



L-Università ta' Malta
Faculty of Education



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR INCLUSION
AND THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

SIPes
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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

APRIL 2026

University of Malta

Breakout Session 1

Inclusive Pedagogies for Belonging and Learning (I)

Time: 10:00 – 11:45

Location: Level 1, Meeting Room 101

Chair: Prof. Margaret Mangion

Paper I

Authors:

Prof. Davide Di Palma – University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli", Italy

Dr Fabiola Palmiero – University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli", Italy

Dr Emma Saraiello – University of Naples "Parthenope", Italy

Dr Giovanna Scala – University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli", Italy

Dr Margarita Bogdanova – University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli", Italy – **Presenting author**

Dr Gianluca Gravino – University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli", Italy)

Title: Artistic Practices and Digital Tools for Inclusion in Lower Secondary School

Abstract: In recent decades, inclusive education has been redefined as the quality of learning environments and participation processes, moving beyond a compensatory approach focused on deficits. In this context, artistic practices—due to their multimodal nature—and digital tools can expand opportunities for expression, agency and belonging, reducing barriers related to traditional performance and language skills.

The aim of this research is to evaluate the impact of an artistic-digital intervention, designed with inclusivity in mind, on levels of school engagement and sense of belonging in lower secondary school, with a particular focus on students with special educational needs (SEN) and students of foreign origin.

The study, conducted in a school in the Ischia area with a sample of approximately 135 students (aged 11–13), adopts a quasi-experimental design and a mixed-methods approach. The experimental group participated, outside school hours, in a 4-month programme (two 90-minute meetings per week) led by art teachers and digital experts, culminating in the co-design of a virtual exhibition using Artsteps. The control group followed a programme of the same duration and structure, based on traditional methodologies.

The quantitative component used the Student Engagement Instrument (SEI) and the Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) in pre/post; the qualitative component included semi-structured interviews with students and teachers, analysed using thematic analysis.

The results indicate higher increases in the experimental group than in the control group for both engagement (+18% vs +6%) and sense of belonging (+21% vs +8%), with more marked effects in the BES and foreign student subgroups. Qualitative evidence attributes these changes to plurality of languages, collaboration, visibility of individual contributions and renegotiation of class roles, while in the control group, narratives are more related to task, fairness and



evaluation. The implications suggest the importance of integrating arts and digital technology as ordinary tools for inclusive teaching and recommend future studies with larger samples, observational measures and follow-ups to assess the stability of the effects and identify the most effective mechanisms.

Keywords: Inclusion, Arts Education, Digital Tools, Engagement, Belonging

Paper II

Author: Yasmin Marie Cachia – University of Malta

Title: Blossoming Minds: A Local Qualitative Study on Enhancing Children’s School Wellbeing Through Nature-Based Outdoor Activities

Abstract: The integration of nature-based learning pedagogies within school settings has garnered increasing attention over the past decade, with empirical evidence suggesting positive impacts on aspects of student well-being, attention and behaviour, and academic outcomes. Despite growing international interest, empirical research in Malta, where urban density limits children’s daily contact with nature, remains scarce. This qualitative study examined how educators and young learners (aged 4 to 6) experienced and understood nature-based outdoor activities within a Maltese primary school that had integrated these practices into its curriculum. The study made use of four semi-structured interviews with educators, three child-friendly focus group discussions that incorporated child drawings, and three hours of field observation, comprising a total of forty-one students across two classrooms. Data was analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis, where five themes emerged: (1) Emotional and relational wellbeing elicited through nature interaction, (2) Learning in and through nature: inclusive relational spaces, (3) Shifting local attitudes to learning, (4) Barriers to nature-based learning, and (5) Environmental stewardship. The findings indicated that student participants experienced the school’s nature area as fostering positive emotions, pro-social interactions, and facilitating moments of reflection. Educators described the outdoor environment as naturally supporting sensory accessibility and differentiated engagement. Educators emphasised the value of experiential, child-led outdoor exploration, while also highlighting the cultural, attitudinal and structural constraints they believe may hinder the successful implementation of nature-based learning in Malta. Notably, both educators and children verbally expressed a sense of care and responsibility toward nature, suggesting the early cultivation of environmental stewardship. Overall, the study provides contextually grounded insights into the developmental and pedagogical value of nature-based learning in Malta, with further implications for educators, school leaders, and policymakers seeking to integrate outdoor-focused initiatives into Maltese schools.

Keywords: Student Wellbeing, Inclusion, Nature-based Learning, School Nature Spaces, Malta



Paper III

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Prof. Filippo Gomez Paloma – University of Cassino and Southern Lazio (ORCID: 0000-0002-0170-0477)

Title: Embodied Education and Transformative Inclusion: The “ECS Grammar” for Rethinking School, Participation, and Well-being

Abstract: This contribution presents a theoretical and critical reflection on the “Grammar of Embodied Education.” Based on the ten guiding principles of the ECS (Embodied Cognitive Science) paradigm, it represents a possible theoretical and pedagogical framework for promoting inclusive futures in contemporary education systems.

In light of current social complexity, cultural plurality, and the profound digital transformations required, the proposal aims to offer an integrated framework capable of overcoming the mind-body and cognition-emotion dualisms, valuing bodily experience, relationality, cooperation, and, last but not least, the ethical dimension of the education professional.

The model presented, born of the collaboration between ten Italian universities that promote the national Embodied Education project, explores the possibilities of the ECS paradigm in supporting processes of transformative inclusion. Inclusion is understood not as a simple compensatory response to diversity, but as a systemic principle oriented towards participation, agency, and well-being throughout the entire lifespan.

The centrality of the person in their mind-body-environment unity is placed at the centre of learning dynamics and processes, recognising the role of emotions, neural plasticity, identity construction processes (synaptic self), and the principle of the extended mind as interpretative keys for ecosystemic educational design.

Based on evidence from school-based experimentation and national educational networks, the ten principles are discussed as guidelines for curriculum design, teacher training, assessment, and the ethical use of digital technologies.

The Grammar of Embodied Education lays the foundations for a profound rethinking of the school system, starting with strengthening motivation and engagement through embodied practices, promoting cooperative and narrative contexts that generate belonging, and enhancing complexity and diversity as evolutionary resources.

The operational implications concern not only learning processes but also directly involve educational policies, school governance, and initial and in-service teacher training, opening up to the construction of inclusive, sustainable, and well-being-oriented educational ecosystems.



The complex work of scientific systematisation of the main constructs described in the contribution opens up possibilities for future research on the empirical validation of the Index for Embodied Education, its implementation in schools, and the transferability of the model to different cultural contexts.

Keywords: Embodied Education; Transformative Inclusion; Inclusive Pedagogy; Teacher Training; Well-being

Paper IV

Author: Dr Emanuel Mizzi – University of Malta (ORCID: 0000-0003-3237-9150)

Title: Futures of School Knowledge and Inclusive Pedagogies

Abstract: In this presentation, the researcher draws on insights from the notion of the ‘Three Futures’ of school knowledge to inform teaching approaches that foster student engagement, voice, agency and learning (Young & Lambert, 2014; Young & Muller, 2010). Grounded in the distinction among Future 1, Future 2 and Future 3, the presentation investigates how different conceptions of school knowledge determine what counts as worthwhile learning. On this basis, inclusive pedagogies are understood as requiring not only the participation of diverse students but also access to powerful disciplinary knowledge and structured opportunities to question and re-contextualise it.

The approach during the presentation combines theoretical analysis with examples from the author’s research in business education. First, the ‘Three futures’ heuristic is outlined, highlighting the limits of Future 1 (traditional, fixed curricula) and Future 2 (over contextualised, skills-driven learning). Future 3 is then presented as a way of placing powerful disciplinary knowledge at the core of the curriculum while opening it up for critique, contestation and application to students’ lived worlds. This conceptual framing is illustrated through inclusive pedagogical practices, including cooperative learning strategies that invite students to interrogate business concepts, engage in deep thinking, and articulate their perspectives.

Key insights point to a Future 3 curriculum as particularly promising for inclusive pedagogy: it enables students to access and work with powerful disciplinary knowledge in ways that support engagement and encourage critical examination of taken-for-granted assumptions in business and economic life. The presentation concludes by discussing implications for policy, classroom practice and future research, including the need for curriculum frameworks that value powerful knowledge, teacher education that develops inclusive, critical disciplinary pedagogies, and further empirical studies on how such approaches can enhance deep learning and agency in diverse classrooms.

Keywords: Inclusive pedagogy, Futures of school knowledge, Business education, Powerful knowledge, Student agency



Paper V

Authors:

Prof. Margaret Mangion – University of Malta (ORCID: 0000-0003-3531-1709)

Prof. Leonie Baldacchino – University of Malta (ORCID: 0000-0001-5574-8874)

Title: Implications of Creative Pedagogies as Relational Practice among Students with Intellectual Disabilities: Themes Informing Inclusive Education

Abstract: Creative pedagogies, which refer to creative and innovative design of curricula and teaching approaches to foster children’s creativity in the classroom, are increasingly recognised as vital for nurturing agency, imagination, and participatory learning within mainstream education; however, their application within disability contexts remains underexplored. This case study investigates how a group of eight students with intellectual disabilities engaged as meaning-makers during a seven-week programme grounded in creative pedagogical principles. Data were gathered through mid- and end-of-programme educator evaluations (n=16) and a focus group with five educators and analysed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis framework.

Our findings suggest that creative pedagogies function not as discrete teaching techniques but as relational practices that involve a person-centred approach, emphasising trusting relationships to create safety and support for positive transformation. These practices emerge within four interdependent themes: (1) relational safety as a precursor to creativity, (2) structured freedom, (3) collective authorship, and (4) creativity as an inherent human capacity. This presentation foregrounds the implications of these themes for educational practice. First, relational safety emerges as a foundational condition enabling risk-taking, expression, and agency, highlighting the need for educators to intentionally design emotionally and socially supportive learning environments. Second, structured freedom reframes pedagogical planning as the careful balancing of boundaries and openness, suggesting practical strategies for scaffolding autonomy without removing support. Third, collective authorship challenges traditional teacher-centred models by positioning learning as co-created, encouraging participatory decision-making and shared ownership of knowledge. Finally, recognising creativity as an inherent human ability shifts deficit-oriented perspectives of intellectual disability toward strength-based pedagogies that recognise neurodiversity as a creative resource.

By translating these themes into recommendations for practice, the study contributes to emerging literature positioning relational practice as central to creative pedagogy in inclusive education. The findings suggest that when educational environments prioritise relationality, imagination, and shared meaning-making, functional independence and agency may flourish within inclusive, imaginative learning contexts.

Keywords: Creative pedagogies, Intellectual disability, Agency, Relational practice, Inclusive education



Breakout Session 1

Leadership and Governance for an Inclusive Education System

Time: 10:00 – 11:45

Location: Level 1, Meeting Room 102

Chair: Dr Jonathan Borg

Paper I

Authors:

Dr Michele Formica – Università degli Studi di Salerno (ORCID: 0009-0004-6119-7035)

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Ass. Prof. Fausta Sabatano – Università degli Studi di Salerno (ORCID: 0000-0001-8799-4498)

Title: Leadership in inclusive processes: comparing perspectives between school principals and middle leaders.

Abstract: Contemporary educational institutions find themselves immersed in educational scenarios characterised by cultural diversity, differentiated training needs and social transformations that have a profound impact on organisational structures. In this context, the role of the headteacher cannot be limited to administrative management alone but should instead be that of a cultural and strategic guide, called upon to steer the professional community towards choices consistent with the principles of equity, participation and inclusion. This reflects a vision of the school as a complex, dynamic system in which decisions, relationships, and processes influence one another. From this perspective, leadership becomes a determining factor in implementing inclusive cultures and practices and promoting educational innovation, especially when it is open and supported by collaboration with key figures within the system, who act as mediators between strategic planning and day-to-day operations. Starting from this theoretical framework, this paper proposes an exploratory investigation into the role of the headteacher and other key figures in the system in the processes of inclusion, with particular attention to the consistency between the stated vision, organisational choices, and the practices actually implemented.

The research is developed through a mixed-methods approach. A first qualitative phase involves semi-structured interviews, with the aim of bringing out representations of inclusion, strategies adopted, critical issues encountered, and resources mobilised, and of enhancing the relational dimensions of professional action. Subsequently, a quantitative phase consists of administering the “Inclusive Leadership in Schools” (LEI-Q) questionnaire, validated in the Italian context, to teachers in educational institutions throughout Italy to explore their opinions on the quality of inclusive leadership by headteachers and other key figures in the system. The objective of the comparative analysis is to compare self-perception and external perceptions of inclusive leadership practices to identify convergences, possible misalignments, and areas for development, offering useful indications for strengthening school governance and supporting inclusive educational innovation processes.



Keywords: School as an organisation; Educational leadership; School principal; Middle leaders; Inclusion

Paper II

Authors:

Dr Stephania Rossi – “G.M. Bertin”, University of Bologna, Italy

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Prof. Roberto Dainese – “G.M. Bertin”, University of Bologna, Italy

Prof. Anna Pileri – “G.M. Bertin”, University of Bologna, Italy

Title: Participation and Equity: The Interconnections Between Teaching and Educational Leadership

Abstract: This contribution presents the findings from two doctoral research projects conducted within the school setting —one concluded in late 2024, focusing on teachers, families, and students; the other is currently finalising and centred on school leaders’ roles in learning environments. Both studies investigate the educational community’s opinions and practices through the polysemic lens of Special Education. The research adopts the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF, 2001) as an evolutionary pedagogical paradigm capable of transforming schools into an ecosystem of participation grounded in Universal Design and oriented toward equity.

The studies share the aim of deconstructing segregating models by proposing a systemic-global educational leadership vision involving all school stakeholders as a governance strategy to orient community practices toward equity. The objective is to demonstrate how leadership posture, understood as a vital connectome of interconnections between roles, inherently possesses the resources to shape pedagogical organisation and culture. This ensures the context becomes a universal facilitator and social rebalancer, transforming individual vulnerability into active citizenship and authentic co-education (Dainese, Pileri, 2025).

A mixed-methods methodology was adopted: the first involved teachers, families, and students in the Bologna area (questionnaires and semi-structured interviews), while the second reached a national sample of 584 Italian school leaders (quantitative questionnaire and in-depth qualitative analysis). Both analyses investigate the system’s modality of action from macro to micro-contexts, according to the inclusive paradigm, navigating the space between declared ideals and enacted practices.

The outcomes reveal a convergence of evidence, particularly regarding discrepancies between theoretical awareness and practical implementation, identifying opportunities for redefining the identities of the Inclusion Plan (P.I.), GLI, and GLO (Inclusion and Operational Working Groups) as innovative research hubs and cornerstones of a new systemic-global inclusive governance. Both research paths highlight the urgent need for a cultural metamorphosis through a new training framework that impacts the professional posture of teachers and leaders,



supported by educational leadership (Rossi, 2025), in which design democracy offers everyone the opportunity to co-construct contexts of well-being and equity.

Keywords: Inclusive Educational Leadership; Equity and Participation; Universal Design for Learning (UDL); ICF Framework in Education

Paper III

Author: Dr Barbara Baschiera – University Ca' Foscari of Venice, Italy

Title: The Key Role of Distributed Leadership for Inclusive Education Systems

Abstract: Inclusive Education is designed to guarantee the right to education for all, independently of individual diversity due to disability or socio-economic and cultural disadvantages. This model allows educational institutions to foster an environment where students can feel welcome and engaged in school life.

The transition towards increasingly inclusive systems varies significantly between Countries. In Italy, the concept of inclusive education is increasingly associated with that of a leadership embracing the principles of inclusion, honouring and valuing the differences and rights of all (Ianes, D., & Zagni, B., 2024).

But how can such leadership - for which differences are important values- concretely promote the educational success of every student? What role should school leaders play in ensuring equal opportunities and well-being for all students?

In order to address these questions and determine whether inclusion falls within the headteachers' personal scope or whether it is delegated to their team, an online questionnaire was administered to 415 teachers attending the 30/36/60-ECTS training course for secondary education qualification at the University Ca' Foscari of Venice.

The results stress the key role of school leaders, middle managers (instrumental functions), curricular and support teachers in promoting the inclusion of students with Special Education Needs in Italian schools. Topics that emerge concern the inclusive professional competences of Italian teachers; teaching strategies used in classrooms, organisational and didactic school autonomy and management; relations between school and surrounding community (families and other stakeholders) and inclusive policies.

The discussion focuses on the concept of distributed leadership among actors who play a key role in promoting quality, inclusive practices (Cramerotti, S., & Ianes, D., 2022).

As inclusive leaders, headteachers should possess technical and non-technical skills, such as agency, reflexivity, and a willingness to implement change, to encourage teaching staff to work as a team in developing an inclusive curriculum and personalisation in line with the ICF principles.



The research also emphasises the need for specific pedagogical training for a new stage of distributed leadership (Dettori, G. F., & Letteri, B., 2022), enabling school staff (including leaders, middle managers and teachers) to work together towards an inclusive school culture, collaborative planning and evaluation.

Keywords: Distributed Leadership; Inclusive Education; Inclusive Leadership; School leaders; Middle managers

Paper IV

Authors:

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Prof.ssa Ester Caparrós Martín – Università di Malaga; Spain

Prof.ssa Nieves Blanco Garcia – Università di Malaga, Spain

Title: Between Regulatory Reform and Living Practice: The NUPE 2 Project as an Inquiry into Inclusion and Equity in Primary School

Abstract: This contribution presents the continuation of the “Nupe-2” project, promoted by the University of Málaga in collaboration with the Universities of Barcelona, Valencia, Madrid, Cádiz, Gran Canaria, Roma Tre, UniKore, and Verona, which will conclude in June 2027. The project aims to study how legislation influences and is translated into school practice in Italy and Spain, in the development of the concept of equity and curriculum personalisation, in the implementation of fully inclusive special education, in the construction of teacher identity, and in the specific training dedicated to it.

In particular, the work carried out by the Roma Tre University research group will be presented through a case study of a comprehensive school in the Garbatella district of Rome.

The research takes place at a time of profound change in the Italian school system, marked by the revision of the National Guidelines and by intense cultural and pedagogical debate. In this context, questions emerge concerning equity, initial teacher training, curriculum fragmentation, and the management of special educational needs, often experienced under conditions of professional isolation. The methodological approach integrates different qualitative tools: free and structured classroom observations (lectures, group work, assessments, informal moments), observations of teachers, narrative interviews with key institutional figures (school leaders, subject teachers, and support teachers), and focus groups.

The results offer interesting points for reflection, suggesting the need to strengthen structured spaces for teacher dialogue, promote practice-based, continuous professional development, support an integrated curricular approach, and develop policies that enhance the school's



community dimension. In the future, the study is expected to be extended to other teachers and to lower secondary school to explore ongoing transformations from a comparative perspective.

Keywords: School inclusion; Educational equity; Teacher education; Curriculum; Professional community

Paper V

Author: Dr Manuela Heinz – University of Galway, Ireland (ORCID: 0000-0003-3542-8931)

Title: A Critical Analysis of Leadership Theory, Policy and Practice through the Lens of Teacher Diversity and Inclusion

Abstract: Despite increasing attention to teacher diversity in education policy and scholarship, the conversation has largely focused on initial teacher education and recruitment, often overlooking how national and school-level policies, discourses and practices support the inclusion of teachers from diverse ethnic, cultural, social class, dis/ability and LGBTQI+ backgrounds. This presentation undertakes a critical analysis of theory, policy and practice to interrogate how teacher diversity is acknowledged – or neglected – in both national policy documents and school-level practices, with a focus on Ireland and comparative international contexts.

Drawing on the work of Heinz and Keane (2018, 2023a, b) on the experiences of teachers from underrepresented groups in Ireland and internationally, the analysis identifies a disconnect between inclusive rhetoric and the lack of systemic frameworks to support the recruitment, professional growth, democratic contributions and wellbeing of diverse teachers. It examines how school leadership preparation addresses – or fails to address – teacher diversity-responsive leadership. Drawing on culturally responsive leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016), critical race leadership theory, and inclusive leadership models (Ryan, 2006), the presentation will explore the question: Are leaders being equipped to recognise and challenge systemic inequities that affect their staff, not just their students? Evans' (2011) work on professionalism and teacher identity provides a crucial lens for understanding how teachers' values, motivations, and sense of agency are shaped by organisational cultures and leadership practices. Her emphasis on leadership that supports rather than shapes teachers resonates with the need for diversity-responsive leadership that acknowledges the professional identities of minoritised teachers as dynamic, valuable, and, often, vulnerable within schools.

This presentation argues that supporting diverse teachers requires moving beyond performative inclusion to structural and relational transformation, in which school leaders play a critical role. Drawing on empirical and theoretical contributions from Ireland and beyond, it offers recommendations for policy and leadership practice grounded in transformative and critically reflexive paradigms.

Keywords: Teacher diversity; Inclusive school leadership; Teacher education; School culture; Belonging; Critical leadership theory



Paper VI

Authors:

Dr Flavia Capodanno – Università degli Studi di Salerno, Italy

Dr Jonathan Borg – University of Malta

Assoc. Prof. Erika Marie Pace – Università degli Studi di Salerno, Italy

Prof. Paola Aiello – Università degli Studi di Salerno, Italy

Title: Middle Leaders for Inclusion in Complex School Systems: A Comparative Study between Italy and Malta

Abstract: This contribution aims to explore similarities and divergences in the ways inclusive school leadership is enacted and managed in Italy and Malta, two Mediterranean contexts that share common European cultural and policy roots yet are characterised by markedly different organisational systems. Specifically, the study focuses on middle leadership roles responsible for inclusive processes: the Funzioni Strumentali per l’Inclusione within the Italian system and the Heads of Department (Inclusion) within the Maltese system. The objective is to analyse whether and how the structural framework—decentralised in Italy and centralised in Malta—influences professional practice, decision-making processes, and the promotion of inclusive practices.

