

SERVIZIO CIPÌ-H EDUCATION AND PARTNERSHIPS IN THE COMMUNITY OF PRATO FOR THE INCLUSION OF BOYS AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

Perla GIAGNONI¹, Barbara DAVANZATI², Silvia ANICHINI³

¹ Former Responsible of Pedagogical and Organizational Coordination Service,
City of Prato, Italy

² Educator skilled in the inclusion of disability, City of Prato, Italy

³ Educational Coordinator, City of Prato, Italy

ABSTRACT

The presence of a child with a disability in a family requires adjustments and deep changes both personal and in the family system. The family is sometimes confused because, even with many available services, these are fragmented and the paths to access them are not always clear and known.

The overall objective is to provide children with disabilities and their families a substantial support in connection with the various public entities that operate in the field of disability,

The objectives are to increase the knowledge of the child with disabilities in a variety of contexts and relationships in order to promote the “facilitator” elements and minimize “barriers”; support families of children with disabilities; involve the social and health workers, the teachers and the families to share responsibilities, objectives and actions to be implemented. Focus is guaranteed on parents, quality of education, teachers’ professionalism, practicability, dissemination, network.

Through Cipì H Service we want to highlight and promote a change in perspective when considering the integration of children with disabilities: i.e. shifting the focus from the child to his environment. Imagine a future where all people, not just specialists, will be able to enter into relationships with disabilities. Adults and children will be facilitators capable of removing or reducing any barriers.

KEYWORDS: childhood, disabilities, inclusion, institutions, networks, public/private

INTRODUCTION

The Municipality of Prato manages 10 public nurseries and 8 private kindergarten, within a wider integrated public-private partnership. The public educational services provide a total of 1,110 children and among them, a percentage of about 4% are children with disabilities.

The City always pursued the goal of integrating children with disabilities in educational services and helping their families in relationships

with the institutions, and proposed itself as a link between the family and the different players of the processes of inclusion.

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Often the access to the nursery or kindergarten is the first opportunity for inclusion of a child with disabilities in a community, with the consequent concerns of every parent-child separation, and the disability makes it more delicate.

A cozy relationship with the child and parents, at this early and critical stage of parenting path, may represent the first significant support and concrete help in the reconstruction of the fragmentary nature of the services.

With this purpose, the municipality of Prato created a service called “Cipi-H” intended for school personnel, the social workers and especially families with children with disabilities attending a nursery or a preschool, with the goal to weave networks between Municipality of Prato, Regional Education Office, Health Office, Autonomous Schools, parents associations and University.

OBJECTIVES

The overall objective is to provide children with disabilities and their families a substantial support in connection with the various public entities that operate in the field of disability, in order to draw coherent interventions aimed at achieving the well-being of children and families, monitored in real-time: this involves all stakeholders, including parents, each with its own role to achieve shared goals. Particularly

- Increasing the knowledge of the child with disabilities in a variety of contexts and relationships in order to promote the “facilitators” and minimize “barriers”
- Supporting families
- Involving social and health workers, teachers and families to share responsibilities, objectives and actions to be implemented

DESIGNING AND CARRYING OUT INITIATIVES AND ACTIONS

In this context, the Pedagogical and Organizational Coordination Service works to:

- weave textures between educational services and the families, to build meaningful connections and to qualify the relationship with parents;

- implement the relations between operators of educational services and parents to raise their awareness as parents and “experts” on their own and others' role by offering different tools and moments of reflection;
- accompany the parents to transform the “threat” of raising children into a challenge.

ACTIVITIES

The service offers, therefore, different “system” actions, putting the focus on two directions:

- Reaching to the other one
- Waiting the other one

These **activities** include:

Focusing on the parents, offering **Parents Projects** such as:

- **supporting the inclusion** of children with disabilities and welcoming their families, through direct knowledge of children and their parents before entering the educational service;
- **planning talks** with the parents for educational continuity, to help an easier transition of the disabled child to a school of higher order;
- sometimes the teacher of kindergarten accompanies children with a disability **entering the primary school**.

Focusing on the quality of the Educational Offer, particularly:

- ordinarily promoting small group activities, secured by a wide coexistence of teachers;
- making workshops for small groups of children, including the child with a disability, using right tools and techniques to foster relationships, facilitative environment, and cognitive, motor, sound, expressive stimulation.

