it (it was required a dichotomic response yes/ not).

At the end, the last question is addressed to teachers who had used this tool and our aim is to study how it has been used. In the question n.18, teachers could choose between the following five response options: to know better the students, to practise the reflexive and narrative skills in the students, to plan targeted intervention, to improve the classroom atmosphere, other.

## Results

The results of the descriptive analysis show that teachers consider very important for the didactic planning the information about the life of the students with disability (mean of 6.63 and standard deviation of 0.69). In spite of it, the averages put on evidence that didactic plannings are very lower than the information collected six months after the beginning and at the end of the school year.

It seems there is a discrepancy between the intention and the action: that means even if teachers consider very important their student's biographies, they do not act coherently, not search the useful information and only after almost the whole school year (six months from the beginning of the school year means the middle of March) they affirm to have more information about the students with special educational needs.

Moreover, the results put on evidence that at the end of the school year support teachers have more information than the regular teachers of the classroom both about the scholastic career and the personal life and diagnosis of the students with disabilities. So, the results show the perception about support teacher as the person who has to take over the management of the student with disabilities, such as an interlocutor not privileged but unique of his teaching path. The responsibility of collecting information, studying diagnosis, finding the more adequate didactic tools is still linked only to the support teacher. Therefore, differently from the *co-teaching* perspective, it is not considered as a common responsibility shared by the class council depending on the intersubjective dimension of the construction of the teaching-learning process.

Respect to how teachers collect information about the personal life story of the students with disabilities it seems that they use mainly the meeting with family (67.56%). Regarding that, it is important to put on evidence that the official meetings school-family are effectively de-structuring, even if they represent (as the same teachers affirm) a special moment of hearing and discussion with families.

In fact, the teacher meets the family without any device for registration and without any specific training which allows him to conduct intentionally and consciously the discussion. So, information loss their documental value because it does not exist the duty of official return and sharing. Therefore, it is evident again the need of the teacher education about the use of qualitative

methods and, particularly, the storytelling tools.

The last relevant evidence of the study, which refers to the results about the first data analysed, regards the knowledge of the storytelling tool. It seems that few teachers know it (37% N=284). More specifically the study puts on evidence that regular teachers know better the storytelling tool than support teachers. Moreover, only the 37.2% (N=105) of 284 teachers who know the storytelling tool affirm to have used it, a part of them (37%) has used it to plan targeted interventions, the 27% to practise the reflective and narrative skills, the 22% to know better the students, the 13% to improve the classroom atmosphere. It comes to light a teacher's profile that even if admit the importance of having information about the life story of students, do not act in order to learn or improve his methodological and didactic skills coherently with this need.

## Conclusions

According to this study results it comes to light a teacher's profile that even if admit the importance of having information about the life story of students, do not act in order to learn or improve his methodological and didactic skills coherently with this need. If only the 37% of the interviewees affirms to know the storytelling tools, it means that some pedagogical and didactic principles, already largely consolidated such as the efficacy of the narrative and autobiographic paradigm, are not included into the professional skills and knowledge of teachers, specifically of support teachers. Anyway, these statistic results do not represent objectively the reality, for this reason it is fundamental to add a phenomenological approach (Damiano, 2006) which values the importance and the significance of them.

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