The theoretical framework is grounded, on the one hand, in the conceptualisation of the school as a complex adaptive system and, on the other, in the adoption of distributed leadership as an interpretative lens for understanding inclusive organisational processes. Adopting a comparative perspective, the research project employed semi-structured interviews inspired by the principles of Appreciative Inquiry. The sample consisted of ten middle leaders from the Campania region in Italy and five Heads of Department (Inclusion) working within the Maltese state school sector, all with several years of experience in their respective roles. Data were analysed using a comparative thematic analysis to identify convergences and divergences between the two contexts.

The findings highlight six recurring themes: role identity and mediating function, professional and relational competencies, enabling factors, collaborative climate and shared vision, professional development, and perspectives for improvement. In both systems, inclusive leaders perceive themselves as mediators among students, families, teachers, and school leadership, grounding their work in organisational, empathetic, and communicative competencies, although the institutional definition of the role remains unclear. With regard to divergences, the Italian model places greater emphasis on territorial networking and external partnerships, whereas in the Maltese context, limited decision-making autonomy emerges within a more centralised system.

In light of these findings, the study suggests the need for clearer role profiling, the strengthening of distributed leadership practices, and a reconceptualisation of inclusion as a shared cultural process.

Keywords: Distributed leadership; Inclusive education; Middle leader; Comparative thematic analysis; Complex adaptive system



Breakout Session 1

Teacher Education and Professional Identity (I)

Time: 10:00 – 11:45

Location: Level 1, Meeting Room 103

Chair: Prof. Annalisa Morganti

Paper I

Author: Francesco Del Sorbo – Università Pegaso, Italy (ORCID: 0009-0005-1040-4898)

Title: Artificial Intelligence and Teacher Professional Development: Effects of Self-Coaching on the Implementation of Integrated Instruction for Students with Autism

Abstract: In recent years, research on pedagogical and inclusive teaching has highlighted that the effectiveness of educational interventions for students with autism depends largely on the quality of teachers' implementation of educational practices (Hattie, 2009; Mitchell, 2014; Cottini, 2017). Despite the availability of empirically validated teaching models, one of the main obstacles to their effectiveness lies in the difficulty of ensuring educational continuity, professional support, and systematic feedback in real-world school contexts (Timperley, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

At the same time, the development of AI-based technologies opens up new perspectives for teacher education, enabling the construction of personalised, reflective, and sustainable professional learning environments (Luckin, 2018; Holmes, Bialik, & Fadel, 2019; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Within this framework, AI-supported self-coaching emerges as an innovative pedagogical tool that integrates principles of professional reflection, situated learning, and the continuous improvement of educational practice (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Perla, 2020).

This study investigates the effectiveness of an Artificial Intelligence (AI)-supported self-coaching system aimed at improving the implementation of Integrated Instruction (EI) by primary school teachers working in inclusive educational settings with students with autism spectrum disorder.

The study aims to: (a) analyze changes in the quality of teachers' implementation of EI; (b) evaluate the indirect effects on the learning of students with autism; (c) verify the maintenance and generalization of acquired teaching skills after the withdrawal of technological support; and (d) explore teachers' perceptions regarding the acceptability, feasibility, and usefulness of the AI-supported self-coaching system as a tool for continuing professional development.

The study's rationale is based on the hypothesis that intelligent digital tools, if designed according to a clear pedagogical framework and oriented towards professional reflexivity, can expand teachers' professional development opportunities, reducing the gap between theoretical training and daily teaching practice, especially in inclusive contexts characterised by high educational complexity (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Rivoltella, 2020).



The research adopted a multiple-probe design. The sample consisted of four primary school teacher-student dyads, selected to systematically monitor changes in teaching practices and student learning.

After initial training on integrated instruction, teachers participated in weekly AI-supported self-coaching sessions. These sessions included four main phases: planning the teaching intervention, entering data on completed activities, guided reflection on teaching practices, and receiving individualised feedback generated by the AI system. Data on implementation fidelity, student learning outcomes, retention and generalisation of skills, as well as social validity indicators, were collected through questionnaires and qualitative surveys on teacher perceptions.

The results highlight a clear functional relationship between the introduction of the AI-supported self-coaching system and a significant increase in teachers' fidelity in implementing integrated instruction. All participants achieved high levels of accurate application of the intended instructional procedures, maintaining performance even after the withdrawal of technological support and generalising the instructional strategies to contexts and routines not directly targeted by the intervention. These findings are consistent with the literature highlighting the role of continuous feedback in enhancing teaching effectiveness (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Concurrently, the students involved showed substantial improvements in spontaneous correct responses aligned with individualised objectives, with stable progress on maintenance and generalisation tests. Social validity data also indicate a high degree of system acceptability: teachers perceived AI-supported self-coaching as a useful, practicable, and meaningful tool for guiding instructional decision-making and supporting professional reflection.

In terms of educational practice, the study suggests that AI-supported self-coaching systems could represent a sustainable and scalable method of teacher professional development, capable of integrating ongoing training, situated reflection, and improving the quality of school inclusion (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), as well as promoting ongoing professional learning embedded in daily practice.

Finally, for future research, further exploration emerges regarding the extension of the model to larger samples, the longitudinal evaluation of its effects on learning, and the analysis of the role of AI as a mediator of professional reflexivity, contributing to the development of the emerging field of Artificial Intelligence in Education (Holmes et al., 2019).

Keywords: Artificial intelligence (AI); Self-coaching; Integrated education (EI); Inclusive education; Autism spectrum disorder



Paper II

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Assoc. Prof. Erika Marie Pace – University of Salerno (ORCID: 0000-0002-4557-7722)

Title: Who is the Teacher Today? Developing Professional Identity for Inclusive Agency in Initial Teacher Education: Italy and Malta Compared

Abstract: This research is situated within the context of a growing focus on Initial Teacher Education (OECD, 2019) and the need to develop professional profiles capable of responding effectively to the challenges posed by increasingly complex, heterogeneous and inclusion-oriented school contexts. Within this framework, professional identity is recognised as a crucial factor in the quality of educational practice and students' academic success (Hattie, 2003) and constitutes a key dimension of initial teacher education programmes and the development of teacher professionalism.

The overarching aim of the study is to measure and compare the level of professional identity that prospective primary school teachers perceive they have achieved upon completion of their initial teacher education. More specifically, it seeks to explore key domains of teacher professionalism, including intrinsic professional value, commitment, professional orientation, perceptions of the teaching task in inclusive contexts, and teacher self-efficacy (Hanna et al., 2019; Wong & Liu, 2022; Sharma & Jacobs, 2016; Sahli Lozano et al., 2023).

This study used a mixed-methods, descriptive-comparative design. The presentation will focus on findings from a semi-structured questionnaire administered to final-year students enrolled in Initial Teacher Education programmes in Salerno (Italy) and Malta. Specifically, participants were drawn from the single-cycle Master's degree programme in Primary Education at the University of Salerno (Italy), the Bachelor of Arts in Primary Education (Honours) and the Master's in Teaching and Learning (MTL) in Early Childhood and Primary Education at the University of Malta (Malta).

Preliminary findings reveal both similarities and significant differences between the two contexts analysed, particularly in relation to perceptions of the teacher's role in inclusive school settings and levels of professional efficacy. In this regard, the study offers relevant implications for enhancing initial teacher education programmes, highlighting the need for more coherent integration of theoretical preparation, school-based experiences, and reflective pedagogies, as widely suggested in the literature (Gee, 2001; Beejard et al., 2004; Izadinia, 2014). In doing so, the study contributes to the international scientific debate on teacher education policy and practice. The findings also point to avenues for further comparative research aimed at deepening understanding of the processes underpinning the development of teacher professional identity across different educational contexts.

Keywords: Teacher professional identity; Initial teacher education; Inclusion; Comparative study



Paper III

Author: Dr Vincenza Barra – Università degli Studi di Salerno, Italia

Title: Emotional Competence in Teaching Professionalism: The Role of Tinkering Pedagogy in Training

Abstract: Emotional competence is a structural dimension of teaching professionalism, particularly in training courses for support teachers, which are characterised by a high degree of relational, organisational and inclusive complexity. International literature highlights how emotions significantly affect decision-making processes, the quality of educational interactions and the construction of professional identity (Zembylas, 2005). Despite this theoretical recognition, in initial training programmes, the emotional dimension often remains implicit and is rarely subject to systematic monitoring.

This contribution is part of the pedagogy of tinkering, understood as a training perspective centred on experience, reflective action and the situated construction of knowledge, in continuity with constructionism (Papert, 1980), creative learning (Resnick, 2017) and the tradition of experiential learning (Dewey, 1938). Within this framework, emotional competence is analysed within a multidimensional model of psycho-professional functioning that integrates five areas: perceived stress, teacher self-efficacy, professional motivation, emotion management and complex systems management. This articulation allows us to interpret the emotional dimension in interaction with variables that affect the stability and transformation of teacher identity in inclusive contexts.

The research adopts a longitudinal design with three measurement points (T0–T1–T2). The T0 phase involves constructing a baseline by administering a structured Likert-scale questionnaire (1–5). The intermediate T1 survey, conducted halfway through the programme, has a dual function: monitoring the progress of the dimensions investigated and activating reflection consistent with the epistemological framework of tinkering. The final T2 survey enables the analysis of evolutionary trajectories and transformative dynamics emerging throughout the training programme. Comparative analyses between the three stages will be conducted using models for repeated measures and estimates of the magnitude of change (Cohen, 1988), from a process perspective of teacher professionalisation.

Keywords: Emotional competence, tinkering pedagogy, teacher training for support, longitudinal design, professional identity



Paper IV

Authors:

Dr Giovanni Petrillo – University of Salerno, Italy

Dr Davide Saggese – University of Salerno

Prof. Di Gennaro Diana Carmela – University of Salerno

Title: Future Support Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Mnemonic Strategies in Visual Impairment

Abstract: Mnemonic techniques have their roots in the classical tradition, from the mythological figure of Mnemosyne to the creation of the method of loci in ancient Greece. Through numerous studies in the psychological and neuroscientific fields over the course of the twentieth century, they have been reconfigured as genuine cognitive strategies that support the encoding, organisation, and recall of information. From an inclusive perspective, their multisensory and associative nature could foster a rethinking of mental representations beyond vision, enhancing vicarious sensory channels, engaging with the concept of vicariance theorised by the neurophysiologist Alain Berthoz, according to which cognitive processes can activate alternative trajectories through different sensory resources. Several studies also show that the systematic use of such strategies can promote deep encoding and effective retrieval by integrating selective attention, semantic organisation, and the emotional components of learning.

The present contribution aims to investigate future support teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of mnemonic techniques for students with visual impairments, with attention to their potential to support autonomy, inclusion, and meaningful learning in school contexts.

The study involved 209 future support teachers. An initial exploratory exercise was proposed to examine spontaneous ways of using mnemonic strategies, followed by a Likert questionnaire to assess their perceived usefulness and applicability in educational contexts for students with visual impairment.

Based on one-sample t-tests conducted in SPSS, the findings indicate strongly positive perceptions of the usefulness of mnemonic techniques for students with visual impairment in educational settings, with high levels of agreement regarding support for autonomous study, spatial management, and the enhancement of vicarious senses. The results also offer the opportunity to integrate initial teacher training with modules dedicated to mnemotechnics from a multisensory perspective, promoting accessible teaching practices and suggesting future studies to investigate the perceived effectiveness of specific strategies.

Keywords: Visual impairment; Mnemonic strategies; Vicariance; Inclusive education



Paper V

Authors:

Prof. Annalisa Morganti – University of Perugia, Italy

Prof. Alessia Signorelli – University of Perugia, Italy

Dr Francesco Marsili – University of Perugia, Italy

Dr Luigi Fenza – University of Perugia, Italy

Title: A European Alliance for Teacher Training between Inclusion and Digitalisation

Abstract: IDEATE (Inclusive Digital Education and Teacher Empowerment Academy) is a project funded under the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies program (2025–2028) that aims to establish a European Academy for initial and continuing teacher education based on the integration of two key themes: inclusive education and digital skills.

Coordinated by the University of Suceava (Romania), the project involves 10 partners from five European countries: Romania, Italy, Spain, Germany, and Greece.

In Italy, the University of Perugia participates under the coordination of Professor Annalisa Morganti, who actively contributes to the development of the pedagogical framework, the analysis of training needs, and the research methodology. In the first phase of the project, a comparative report on inclusive and digital policies in the consortium countries was produced, supplemented by focus groups with teachers and experts.

The analysis of international data highlighted three common problematic cores: the disconnect between regulatory frameworks and real school practices, the fragmentation in teacher training, especially on topics such as diversity management, inclusive technologies, and multi-professional collaboration, and the widespread need for transversal and soft skills.

These findings are guiding the development of a transnational training kit for teachers, adaptable to various educational contexts. The goal is to highlight how IDEATE's comparative and multi-level approach can contribute to the development of sustainable models of teacher education that are consistent with the 2030 Agenda, the CRPD, and European guidelines on digital and inclusive education.

The contribution of the University of Perugia focuses in particular on the definition of operational tools for inclusive instructional design, valuing the potential of the Italian regulatory framework (ICF, UDL, Law 104/1992) in a European perspective while addressing the themes of Neurodivergence, Digital Tools, and Classroom management.

Keywords: Teacher training; Inclusive teachers; Neurodiversity; Technology





L-Università ta' Malta
Faculty of Education

Department
for Inclusion &
Access to Learning

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di Pedagogia
speciale



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR INCLUSION
AND THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Breakout Session 1

Digital Transformation and Inclusive Futures (I)

Time: 10:00 – 11:45

Location: Level 0, Meeting Room 2

Chair: Dr Michele Domenico Todino

Paper I

Authors:

Dr Anna Rescigno – Università degli Studi di Salerno

Dr Umberto Bilotti – Università degli Studi di Salerno

Dr Marco Caruso – Università degli Studi di Macerata

Dr Argyro Fella – University of Nicosia

Dr Elisavet Pitri – University of Nicosia

Dr Michele Domenico Todino – Università degli Studi di Salerno

Title: Discovering Cypriot Traditions: An Edugame for Intercultural Learning

Abstract: Digital transformations that are redefining practices and modes of access to knowledge make it increasingly necessary to have educational tools grounded in solid pedagogical foundations, capable of ensuring equity and supporting pupils with different learning profiles. To test these opportunities, the project “Discovering Cypriot Traditions” was implemented with the fifth-grade classes of I.C. Settimo II in Settimo Torinese (TO), aimed at promoting intercultural awareness by exploring Cypriot folklore in a virtual environment inspired by the Cyprus Folklore Museum. The presence of a structured guide, multimodal cues, and an avatar programmed to provide clear answers on motifs, symbols, and craft techniques of traditional blankets makes it possible to build an experience that is cognitively accessible and educationally meaningful.

The open-source edugame developed at the University of Salerno recreates a virtual room that can be freely explored, in which students can interact with the avatar; the environment ensures cognitive accessibility through clear indications and a predictable interaction flow, fostering authentic participation.

A mixed-methods research design was adopted to understand how students with no prior knowledge of Cypriot folklore constructed new learning. Before the start, the absence of information on the topic was verified; at the end, the same content was reintroduced to assess the level of acquisition and symbol recognition. Short 5-point Likert questionnaires were administered to measure engagement, perceived clarity, and self-efficacy. The qualitative component examined the development of learning through structured observations, brief interviews, and reflective questions, analysing how students formulated questions to the avatar and how they constructed new cultural meanings.

Preliminary results show high levels of motivation, greater ability to ask targeted questions, and



improved accuracy in recognising symbols. The interactive structure supported different learning profiles, especially for students who rely on visual observation and guided dialogue.

The project highlights the potential of virtual environments to expand access to cultural content and support inclusive practices. Future research will examine the scalability of the tool, its effects on students with special educational needs, and the longitudinal development of intercultural competences

Keywords: Digital transformation, Inclusivity, Interculturality, Virtual Environments, Accessibility

Paper II

Authors:

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Dr Marco Iommi – Università degli Studi di Macerata, Italia

Dr Arianna Santoro – Università degli Studi di Macerata, Italia

Title: Measuring Attitudes Toward AI in the School Context: An Empirical Study Using the GAAIS Scale in the Marche Region, Italy.

Abstract: The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in 21st-century educational settings raises several challenges for Special Pedagogy and Didactics, balancing the potential for radical personalisation with the risk of uncritical technological delegation. Understanding teachers' attitudes is essential to guide the ethical and conscious adoption of emerging technologies, particularly in supporting students with disabilities from an inclusive perspective and in removing learning barriers.

This study aims to explore secondary school teachers' perceptions of AI. The objective is to analyse the dichotomy between resistance toward the technology's broader societal impact and the recognition of its specific potential as a pedagogical tool designed to foster school inclusion.

The research involved a sample of 596 teachers (74.5% curricular, 25.5% special education) working in seven upper secondary schools in the Marche region, Italy. Data was collected online using the General Attitudes Towards Artificial Intelligence Scale (GAAIS), adapted in Italian. The questionnaire explores two primary domains through 36 items on a 3-point Likert scale: general perceptions of AI's socio-existential impact (Dimension I) and perceptions of its educational and professional use (Dimension II). The analyses were performed to highlight correlations between teaching roles and openness to innovation.

The findings reveal an attitude characterised as "critical optimism." A significant discrepancy emerges between the two dimensions: at a general level, scepticism prevails, with 60.7% of teachers opposing entrusting complex decisions to AI and a strong distrust regarding its impact on human happiness (only 6.1% agree). Conversely, attitudes toward educational use are



markedly more positive (47.4% overall agreement). In inclusive settings, 72.6% consider AI useful for creating specific materials (e.g., sign language translation or simplified texts), 65.5% for diversifying teaching strategies, and 64.7% for personalising learning paths for students with disabilities according to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles.

Teachers reject the vision of AI as an autonomous decision-maker, instead viewing it as a valuable specialised support tool that does not replace human mediation. This positive inclination highlights the urgent need to invest in teacher training programs that are not merely technical but integrate ethical and pedagogical dimensions. School policies should promote an AI framework oriented toward equity, while future research should investigate the actual impact of these tools on students with Special Educational Needs' learning outcomes through longitudinal studies.

Keywords: Special Education, Inclusive Didactics, Artificial Intelligence, Teachers' perceptions, GAAIS Scale.

Paper III

Authors:

Dr Lucia Campitiello – University of Salerno, Italy

Dr Marco Caruso – University of Macerata, Italy

Dr Mirra Mariangela – University of Salerno, Italy

Prof. Di Tore Stefano – University of Salerno, Italy

Title: Pedagogically Mediated Artificial Intelligence for Socio-emotional Learning in Autism Spectrum Disorder

Abstract: Artificial Intelligence is increasingly employed in social interventions for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), raising critical concerns regarding pedagogical governance and educational responsibility. While many current approaches position AI as an autonomous instructional agent, this contribution foregrounds the role of pedagogical mediation and human supervision in structuring learning processes.

The paper presents EMORI, an educational project designed to support socio-emotional learning in children with autism through structured, progressive interactive pathways. Rather than positioning AI as an autonomous teaching entity, EMORI conceptualises it as a mediating tool embedded within a pedagogically regulated environment, where interaction is guided, monitored, and calibrated through educational oversight. The system integrates an embodied robotic interface with an orchestration platform that manages conversational progression through state-based interaction models and retrieval-augmented generation techniques.

The dialogical architecture is structured according to the five levels of intervention proposed by Patricia Howlin for teaching emotion recognition and understanding in children with ASD, ensuring a gradual progression from the perceptual identification of emotional expressions to the situational and contextual comprehension of affective states. Within the EMORI system,



predictability and guided structuring (scaffolding) are emphasised in order to reduce cognitive load, support skill generalisation, and promote transferable learning. A human-in-the-loop architecture ensures continuous pedagogical supervision, enabling the observation and regulation of AI-generated feedback in alignment with educational objectives.

The proposed model provides a framework for the pedagogically sustainable integration of artificial intelligence in socio-emotional contexts, placing educational mediation at the centre of technological design.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Socio-Emotional Learning; Pedagogical Mediation

Paper IV

Authors:

Prof. Anna Maria Mariani – Pegaso Digital University, Italy

Prof. Francesco Peluso Cassese – Pegaso Digital University, Italy

Prof. Davide Perrotta – Pegaso Digital University, Italy

Prof. Eugenia Treglia – Pegaso Digital University, Italy

Title: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Special Educational Needs: A Comparative Analysis of Italian and Japanese School Systems.

Abstract: Within the international debate on education, culture, and intercultural dialogue for inclusive futures, this contribution offers a theoretical-comparative analysis of the management of Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) in the Italian and Japanese school systems. It aims to identify convergences, divergences, and pedagogical implications, with particular attention to teaching practices from an intercultural perspective.

The study examines two cultural contexts – Italy and Japan – characterised by different educational structures and value systems. Cultural dimensions such as identity, collectivism, representations of disability, and participation significantly shape classroom practices. Although SLDs are recognised as neurodevelopmental disorders, their interpretation and management are also culturally mediated. Japan’s strong focus on effort, group cohesion, and academic performance, together with the cognitive demands of its writing system, influences how learning difficulties are manifested and addressed.

The research adopts a qualitative, theoretical-comparative design based on document analysis within an intercultural education framework. Using category-based analysis, it explores similarities and differences in how the two systems address SLD, focusing on pedagogical literature and documented teaching strategies. Comparison is used as a heuristic tool to interpret the cultural foundations of didactic practices.