Focusing on the professionalism

The service provides continuous professional **development activities**:

- **annual training**, to promote culturally and practically the point of view of acceptance / inclusion of children with disabilities;
- **recurring training**, to promote a culture of inclusion in the city, particularly in two conferences in September:

2010: Growing in a different mind

in a world of relationships possible for the well-being of children with disabilities

2011: Growing up ... no exception

“No Exception” means involving all the figures around children with disabilities and making everyone feel involved, to exclude no child or family.

This “path” intends to highlight and promote a change in perspective when considering the integration of children with disabilities: i.e. shifting the focus from the child to his environment.

Imagine a future where all people, not just specialists, will be able to enter into relationships with disabilities. Adults and children will be facilitators capable of removing or reducing any barriers.

- **specialist training, promoting interdisciplinary working groups** (UFSMIA - Unità Funzionale Salute Mentale Infanzia e Adolescenza / Functional Childhood and Adolescence Mental Health Unit - operators and teachers of the municipal nurseries and schools) for the specific type of disease (subjects with autistic disorder and those with severe communication difficulties that require the use of CAA, Augmentative and Alternative Communication) with the goal of improving the quality of educational intervention, create a scheduled collaboration between staff education and health;
- **workshop**, with laboratory activities conducted by experts, organized in small groups of children, including children with disabilities, with the presence of their teachers during classes. This is on the job training, designed to increase the knowledge of the child with disabilities in various contexts and relationships in order to promote the “facilitator” elements and minimize the obstacles. (CAA - music therapy). It is also vital to **systematize** the use of workshops for children with disabilities in order to make them a training action “on the job” for teachers through **planning, monitoring and workshops evaluation**.

Focusing on the Application of Law 104/92 to include disabilities

- **Offering a concrete support** to teachers for planning of special educational intervention aimed at children with disabilities. Exercising to build support through regularly scheduled meetings (the name of this service is “sportello Amico PIS”);
- **Spreading of best practices for viewing and sending reports to UFSMIA about risk situations in evolutionary development.**

There is a systematic and shared path concerning notifications:

- Reporting to the Coordination Service by the teachers of children who exhibit behaviors that are consistent with those in line with age or with peers.

- Observation targeted by filling in a special grid, direct observation by the pedagogical coordination.
- Interview with parents to share and decide together an evaluation by the health care system (UFSMIA). in support of the right to information, also reported by Law 104/92,

Focusing on the dissemination of knowledge and the promotion of the culture of childhood giving continuity to:

DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES:

- prepared by the Pedagogical and Organizational Coordination **participation is organized through conferences**, initiatives at local, regional, national level for the dissemination of practice on school inclusion of children with disabilities;
- within the framework of **international projects**, dissemination of good practices to the education of children with disabilities, exportable in contexts that are going to experience laws on inclusion education;
- time and space for the activities of **educational documentation**;
- care and support for local networks of all players involved in the inclusion of children with disabilities.

WEAVING NETWORKS OF CONTINUITY

Networks of continuity between the various actors are hard to build and understand all the implications, and to sustain over time, especially in the presence of personnel changes, but are valuable for the plots they offer.

In recent years, a permanent local network was born between the City of Prato (Department of Education), the Office of School Planning and the USL 4 (Health Service), the Autonomous Schools, which operate in synergy. This network:

- created new forms to support integration; D.P.F. (Diagnosis and Functional Profile) and P.I.S. (Including School Plan)
- offered specific training involving more than 400 teachers from schools of every grade and kindergartens in the province of Prato
- produced a brochure to detect the presence of handicap in accordance with Law 104/92 to have the support and the right to a higher score for access
- made an agreement between UFSMIA (Functional Unit Childhood and Adolescent Mental Health) and the Educational Services of the Municipality of Prato to allow disabled children from non-Italian speaking families without residence to enter kindergarden; the

agreement determined that in the presence of the health report, the Admissions Office of Educational Services is required to examine the specific case of the child.

TO WHOM AND WHY THESE ACTIVITIES ARE MADE:

Let us always remember the ultimate goal of the activities and services put in place by the Municipality of Prato:

- well-being and well-staying of boys and girls;
- support to parents and professionals;
- good practices of integration;
- developing the skills of teachers: learning to work with children with disabilities means developing skills they can use even with “normal” children;
- development of a culture of acceptance and inclusion;
- change of context, to be more empathetic towards people with disabilities;
- inter-institutional cooperation, to overcome the fragmentation of the actions.