

Chapter 8

School of the Future: E-Tools and New Pedagogies to Build Up an Inclusive Learning Community

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ABSTRACT

This chapter tackles the issue of e-inclusion in the field of school education. A picture of the new millennium learning panorama is outlined where new learners, new teachers, new tools and new pedagogies are around. Some experience –based reflections are also proposed on how, from this panorama, new learning opportunities may arise for “all” learners, irrespective of their individual differences and specific characteristics. The overall purpose of the chapter is to give an idea that the building up of a genuinely inclusive classroom is an achievable goal, provided that strong efforts are devoted not only in the direction of producing/using fully accessible e-tools but also (perhaps mainly) in the direction of making the most of them in order to suit the “different” needs of the “different” students.

SETTING THE SCENE

Nowadays the term “school of the future” is widely used¹. It expresses a common feeling that school is changing and evolving so that in the future it will be able to offer a variety of new and augmented learning opportunities. But in which direction is the new school moving exactly, what are the achievable targets and the suitable milestones along the hard road? Above all, what exactly will this “school of the future” be like? In the following

we tackle these issues by taking the viewpoint of those students who are less fortunate, those who in the “school of the past” were often forced to live at the margins of mainstream school systems.

The Challenge: No Student Left Behind

The recent UNESCO Education for All - Global Monitoring Report 2009 reminds us that “the right to education is a basic human right” and that “like any human right, it should be protected and extended as an end in itself”.

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In this direction: “Accelerating progress towards education for all is one of the defining development challenges of the early twenty-first century” also because: “progress towards the equalization of opportunity in education is one of the most important conditions for overcoming social injustice and reducing social disparities in any country. It is also a condition for strengthening economic growth and efficiency” (UNESCO, 2009).

The emerging concept of Universal Access to Education ² entails the ability of all students to have equal opportunity in education, regardless of their social class, ethnicity, background or physical disabilities³; it is directly linked to the principle of “non-discrimination” clearly stated in the charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000) according to which: “Any discrimination such as sex, race, color, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited”.

As a matter of fact, instead, many young people of school age are currently still unable to fully access mainstream education or are *de facto* excluded from active participation in school systems. This may happen for a variety of reasons and mainly regards those students:

- with physical and/or sensorial impairments;
- with cognitive disabilities;
- with specific and non-specific learning difficulties;
- with communication disorders
- who have a cultural/linguistic heritage that is different from the one of the majority of their classmates (e.g. immigrants);
- who are hard to reach because of specific personal, family or social situations (school drop outs, illness, social exclusion, nomadic habits,...)

Most of these students are unable to fully access standard education systems and are, therefore, at risk of being marginalized: as a matter of fact, for some of them regular attendance at school is highly problematic while others show significant problems in accessing and /or using mainstream educational tools. Despite the specificity and the seriousness of their problems, they have, instead, the right to expect the same standard of education as their schoolmates (Dymond et al, 2008) and also to be considered and act as being an integral part of the learning community.

From Integration to Inclusion

The recognition of the right of all students to “belong to the mainstream” has given rise to the concept of school inclusion, which has gradually substituted that of school integration. The difference between the two terms instantiates a change in perspective rather than simply a change in terminology.

According to what Northway (1977) underlines, the idea of integration implies that people with special needs (which are “different”) are integrated into an existing “normal/standard” society; the concept of inclusion, instead, implies looking at the overall society as a whole which contains and encompasses a variety of individuals, each one with his own peculiarities and specificities.

While the concept of integration focuses on the enactment of suitable “support actions” for people with special needs (who are considered different from those defined as “normal”), inclusion entails a society where all the persons, despite individual differences, have the same rights, play their own active roles and are all actors and co-stars in the same theatre.

The new concept of inclusion refers to almost all aspects of social life, including education, where, as mentioned above, it actually refers to the idea that all students are ensured equal opportunities, irrespective of their varying skills, abilities, possibilities, problems, difficulties.

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