The study identifies selected practices that may inform more effective support for students with SLD, particularly within the Italian context. The comparison goes beyond description, offering a reflective lens to rethink inclusive teaching through cultural mediation, linguistic plurality, and



value-oriented approaches. It confirms that teaching strategies are culturally embedded and require contextual reinterpretation.

Intercultural comparison can foster more effective inclusive practices. Some elements of Japanese didactics may be adapted to the Italian context to balance individualisation with structured learning. The findings stress the role of cultural mediation, language, and value systems in educational design and call for further research on the transferability of teaching practices across contexts.

Keywords: Specific Learning Disorders (SLD), Intercultural education, Inclusive teaching practices, Italy–Japan comparison, Cultural mediation



Breakout Session 1

Reframing Inclusion in Global and Mobile Societies

Time: 10:00 – 11:45

Location: Level 0, Meeting Room 3

Chair: Prof. Arianna Taddei

Paper I

Authors:

Dr Alevtina Ivanova – University of Cadiz, Spain (ORCID: 0000-0002-2368-1692)
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Dr. Goenechea Cristina, University of Cadiz, Spain, (ORCID: 0000-0001-6890-3431)

Title: Between Inclusion, Compensation and Segregation: Narratives on Migrant Students' Access to Basic Vocational Education

Abstract: In recent years, Spain has experienced a significant increase in migratory flows, leading to a notable rise in the number of students of foreign origin within the educational system. This phenomenon has introduced new challenges related to equity, inclusion, and the need to address diversity in educational contexts.

Although the increase has occurred in all stages and types of schooling, an analysis of the recent statistical data reveals an especially significant presence of students of foreign origin in Basic Vocational Education and Training (BVET) (known in Spanish as Ciclos Formativos de Grado Básico, CFGB). These programs are characterised by a wide diversity of student profiles and serve as an alternative formative pathway for students aged 15 to 17 who, for various reasons, do not complete the third and fourth years of Compulsory Secondary Education (CSE). This situation highlights the need for an in-depth analysis of the factors influencing the choice or recommendation of this educational trajectory.

This paper is developed within the framework of the project PID2022-140271OB-I00 funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and by ERDF/EU. Adopting a descriptive qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, management teams, school counsellors, and students in the autonomous communities of Andalusia and Castile and Leon. The primary objective is to explore educational agents' perceptions of the reasons for referring foreign students to BVET cycles, and to analyse whether this option is considered more appropriate than standard CSE. Furthermore, the study prompted professionals to reflect on whether this educational level effectively meets the students' educational needs.

Finally, the study examines whether referral to CFGB fulfils a compensatory function—acting as a support or “rescue” strategy to facilitate the attainment of a qualification—or, on the contrary, whether it may be interpreted as a mechanism of segregation within the education system that limits expectations for educational progression. In doing so, the research contributes to the broader debate on equity, inclusion, and the educational trajectories of students of foreign origin in Spain.



Keywords: Educational inclusion, Foreign students, Vocational Education and Training, Educational equity

Paper II

Authors:

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Prof. in Dr. Vogt, Michaela – University of Bielefeld, Germany
Prof. Pace, Erika. Marie – University of Salerno, Italy, (ORCID: 0000-0002-4557-7722)

Title: Teaching in Multicultural Primary Classrooms: Teachers' Perspectives from Iran and Germany

Abstract: Globalisation processes, technological development, the reduction or abolition of borders, and the increase in migration have transformed human mobility and global interconnectedness. Europe and Asia host approximately 87 and 86 million international migrants, respectively, accounting for 61% of the world's international migrant population. Germany is the second-largest destination country for migrants worldwide, and Iran is the twenty-second-largest.. In such countries, teachers are considered key catalysts for strengthening inclusion and celebrating diversity, highlighting the need for an approach that effectively supports the development of teacher agency. Despite the increasing importance of multicultural education in culturally diverse societies, comparative research on teachers' approaches remains limited due to differences in social contexts and perspectives on cultural diversity.

This presentation focuses on qualitative data collected using semi-structured interviews in an ongoing doctoral study aimed at expanding knowledge on teachers' readiness to teach in multicultural primary schools. The interviews, conducted in 2025, aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of multiculturalism, the challenges and opportunities they face, and the strategies they employ to promote participation and inclusion among culturally and linguistically diverse students. Data were collected from eight primary school teachers, four working in North Rhine-Westphalia (federal state of Germany) and four working in Tehran (Iran). The data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, shared concerns, and specific differences.

Initial findings suggest that multicultural classrooms have been both opportunities for teachers to grow and gain experience and sources of challenge. Language barriers limited institutional support, and inadequate preparation in initial teacher education has been a challenge for teachers. Despite the different structural conditions in the two contexts, systematic shortcomings in initial teacher education are clearly evident. These common concerns highlight the need for more practical, culturally responsive, and context-sensitive models.

By highlighting the lived experiences of teachers in two distinct immigration contexts, this study provides comparative empirical evidence that can help bridge the gap between policy and classroom realities. The findings offer essential insights for rethinking core programs in teacher



preparation and professional development in diverse and multicultural education systems internationally.

Keywords: Multicultural education; Inclusive education; Teacher perspectives; Primary schools; Iran and Germany

Paper III

Authors:

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Assoc. Prof. Selen Demirtaş Zorbaz – Ankara University, Türkiye, (ORCID: 0000-0003-0040-9095)

Title: More Than a Score: Students' Voices on What Intelligence Really Means

Abstract: Intelligence has long been a central topic in educational and psychological research, yet its definition remains complex and multifaceted. While traditional studies often treat intelligence as a measurable cognitive ability, more recent perspectives emphasise the importance of individuals' beliefs and perceptions of their own intelligence. These implicit theories of intelligence, particularly the distinction between growth and fixed mindsets (Dweck, 2006), have been shown to significantly influence students' learning behaviours, motivation, and academic achievement. However, research on this topic has largely centred on Western contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how students from diverse cultural backgrounds conceptualise intelligence.

This study addresses that gap by examining Turkish secondary school students' perceptions of intelligence through a qualitative lens. Interviews were conducted with 15 students from three schools categorised by their performance on the High School Entrance Examination (low, average, high). Thematic analysis revealed three key themes: students' perceptions of intelligence (categorised as growth, fixed, or mixed), definitions of intelligence (described with both positive and negative orientations, encompassing cognitive, affective, and social components), and factors influencing intelligence (divided into individual and environmental domains).

Findings suggest that students in high-performing schools were more likely to attribute intelligence to external, contextual factors, such as educational resources and teacher support, while others emphasised personal effort or innate ability. These differences indicate that school culture and academic environment may shape students' belief systems. Importantly, students' conceptualisations of intelligence are not only cognitive but also deeply embedded in their emotional and social experiences.



By providing insights into how Turkish students understand and interpret the concept of intelligence, this study contributes to a more culturally inclusive understanding of mindset theory. The results highlight the need to consider sociocultural influences when designing educational interventions to foster a growth mindset and improve learning outcomes across diverse educational settings.

Keywords: Intelligence, Mindset theory; Growth mindset; Fixed mindset; Turkish students; Qualitative research; Cultural context

Paper IV

Authors:

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Prof. Marinella Muscarà – Kore University of Enna, Italy (ORCID: 0000-0002-9330-450X)

Title: Rethinking the Individualised Education Plan (IEP) from a Cross-Cultural Perspective: Inclusive Policies and Practices for Migrant Students with Disabilities

Abstract: This contribution presents the preliminary results of a research project focused on analysing the policies and practices of school inclusion for students with a migratory background (NAI, first and second generation) with certifications of disability in accordance with Italian Law 104/1992. Specifically, the main goal of the research, which uses a mixed sequential explanatory method (Creswell, 2009), is to conduct a comparative study between Sicily (Italy) and Andalusia (Spain).

Migration paths – individual or family – as well as the plurality of linguistic and cultural backgrounds significantly impact the learning experience in formal educational contexts and the academic success of students (European Commission, 2025). This framework is particularly complex when socio-cultural vulnerability is linked to disability or specific developmental disorders, leading to highly complex Special Educational Needs (SEN-D) that require a systemic approach and an integrated interdisciplinary methodology.

This contribution presents some preliminary but significant considerations on the Individualised Education Plans (IEP) drafted in schools in the province of Ragusa (Sicily, Italy) for students with disabilities belonging to the first or second generation of migrants, in order to verify their ability to take into deep consideration the microsystem of life of migrant students with SEN -D. In particular, a documentary analysis was carried out on 322 IEPs: 264 from 30 comprehensive schools and 58 from 13 secondary schools.

The qualitative-quantitative analysis examined the description of functioning, educational personalisation, attention to cultural and linguistic dimensions, and projection towards life plans. Preliminary results highlight a prevailing medical-diagnostic focus in the definition of functioning and limited systematic integration of information from migration stories, cultural and linguistic differences, and intersectional vulnerabilities in IEP. Elements of fragmentation



between the clinical dimension and pedagogical planning emerge, with a weak explanation of the pupil's life microsystem and contextual resources. This evidence suggests a critical review of the guidelines for writing PEIs from an intercultural perspective and highlights the opportunity to integrate specific intercultural knowledge into the initial training of specialised teachers.

Keywords: IEP; Migrant students; SEN-D; Sicily

Paper V

Dr. Sara Pellegrini - Link Campus University, Italy (ORCID: 0009-0008-3827-3916)
Prof. Riccardo Mancini - Link Campus University, Italy (ORCID: 0000-0002-1053-9400)
Prof. Riccardo Sebastiani - Link Campus University, Italy (ORCID: 0009-0002-1090-0734)

Title: Reframing Inclusion through Social Pedagogy: L2 education, care practices, and migrant trajectories in mobile societies

Abstract: In increasingly mobile and multicultural societies, inclusion has evolved into a complex and expanded paradigm that goes beyond disability to address emerging forms of socio-cultural vulnerability, particularly those associated with migrant trajectories. Within this framework, the purpose of this study is to investigate how second language (L2) learning, digital technologies, and care-oriented educational practices contribute to the development of inclusive pathways for migrants and vulnerable groups. The study aims to (a) analyze educators' perceptions of effective L2 methodologies, (b) examine the role of digital environments in supporting inclusion, (c) explore the impact of care practices, and (d) identify structural challenges that may hinder inclusive processes.

The research is grounded in an evidence-informed perspective that integrates the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) with Embodied Cognitive Science and the Life Project paradigm, framing inclusion as a situated, relational, and dynamic construction of human functioning. A mixed-methods embedded design was adopted. Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 168 student-teachers, while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke. Integration of results was achieved through meta-inferences.

Findings indicate a clear preference for communicative, collaborative, and interdisciplinary approaches, highlighting a shift from a formal understanding of language learning toward a situated social practice that promotes participation and agency. Digital technologies are widely perceived as enabling environments that support accessibility and personalization; however, their effectiveness depends significantly on instructional design and teacher training. Care-oriented practices emerge as a central dimension of inclusion, fostering meaningful relationships, mutual recognition, and active engagement. Nonetheless, persistent challenges are identified, including limited dissemination of innovative methodologies and insufficient professional development. The study suggests that inclusion should be understood as a systemic and transformative process shaped by the interaction of linguistic, technological, and relational dimensions. Implications highlight the need for targeted teacher education, investment in inclusive digital infrastructures,



and the development of integrated pedagogical models. Future research should further explore context-sensitive approaches capable of addressing the complexity of multilingual and multicultural educational environments.

Keywords: inclusion, migration; care

Paper VI

Authors:

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Dr Ilaria D'Angelo – Università degli Studi di Macerata, Italy, (ORCID: 0000-0001-8651-3939)
Dr Tommaso Santilli – Italy (ORCID 0009-0009-3323-1087)

Title: Special Pedagogy, Challenges and Pathways for Quality Education in Mozambique

Abstract: Ensuring equitable access to quality education in vulnerable contexts, particularly for children with disabilities, represents a challenging but fundamental endeavour to protect human rights and foster communities' wellbeing. In Mozambique, access to early childhood education remains limited and uneven, with children with disabilities facing physical and cultural barriers related to infrastructure, teacher preparation, and cultural stigma that call for context-sensitive, community-based, and pedagogically oriented interventions. In this challenging scenario, this contribution presents the Educ-IN project, a structured international cooperation intervention aimed at strengthening inclusive education systems in the Mozambican context, which is marked by structural inequalities and instability.

The project, involving Italian and Mozambican institutions, ministries, and local organisations, adopted an integrated, ecosystemic approach that combined professional development, local interventions, and community awareness. The project also involved creating a structured monitoring system that combines qualitative and quantitative indicators to observe and document systemic change, support reflective practices, and enhance social impact.

By presenting the project's research background, participatory methodology, and main findings, this contribution highlights the strategic centrality of teacher professional development and community involvement in generating virtuous transformations within schools and local territories in vulnerable contexts. In conclusion, this research experience demonstrates that inclusive education in emergencies relies on cultivating collective learning spaces that sustain dialogue and cultural change. The study offers useful insights to orient policymakers, researchers, and educators in promoting international cooperation models to advance inclusive education in fragile and crisis-affected settings.

Keywords: Inclusive Education; International Cooperation; Early Childhood Education; Mozambique



Breakout Session 1

Disability, Neurodiversity and Inclusive Educational Culture (I)

Time: 10:00 – 11:45

Location: Level 0, Meeting Room 4

Chair: Prof. Diana Carmela Di Gennaro

Paper I

Author: Prof. Ewa Wysocka – Opole University, Poland

Title: "Us and Them" – Why is Being Together so Difficult? Psychosocial Mechanisms of Devaluing "Others" as Inhibitors of Inclusive Education

Abstract: This presentation constitutes a short report based on questionnaire research, which focused on academic students' (students of pedagogy and special education/pedagogy) imagination concerning social differences, attitudes towards "their own people" and "alien people/outsideers", as well as sources and mechanisms of shaping various attitudes towards otherness. The author presents the main theoretical assumptions regarding the shaping of attitudes towards various forms of otherness, bringing them closer to cognitive, emotional, and social mechanisms. The author also highlights the importance of moral defence mechanisms in the development of negative attitudes towards otherness.

In the aforementioned research, various indicators were used, enabling the identification of diverse stereotypes, both positive and negative, among academic students. Prejudices, including clearly positive or negative emotions, ambivalence, or indifference, towards various social groups (socially excluded) could also be identified.

The analysis of the problem enables one to conclude that stereotypes (cognitive aspect of attitudes), prejudices (emotional aspect of attitudes), and moral defence mechanisms are important factors influencing the way academic students (potential future educators and special educators) perceive and experience social life. This, unfortunately, negatively forecasts the potential future educational activities in the field of inclusive education.

Keywords: Inclusive education; Mechanisms of shaping attitudes towards otherness; Cognitive defence mechanisms; Emotional defence mechanisms; Social defence mechanisms; Moral defence mechanisms; Negative attitudes towards otherness



Paper II

Authors:

Barbara Centrone – University of Roma Tre, Italy (ORCID: 0009-0007-1068-402X.2)

Benedetti Virginia – University of Macerata and University of Roma Tre, Italy

Title: Beyond Disability-Only Accessibility: UDL 3.0 and the Repair of Epistemic Injustice in Higher Education

Abstract: This paper emerges from work conducted within the D.A.N.T.E. Project, where we developed operational guidelines and teaching activities to support Italian university professors in implementing the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) 3.0 Guidelines, with particular attention to the principle of “Representation.” During this process, the transition from version 2.0 to 3.0 became a central object of reflection. The inclusion of explicit references to gender identity, cultural identity and linguistic plurality signalled not merely a revision of structure, but an expansion of the conceptual horizon of accessibility.

While UDL has consistently framed accessibility as a matter of educational rights and learner variability, version 3.0 renders more visible the role of identity, bias and cultural positioning in shaping access to knowledge. From this standpoint, this paper aims to reframe accessibility as an epistemic issue, arguing that it cannot be understood solely as a question of format or modality; it also concerns the conditions under which knowledge is produced, represented and recognised. Methodologically, the paper combines critical theoretical analysis with practice-based innovation. Drawing on Critical Disability Studies, Crip Theory, Queer Studies and Decolonial Studies, the paper argues that language, curricular content and representational practices shape whose knowledge is legitimised and whose experiences remain marginal within academic institutions.

Our analysis suggests that, within this framework, the Representation principle becomes a site for addressing forms of epistemic injustice, including testimonial and hermeneutical dimensions. Practices such as respecting chosen names and pronouns, critically revising biased materials, pluralising cultural references, and integrating multimodal and context-sensitive content are discussed not only as inclusive strategies but as epistemic interventions. We situate these reflections within the Italian higher education context, where inclusive language and decolonial curricular approaches remain politically debated and unevenly implemented.

We conclude by discussing implications for teacher professional development, institutional governance, and future research on UDL as a politically situated framework. In this sense, the repair of epistemic injustice is not an abstract aspiration but a pedagogical and socio-political task embedded in everyday academic practice, shaping how knowledge is represented, legitimised and made accessible in higher education.

Keywords: Universal Design for Learning; Epistemic Justice; Higher Education; Critical Disability Studies; Crip Studies



Paper III

Authors:

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Title: Committed to Inclusion? The Structural Invisibility of Students with Dyscalculia in Germany

Abstract: Germany formally endorses inclusive education, in line with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the right to inclusive schooling, as set out in international human rights frameworks (United Nations, 2015). Yet, within Germany's federal system, educational authority lies with the federal states (Grundgesetz, 1949, Arts. 30 & 70), resulting in significant regulatory fragmentation.

Unlike dyslexia, which has been addressed in national-level recommendations (KMK, 2007) and recognised in constitutional jurisprudence (Bundesverfassungsgericht, 2023), dyscalculia has not achieved comparable policy consolidation. Its recognition, definition, and associated support measures vary across Germany.

This paper argues that such uneven recognition produces a form of structural invisibility, whereby students with dyscalculia are not uniformly positioned as rights-bearing subjects within the inclusive education framework. When a condition lacks consistent legal recognition, access to accommodations and legally enforceable support becomes contingent on regional policy choices rather than educational need. This raises a critical governance question: can a system formally committed to inclusion create hierarchies of visibility within neurodiversity?

This paper seeks to address this question by investigating how the uneven legal recognition of dyscalculia across Germany translates into practical differences in students' rights, access to support, and educational opportunities, and how these regulatory choices shape their everyday school experiences.

The study employs qualitative document analysis of constitutional provisions, state-level school legislation, ministerial decrees, and policy guidelines to examine how dyscalculia is defined, regulated, and linked to enforceable accommodation rights. The analysis shows considerable differences between federal states and the absence of binding regulatory standards. In several states, dyscalculia is treated as a general mathematical difficulty rather than as a specific learning disorder, thereby limiting eligibility for structured support and weakening the legal enforceability.



In conclusion, without clearer nationwide standards, recognition and support for students with this condition remain inconsistent across states. As long as regulatory frameworks differ, the implementation of inclusion will be uneven, and students' rights will depend on their place of residence. By highlighting these governance gaps within the broader framework of inclusive education and equal rights, this paper aims to inform the debate and encourage greater coherence and fairness in Germany's education system.

Keywords: Inclusive Education Policy; Dyscalculia Recognition; Educational Governance and Federalism; Equity and Access to Support; Neurodiversity in Education

Paper IV

Author: Prof. Alessandra Faggiotto - Università di Macerata, Italy (ORCID: 0009-0008-5410-4418)

Title: Deafness and Structural Vulnerability: Rethinking Linguistic Accessibility

Abstract: In contemporary pedagogical debates, inclusion is often framed in terms of individual adaptation or compensatory measures. Deafness offers a critical perspective on this approach, as it makes visible a form of vulnerability that is not merely individual but structural: it emerges when educational contexts are grounded in an implicitly phonocentric paradigm in which access to spoken language is taken for granted. The historical roots of this paradigm, linked to long-standing dominance of oralism in European educational traditions, help explain its persistence in contemporary schooling.

This paper develops a theoretical reflection on educational models in the Italian context, with particular attention to the tensions between oralist and bilingual approaches (Italian Sign Language/written Italian). In this perspective, bilingualism is not conceived as a simple coexistence of two codes, but as a pedagogical hypothesis that redefines the conditions of linguistic access and school participation.

The analysis aims to show how different configurations of linguistic access have produced distinct understandings of inclusion and linguistic normality. Deafness should not be treated as a separate field, but rather as the critical lens through which the epistemological assumptions of mainstream pedagogy can be examined.

Rethinking linguistic accessibility, therefore, requires moving beyond not only the separation of Sign Language/ written language, but also a compensatory logic, recognising access to language as a structural condition of the educational environment. Considering this framework, teacher education becomes central to transforming inclusion from an adaptive practice into a systemic principle of educational action.

Keywords: Linguistic accessibility; Deaf education; Structural vulnerability; Bilingual education; Inclusive pedagogy



Paper V

Authors:

Dr Leonardo Tantari – University of Macerata and Roma Tre, Italy
Prof. Fabio Bocci – Roma Tre University, Italy

Title: Disability and Neurodiversity in Movie Representations. A “Critical Observatory” on Cinema as an Analyser of the Socio-political-cultural System with Regard to Inclusive Processes

Abstract: Since the dawn of the “Seventh Art,” movie representations have played a fundamental role in the construction of individual and collective identities and the imagery that derives from them. For this reason, cinematic images are never neutral (Hall & Du Gay, 1996), nor is the “cinema apparatus” (Guattari, 2017). In this sense, the “cinematic imagination” has, since its inception, portrayed disability, contributing to its construction as a “cultural object” (Longmore, 1985; Norden, 1994; Bocci, 2005; 2012; 2014; 2025; Bocci & Domenici, 2013; Bocci & Straniero, 2020; Bocci, Straniero & Tantari, 2024; Schianchi, 2023).

