

Collaboration between professionals for inclusive education: challenges from Italian policy, practice and evidence

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1) Historical Roots & Legal Milestones

From exclusion to full inclusion

Historical milestones

- Students with disabilities largely excluded from mainstream schools
- Institutionalization common; limited access to community life
- Basaglia movement & early laws
- Basaglia de-institutionalization (1968) – shift toward community care
- Law 517/1977 : Mainstream placement as the norm; right for all to attend the same school
- Law 104/1992: medical certification as the basis for entitlement to IEP (Individualized Educational Plan) and support hours
- Law 170/2010
 - Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) entitled to a Personalized Didactic Plan (PDP)
- 2012–2013 directives/circulars
 - "Other SEN" including socio-cultural disadvantage; school team defines needs; PDP formalized
- Law 66/2017: adoption of WHO International Classification of Functioning as reference for assessment & intervention

2) Categories of Special Educational Needs

Entitlement pathways & common critiques

Three categories at a glance

- 1) Certified disability (IEP + support teacher hours)
 - 2) Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) — PDP, no extra staff
 - 3) Other SEN — PDP decided by teaching team, no extra staff
- A common challenge: the medical model
 - Entitlement hinges on diagnosis/certification
 - Risks: deficit focus, social labelling, stigmatization

3) Monitoring & Evaluation

From structures to outcomes

System monitoring

- Growth of national/cross-national assessments (e.g., PISA)
- Expanded roles for INDIRE and INVALSI
- Recent legislation
 - PEI (IEP), PDP (PDP), PAI (Annual Inclusion Plan)
- Whole-school documents
 - PTOF, RAV, Piano di Miglioramento
 - Sections dedicated to inclusion
- Decrees 66/2017 & 96/2019: QA systems to assess effectiveness
- INVALSI tasked with developing outcome indicators
- Challenge: individualized IEP goals complicate comparability

Evidence gaps & perceptions

- Limited empirical evidence linking inclusion model to outcomes
- Mixed but promising signals
 - Positive teacher/parent perceptions in some studies
 - Social participation evidence still thin

4) Teaching Roles

Classroom/subject teachers & support teachers

Roles & status

- Both roles legally co-responsible for all students
- In practice, classroom/subject teachers often hold higher status
- Support teachers increased steadily (310.000 students with disabilities)
- 2022–2023: ~218,000 support teachers ($\approx 23.1\%$ of workforce)
- Italy chose multi-purpose (not disability-specific) initial training for support teachers
- Critiques call for deeper specialization

Collaboration challenges

- Support linked to individual student entitlement ⇒ perceived as individual resource
- Risk of delegating responsibility to support teachers
- Low retention as some move to classroom roles

5) In-School & External Resources

Human resources at the core

In-school provision

- Curricula adaptations, modified evaluation, accessible materials
- Assistive equipment and adult support (support teachers)
- Educatori, autonomy/communication facilitators
- Operative working group plans the IEP with family and professionals
- School level inclusion coordinator
- School level Inclusion group for culture and practice

6) Networks & Cross-Sector Collaboration

From school to health services

Territorial support networks

- CTS/CTI centers support schools and teachers; uneven availability by region
- Autism help desks (Sportello Autismo) for training & peer consultancy
- GIT (territorial inclusion groups) support schools' planning
- ASL units include UVM (multidisciplinary assessment & rehabilitation)
- Specialized legacy institutes (e.g., blind/deaf) as resource centers

7) Trentino Experimental Project (2013– 2015)

Changing role of support teacher: normalization

Activities & design

- Training for teachers, educators, facilitators across 17 experimental classes
- Tutor-teachers provided ongoing support; advanced course for case managers
- External evaluation; parallel control classes (n=17)
- Web platform for best-practice exchange; ICF-based profiling

Classroom innovations

- Reorganized spaces; cooperative learning with structured roles
- Laboratories in learning activities
- Metacognition activities, self-regulation and self-evaluation

Results — learning & cognition

- Academic levels comparable to controls
- Metacognition gains: more flexible 'theory of intelligence'
- Social participation and climate
- Reduced rejection of SEN students; chosen more often in group work
- Classes became more adaptable; better adherence to social norms
- Teachers: improved collaboration, shared knowledge, cohesion

What made the difference?

- Tutor-teachers enabled systematic, hands-on guidance
- Reorganized support hours for co-teaching & workshops
- Parity for support teachers in planning and evaluation

8) Key Takeaways & Implications

From project to policy and practice

Policy/practice implications

- Invest in collaborative planning time and co-teaching structures
- Clarify support teacher as a class/school resource, not just individual
- Use structured cooperative learning with role clarity and observation sheets
- Embed metacognition routines across subjects
- Leverage labs/projects and multimedia to engage diverse learners

Thank you for your attention!

Questions?

Contact & references available on request.

Key References

Law 118/1971; Law 517/1977 — Foundational shift to mainstream schooling in Italy.

Law 104/1992 — Framework law on disability and individualized education plans (IEP).

Law 170/2010 — Recognition of Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) and Personalized Didactic Plans (PDP).

Legislative Decrees 66/2017 and 96/2019 — Alignment with the WHO ICF bio-psycho-social model; system evaluation for inclusion.

WHO (2001/2007). International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF).

INVALSI & INDIRE documents on school self-evaluation (RAV) and improvement planning (PTOF).

Autonomous Province of Trento — Provincial Law 5/2006; 2013–2015 inclusive schooling experimental project reports.