Analysing how movies represent disability and neuro-diversity on screen, therefore, allows us to better grasp and understand the socio-psycho-cultural implications, the attitudes and perspectives of those who represent, the way in which disabled bodies and others are represented, as well as to identify the discursive rhetoric (Vadalà, 2013) and ableist matrices of the device.

Taking these premises as a starting point and building on previous studies (Bocci & Bonavolontà, 2020; Bocci & Tantari, in press), we present here the initial outcomes of a qualitative-quantitative study that is part of a larger doctoral research project. The study aims to establish a critical observatory, using a qualitative-quantitative approach to identify the knowledge and perceptions of a group of subjects, selected as a convenience sample, regarding the representation of disability and neurodiversity on screen.

The cinematic representations of disability and diversity serve here as an analyzer (Lapassade, 1974; Gueli, 2018; Bocci, 2020; 2025), thus bringing to light the contradictions of the system, which, through its reproductive apparatus (Illich, 1986), makes use of mainstream artistic mediators (starting with cinema, but not only, think of television series) to confirm, also through the exaltation of apparently inclusive rhetoric, such as that of “normality” and “supercrip”, the hegemonic vision of a society centered on productive standards that make ableism and the meritocracy of performativity their cornerstones.

Keywords: Disability; Neurodiversity; Movie Representations; Collective Imagination; Inclusive Processes

Paper VI

Authors:

Assoc. Prof. Mariateresa Cairo – Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (UCSC), Italy
Adjunct Prof. Caterina Martinazzoli – Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (UCSC), Italy



Dr Rebecca Belforti – Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (UCSC), Italy
Maria Grazia Moneta
Erika Terenghi

Title: “Children with High Cognitive Potential and Giftedness Aged 6 to 11: Results of a Research Study”

Abstract: The research project “Children with High Cognitive Potential and Giftedness Aged 6 to 11: Results of a Research Study” arises from the need to embrace the thoughts of gifted students and their parents. The project’s focus was particularly directed towards:

- School experiences;
- Family experiences;
- Dynamic evaluation of the school context;
- Barriers and solutions aimed at the school inclusion of students with high cognitive potential and giftedness;
- The most effective methodologies for school and relational well-being at school;
- Inclusive policies, cultures, and practices based on the principles of educational mediation and differentiated instruction.

The research sample involved a total of 18 parents of 20 children (ages 6-11) and 19 parents of 17 teenagers (ages 12-20) belonging to the Step-Net ODV Association in Milan. Through individual semi-structured interviews, interesting recurring themes were highlighted, inviting reflections and new research ideas. In particular, the interests, hobbies and personal passions of the students were revealed, as well as their pronounced sensitivity alongside their characteristics of excellence. The children and teenagers expressed their ideas and experiences about school and their future.

Parents participated in the interviews with enthusiasm and generosity, sharing experiences, memories, future perspectives, ideas, and proposals, and expressing their emotions (pride, happiness, optimism, and on the other hand, fears, worries, pessimism). Themes emerged relating to the positives as well as difficulties their children encounter at school. Moreover, reflections on school performance, relationships, bullying, and the competence (or lack thereof) of teachers and the school in managing Giftedness was brought to light. Finally, parents shared their needs and suggested educational and didactic insights useful for guiding school policies.

The voices of the students and their families allowed for a deeper understanding of some aspects of giftedness, confirming scientific literature and exploring the subtle world of experiences and needs of a part of the Italian school population living “beyond the lines”.

Keywords: Giftedness; High Cognitive Potential; Inclusive Education; Qualitative Research



Day 2: Friday, 10 April

Parallel Practical Workshop Sessions

Time: 10:00 – 10:45

Workshop I: Dr Bruce Marlowe
Location: Level 1 Meeting Room 101

Inclusive Learning by Design: Constructivist Strategies that Centre Student Voice and Engagement

Abstract: Educators across secondary and post-secondary contexts share a common aspiration: to cultivate enduring learning, critical thinking, and intellectual curiosity that extends beyond the boundaries of the classroom. Yet many teachers and university faculty remain unaware of the breadth of instructional approaches available to support these goals—particularly those that promote inclusion, belonging, and student agency. This interactive session positions constructivist pedagogy as a powerful and practical framework for inclusive teaching, one that centres learners’ voices, lived experiences, and collaborative meaning-making as foundations for engagement and learning.

Grounded in constructivist theory, the session invites participants to reimagine high school and university classrooms as inclusive learning communities where knowledge is co-constructed rather than transmitted. Constructivist approaches are especially well-suited to inclusive pedagogies because they recognise students as active contributors, honour diverse ways of knowing, and create multiple entry points for participation. By emphasising dialogue, collaboration, and inquiry, these strategies foster a sense of belonging while supporting meaningful academic outcomes for learners with varied backgrounds, identities, and levels of prior preparation.

Participants will engage firsthand with a range of adaptable, active-learning strategies informed by constructivist principles, including modified pair-share activities, jigsaw learning, open-ended problem-solving, case studies, collaborative grouping, and classroom-based action research. Each strategy will be examined through an inclusion-focused lens, highlighting how intentional design choices can amplify student voice, promote equitable participation, and support learner agency. The session will also address how these approaches can be implemented across disciplines and educational levels, with attention to structural and cultural factors that shape student engagement.

By the end of the session, participants will leave with both a clear rationale for the role of constructivist pedagogy in inclusive teaching and a practical toolkit of strategies they can immediately adapt to their own contexts. Ultimately, this session contributes to the conference theme by demonstrating how constructivist, inclusive pedagogies can cultivate belonging, deepen learning, and empower students as active participants in their educational journeys.



While most high school teachers and university faculty hope to foster in their students enduring learning, critical thinking, and a desire to extend student scholarship beyond the classroom, research suggests that very few are aware of the wide range of instructional options available to them. The purpose of this interactive session is to engage participants in a constructivist framework for reimagining both high school and post-secondary education. Participants will leave with both a rationale for the importance of constructivist pedagogy at the secondary and university levels and specific, active-learning approaches and strategies informed by constructivist theory, such as modified pair-share activities, jigsaw learning, open-ended problems, case studies, collaborative grouping, and action research.

Keywords: Inclusion; Constructivism; Engagement

Workshop 2: Prof. Christine Johnston and Joel T. Johnston

Location: Level 1 Meeting Room 103

Who is the Learner You Seek to Include?

Abstract: Participants in this workshop will explore the Interactive Model of Learning, complete an adaptive technology-generated personal learning profile, and deconstruct and discuss two case studies in which they identify how the use of the theory and instrument, as a part of the inclusion process, yields enhanced results for learners, parents, and teachers.

The Inclusion Movement has spanned eighty years and many adaptations; however, while the shift from the medical model to the UDL inclusion model is a major move forward, it does not include the learner as an active participant in shaping the inclusion experience. Understanding the learners' specific learning processes, on the other hand, using the Interactive Learning Model allows the teacher to shape and guide the individual's learning experience shifting the point of efficacy from "done by the teacher to the learner" to "done with the teacher and informed by the learner" thereby allowing the learner to develop both in executive function and self-regulation.

The content of this practical workshop is based on 30 years of application in the Inclusion process and continues to be transferred to educational and workplace contexts. The workshop is divided into three components: (1) introduction to the Interactive Learning Model; (2) completion of the Personal Learning Profile with accompanying handout; and (3) small group/large group discussion and debriefing of two inclusion case studies in which the process presented in the workshop was used. Participants will use their computers or phones. The room used requires strong, consistent wi-fi connectivity.

Starting from a foundational understanding of the learner, Inclusion programs can engage others more deeply. Future Research could involve inclusive remediation by connecting the learner to technologically developed strategies that empower them through self-awareness and increased self-confidence.

Keywords: Inclusive practices; Learning diversity; Metacognitive framework; Let Me Learn Process; Learning patterns



Workshop 3: Dr Ann Gaillard
Location: Level 1 Meeting Room 102

Belonging by Design: Creating Inclusive Performances of Understanding

Abstract: This interactive workshop strengthens educators' capacity to design inclusive performances of understanding. These tasks allow all learners to demonstrate rigorous learning through multiple, equitable pathways. Drawing on Wiggins and McTighe's GRASPS framework (Goal, Role, Audience, Situation, Product/Performance, Standards), participants will learn to create performance tasks that reduce unnecessary barriers, keep success criteria explicit, and foster a sense of belonging and meaningful participation for diverse learners, including students with disabilities and neurodivergent learners.

In many K-12 classrooms, performance tasks may favour certain ways of communicating or specific experiences, making it harder for some students to participate and feel they belong. This can also hide what students really know, understand, and can do. To be more inclusive, assessments should separate true understanding from unnecessary barriers, give students meaningful choices, and include supports without lowering academic standards.

Participants will follow a step-by-step design process: choose a learning goal, create a real-world GRASPS task, then revise it by adding multiple ways for students to show learning, built-in supports, and consistent standards and criteria. Key insights from the session include practical design "look-fors" that help educators (1) preserve cognitive demand while increasing access, (2) align choice options to the same standards and criteria, and (3) identify and remove construct-irrelevant barriers that can suppress participation and belonging. The workshop concludes with the collaborative creation of a concise Inclusion Checklist to review tasks related to access, support, choice, and equity. Participants will leave with an inclusion-focused GRASPS template, the Inclusion Checklist, and a revised performance task ready to pilot. The session will also highlight implications for feedback, moderation, and future inquiry into how inclusive performances of understanding shape participation, belonging, and learning outcomes across learner profiles.

Keywords: Inclusive Assessment; Performance Tasks; GRASPS; Belonging; Neurodiversity; Equity

Workshop 4: Susan Grixti, Valerie Salerno and Tania Farrugia
Location: Level 0 Meeting Room 2

The Let Me Learn Process®: Critical Considerations for More Inclusive Practices

Abstract: True inclusion is not about sameness; it is about recognising and valuing differences and creating space for diverse ways of learning, working, and engaging to flourish. While diversity is often understood through visible characteristics such as ethnicity, culture, gender, or ability, an equally important yet often overlooked dimension lies in how individuals think, act, and feel when responding to challenges.



This workshop aims to explore how the Let Me Learn Process® (LML) can support more inclusive practices by making differences in learning processes visible and actionable. Grounded in a metacognitive framework, LML identifies four learning patterns—Sequence, Precision, Technical Reasoning, and Confluence—that influence how individuals approach tasks, solve problems, and engage with others.

Adopting a conceptual and practice-informed approach, the workshop examines how LML can be applied across educational and professional contexts to better understand and respond to learner variability. Drawing on illustrative case scenarios, it demonstrates how attention to cognition, conation, and affectation can inform the design of inclusive environments that recognise and leverage individual strengths.

Key insights suggest that when learning differences are intentionally integrated into practice, they become a source of strength rather than a barrier. The application of LML supports more effective collaboration, enhances engagement, and fosters innovative problem-solving by enabling individuals to contribute in ways aligned with their learning patterns.

The implications of LML awareness and implementation are relevant for policy, practice, and future research. Embedding metacognitive awareness through frameworks such as LML can support responsive teaching, inclusive workplace design, and professional development. Further research is needed to explore how awareness of learning patterns can be systematically integrated to promote equitable and meaningful participation across diverse settings.

Keywords: Inclusive Practices; Learning Diversity; Metacognitive Framework; Let Me Learn Process; Learning Patterns

Workshop 5: Dr Gifford Rhamie
Location: Level 0 Meeting Room 3

Building a Thriving and Inclusive Learning Environment. Embracing the Growth of Malta Population from 40+ Countries

Abstract:

Purpose and Aims

This workshop, Reframing the Geography of Reason: Advancing DEIB in the Contemporary University, invites educators, professional staff, and researchers to critically engage the epistemic assumptions shaping teaching, research, and institutional culture. It explores how Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) can move beyond compliance to become a transformative framework for a more inclusive and intellectually expansive academy. Central to this are epistemic justice, ontology, pedagogy, and transformation.

Context and Rationale

The workshop responds to growing recognition that higher education often reflects historically narrow epistemic traditions, marginalising alternative ways of knowing and being. In a European



and Mediterranean context such as the University of Malta, this raises questions about whose knowledge is centred and how institutional practices shape belonging. Addressing this requires rethinking both ontology and pedagogy.

Approach and Method

Using an interactive, practice-oriented approach, the workshop combines brief inputs with participatory exercises, including epistemic mapping, belonging diagnostics, and collaborative design labs. Participants reflect on their own practices and co-create strategies across five domains: representation, curriculum and pedagogy, culture, research, and accountability.

Key Findings and Insights

The workshop highlights belonging as central to academic excellence and shows how epistemic diversity enhances institutional vitality. It demonstrates that transformation is most effective when both systemic and relational, and that targeted interventions, such as curriculum audits and inclusive pedagogy, can drive meaningful change.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Future Research

For policy, the workshop emphasises embedding DEIB in institutional strategy. For practice, it offers a scalable framework for inclusive pedagogy and epistemic justice. For research, it points to examining how shifts in ontology and epistemology shape outcomes and institutional transformation.

Keywords: DEIB; Epistemic Justice; Ontology; Pedagogy; Transformation

Workshop 5: Dr Ann Palmer
Location: Level 0 Meeting Room 4

From Initiative to Ethos: Sustaining Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Global Education

Abstract: This interactive workshop examines how educational institutions can move beyond short-term diversity initiatives towards sustained, systemic approaches to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) within global education contexts. Framed around the transition from isolated interventions to an embedded institutional ethos, the session addresses a central challenge in contemporary education: ensuring that commitments to equity and inclusion are durable, measurable, and responsive to diverse cultural and policy environments.

Drawing on an established framework for systemic change, the workshop engages participants in critically exploring how DEI can be integrated across governance structures, pedagogical practices, institutional policies, and community engagement. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of leadership in cultivating inclusive cultures that extend beyond individual champions and are sustained through collective responsibility and ethical practice. Participants will examine key structural enablers and barriers influencing the implementation of equitable practices across different national and institutional contexts.



Through a combination of guided reflection, collaborative dialogue, and applied activities, participants will utilise diagnostic tools to assess the maturity and impact of DEI practices within their own institutions. The workshop also foregrounds the importance of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, capacity-building strategies, and stakeholder engagement in ensuring long-term sustainability. By facilitating cross-cultural exchange among educational leaders, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners, the session aims to generate context-sensitive strategies that support the development of inclusive educational systems grounded in social justice and belonging.

Ultimately, the workshop positions DEI not as a discrete initiative but as an enduring institutional ethos, shaped through intentional leadership, reflective practice, and systemic alignment across educational ecosystems.

Keywords: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI); Sustainable Educational Change; Inclusive Leadership in Education; Institutional Culture and Belonging; Global and Intercultural Education



Breakout Session 2

Teacher Education and Professional Identity (II)

Time: 15:00 – 16:45

Location: Level 1, Meeting Room 101

Chair: Prof. Filippo Dettori

Paper I

Author: Prof. Filippo Dettori – Università degli Studi di Salerno, Italia

Title: The Inclusive Teacher in the Secondary School

Abstract: This contribution is part of the most recent transformations in international pedagogical thought, which have redefined the concept of inclusion as an evolutionary, multilevel process structurally connected to educational equity. The growing heterogeneity of educational needs, developmental trajectories, and sociocultural contexts today requires educational institutions to profoundly revise teaching practices and professional skills, calling on educational research to provide interpretative tools and evidence-based operational guidance.

The results of a national research project involving the Universities of Sassari, Parma, and Verona will be presented, articulating theoretical perspectives, empirical analyses, and professional reflections.

This paper focuses on analysing the authors' recommendations for teachers, analysing their training needs, their perceptions, and the skills required to work in complex contexts, highlighting the need for a structured dialogue between schools, families, and services.

Keywords: Inclusion; Teaching; Special Educational Needs

Paper II

Author: Dr Eva M. García-Terceño – University of Burgos, Spain (ORCID: 0000-0003-4631-0058)

Title: The Inclusive Teacher in the Secondary School

Abstract: The commitment to achieving equitable, open, and accessible education systems that prevent segregation and unequal access to opportunities for receiving a quality education remains an internationally recognised duty. Joint efforts to achieve this goal are channelled towards the establishment of inclusive educational models. However, this change cannot be understood solely as a technical or organisational adjustment; rather, it represents a profound cultural transformation that demands careful reflection on the deeply embedded beliefs, conceptions, and values that underpin educational decision-making and practice.



In this process of change, one of the most significant challenges is to establish initial teacher training in line with the requirements and principles of inclusive education, which provides future teachers with the competencies necessary to understand, value, and respect diversity, and to teach and coexist within it. Despite the long journey, there remains a disconnect between the training future teachers receive and the skills they need to commit to inclusive education.

With the aim of contributing to the advancement of inclusive educational spaces, this paper analyses this reality in two contexts, Malta and Spain, and identifies training proposals for future teachers to develop their professional practice in line with inclusive education, thereby helping to overcome the barriers faced by each education system. To this end, two group interviews were conducted with professors from the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta and the University of Burgos.

The results reveal the need for greater coherence and specificity between the statements issued by educational authorities in support of inclusive education and the measures implemented to advance in that direction, as well as for increased support and guidance for schools throughout the process. Furthermore, the university's importance is highlighted as a knowledge-generating institution capable of guiding decision-making on inclusion policies. Simultaneously, the university is responsible for preparing future teachers through training programs that are closely aligned with classroom realities and address inclusive education both transversally and explicitly. Achieving this necessitates breaking down the boundaries that compartmentalise different educational departments and working in a coordinated manner toward a shared goal.

Keywords: Inclusive education; Pre-service teachers; University

Paper III

Authors:

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Ms. Mariagrazia Verbicaro – University of Messina, Italy. (ORCID: 0009-0009-0654-5646)
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Prof. Oliva Patrizia – University Magna Graecia of Catanzaro (ORCID: 0000-0002-3907-0001)

Title: What Shapes Attitudes and Preparedness for the Inclusion of Students with Specific Learning Disorders? The Role of Inclusive and General Teaching Self-Efficacy

Abstract: Preparing teachers to respond to the needs of students with Specific Learning Disorders (SLDs) represents a growing priority within initial teacher education. Understanding how future teachers perceive their preparedness to support these learners is particularly relevant for developing inclusive educational futures.

This study aims to investigate pre-service teachers' attitudes and perceived preparedness toward students with Specific Learning Disorders (SLDs), focusing on the role of inclusive self-efficacy and general teaching self-efficacy. Situated within the field of teacher education, the study conceptualises preparedness as a multidimensional construct emerging from the interaction of



professional beliefs, efficacy perceptions, and inclusive dispositions.

The study employed a quantitative survey design. Participants were 579 pre-service teachers enrolled in a national teacher education training program in Italy (411 females, 167 males; age range 19–58; 1 participant preferred not to disclose gender). Data were collected through a structured survey exploring attitudes toward SLDs, inclusive dispositions—e.g., attitudes, sentiments, and concerns regarding inclusion—and both inclusive and general domains of teaching self-efficacy. Descriptive statistics and correlational analyses will be conducted to examine the relationships among these dimensions and to explore how different belief systems are associated with perceived preparedness for the inclusion of students with SLDs.

The study is expected to provide evidence on how perceived preparedness for SLD inclusion is configured during initial teacher education, by disentangling the contribution of inclusive self-efficacy, general teaching self-efficacy, and inclusive dispositions. It is hypothesised that more favourable attitudes toward the inclusion of students with SLDs will be associated with higher levels of both inclusive and general teaching self-efficacy. In particular, inclusive self-efficacy is expected to show stronger associations with attitudes toward students with SLDs than general teaching self-efficacy, given its closer alignment with inclusive educational practices.

This work offers implications for teacher education curricula, highlighting the importance of addressing not only knowledge and skills but also professional beliefs and perceptions of efficacy to strengthen teachers' preparedness to support all learners, including those with SLDs, in inclusive educational contexts.

Keywords: Specific Learning Disorders; Teacher education; Teacher self-efficacy; Inclusive attitudes, Perceived preparedness

Paper IV

Authors:

Prof. Annalisa Morganti – University of Perugia, Italy

Prof. Angeles Parrilla Latas – University of Vigo, Spain

Dr Samantha Mulloni Martinez – University of Vigo, Spain

Prof. Alessia Signorelli – University of Perugia, Italy

Dr Francesco Marsili – University of Perugia, Italy

Title: What are we Missing in Initial Teacher Training in Inclusive Education?

Abstract: This communication presents a research project aimed at analysing and creating new approaches to think about initial training in inclusive education. The study creates dialogue environments that recognise and appreciate diverse types and sources of knowledge that various educational actors can contribute to student teacher training.

The need to rethink the initial training of students' teachers, considering it a continuous reflective and collaborative process informed by practice, is internationally accepted (Susinos &



Parrilla, 2013; Florian, 2015; Morganti et al., 2023).

The study aims to create new environments and insights for inclusive Teacher education. To achieve this objective, a study proposing the development of a Human Libraries cycle, “Experiences that teach,” has been proposed in two Faculties of Education at two Spanish universities. A Human Library (HL) is a methodological strategy (Sierra, Fiuza & Parrilla, 2024), which emphasises the agency of diverse stakeholders, who act as books, in inquiry, dialogue, and the collaborative construction of new narratives with their readers (attendees at the HL). A total of 32 agents in the inclusive field (teachers, school principals, counsellors, and specialists) served as human books, while 160 student teachers from Early Childhood and Primary Education served as readers.

Over six months, a total of eight HLs were held. The development of the libraries was audio- and videotaped. A methodology based on narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) was used with transcriptions. Two issues were analysed: what is being omitted from training in inclusive education, and what advice do books give to students’ teachers on being inclusive in their future professional practice. Following this analysis, the results (under development now) are focused on identifying lines of action to reimagine and improve initial teacher training on inclusion, which will be presented and discussed at the Conference.

Keywords: Inclusive Education; Teachers’ Education; Qualitative Research; Student Teachers.

Paper V

Authors:

Assoc. Prof. Erika Marie Pace – University of Salerno, Italy (ORCID: 0000-0002-4557-7722)

Dr D'Agostino Rossella – University of Salerno, Italy (ORCID: 0009-0006-7908-4455)

Dr Esposito Ida – University of Salerno, Italy (ORCID: 0009-0006-7271-4303)

Ms. Mohajeri, Zahra. Sadat – University of Salerno, Italy (ORCID: 0009-0006-0139-973X)

Title: “It Doesn’t Fall within my Remit”: Professional Identity Development and Teacher Commitment for Inclusive Collective Agency

Abstract: This study examines how future learning support teachers in Italy conceptualise responsibility and professional commitment within inclusive educational contexts, and how these perceptions contribute to the development of collective inclusive agency, based on the idea that such agency can only emerge when teachers, change catalysts in the education system (Sharma & Pace, 2019), develop a strong professional identity (OECD, 2022). Thus, inclusive education is understood as a shared, relational, and ethically grounded endeavour and inclusive practice depends on teachers’ willingness to assume collective responsibility, rather than delegating inclusion solely to specialised roles.

The study is based on Florian and Black-Hawkins’ (2011) inclusive pedagogy, which challenges deficit-based models, and is enriched by Biesta’s ecological conception of agency, which considers it as an achievement that emerges through the interaction with temporal, relational, and



structural conditions (Biesta et al., 2015). Teacher identity is constructed and continually reworked through agentic processes of self-regulation and goal orientation (OECD, 2022).

Teacher commitment constitutes another key dimension frequently examined in studies of professional identity (Wong & Liu, 2022). In inclusive contexts, shared commitment has been shown to foster more equitable school experiences for students with disabilities and additional learning needs by distributing responsibility across the school community (Subban et al., 2024).

The study involved 450 students enrolled in a specialisation programme required to obtain the national teaching warrant for learning support teachers in lower secondary education in Italy, as regulated by the Ministry of Education and delivered by public universities. Situated within a 30-hour study unit, which integrates strengths-based reflective practices to foster awareness of the values, beliefs, and responsibilities shaping teacher agency in inclusive contexts the study adopts a qualitative, appreciative research approach (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stravos, 2008) aimed at exploring how future learning support teachers articulate responsibility, professional commitment, and inclusive agency during initial teacher education.

Data analysis for this study is currently underway. Responses will be analysed using inductive and deductive thematic approaches, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) protocol, and organised in MAXQDA2020 to ensure both theoretical alignment and openness to participants' voices. Results will be summarised qualitatively, highlighting thematic patterns and quantitatively, reporting the frequencies of coded responses.

Keywords: Teacher Identity, Reflective Practice, Commitment, Qualitative Study, Learning Support Teachers



Breakout Session 2

Digital Transformation and Inclusive Futures (II)

Time: 15:00 – 16:45

Location: Level 1, Meeting Room 102

Chair: Dr Giuseppina Rita Jose Mangione

Paper I

Authors:

Dr Stefano Di Tore – University of Salerno, Italy

Dr Anna Rescigno – University of Salerno, Italy

Dr Lucia Campitiello – University of Salerno, Italy

Dr Michela Galdieri, University of Salerno, Italy

Title: AI4COMMUNICATION: An Adaptive AI-based AAC System for Inclusive Education

Abstract: Artificial intelligence is expanding the possibilities of assistive technologies in inclusive education, contributing to increasing access, participation and autonomy for students with different types of needs. AI4COMMUNICATION aims to develop an AI-driven AAC system that supports inclusive practices in primary schools, going beyond the simple selection of symbols toward the adaptive generation of contextualised visual sequences. The project is based on the idea that many everyday difficulties experienced by students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) stem from challenges in understanding verbal instructions, anticipating activities and managing transitions, factors that affect participation and self-regulation.

Despite the widespread adoption of digital tools for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), many applications remain focused on expressive communication and require adult manual mediation. Unlike traditional word-symbol association systems, AI4COMMUNICATION can analyse the communicative context in which the instruction is formulated, considering the activity phase, the task structure, and the student's characteristics.

The software does not simply translate words into symbols but also performs semantic and pragmatic mediation, allowing the construction of visual representations aligned with the meaning of the required action and with the educational moment in which it occurs. Teachers' instructions are automatically transformed into structured visual sequences enriched with speech synthesis, with the goal of reducing cognitive load and increasing predictability.

AI4COMMUNICATION is supported by an artificial intelligence platform that manages interaction logic through retrieval-augmented generation techniques guided by pedagogical principles, ensuring that outputs are anchored to explicit educational criteria. The system also integrates a human-in-the-loop approach that keeps the teacher at the centre of the decision-making process and an interaction design based on a state machine that structures the experience into recognisable phases.



The experimentation is currently under development and initial implementation and adopts a single-case experimental design in primary school classrooms. Data collection will include systematic observations focused on indicators such as task acceptance, time on task and frequency of prompts from adults. The work aims to contribute to the debate on the potential of ethically governed artificial intelligence as an assistive technology, offering insights for educational practice, digital inclusion and future empirical research.

Keywords: AI; Assistive technology; AAC

Paper II

Authors:

Dr Luna Lembo – Pegaso net University, Italy

Prof. Stefania Morsanuto – Pegaso net University, Italy

Prof. Francesco Peluso Cassese – Pegaso net University, Italy

Title: Augmented Reality and Learning Outcomes in Students with Mild Visual Impairment: Evidence from a Cross-Over Study

Abstract: The study examines the impact of Augmented Reality (AR) on the learning processes of students with mild visual impairment, with particular attention to conceptual comprehension and sequential memorisation.

Students with mild visual impairment often face hidden accessibility barriers in mainstream teaching materials, which can negatively affect comprehension and retention; therefore, there is a need for inclusive tools that support personalisation and multisensory access to information (Diasse et al., 2025).

A within-subject cross-over experimental design was adopted, in which each participant experienced both a traditional instructional condition and an AR-mediated condition, serving as their own control. The sample consisted of 87 young adults (18–30 years old) with a certified diagnosis of mild visual impairment (visual acuity between 3/10 and 5/10), recruited from schools, universities, and training contexts. The two experimental conditions were separated by a six-month washout period to minimise residual learning effects.

Learning outcomes were assessed using the Learning Task (Prova di Apprendimento, PA) from the AMOS test battery, based on a text on African Protohistory. The task measured both conceptual comprehension (true/false items) and sequential memorisation (chronological ordering tasks). In the AR condition, students interacted with high-contrast three-dimensional models accessible via mobile devices, equipped with zoom, rotation, lighting control, and integrated auditory support.

The results showed statistically significant improvements in performance across both learning dimensions. Specifically, conceptual comprehension scores were higher in the AR condition compared to the traditional condition ($M = 28.1$ vs 26.4 , $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.59$), as were



sequential memorisation scores ($M = 12.1$ vs 10.7 , $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.53$). These effects were not influenced by participants' age, gender, or educational level.

Overall, the findings suggest that Augmented Reality can function as an inclusive pedagogical mediator, enhancing access to information and supporting deeper cognitive processing in students with visual impairments, in line with the principles of UDL and the goal of a more equitable and accessible educational system.

Keywords: UDL; Inclusive Education; Augmented Learning Environments

Paper III

Authors:

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Prof. Francesco Peluso Cassese – Pegaso Telematic University, Italy (ORCID: 000000-0002-6798-3668)

Title: Brain–Computer Interfaces for Disorders of Consciousness: Advancing Digital Transformation toward Inclusive Neurorehabilitation

Abstract: This contribution provides a critical overview of assistive and rehabilitative Brain–Computer Interface (BCI) research for people with disorders of consciousness (DoC), including unresponsive wakefulness syndrome/vegetative state and minimally conscious state (Giacino et al., 2002; Laureys et al., 2010). The aims are: (1) to map the main BCI paradigms used for consciousness assessment, interaction, and potential communication; and (2) to identify priorities for inclusive implementation in neurorehabilitation pathways (Chatelle et al., 2012; Luauté et al., 2015)

Behavioural bedside assessments remain the clinical standard for DoC patients, but are limited by motor and sensory impairments, which can lead to misdiagnosis (Schnakers et al., 2009). Guidelines recommend repeated and multimodal evaluations to improve diagnostic accuracy (Giacino et al., 2018; Kondziella et al., 2020). EEG-based BCIs can detect covert awareness and thus complement clinical assessment, supporting diagnosis and patient management (Cruse et al., 2011; Chatelle et al., 2012). However, their clinical adoption is still limited by methodological heterogeneity and lack of standardisation (Luauté et al., 2015; He et al., 2023).

This literature review draws on peer-reviewed reviews and landmark empirical studies in DoC-BCI, and highlights paradigms for assessment, alongside key barriers to clinical translation (Kondziella et al., 2020; He et al., 2023).

P300-based paradigms are widely used to detect command following and enable communication in DoC patients (Lulé et al., 2013; He et al., 2023). Hybrid BCIs and repeated assessments may address fluctuations in responsiveness (Wannez et al., 2017; Kondziella et al., 2020), although



their clinical application remains limited by sensory deficits and the lack of standardised validation frameworks (Giacino et al., 2018; He et al., 2023).

Best practices for DoC-BCI implementation encompass the integration of BCIs as additional tools within standardised, multimodal diagnostic frameworks; the adoption of repeated and longitudinal assessments to account for within-subject variability in responsiveness (Wannez et al., 2017; Giacino et al., 2018); the implementation of transparent, standardised acquisition and analysis pipelines to ensure reproducibility; and the promotion of patient-centred, equity-oriented approaches targeting clinically meaningful outcomes.

Keywords: Brain-Computer Interface, Disorders of Consciousness, Neurorehabilitation, Assistive Technology

Paper IV

Authors:

Dr Giuseppina Rita Jose Mangione – INDIRE – National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research (Italy)

Francesca De Santis – INDIRE – National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research (Italy)

Dr Lydia Zampolini – INDIRE – National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research (Italy)

Title: Digital Technologies and Inclusive Pedagogy in Multigrade Classrooms: Evidence and Future Tensions from a National Survey of Italian Teachers

Abstract: This study investigates how teachers in Italian multigrade classrooms interpret digital technologies through an inclusion lens, examining (a) reported practices, (b) perceived inclusive functions, and (c) tensions embedded in future-oriented scenarios, including emerging imaginaries of AI-supported teaching. Multigrade classrooms constitute “extreme” heterogeneous environments that can foster inclusion through differentiated instruction and mixed-age peer learning (Little, 2006; Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015; Hattie, 2009; Tomlinson, 2017). Yet teachers often work under organisational constraints and professional isolation, which may shape their use of technology toward regulation rather than participation. Current debates stress that educational technologies are cultural artefacts whose meaning depends on situated pedagogical translation (Beetham & Sharpe, 2019).

Data collected as part of the INDIRE national survey (2024–2025) on digital technologies in multigrade teaching includes 1,061 valid responses from teachers in primary and lower secondary multigrade settings. The instrument consisted of closed-ended items on access, devices and uses, and an open-ended question inviting teachers to envision an “ideal” technology-supported activity for the whole multigrade class. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively; open-ended narratives were examined through qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2021), identifying inclusive functions (e.g., differentiation, cooperation, accessibility, feedback) and value-laden tensions. The analysis is informed by a situated epistemology and by recent work that treats technological imagination as professional knowledge, including reflective



engagement with generative AI in interpretation (Holmes et al., 2024; De Santis & Mangione, 2025).

Technologies are primarily described as regulative infrastructures (orchestration of time, parallel tasks, visibility of instructions), yet teachers also attribute inclusive value to multimodal access, adaptive pacing, and scaffolding for learners with diverse profiles. Future scenarios intensify three tensions: (1) personalisation vs cooperation (risk of individualisation overshadowing mixed-age peer learning); (2) support vs. substitution (AI imagined as scaffolding and feedback vs. delegating professional judgment); (3) efficiency vs. relational time (tools that “save time” vs. protecting relational pedagogy). Results suggest that digital inclusion in multigrade classrooms depends less on availability than on pedagogical design capacities and ethical-professional governance of AI. Policy and teacher education should prioritise context-sensitive professional learning that reconnects technology use with inclusive mixed-age pedagogies.

Keywords: Multigrade Classrooms; Digital Inclusion; Differentiation and Participation; Socio-Material Mediation; Pedagogical Tensions

Paper V

Author: Prof. Igor Ž. Žagar – Educational Research Institute, Slovenia

Title: Digitalising Education or Digitalising Students? Rethinking Screens in Early Literacy and Learning

Abstract: European educational policy over the past decade has strongly promoted digital education as a pathway to inclusion, flexibility, and resilience, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. While strategic frameworks emphasise digital skills and technological integration, schools were not initially central to these agendas; their rapid digital transformation accelerated only after the pandemic. This paper critically examines whether current reforms genuinely enhance education or primarily normalise screen-based interaction as the dominant mode of learning.

Drawing on policy analysis and national assessment data from Slovenia (2025), the paper highlights a widening gap between students’ ability to solve closed, recognition-based tasks and their capacity for sustained reading comprehension, independent written expression, and syntactic precision. Across grade levels (3, 6, and 9), students consistently perform better on multiple-choice items than on tasks requiring explanation, argumentation, or coherent text production. These patterns raise concerns about the cognitive consequences of replacing handwriting and paper-based reading with screen-based tapping and scrolling—practices that risk privileging selection over formulation, and reaction over reflection.

The presentation situates these findings within broader debates on digital literacy, arguing that the uncritical expansion of screens in primary education may inadvertently weaken foundational literacy competencies. Rather than opposing digital tools outright, the paper advocates a recalibrated approach: prioritising deep reading, handwriting, and structured text production in



early schooling, while integrating digital technologies in ways that reinforce—not substitute—core linguistic and cognitive development.

The central question is forward-looking: how can education systems harness digital innovation without compromising the very skills upon which meaningful learning depends?

Keywords: Digitisation; Digitalising; Screen Learning; Reading; Writing

Breakout Session 2

Teacher Education and Professional Identity (III)

Time: 15:00 – 16:45

Location: Level 1, Meeting Room 103

Chair: Prof. Elisabetta Ghedin

Paper I

Authors:

Dr Francesco Marsili – University of Perugia, Italy (ORCID: 0000-0003-1352-4842)

Dr. Maria Mirandi – Istituto Universitario Sophia

Prof. Annalisa Morganti, University of Perugia

Title: School Selection, Meritocracy Beliefs and Attitudes Toward Gifted Students: A Mediation Analysis with Italian Teachers

Abstract: This study examines how teachers' attitudes toward gifted education relate to belief in school meritocracy and endorsement of the selective function of schooling. Situated within ongoing debates on inclusive education and excellence-oriented reforms, the study aims to clarify whether support for gifted education operates as an ideological bridge linking inclusion rhetoric with selection-oriented practices.

Brief context and rationale.

Contemporary education systems are marked by a structural tension between commitments to inclusive education and meritocratic selection mechanisms. While belief in school meritocracy has been shown to legitimise inequality and reduce support for inclusive practices, less is known about how it intersects with teachers' attitudes toward gifted education—an area often positioned at the crossroads of talent development and stratification. Investigating these relationships is particularly salient in Italy, a context historically committed to inclusion yet increasingly influenced by meritocratic and excellence-driven discourses.

A cross-sectional survey was administered to a sample of Italian in-service teachers (N not reported here). Validated scales measured attitudes toward gifted education (ATGE), belief in school meritocracy (BSM), and belief in the selective function of schooling (BSS). A mediation model tested whether BSM mediated the relationship between ATGE and BSS, controlling for professional role (curricular vs. support teacher).



Results indicated a strong positive association between ATGE and BSS. ATGE was also positively, though modestly, related to BSM. Crucially, BSM significantly mediated the relationship between ATGE and BSS, accounting for approximately 12% of the total effect, while a substantial direct effect remained. Additionally, curricular teachers reported higher levels of meritocratic and selection-oriented beliefs than support teachers, whereas attitudes toward gifted education did not differ by role.

Implications for policy, practice, or future research: Findings suggest that support for gifted education is partly translated into endorsement of school selection through meritocratic ideology, illuminating an “inclusion paradox”: the same belief system that legitimises differentiation for high-ability students may undermine equity-oriented inclusion for students with special educational needs. Policy and teacher education initiatives should therefore address the ideological dimensions of meritocracy, fostering critical reflection on how beliefs about fairness, talent, and excellence shape inclusive design and evaluation. Future longitudinal research is needed to examine causal dynamics and additional mediating mechanisms.

Keywords: Gifted education; School meritocracy; School selection; Inclusive education; Teacher beliefs

Paper II

Author: Dr Damian Spiteri – University of Malta

Title: Sustaining Inclusion in Higher Education: Professional Wellbeing, Burnout, and Inclusive Practice

Abstract: This paper argues that educator wellbeing, particularly in relation to burnout, is a foundational condition for sustaining inclusive futures in higher education and professional training. The paper aims to examine how burnout shapes professional identity and inclusive practice, and to highlight how well-being must be understood as a collective and institutional responsibility rather than an individual coping task.

Higher education and professional training contexts are increasingly characterised by widening participation, diverse learner needs, and intensified expectations placed on educators. While inclusion is widely promoted through policy and institutional strategies, educators are often expected to enact inclusive practices within environments marked by heavy workloads, managerial accountability, and limited relational support. These conditions contribute to emotional exhaustion and reduced professional agency, creating a tension between inclusive ideals and everyday professional realities. When burnout becomes normalised, inclusion risks being reduced to procedural compliance rather than lived experiences of belonging, participation, and meaningful engagement.

The paper adopts a qualitative, practice-based approach grounded in reflective analysis of teaching, supervision, and professional training experiences in higher education. Drawing on



inclusive education principles, person-centred perspectives, and systemic understandings of professional functioning, the analysis integrates illustrative practice examples to explore the relationship between institutional conditions, educator wellbeing, and inclusive practice.

The paper identifies educator wellbeing as both a precondition for and an outcome of inclusive practice. Three key insights emerge: first, burnout constrains relational capacity, reducing flexibility, attunement, and responsiveness to learner diversity; second, professional wellbeing is shaped by organisational cultures, leadership practices, and workload structures rather than individual resilience alone; and third, relational and reflective practices—such as peer dialogue, supervision-informed spaces, and collegial support—act as protective factors that sustain inclusive professional identities.

The paper calls for wellbeing to be embedded within inclusive education strategies through institutional leadership, workload planning, and professional development that values relational and reflective labour. Future research should further examine how educator wellbeing mediates inclusive learning environments and long-term sustainability in higher education and professional training.

Keywords: educator wellbeing, professional identity, inclusion

Paper III

Authors:

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Prof. Sibilio Maurizio – University of Salerno, Italy (ORCID: 0000-0003-1322-7776)

Title: Teacher Education and Creative Thinking: Preliminary Results of a Systematic Review of the International Literature

Abstract: Creativity is widely recognised as a key competence in contemporary educational systems and as a central resource for the development of knowledge-based societies (Robinson, 2001). Over time, the concept of creativity has undergone a significant evolution, progressively embracing a more inclusive perspective that considers creativity as a potential all individuals possess, provided it is supported by appropriate educational contexts (Craft, 2005; Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010; Starko, 2021). In addition, several studies highlight how the development of creativity requires inclusive learning environments characterised by positive relationships between teachers and students, capable of fostering exploration, autonomy and active participation in the construction of knowledge (Craft, 2005; Gajda et al., 2017).

Despite growing attention to creativity in educational policies and school curricula, much of the research has focused on developing students' creativity, while less attention has been paid to teachers' creative thinking and its relationship to teaching practices. However, fostering students' creativity presupposes teachers who can adopt flexible and innovative pedagogical approaches (Craft et al., 2001). Many teachers report feeling insufficiently prepared to



implement creative teaching practices, partly because such approaches involve openness to unpredictability and learning processes that cannot be entirely planned in advance (Craft et al., 2001; Starko, 2021). Within the Italian pedagogical debate, some perspectives view teaching as a dynamic, adaptive process. In particular, Sibilio (2014; 2023) proposes the concept of simplex didactics, which interprets teaching as a simplex [9-8] and non-linear system in which teachers are required to manage the variability of educational situations through flexible and adaptive strategies.

This perspective may support creativity-oriented teaching practices, as it values exploration, the plurality of pathways and openness to different solutions within learning processes. This contribution is part of a broader research project that explores the use of the Six Thinking Hats method (De Bono, 2015) as a tool to further develop teachers' creative thinking and agency. The study presents preliminary results from a systematic review of national and international literature published over the last six years, conducted in accordance with the PRISMA protocol (Moher et al., 2009) by consulting several international academic databases. The preliminary findings enable the identification of the main theoretical perspectives emerging in the literature and to highlight relevant implications for both pre-service and in-service teacher education.

References:

Keywords: Teacher Education; Creative Thinking; Simplex Didactics

Paper IV

Authors:

Dr Antonio Giannone – Kore University of Enna (ORCID: 0009-0001-5279-9657)

Prof. Raimondo Enza Manila – Kore University of Enna, Italy

Prof. Marinella Muscarà – Kore University of Enna, Italy (ORCID: 0000-0002-9330-450X)

Title: Promoting Teacher Well-Being: Burnout Prevention in Pre-Service Teacher Education

Abstract: The transformations currently affecting school systems find one of their most evident expressions in the configuration of classrooms, which are increasingly heterogeneous and interpretable through the lens of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007; Zoletto, 2022). This shift directly challenges teacher education policies, which must address the growing pluralisation of cultural, linguistic, and social experiences characterising contemporary classrooms.

As educational processes become more complex, the need to strengthen teachers' professional competencies becomes increasingly urgent. Within this framework, the recent reform of initial teacher education for secondary school teachers, introduced in connection with the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, represents a significant development. Law No. 79/2022—implemented through the Prime Ministerial Decree of August 4, 2023—has redefined the structure of qualifying pathways, outlining the expected competencies of future teachers and delineating a professional profile that integrates pedagogical, didactic, and methodological competencies with reflective and self-assessment skills.



However, the compressed timeframe of these training pathways has fueled scientific debate concerning working conditions in the teaching profession and the potential risks of work overload. Existing literature suggests that the intensification of institutional demands, combined with unfavourable contractual conditions and increasing bureaucratic requirements, may significantly affect teachers' professional well-being (Gremigni, 2012; 2013; Carbone & Gargiuolo, 2022; Botta, 2025).

From this perspective, burnout can be understood as a possible manifestation of structural tensions arising in the early stages of teacher education. Drawing on the Job Demands–Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), burnout is understood as the outcome of an imbalance between high professional demands and the availability—or perceived availability—of personal and professional resources. Against this background, this contribution presents preliminary findings from a quantitative study investigating the relationship between perceived self-efficacy, metacognitive beliefs, and the three dimensions of burnout identified by the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (personal, work-related, and student-related burnout).

The study involved 359 prospective upper secondary school teachers enrolled in initial teacher education programs. Results indicate that higher levels of self-efficacy and metacognitive beliefs are negatively associated with burnout dimensions, highlighting the importance of intentionally designing workshop-based training activities to foster professional empowerment.

Keywords: Teachers; Burnout; Professional well-being

Paper V

Author: Prof. Elisabetta Ghedin – Università degli studi di Padova, FISPPA Dept. Italy, (ORCID: 0000-0003-4226-1519)

Title: Teachers' Well-Being and Professional Collaboration in Inclusive School Contexts: A Pedagogical Reading of Co-Teaching as a Relational Device

Abstract: This study investigates the relationship between teachers' well-being and professional collaboration, with specific attention to co-teaching as a pedagogical and relational device. Grounded in a pedagogical perspective, well-being is conceptualised not as an individual psychological state, but as a situated and relational process emerging from professional practices, organisational conditions, and shared meanings within school communities (Ghedin & Aquario, 2016; Ghedin, 2017).

The study is situated within the broader debate on teachers' professional well-being and collaborative practices, which has identified collaboration as a potentially protective factor through mechanisms of social support (Cohen & Wills, 1985), while also highlighting its non-automatic and context-dependent effects. In particular, recent research in educational organisation and professional learning emphasises the need to distinguish between superficial or mainly organisational forms of collaboration and more intensive didactic practices characterised



by shared responsibility, such as co-teaching (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Vangrieken et al., 2015).

A quantitative descriptive–correlational design was adopted. Data were collected through a structured online questionnaire administered to 1,381 teachers from pre-primary, primary and lower secondary schools in the Veneto region (Italy). The instrument explored perceived well-being and multiple dimensions of professional collaboration, including relational–organisational collaboration and structured didactic collaboration. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, analysis of variance by school level, and correlation analyses.

Results indicate overall positive levels of perceived well-being across school levels, with no statistically significant differences among pre-primary, primary and lower secondary teachers. Professional collaboration was also generally perceived positively; however, clear differences emerged across school levels, with higher levels of collaboration in pre-primary education and progressively lower levels in primary and lower secondary schools. Exploratory factor analysis confirmed the multidimensional nature of collaboration, distinguishing relational–organisational forms from structured didactic practices such as co-teaching, which appeared less widespread (Cook & Friend, 1995). Correlation analyses revealed a positive but weak association between collaboration and well-being, suggesting that collaboration alone does not automatically translate into enhanced professional well-being.

These findings underscore the importance of focusing not merely on the presence of collaborative practices, but also on their pedagogical quality, intensity, and organisational support. Implications for educational policy and school leadership include creating conditions that enable authentic collaborative practices, particularly co-teaching, as part of broader strategies to foster inclusive school cultures and sustainable professional well-being. Future research should further explore the mediating role of collaborative practice quality through mixed-method and longitudinal designs.

Keywords: Teacher Well-Being; Professional Collaboration; Co-Teaching; Pedagogical Well-Being



Breakout Session 2
Inclusion Beyond School
Time: 15:00 – 16:45
Location: Level 0, Meeting Room 2
Chair: Prof. Fausta Sabatano

Paper I

Authors:

Dr Raimondo Enza Manila – University of Enna "Kore", Italia
Muscarà Marinella – University of Enna "Kore", Italia

Title: Concept Maps in Higher Education: An Exploratory Investigation into their (Ab)use in the Learning Process of Students with SEN

Abstract: Within the framework of practices that govern inclusion processes in university contexts, the use of concept maps is formally legitimised, yet still poorly addressed in educational reflection. Regulatory provisions recognise their value as an aid for students with Special Educational Needs (CNUDD, 2024); nevertheless, in academic practices, their educational status remains largely implicit, often reduced to a mere compensatory or instrumental function. This reduction compresses their pedagogical value. Indeed, maps impact the processes of structuring knowledge, building understanding, and self-regulating learning, serving as cognitive and metacognitive mediators (Novak, 2001, 2012). Their use calls into question the teaching tools that guide and support the inclusion process.

This paper presents the results of an exploratory survey aimed at analysing the needs, study strategies, learning representations, and ways of using compensatory tools, with particular reference to concept maps, among university students with SEN. The survey, conducted via an online questionnaire during the 2025/2026 academic year at the Department of Classical, Linguistic, and Educational Studies at Kore University of Enna, examined the relationships between declared use of tools and perceived needs in organising personalised learning.

The results outline a pattern of map use primarily oriented toward consultation during assessment, whereas their adoption as a study method, permanently integrated into the processes of constructing and reworking knowledge, is less structured. This orientation highlights students' difficulty in generating forms of representation that require higher levels of abstraction and metacognitive awareness, creating a gap between the educational potential attributed to maps and the reductive ways they are used.

Overall, the analysis highlights the limitations of approaches that focus primarily on compensating for individual difficulties without rethinking teaching and learning practices (Fogarolo, Guastavigna, 2013). This underscores the need to promote teaching structures that support students' agency and self-direction as prerequisites for building informed educational and professional paths. This necessitates promoting teaching structures that support student agency and self-guidance as conditions for informed and professional learning.



Keywords: Inclusive practices; Higher education; Concept maps

Paper II

Authors:

Dr Lorena Montesano – University of Calabria, Italy (ORCID: 0000-0002-6678-8545)

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Prof. Sonia Rodriguez Cano – University of Burgos, Spain (ORCID: 0000-0002-4242-6865)

Prof. Antonella Valenti – University of Calabria, Italy, (ORCID: 0000-0002-4995-1013)

Title: Cross-Cultural Adaptation and Psychometric Comparison of the Spanish and Italian Versions of the Vinegrad Plus Questionnaire

Abstract: Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) are increasingly identified during compulsory education; however, a substantial proportion of individuals still reach university without a formal diagnosis. This gap may limit access to appropriate academic accommodations and support services, increasing the risk of academic underachievement and dropout. In higher education contexts, the availability of reliable screening tools specifically designed for adults is therefore crucial. Against this background, the present study aimed to translate, cross-culturally adapt, and conduct a pilot validation of the Spanish version of the Vinegrad Plus Questionnaire, originally developed and validated in Italy as a screening instrument for identifying undiagnosed SLD in adulthood.

The adaptation process followed established international guidelines for cross-cultural validation. It included independent forward translations, back-translation, expert committee review, and linguistic refinement to ensure semantic, conceptual, and cultural equivalence between the Italian and Spanish versions. A pilot study was conducted with 173 Spanish university students. After excluding participants with diagnosed SLD, other neurodevelopmental disorders, mood disorders, or anxiety disorders, the final normative sample consisted of 150 students without reported learning difficulties. An additional clinical group of 12 students with diagnosed dyslexia was included to examine discriminative validity.

The Spanish version demonstrated good internal consistency (.816). The score distribution in the non-SLD group was positively skewed, consistent with findings from the original Italian validation study. Significant differences emerged between students with and without SLD ($p < .001$), with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 3.05$), indicating strong group discrimination. Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) analysis showed excellent discriminative accuracy, confirming the questionnaire's ability to distinguish between clinical and non-clinical participants.

Overall, the Spanish Vinegrad Plus retained psychometric properties comparable to the original version, supporting its use as a reliable screening instrument in Spanish higher education. These findings have implications for early identification policies and inclusive practices at the



university level. Further research with larger, more representative samples is recommended to confirm normative cut-offs and strengthen the evidence for broader implementation.

Keywords: Specific Learning Disorders; University students; Inclusion

Paper III

Authors:

Dr Chiara Gentile – University of Salerno, Italy
Prof. Di Gennaro Diana Carmela – University of Salerno, Italy
Prof. Aiello Paola – University of Salerno, Italy,

Title: Faculty Development, Higher Education and Inclusion: Suggestions from a Study on Teacher Agency

Abstract: Faculty development processes, as highlighted by national and international guidelines, recognise the professional development of university teaching staff as a strategic priority of the current higher education system (ANVUR, 2023; ENQA, 2007, 2015; OECD, 2012; ESG, 2015; EUA Trends, 2015, 2017, 2018; EHEA, 2015, 2018, 2020; Eurydice, 2017). Specifically, initiatives promoted within the faculty development framework foster greater awareness of teachers' responsibilities and competencies, drawing increasing attention to promoting inclusion within the university context.

In the wake of these reflections, the acquisition of reflective and agentive competences constitutes a cornerstone of teacher training for a truly aware and inclusive professional practice (Aiello, 2019). Moving from these premises, targeted professional development appears essential to support the exercise of teacher agency, even in higher education, as a competence aimed at inclusive design by promoting accessible and personalised academic paths (Coso Strong et al., 2023; Marin & van der Rijst, 2025). Within this perspective, teacher agency, with reference to the ecological model (Priestley et al., 2015), can be translated into behaviours oriented at achieving professional intentionality, where action takes shape in relation to the context and its protean affordances (Gibson, 1979).

Considering the above, this contribution presents a research project designed to explore the exercise of teacher agency among the academic staff at the University of Salerno. The instrument, which will be administered to teachers undergoing training within the University's faculty development programs, was developed based on a validated questionnaire (Leijen et al., 2024) and adapted to the design of teaching activities in the higher education context. Specifically, this questionnaire, grounded in the theoretical framework of the ecological model (Priestley et al., 2015), aims to investigate the factors involved in decision-making processes related to the design of teaching activities across the three constitutive dimensions of the model: the iterative, the projective, and the practical-evaluative.



The aim of the study is to assess whether and how university teachers exercise their agency in decision-making processes related to didactic design, in light of the evidence recognising this construct as a distinctive feature for the implementation of inclusive teaching practices.

Keywords: Teacher Agency; Faculty Development; Higher Education; Professional Development; Inclusion

Paper IV

Authors:

Dr Miriam Galloro – University of Catanzaro “Magna Graecia” Italy (ORCID: 0009-0006-3862-3272)

Prof. Teresa Iona –University of Catanzaro “Magna Graecia”, Italy (ORCID: 0000-0002-1439-320X)

Title: Inclusive Outdoor Contexts and Teacher Training: The Role of Adventure Playgrounds in Special Education

Abstract: A review of the literature reveals a lack of knowledge regarding the potential educational role of inclusive adventure parks for children with disabilities. Playing outdoors in nature promotes physical and mental health, as well as emotional and social well-being, contributing to a child’s overall growth (Allan, 2020).

Playgrounds facilitate the development of motor skills and the construction of personal identity, as well as the learning of rules and relational skills, through the exploration of territory (Ripat & Becker, 2012). Play is a fundamental right for all children, including those with disabilities. Inclusive playgrounds are becoming a necessity to ensure equal opportunities for growth, as well as to provide an educational experience. While recent literature has focused on designing inclusive playgrounds that accommodate all types of disability (Beekhuizen, 2025), less attention has been paid to educating professionals to promote such environments. No study has focused on the 'prescription' of inclusive playgrounds as an outdoor experience that provides autonomy, a safe environment, socialisation, play and group learning.

The aim of this study is to investigate the level of knowledge of these structures among future specialist support teachers, support teachers and curriculum teachers, and to verify whether they have ever considered this option as an educational opportunity. An online survey was sent to a sample of future specialist support teachers, as well as to teachers and special education teachers of various levels in Italian schools in the Calabria region.

The online survey covered three sections: knowledge, inclusive adventure playgrounds, and emotional perception (SACIE-R, IUS12 and STAY-1/2). SPSS software was used to analyse the data and explore the correlations among the emotional dimension, knowledge of the parks, and inclusive teaching. The positive correlation between attributing emotional value to contact with nature and greater openness to using such contexts suggests a new form of inclusive teaching as an educational resource. These contexts must be integrated into the training of future teachers,



with greater attention paid to the resources available in the local area. Further studies could focus on inclusive natural environments to promote connections among schools, the local area, and well-being.

Keywords: Inclusive Adventure Parks; Inclusive Outdoor Playground; Specialised Support Teachers; Outdoor Education; Special Education

Paper V

Author: Karen Buttigieg – University of Malta (ORCID: 0000-0001-5542-2305)

Title: Reclaiming Bildung for Inclusive Futures: Formation, Dignity, and Learning Beyond Instrumentalism

Abstract: Contemporary education systems increasingly frame inclusion through instrumental logics that emphasise access, participation, and measurable outcomes, often closely aligned with employability and performance indicators. While such approaches have expanded opportunities for many learners, they risk narrowing the meaning of inclusion to functional integration within existing structures. This tendency is particularly evident in post-secondary education, where questions of belonging, dignity, and human formation are frequently overshadowed by pressures for efficiency and accountability. The purpose of this paper is to critically examine these dominant framings and to propose an alternative conceptualisation of inclusive futures grounded in the tradition of Bildung.

The paper is situated within broader international debates on inclusive education, responding to concerns that contemporary inclusion discourses insufficiently address the ethical and formative dimensions of education. The rationale for this inquiry lies in the growing recognition that inclusion cannot be sustained through access and outcomes alone, but requires attention to how educational spaces recognise difference, foster belonging, and support learners as whole persons.

Adopting a conceptual and philosophical approach, the paper critically analyses educational literature on inclusion, instrumentalism, and human formation. It synthesises theoretical perspectives to articulate a normative framework for inclusion oriented toward formation, relationality, and dignity. The central insight advanced is that Bildung offers a valuable lens through which inclusion can be reimagined as a process of ethical and social becoming, in which learners participate not only in educational systems but also in shaping their purposes and values.

The paper argues that reclaiming Bildung enables a shift from deficit-oriented and outcome-driven models of inclusion toward more humane and sustainable educational futures. The implications of this reframing are discussed in relation to post-secondary education policy and practice, suggesting the need for inclusion frameworks that foreground diversity as a constitutive strength and prioritise belonging, ethical responsibility, and global connectedness. Finally, the paper identifies directions for future research that further explore formative and relational dimensions of inclusion across diverse educational contexts.



Keywords: Bildung; Inclusive education; Educational philosophy; Diversity and dignity

Paper VI

Authors:

Dr Cristina Promentino

Carmen Lucia Moccia

Prof. Fausta Sabatano – Università di Salerno

Title: The Culture of “Zero Risk” as an Invisible Barrier to Outdoor Education for All: A Study in Marginalised Contexts.

Abstract: Outdoor Education for All is a pedagogical approach aimed at promoting self-determination and inclusion for individuals with intellectual disabilities, including those living in contexts of marginalisation and social disadvantage (Dewey, 1938; Wehmeyer, 2005). However, access to outdoor experiences for these young people is often mediated by family representations of risk, which may function either as enabling factors or, conversely, as invisible barriers. Social representations shape educational practices and parental decision-making, thereby influencing the opportunities offered to children (Abric, 1994; Bruner, 1990).

This study is part of a broader research project investigating the applicability of Outdoor Education for All in socially vulnerable contexts and aims to explore the role of parental implicit beliefs (Moscovici, 1989) in the construction of educational opportunities. Specifically, the objective is to examine how family representations of fear and risk affect the participation of young people with intellectual disabilities in outdoor activities.

It is hypothesised that a predominantly threat-oriented perception of risk is associated with dynamics of fear and overprotection (Bertolini, 2006), thereby reducing the willingness to allow outdoor experiences and limiting access to opportunities for “beneficial risk,” which are recognised as fundamental for physical, motor, and emotional development (Sandseter, 2007; Brussoni et al., 2012). The qualitative research adopts a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach, oriented toward understanding subjective meanings and experiential dynamics in real-life contexts (Mortari, 2007).

The study was conducted at the Casa Raoul residential community (Sabatano, 2022), which supports young people with intellectual disabilities living in territorially vulnerable conditions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents and subsequently analysed using thematic analysis in MAXQDA 2024 to identify implicit knowledge and latent representations related to risk. The findings reveal a pervasive association between the external environment and unpredictability, precariousness, and potential threat, leading to a marked tendency toward overprotection. This tendency can be traced back to the culture of “zero risk” (Zinn, 2016) and to phenomena described as “risk deficit” (Brussoni et al., 2012). Such representations restrict access to the embodied and transformative experiences made possible by Outdoor Education for All, thereby limiting opportunities for the development of self-determination, independent mobility, and emotional regulation (Wehmeyer, 2005).



In line with a perspective that recognises risk as a constitutive component of growth and educational experience (Bertolini, 2006; Sandseter, 2007), the study highlights the need to promote shared reflective processes with families—such as focus groups (Marradi in Acocella, 2023)—distinguishing between real danger and educational risk. This distinction is crucial in order to reframe risk not merely as a threat to be avoided, but as an educational opportunity inherent to human development.

Keywords: Outdoor Education for All; Intellectual disability; Educational risk; Marginalized context; Self-determination



Breakout Session 2

Evidence-informed Practices and Innovation in Inclusion

Time: 15:00 – 16:45

Location: Level 0, Meeting Room 3

Chair: Prof. Nicole Bianquin

Paper I

Author: Stephanie Bugeja – University of Malta

Title: The Break that Makes or Breaks You: School Break Experiences in Maltese Secondary Schools

Abstract: The school break plays a critical role in fostering students' overall well-being by providing them with opportunities to engage in activities that support their physical, emotional, and social development (McLoughlin et. al., 2021). Research consistently underscores that these periods are not “simply a habitual, relatively unimportant pause in a busy day” (Baines & Blatchford, 2019, p. 5) but are fundamental for fostering a range of essential skills and promoting overall well-being.

This research seeks to explore how school-break experiences impact the holistic well-being—physical, emotional, and social—of young people aged 13-16 years in Maltese secondary schools. It aims to provide a better understanding of the school break by exploring school policies and procedures, the value placed on the school break by relevant stakeholders, and the outcomes of human and non-human entanglements that arise during the school break. Heads, teachers, break-time supervisors and students form the pool of informants. Data will be analysed using Thematic Analysis and Diffractive Analysis.

This study employs a qualitative, new materialist case-study approach to three secondary schools in Malta (one state, one church, and one independent). Specifically, Barad's works (1999, 2003, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014) inform the theoretical framework. This posthuman approach is employed because the school break is considered an emergent reality, co-constituted by the relationships among the various elements at play, which also include time, space, and policy.

Findings from this research are intended to provide vital, context-specific recommendations to promote measures that ensure a more inclusive school break for all students.

Keywords: School break; New materialism; Holistic wellbeing; Inclusion



Paper II

Authors:

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Dr. Ivan Riolo – University of Malta (ORCID: 0000-0001-6948-2018)

Prof. Antonella Valenti – University of Calabria, Italy (ORCID: 0000-0002-4995-1013)

Title: Cognitive-Motor Practices and Inclusive Settings: A Systematic Review on ADHD and Executive Functions

Abstract: Within an international landscape increasingly demanding evidence-based educational approaches, there is an urgent need to overcome the persistent dichotomy between physical and cognitive development. Although difficulties in self-regulation and organisation, typical of but not exclusive to Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), are associated with deficits in Executive Functions (EF), recent literature advocates for a paradigm shift. Specifically, the enhancement of core EFs (inhibition, working memory, and cognitive flexibility) should be reframed from a purely rehabilitative intervention for specific disorders to a transversal educational objective for the broader developmental population.

This study proposes a systematic literature review to investigate the efficacy of an integrated cognitive-motor approach. The primary objective is to examine how complex motor practices can serve as a catalyst for EF development, thereby providing inclusive educational strategies applicable to both typically developing and neurodivergent students. Specifically, the study explores the adaptability of the Long-Term Athletic Development (LTAD) framework. Despite criticisms concerning the non-linearity of biological growth processes, the LTAD model provides a valuable multidimensional structure. When integrated with specific cognitive tasks, this framework can guide not only motor development but also the enhancement of executive control processes within an inclusive paradigm.

In accordance with PRISMA guidelines, the review will systematically search the EBSCOhost (and affiliated) databases to identify peer-reviewed quantitative studies (published from 2015 to the present, in English and Italian) that correlate structured motor training with improvements in executive functions across educational and athletic contexts.

Keywords: ADHD; Executive Functions; Inclusive Practice; Long-Term Athletic Development; Systematic Review



Paper III

Authors:

Dr Emanuela Zappalà – Researcher at the University of Salerno, Italy (ORCID: 0000-0002-4804-071X)

Prof. Aiello Paola – University of Salerno, Italy

Dr. Russo Irene – Every Child, El Dorado Hills, California, USA

Dr Zierhut-Ursu Cynthia – Every Child President, El Dorado Hills, California, USA

Title: Implementation Champions and School Readiness for Evidence-based Practice. A Pilot Study on Attitudinal Change and G-ESDM Adoptability

Abstract:

The integration of evidence-based practices (EBPs) in early childhood education plays a critical role in promoting inclusive opportunities for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). However, large-scale implementation of interventions in community preschool settings remains limited, in part due to challenges in aligning clinical intervention frameworks with educational priorities. In fact, successful adoption depends not only on training, but also on teachers' attitudes, contextual fit and organisational readiness.

This study investigated the feasibility and perceived adoptability of the Group-based Early Start Denver Model (G-ESDM), a Naturalistic Developmental Behavioural Intervention (NDBI), in four Italian preschools through a collaboration between the University of Salerno and Every Child (USA). Twenty preschool teachers participated in a structured training and action-research process guided by the Active Implementation Framework. Within this group, six teachers were identified as implementation champions and were examined in a focused pre–post analysis using the school-adapted Evidence-Based Practice Attitude Scale (E-PBAS).

Results indicated increased openness toward evidence-based innovation and reduced perceived divergence between research-based practices and everyday teaching. Perceived adaptability and professional value of G-ESDM also improved. These findings align with emerging literature highlighting the compatibility between NDBI principles and developmentally appropriate educational practices, particularly in their shared emphasis on responsive relationships, naturalistic learning environments and active child engagement.

Preliminary evidence suggests that reducing “perceived innovation”-“practice” incongruence among strategically positioned teachers may strengthen implementation drivers and enhance sustainability. The study underscores the importance of context-sensitive professional development, stakeholder engagement and implementation science frameworks to bridge clinical and educational systems and promote inclusive preschool models for children with ASD.

Keywords: Inclusive early childhood education; EBP; ASD; G-ESDM; Teacher attitudes



Paper IV

Authors:

Prof.ssa Marianna Traversetti, Università degli Studi "La Sapienza", Italy

Dr Donatella Visceglia – Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Italy

Prof.ssa Amalia Rizzo – Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Italy

Title: Inclusive Processes and Teaching Practices: Validation and Extension Prospects of an Observation Tool from Primary to Secondary School

Abstract: This contribution presents the continuation of a study to analyse and enhance inclusive processes and teaching strategies in schools by developing and testing a self-administered observation tool for teachers. The research is grounded in a theoretical framework that views inclusion as a process that does not focus exclusively on the individual student but rather aims to redesign educational contexts to ensure learning and participation for all.

The first study involved 235 teachers, exclusively from primary school, enrolled in the specialisation course for support teaching activities (TFA). An observation grid was used, consisting of a checklist (21 descriptors) related to the structure of the Individualised Education Plan (IEP) and contextual inclusive processes, and a rating scale (17 descriptors) focused on inclusive teaching strategies, the teacher's role, and the learning environment. Data analysis revealed widespread formal attention to completing the IEP and a good sensitivity to classroom climate and the relational dimension. However, several critical issues emerged, including limited integration between the IEP and subject planning, the persistence of practices still centred on frontal teaching, and personalisation often limited to certified students rather than oriented toward universal design.

Therefore, in order to promote an initial level of professional awareness, strengthen the transition from descriptive observation to systematic redesign of practices, verify the transferability of the tool in contexts characterized by greater organizational and disciplinary complexity, and foster vertical dialogue between school levels, the sample was expanded to include lower and upper secondary school teachers enrolled in the specialization course for support teaching activities (TFA).

The results to be presented highlight several significant points for reflection, especially in relation to primary school, and their analysis aims to guide the future development of training and research pathways.

Keywords: School Inclusion; IEP; Inclusive Teaching Strategies; Systematic Observation; Teacher Professional Development



Paper V

Authors:

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Prof. Gomez Paloma Filippo – University of Cassino and Southern Lazio (ORCID: 0000-0002-0170-0477)

Title: Towards an Embodied Cognition-based Approach to Teaching Mathematics: A Research Project for the Integration of Generative Ontology, Enactive Cognition and Enabling Pedagogy

Abstract: This study aims to develop, test and evaluate an evidence-informed model of inclusive mathematics teaching, based on the principles of embodied cognition, enactivism, autopoiesis and commognition theory. The objective is to construct a theoretical-operational framework capable of supporting innovative teaching practices that are sensitive to student diversity and transferable to school contexts through participatory design and evaluation processes.

Contemporary educational policies promote inclusion as a central principle of education systems. However, there remains a significant gap between research, teaching practices and decision-making processes. In particular, in mathematics education, transmissive models persist that struggle to respond to the cognitive, emotional and cultural needs of students. Starting from a conception of mathematics as an embodied, situated, and relational cultural practice, the project aims to contribute to the construction of teaching devices grounded in empirical evidence and oriented towards educational equity.

The research adopts a qualitative and design-based approach, supplemented by formative and participatory assessment procedures. In collaboration with secondary school teachers, inclusive learning environments will be developed that are grounded in enactive practices, the conscious use of mathematical language, the valorisation of error, and sensorimotor activities. The research design involves iterative cycles of co-design, experimentation, data collection and review. Data will be collected through systematic observations, multimodal discourse analysis, semi-structured interviews, metacognitive self-assessment tools and indicators of participation and well-being.

The study aims to produce empirical evidence on the processes through which embodied and enactive environments promote conceptual accessibility, engagement and student participation. It also plans to document effective practices in instructional adaptation and inclusive design, which are useful for building shared professional repertoires.

The results will contribute to strengthening the dialogue between research, practice and policy, offering replicable models of inclusive design and assessment. The project will provide guidance for teacher training, the definition of curriculum guidelines and the development of evidence-



based educational policies, promoting equitable, sustainable and innovation-oriented educational ecosystems.

Keywords: Commognition; Empowering pedagogy; Generative learning; Mathematics education

Paper VI

Author: Dr Maria Antonietta Maggio – Università degli Studi di Parma, Italy (ORCID:0000-0002-2263-7403)

Title: The Teacher with Instrumental Function for Inclusion as "Ally" of Persons with Disabilities: Theoretical Framework of Qualitative Research

Abstract: The paper presents the framework for a research project investigating the role of the teacher with an Instrumental Function for inclusion, from a Disability Studies in Education perspective.

The relevant literature, recognising the discrepancies between legislation and actual school practices, has focused on the theoretical assumptions and paradigms of those who can bring about the claimed change in the approach to inclusion (D'Alessio, 2011; Ferri, 2015).

However, legislation does not define the profile of this role, and despite its recognised importance, there is no training program that enables teachers to be trained in a sociological perspective on disability (D'Alessio, 2013).

The results of an exploratory study conducted during the Specialisation Course for Support Teachers (IX cycle) at the University of Parma have enabled us to identify a profile based on support teachers' representations in training.

The role is described as:

- competent and experienced;
- capable of managing the organisation of experiences, both internal and external to the institution, having a 'systemic vision' of past programs;
- capable of sharing the 'culture of inclusion' that supports teachers in training to recognise exists as specific to each individual school;
- capable of satisfying the training needs expressed by support teachers in training through specific training activities within the institution.

The research findings suggested the need to further investigate the role through a qualitative investigation aimed at highlighting the implications and significant scope of the skills described by the trainees. In asking how these teachers can act in a transformative way, attention has focused on (1) what principles guide their choices, (2) how they can act as “allies” (Oliver, 1990; Barton, 2001; Piccioli, 2020) for students with disabilities, and (3) how they can promote their



participation within the GLO.

The ongoing research recognises that teachers with Instrumental Function can bring about an effective shift in the reference paradigms of a school community, and that true inclusion cannot be reduced exclusively to the application of regulations but must concern effective inclusive action that can also produce change at a social level.

Keywords: Instrumental Function for Inclusion; Disability Studies in Education; Teacher training; Support teachers, Inclusive school



Breakout Session 2

Inclusive Pedagogies for Belonging and Learning (II)

Time: 15:00 – 16:45

Location: Level 0, Meeting Room 4

Chair: Dr Louis Camilleri

Paper I

Authors:

Dr Andrea Monaco – University of Salerno, Italy

Dr Rita Colace – University of Salerno, Italy

Prof. Iolanda Zollo – University of Salerno, Italy

Title: Non-linear Didactics in Mother Tongue Teaching: An Exploratory Study of Italian Primary School Teachers' Perspectives

Abstract: The mother tongue represents the primary symbolic mediator through which individuals interpret the reality in which they are embedded. It is an essential tool not only for personal development, but also for academic achievement and the full exercise of citizenship (Aiello, 2012; Raza, Nasir, Sadiq & Ahmed, 2015; Mazari & Derraz, 2015; Nishanthi, 2020; Setti, De Santis & Cella, 2021).

However, recent INVALSI data from the National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System (MIUR, 2025), compared with data from previous years (MIUR, 2022, 2023, 2024), paint a concerning picture of Italian primary schools. These findings do not seem to reflect the importance attributed to language instruction, necessitating reflection on possible factors that may have contributed to this situation. One such factor may be the persistence, within primary education, of teaching practices often shaped by sequential and standardised models which, while seemingly reassuring, do not always adequately respond to students' actual needs (Voghera, Basile & Guerriero, 2005; Lo Duca, 2018; Roccia, 2021). When teaching is directed at a group of students, it must balance with each learner's individual characteristics, requiring a move beyond linear didactic approaches (Sibilio, 2017).

Against this backdrop, an exploratory study was conducted with Italian primary school teachers to investigate their opinions and teaching practices regarding Italian language instruction. Data were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire distributed via formal channels (institutional email) and informal channels (WhatsApp groups). The questionnaire consisted of two sections: the first aimed to outline each participant's professional profile, and the second focused on their views and teaching practices regarding Italian language instruction. The data were subsequently analysed using a mixed qualitative–quantitative approach, supported by the software MAXQDA.

In line with these premises and the stated objective, this paper offers a reflection, in light of the findings, on the views of the teachers involved and the teaching practices actually implemented,



with particular attention to how they align with the principles of non-linearity, inclusion, and the recognition and valuing of differences.

Keywords: Mother tongue; Didactics; Primary school; Inclusion; Teacher education

Paper II

Authors:

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Prof. Stefania Morsanuto – Università Telematica Pegaso, Italy (ORCID: 0000-0002-9323-1005)

Dr. Walter Savarese – Università Telematica Pegaso, Italy

Title: Outdoor Education and School Well-Being: Emerging Models and Research Directions

Abstract: This paper analyses the impact of environmental education and learning in natural contexts on students' well-being and learning processes, with the aim of identifying effective and sustainable educational models, as well as critical issues and gaps, to guide future research and teaching practice.

The literature highlights how contact with the natural environment produces significant psychological and physical benefits, promoting attention, emotional regulation, socio-emotional development, and sustainable behaviours. (Schenetti, M. & Guerra, E. (2018). Educating in the environment to build active citizenship. *Investigación en la Escuela*, 95, 15-29). However, traditional school models remain predominantly transmissive and poorly connected to direct experience, necessitating active, experiential approaches. (Sukma, E. et al. (2020). Integration of environmental education in elementary schools. *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, 1481, 012136).

The research is based on a systematic review of the literature conducted according to the PRISMA protocol, through consultation of national and international databases using keywords in Italian and English. From approximately 100 initially identified contributions, 20 empirical studies on school-based environmental education interventions that measured psychological outcomes and well-being were selected, excluding studies lacking an educational component or evaluation indicators. The methodological and contextual heterogeneity of the studies allowed for a comprehensive comparative analysis.

Evidence converges in indicating that outdoor and green space interventions are associated with improvements in cognitive, emotional, and relational dimensions and are most effective when they integrate active, participatory, and experiential methodologies (Dadvand, P. et al. (2015). "Green spaces and cognitive development in primary schoolchildren." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*). This has implications for school and university policies, which are called upon to integrate green spaces and outdoor learning facilities, and for future research, which should develop longitudinal studies on the mechanisms by which natural environments



affect learning and well-being. In line with the systematic review, the research will evolve into a comparative empirical phase that will use validated tools and tests to analyse school well-being and cognitive function development in two different educational model schools with a high outdoor impact and schools with a traditional teaching model in order to verify differences in outcomes and educational effectiveness profiles.

Keywords: Outdoor Education; Psychological Well-Being; Educational Models

Paper III

Authors:

Prof. Barbara De Angelis – Roma Tre University, Italy

Dr Philipp Botes – Roma Tre University, Italy

Dr Orlando Andreina – Roma Tre University, Italy

Title: Rethinking Peer Tutoring in Higher Education through the UDL Guidelines 3.0: A Professional Development Pathway to Promote Inclusive University Cultures

Abstract: Within the international higher education landscape, disability and Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) are still frequently addressed through compensatory provisions that individualise need while leaving institutional, cultural, and organisational structures substantially unchanged. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Guidelines 3.0 (CAST, 2024) represent a significant theoretical advancement by shifting the focus from mere access to content toward the construction of learning ecosystems in which identity, agency, belonging, and participation become structural dimensions of educational environments (Bocci et al., 2025; Botes et al., 2025).

In accordance with this perspective, this paper presents a professional development project for peer tutors engaged in supporting students with disabilities and Specific Learning Disorders. The project will be implemented beginning in the second semester of the 2025–2026 academic year and is designed to systemically integrate the UDL Guidelines 3.0 into the training of peer tutors as a strategic lever for the cultural transformation of university support services.

The central aim is to reconceptualise tutoring not as an ancillary accommodation service, but as a relational, educational, and culturally situated practice capable of reshaping representations of difference within the broader academic community and of enhancing the conditions for university participation for all students at Roma Tre University (De Angelis et al., 2024a; 2024b; 2024c).

The proposal adopts the UDL Guidelines 3.0 as the epistemic infrastructure for the training pathway and seeks to valorise the plurality of cognitive and identity profiles, promote flexible access to knowledge and participation, and foster self-determination across the student body. The training model integrates theoretical inquiry, narrative and self-reflective devices inspired by reflective practice (Schön, 1983), structured pedagogical supervision (De Angelis et al., 2024c), and collaborative analysis of complex cases (Orlando, 2024).



Keywords: UDL; Peer Tutoring Services; Peer Tutors; Inclusion; Higher Education

Paper IV

Authors:

Dr Maria Grazia Verbicaro – Università degli Studi di Messina

Dr Gallo Francesco – Università degli Studi di Macerata

Dr Lombardo Pontillo Angela – Università degli Studi di Macerata

Prof. Oliva Patrizia – Università degli Studi “Magna Graecia” di Catanzaro Italy

Title: Spaces that Shape Learning: Innovative Learning Environments between Participatory Design and Inclusion

Abstract: This study explores the effectiveness of a laboratory-based training pathway designed to enhance pre-service teachers’ capacity to critically interpret, design, and rethink learning environments from an inclusive perspective. The research is grounded in the paradigm of Innovative Learning Environments (ILE) and is updated in light of recent international evidence highlighting the interconnections among spatial design, pedagogical innovation, and student well-being (OECD, 2023). Within this framework, the study addresses the need to prepare teachers who can engage with classroom spaces not as neutral settings but as active agents in fostering educational inclusion.

Adopting a pre/post research design, the study compares participants’ initial and final perceptions of three key dimensions: the physical and sensory configuration of the classroom, the use of active teaching practices, and students’ perceived well-being. The research involved a cohort of pre-service teachers enrolled in university-based laboratories focused on designing inclusive educational spaces. Data were collected using the Physical and Sensory Classroom Environment Scale (PSCES; Angulo De la Fuente et al., 2025), integrated with guided participatory design activities. These activities engaged participants in the collaborative redesign of classroom spaces.

Preliminary findings indicate increased levels of spatial flexibility, sensory accessibility, and participation among students with special educational needs. The results reinforce existing evidence that participatory environmental design fosters student engagement and perceived well-being (Clemson, 2025; Page, 2024). The integration of immersive technologies, particularly Augmented Reality, was originally planned within the laboratory pathway but could not be implemented due to time constraints. This limitation opens avenues for future research, especially regarding the use of immersive applications to visualise and simulate inclusive spatial reconfigurations. Although the findings are still partial, they highlight the value of structured professional learning pathways focused on the critical reading of educational spaces. They also point to the potential of immersive technologies in supporting the development of sustainable, inclusive, and spatially responsive learning environments (Lapidot-Lefler, 2025).

Keywords: Innovative Learning Environments; Inclusive Learning Spaces; Lifelong Learning.



Paper V

Author: Dr Amanda Schembri Muscat

Title: Voices Spoken in the Cracks: Listening to the Literacy Experiences of Students with Intellectual Disability in a Maltese Secondary School

Abstract: The perspectives of secondary students with Intellectual Disability (ID) have not previously been examined in relation to their experiences with literacy curricula. This study engaged with a cohort of eight Maltese students, aged 13–16, to gain an in-depth understanding of their literacy experiences, assess the appropriateness of the literacy curriculum, capture the perceptions of parents and educators, and the instructional approaches employed by teaching staff.

All participants in this qualitative research have mild or moderate ID. Through student interviews, a platform was established for these individuals to articulate their literacy experiences, further contextualised through direct classroom observations during literacy lessons. Additional interviews with parents, members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), and educators provided valuable insights into the broader educational context and illuminated stakeholders' beliefs and perceptions.

The findings, derived from both verbal accounts and observable engagement behaviours, suggest that students with ID can express their preferences for language learning, articulate challenges they face, and identify favoured topics related to their personal interests. The contributions of educators and parents corroborated and enriched the students' perspectives. Parents, in particular, highlighted effective inclusion practices and barriers, such as insufficient collaboration between home and school.

The study also identified manifestations of ableism and disabling practices within teaching, learning, and assessment processes. Based on these findings, the study recommends regular incorporation of student voices in classroom settings, leveraging technology to enhance student potential, and ensuring a balanced curriculum to support a comprehensive literacy experience.

Keywords: Student Voice; Classroom Engagement; Literacy; UDL; Intellectual Disabilities

Paper VI

Authors:

Prof. Stefania Pinnelli – University of Salento, Italy (ORCID: 0000-0001-8664)

Dott. ssa Ludovica Rizzo – University of Macerata, Italy (ORCID: 0009-0009-2371-5870)

Dott. Ssa Francesca Baccassino – University of Salento, Italy

Dott.ssa Elena Abbate – University of Salento, Italy



Title: Negotiating Double Exceptionality within the Family-School-University Network: An Exploratory Case Study

Abstract: Twice-exceptionality refers to the coexistence of high potential and/or high levels of creativity in one or more domains, along with a disability, deficit, or disorder. Rather than a simple juxtaposition of seemingly contrasting conditions, it represents a complex developmental configuration characterised by a dynamic—and sometimes paradoxical—interaction between strengths and areas of difficulty. This intricate interaction makes identification processes complex, less immediate, and less integrated. At the same time, it requires designing appropriate, challenging, and systemic educational responses. High cognitive abilities and diverse neurodevelopmental conditions are associated with context-dependent heritability estimates, suggesting that double exceptionality may, in some cases, reflect partially overlapping neurobiological pathways that shape individual variability and developmental trajectories.

This perspective does not imply a deterministic interpretation of the phenomenon but requires considering the ongoing interaction between individual predispositions and life contexts, recognising the role of family, school, and sociocultural systems in shaping developmental trajectories. This paper presents a case study of a family unit of five people—parents and three minor sons—in which all five members exhibit profiles of double exceptionality. The analysis aims to understand how double exceptionality is experienced, narrated, and negotiated within family life and in interactions with external systems, with particular attention to the school context. Special attention is paid to the experiences of two students with twice-exceptionality, examining their perceived well-being, participation patterns, and emerging tensions within educational contexts. At the same time, the study explores teachers' perceptions and professional needs, situating the research within an action research framework aimed at promoting a collaborative network between families, schools, and universities, and the experiences of parents in their interactions with broader social contexts. The study will present the intervention plan, management model, survey tools, and instructional design guidelines developed by the research team.

Keywords: Twice-Exceptionality; Case Study; Family; Teacher Perceptions; Family Narratives



Breakout Session 3

Digital Transformation and Inclusive Futures (III)

Time: 10:30 – 12:00

Location: Level 1, Meeting Room 101

Chair: Prof. Şehnaz Nigar Çelik

Paper I

Authors:

Dr Rosa D'Angelo – University of Salerno, Italy

Prof. Di Tore Stefano – University of Salerno, Italy

Prof. Aiello Paola – University of Salerno, Italy

Title: Rethinking University Studies in the Era of AI: Qualitative Evidence derived from Experiences with a Montessori Chatbot

Abstract: The rapid evolution of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital technologies is driving a significant transformation of educational contexts, affecting teaching and learning methods. In this scenario, chatbots – computer programs designed to simulate human conversation through Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques (Bradeško & Mladenčić, 2012) – are emerging as pedagogical devices of relevance. These tools, in fact, enable dynamic forms of interaction with students, offering immediate feedback (Fauzi et al., 2023), supporting the mediation of content, and adapting response methods to different competency levels and individual educational needs (Lecce & Di Tore, 2025; Kasneci et al., 2023). Accordingly, the most recent literature (Labadze, 2023; Pappagallo, 2024; Jiaqi et al., 2025) highlights a growing interest in such technologies, recognising their potential to advance accessibility and inclusivity in redefining educational models (Lecce & Di Tore, 2025). Based on these premises, this contribution aims to explore, from a qualitative perspective, the opinions and awareness developed by university students regarding their interactions with a chatbot designed on key principles of Montessori pedagogy (Aiello, 2023; Montessori, 2017). These key principles include educational materials, the structuring of an accessible environment, and the promotion of active participation by all learners.

The study provides initial interpretive evidence regarding whether and to what extent students recognise the chatbot as a tool to support learning and as a guide to developing autonomy and active exploration of content. The research involved 88 female students from the Bachelor's degree program in Educational Sciences at the University of Salerno; the data, collected via a semi-structured questionnaire following a guided interaction with the tool, were analysed using reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in an inductive approach. Preliminary results indicate an overall positive perception of the device, associated with greater conceptual clarity, increased engagement, and autonomous reorganisation of the study. However, critical awareness emerges regarding the limitations of the chatbot, understood as a supportive tool and not a substitute for traditional teaching practices, suggesting implications for future research on the reflective integration of AI in university contexts.



Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Educational Chatbot; Accessibility; Inclusion

Paper II

Authors:

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Dr Gian Marco Rosato – University of Macerata, Italy (ORCID: 0009-0009-6017-9253)

Prof. Antonella Valenti – University of Calabria, Italy (ORCID: 0000-0002-4995-1013)

Title: Virtual Reality for Adolescents and Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Systematic Review in Progress

Abstract: Adolescence and young adulthood represent critical phases for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), characterised by transitions between educational stages, access to tertiary education or employment, and development of personal and social autonomy. These moments are often associated with elevated anxiety, difficulties in managing less structured social interactions, and challenges in adapting to new and complex contexts. Immersive technologies, particularly virtual reality (VR), are emerging as potentially transformative tools in inclusive education, offering controlled, predictable, and repeatable three-dimensional environments that align with the cognitive and sensory profiles of individuals with ASD. However, existing literature has predominantly focused on school-aged children, while the adolescent and young adult population remains less explored despite the transitions characterising this developmental phase.

This systematic review provides a rigorous synthesis of evidence on VR-based interventions for adolescents and young adults with ASD aged 15-25 years. The review is conducted in accordance with PRISMA 2020 guidelines, with a systematic search strategy across EBSCOhost and Scopus for the period 2015-2025, when technological developments made VR more accessible through standalone headsets and 360-degree immersive content suitable for ordinary educational settings. Inclusion criteria comprise quantitative and mixed-methods studies investigating immersive VR interventions aimed at supporting educational inclusion for adolescents and young adults with ASD in secondary and higher education. Study quality is assessed systematically using validated appraisal tools, with a comprehensive synthesis of intervention characteristics, outcome measures, and patterns of effectiveness.

The presentation will offer preliminary findings from the review process, including a systematic mapping of identified interventions, emerging patterns of effectiveness across different outcomes and populations, and methodological considerations for the field. Initial insights will concern optimal conditions for implementation in educational settings, with attention to feasibility, acceptability, and sustainability. The presentation will provide evidence-informed directions for secondary schools, universities, and educational contexts interested in accessible immersive technologies to support inclusion, while identifying critical gaps to inform future large-scale trials and protocol development.

Keywords: Virtual Reality; Autism Spectrum Disorder; Inclusive Education; Systematic Review



Paper III

Authors:

Prof., Davide Di Palma – University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli", Italy

Dr Fabiola Palmiero – University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli", Italy

Dr Emma Saraiello – University of Naples "Parthenope", Italy

Dr Giovanna Scala, University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli", Italy

Dr Margarita Bogdanova – University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli", Italy

Dr Gianluca Gravino, University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli", Italy

Title: Education, Culture and Intercultural Dialogue in Primary Schools for an Inclusive Future

Abstract: The growing cultural and linguistic diversity that characterises contemporary school environments means that primary schools need to adopt educational practices that promote inclusion, intercultural dialogue and social cohesion from the earliest stages of schooling. In particular, Years 4 and 5 represent a crucial developmental stage for the construction of attitudes, values and socio-relational skills related to the recognition of others and coexistence in diversity.

In this context, the study aims to analyse the effectiveness of a structured intercultural educational intervention aimed at developing intercultural skills, positive attitudes towards cultural and linguistic diversity and an inclusive classroom climate. The research adopts a mixed-methods quasi-experimental design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. The sample comprises 48 pupils in years IV and V of a state primary school, divided into an experimental group and a control group, which are homogeneous in terms of socio-demographic characteristics. The experimental group participated in a 12-week intercultural intervention that incorporated inclusive teaching strategies such as cooperative learning, intercultural storytelling, multilingual teaching, circle time, and authentic citizenship tasks. Data collection involved the use of standardised tools to assess intercultural skills, perceived inclusion, and classroom climate, along with systematic observations, teacher interviews, and focus groups with pupils. The quantitative results show statistically significant improvements in the experimental group relative to the control group across all variables considered, with large effect sizes. Qualitative evidence confirms these results, showing an increase in the sense of belonging, a reduction in exclusionary behaviour and an improvement in peer relationships. The study suggests that structured intercultural interventions, integrated into regular teaching, can be an effective lever for promoting inclusion and well-being in primary school, with significant implications for educational practice, teacher training and equity-oriented school policies.

Keywords: Intercultural Education; School Inclusion; Primary School; Intercultural Dialogue; Classroom Climate



Paper IV

Authors:

Prof. Annalisa Morganti – University of Perugia, Italy

Dr Luigi Fenza – University of Perugia, Italy

Title: "Rete-Onlife": a Digital Platform for Developing Life Plans for Adults with Disabilities

Abstract: The Rete-Onlife platform arises from the need to overcome the fragmentation between the territory, educational agencies, and life contexts, establishing itself as an integrated digital ecosystem to support the Life Project of every citizen. The "Onlife" concept refers to a new existential dimension in which digital interaction and concrete experience within territorial contexts are continuously intertwined, driving personal growth, participation, and inclusion.

The App's functionality is based on an intelligent and participatory matching model. The platform systematically maps territorial resources—schools, laboratories, music academies, universities, companies, and socio-sanitary centres—allowing individuals with disabilities and their support groups to identify contexts that best support their functioning, interests, and educational needs. The individual is placed at the centre of the process: by inputting passions, goals, and training needs, the Rete-Onlife algorithm—enhanced by Artificial Intelligence—does not merely return a list of services but proposes personalised experiential pathways. To guarantee the quality of these interventions, a supervision team evaluates the accessibility, coherence, and availability of the proposed contexts, ensuring that every experience truly responds to the individual's Life Project and unique characteristics.

Through the integration of municipal services, university spaces, community realities, and the production world, Rete-Onlife ensures that every passion finds a context for expression and that every "functioning" finds an adequate space for fulfilment.

The platform aims to transform territorial resources from a mere service aggregator into an enabling infrastructure that transcends the logic of passive delivery. By implementing the principles of Universal Design for Transition (UDT), it works to remove contextual barriers and promote the accessibility of territorial opportunities.

In this perspective, the territory is no longer a mere passive backdrop but regains its function as an educating ecosystem, capable of generating measurable outcomes across the domains of Quality of Life (Schalock, 2002).

Through the UDT paradigm—a systemic evolution of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)—educational continuity is fostered via inter-institutional networks and contexts of meaningful participation, promoting inclusive, accessible pathways oriented toward autonomy.

The network allows integrated access for the person with disabilities, family members, relevant services, and multidisciplinary working groups. Furthermore, a dedicated support system for Special Educational Needs (SEN) is provided, including Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and digital accessibility tools to ensure the participation of all. The



platform's actions are guided by the Quality-of-Life domains (Schalock & Verdugo, 2002) and the promotion of active participation and self-determination, in alignment with the Italian national regulatory framework (D.lgs 62/2024).

Keywords: Digital educational ecosystems; Community-based inclusion; Support networks; Assistive technologies; Disability empowerment

Paper V

Authors:

Prof. Dilek İlhan Beyaztaş –Ankara University, Türkiye (ORCID: 0000-0002-7642-9087)

Assoc. Prof. İlkay Aşkın Tekkol – Kastamonu University, Türkiye (ORCID: 0000-0003-0964-1528)

Asst. Prof. Şehnaz Nigar Çelik – Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Türkiye, (ORCID: 0000-0001-9949-0668)

Title: Balancing Technology and Learning: Digital Detox Experiences and Effective Learning Processes Among Medical Students

Abstract: Medical education is a mentally and emotionally taxing process for students because it requires them to learn extensive material, pay close attention, and perform well academically. In this context, effective learning requires various skills, such as self-regulation, self-direction, learning strategies, higher-order thinking, and time management. Digital technologies have transformed how people learn by making it easier for students to access information through online resources, AI, mobile apps, video lectures, and social media. However, excessive and unregulated use of digital tools has been linked to adverse effects, including distraction, increased cognitive load, reduced sleep quality, and diminished academic productivity. As a result, the concept of "digital detox" has become increasingly important in recent years. Digital detox is the practice of consciously limiting or taking a break from digital device use for a set period to improve focus, mental health, and productivity. Studies indicate that digital detox practices can improve attention span, self-awareness, and learning quality.

This research aims to investigate effective learning processes, digital tool use habits, and digital detox experiences among medical students; to elucidate the relationships among these variables; and to formulate recommendations to enhance learning efficiency in medical education. It also seeks to raise awareness of balanced technology use in digital educational environments and to inform the development of educational strategies. Designed as a qualitative, exploratory inquiry, the research is grounded in Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis framework. The participant group comprises 39 medical students selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected using a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide. The qualitative data are being analysed thematically using MAXQDA software. The analysis is ongoing; upon completion, the findings will be presented alongside a literature-supported discussion and recommendations for future research.

Keywords: Effective Learning; Medical Students; Digital Detox



Breakout Session 3

Rights, Wellbeing and Transformation

Time: 10:30 – 12:00

Location: Level 1, Meeting Room 102

Chair: Prof. Elena Bortolotti

Paper I

Authors:

Mr Pantano Giuseppe - Université de Lorraine, France and Roma Tre University, Italy (ORCID: 0009-0007-7558-5196)

Dr Alessia Tomei – Roma Tre University, Italy

Susanna Zanella – Universität Münster-Musikhochschule Münster Germany and Roma Tre University, Italy

Ms Marianna Valente – Roma Tre University, Italy

Prof. Marina Chiaro – Università degli Studi LINK, Italy

Prof. Amalia Rizzo – Roma Tre University, Italy

Title: Circle Singing to Promote Participation, Disciplinary Competences, and Wellbeing: An Empirical Study in Higher Education

Abstract: This contribution introduces Circle Singing as an embodied, arts-based pedagogical approach that cultivates participation, psychophysical wellbeing, and the enhancement of musical and linguistic competences within an inclusive, person-centred educational framework. Consistent with the WHO's definition of health as a condition of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing (WHO, 2001), and with UNESCO's endorsement of arts-based inclusive education (UNESCO-KACES, 2010), the study explores how collective music-making can concurrently strengthen disciplinary and socio-relational competences while supporting holistic wellbeing for all learners.

Musical engagement has long been acknowledged as a preventive and regulatory resource for wellbeing across the life span (Wosch & Wigram, 2007). It contributes to emotional self-regulation (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010), enables flow states (Csikszentmihályi, 1996), operates as an alternative communicative channel (Hargreaves et al., 2005), stimulates neural plasticity with transfer effects to linguistic and cognitive domains (Kraus et al., 2014; Patel, 2012; Ramírez-Moreno et al., 2023), and shapes behaviour as well as social connectedness (North & Hargreaves, 2008).

Within this theoretical background, the paper presents a mixed quali-quantitative investigation grounded in a 15-hour Circle Singing laboratory carried out at Roma Tre University between October and December 2025 (Pantano & Rizzo, 2025). The programme involved 104 students from Educational Sciences and DAMS and was compared with a control group of comparable size. Musical and linguistic performance was evaluated through standardised digital tools (Mini-PROMS and SpeechAce), whereas socio-relational variables and well-being indicators were examined via Likert-scale questionnaires and focus groups.



Preliminary results reveal statistically significant gains in both musical and linguistic competencies. Participants improved across all dimensions of aural perception on Mini-PROMS, with particularly marked development in pitch discrimination. Consistent progress in pronunciation accuracy emerged across the SpeechAce training modules. These quantitative improvements are associated with a heightened sense of belonging, decreased anxiety, and greater bodily and vocal awareness. Qualitative findings corroborate increased emotional involvement, cooperative cohesion, and experienced inclusivity.

Overall, Circle Singing emerges as a democratic and participatory learning environment in which each individual actively contributes to collective achievement. It thus represents a transferable, pedagogical model capable of fostering meaningful engagement and durable well-being, particularly for learners with special educational needs.

Keywords: Circle Singing; Inclusive Pedagogy; Wellbeing; Embodied Learning; Arts-Based Education

Paper II

Author: Dr Grzegorz Kozdras – University of Opole, Poland (ORCID: 0000-0001-5346-4712)

Title: From School Survival to Student Agency: Participation, Voice and Self-Determination in Primary School

Abstract: The study is based on data collected in primary schools in Opole (a provincial capital city in Poland), in Grades IV–VIII (N=100). Data were gathered using an original student survey questionnaire addressing perceptions of school climate, teacher–student relations, peer dynamics, opportunities to express one’s views, and perceived consequences of disagreement. A comparative interpretive approach was applied to identify patterns in student functioning across two broad orientations: a school-survival orientation and a self-creation/agency orientation.

The findings show that students who describe school through agency-related categories (e.g., influence, future orientation, meaningful learning) report higher levels of participation and more constructive educational expectations. By contrast, survival-oriented perceptions are associated with compliance, a reduced sense of influence, and greater concern about social or institutional costs of expressing difference. At the same time, the data indicate that even agency-oriented students may face peer-level tensions when articulating independent positions, which highlights the significance of classroom culture and dialogic safety.

The paper argues that inclusive schooling requires moving beyond formal access toward conditions that actively support student voice, disagreement without sanction, and shared responsibility for participation. Practical implications include strengthening dialogic pedagogies, embedding rights-based participation in everyday school practice, and preparing teachers to foster inclusive climates in which the diversity of perspectives is treated as a resource rather than a disruption. The study contributes evidence-informed insights to current debates on inclusive pedagogies and school development.



Keywords: Inclusive Education; Student Voice; Agency; Participation; School Climate

Paper III

Authors:

Dr Antonella Perrotta – Università degli Studi di Salerno, Italia

Prof.ssa Aiello Paola – Università degli Studi di Salerno, Italia

Title: Human Rights, Well-being, and Participation: The Pedagogical Challenge of the Life Project in the Wake of the Italian Reform (Legislative Decree 62/2024)

Abstract: This contribution analyses the regulatory and pedagogical evolution of inclusion within the Italian context, focusing on Legislative Decree no. 62 of May 3, 2024. The objective is to examine how this decree redefines the "Life Project" no longer as a mere formal fulfilment — although already present in previous regulatory frameworks — but as a unified, dynamic, and participatory tool aimed at guaranteeing self-determination and full citizenship. By definitively overcoming the medical-individual model in favour of a human rights-based approach aligned with the UN Convention (2006) directives, well-being and social participation are understood here as mandatory obligations of the Italian Republic.

From the perspective of special pedagogy (Canevaro, 2006; Aiello & Giaconi, 2024), the Life Project acts as a device for social justice and empowerment, aimed at removing contextual barriers and realising individual potential. This perspective draws on the Capability Approach (Nussbaum, 2011) and the vision of social support as a foundation for independent living (Shakespeare, 2006), defining quality of life as a construct oriented toward participation under conditions of equality (Schalock & Keith, 2016).

Based on these reflections, the work presents the findings of an investigation of a sample of upper secondary school teachers in Campania. Using a semi-structured questionnaire with a mixed-methods approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007), the teachers' perceptions of their knowledge and of the implementation of Legislative Decree 62/2024 within their respective institutions were investigated. The research highlights a significant tension between the avant-garde regulatory intent and the daily operational reality, emphasising the urgency of an educational vision capable of translating national and international mandates into systemic practices. This requires overcoming the operational isolation of schools through inter-institutional planning to guarantee the so-called right to a future. Such an objective necessitates the continuity of support well beyond the boundaries of the school cycle, implying the development of social support models capable of ensuring independent living, as well as investments in teacher training and the creation of territorial networks to ensure that the Life Project becomes a real tool for inclusion rather than a mere formal procedure (Legislative Decree 62/24, arts. 19, 20, 25).



Keywords: Inclusive Education Policy in Italy, Life Project (Progetto di Vita), Human Rights-Based Approach to Inclusion, Capability Approach and Social Justice, Teacher Perceptions and Policy Implementation

Paper IV

Authors:

Dr Alessia Tomei – Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Italy (ORCID: 0009-0006-0282-8479)

Dr. Visceglia Donatella – Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Italy,

Dr. Pantano Giuseppe – Université de Lorraine - IDEA research Unit, France and Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Italy

Dr. Valente Marianna – Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Italy

Dr. Schiavone Alessio, Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Italy

Prof. Rizzo Amalia – Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Italy

Title: Job Inclusion and Life Project: Outcomes of an Erasmus+ Experience for Young People with Fragile X Syndrome

Abstract: This paper describes the results of an Erasmus+ project promoted by the Associazione Italiana Sindrome X Fragile (Italian Fragile X Syndrome Association). The project provides mobility grants to members who have completed secondary school, enabling them to undertake 30-day vocational training and work-based traineeships on the island of Malta. Specifically, this contribution presents data on the reflections shared by several families in the Association.

The project is rooted in a human rights-centred approach, drawing on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Italian Law 68/99 regarding the right to work for people with disabilities. During the traineeship period, each participant—supported by a companion—has the opportunity to experience independent living away from home and family. Consequently, it is necessary to investigate the impact this experience has on the participants.

Given the absence of standardised tools in the literature capable of specifically monitoring these outcomes, ICF-based (2018) observation rating scales were developed. These scales aim to evaluate and analyse the impact of the experience on the trainees and their independent living skills in a structured manner. The development of this tool is part of a doctoral research project conducted using a qualitative approach, specifically employing action-research methodology (Lucisano & Salerni, 2002; Trincherò, 2002).

The goal is to improve current practises, allowing persons with disabilities to place themselves at the centre of inclusive processes involving them in both the educational and professional spheres, ensuring they have high-quality experiences. Indeed, work should not be considered a mere occupation, but rather a space for self-actualisation, enabling each individual to be the effective protagonist of their own Life Project (Progetto di Vita, Legislative Decree 62/2024).

Keywords: Fragile X Syndrome, Work, Inclusion, Traineeship, Life Project



Paper V

Authors:

Dr Filomena Izzo – University of Macerata, Italy

Prof. Fausta Sabatano – University of Salerno, Italy

Prof. Paola Aiello – University of Salerno, Italy

Title: The desire compass: A survey on guidance pathways for students with disabilities

Abstract: Legislative Decree no. 62 of May 3, 2024, focuses on the development of individualised, personalised, and participatory life projects, based on the wishes, expectations, and preferences of a person with disability (Legislative Decree 62/2024). From this perspective, guidance pathways (Aiello, Sabatano, Capodanno, 2023) from an inclusive viewpoint can bring out the dimension of personal desire. This aims to the construction of autonomously determined life trajectories, free from externally directed influences (Pavone, 2014; D’Alonzo, 2019), in order to increase the agentic potential (Gibson, 1979; Sibilio, Aiello, 2018) of each individual and promote self-determined action in every student (Wehmeyer, 1996).

In this way, guidance is framed as a preventive and contextualized intervention which, from a lifelong and life wide perspective, is not limited only to the transition phases that the student faces, but it refers to every field of their life, focusing not only on the educational component of the path but also on the personal, social, and family dimensions (Van Esbroeck, 2011) that characterize the student's history. The purpose is to create an actively participated and personalised life path.

This contribution presents the initial results from an exploratory survey conducted at schools within the Elis consortium in Rome, in collaboration with the National Orientation Centre (<https://www.elis.org/>). The research is based on the Participatory Action Research methodology (Orefice, 2006) and involved administering a questionnaire to students in their final year of upper secondary school and conducting interviews with teachers and guidance counsellors involved in the pathways. The resulting data were subjected to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), conducted using MAXQDA software.

The objective of the research is to investigate whether students with disabilities feel that their desires are heard and accepted, and whether these desires contribute to the co-construction of the guidance pathways offered by the school or undergo adaptive modification in relation to available opportunities.

Keywords: Guidance, Inclusion, Desire



Paper VI

Authors:

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Prof. Noemi Del Bianco – University of Macerata, Italy (ORCID: 0000-0001-6303-9605)

Prof. Catia Giaconi – University of Macerata, Italy (ORCID: 0000-0001-5861-7351)

Title: Transitions and Life Planning: Voices from Students, Families, and Teachers in Inclusive Contexts

Abstract: Promoting self-determination is increasingly recognised as a key dimension for enhancing overall well-being and Quality of Life across the lifespan, particularly within inclusive educational contexts. The present study aims to contribute to this field by presenting the ongoing Italian adaptation and validation of the Self-Determination Inventory System (SDI), designed to capture students’, families’, and educators’ perspectives during critical educational transitions.

International research highlights the importance of listening to multiple stakeholders when supporting life planning and transition pathways for adolescents and young adults, especially those with disabilities. However, validated culturally responsive tools capable of integrating diverse viewpoints remain limited in the Italian context. Addressing this gap, the SDI offers a multi-informant framework aligned with inclusive education principles and contemporary approaches to Quality of Life.

The Italian validation process of the Self-Determination Inventory: Student Report (SDI: SR) and the Parent/Teacher Report (SDI: PR/TR) follows a rigorous, multi-step methodological procedure to ensure linguistic and cultural appropriateness. In particular, this contribution focuses on the pilot phase of the validation protocol. The preliminary versions of the questionnaires were administered to a purposive sample of 75 participants (25 students aged 13-22, 25 parents, and 25 teachers/educators).

Subsequently, participants participated in focus groups to explore item clarity and the conceptual understanding of self-determination. Qualitative data were analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021), following six systematic phases, supported by MaxQDA software.

Preliminary findings indicate a substantial convergence among students’, parents’, and teachers’ perceptions regarding the relevance of the SDI constructs, alongside notable divergences in how autonomy, participation, and decision-making opportunities are experienced across contexts. Data triangulation supports the instrument's preliminary validity while revealing nuanced dynamics related to educational pathways and transitions.

These insights underscore the importance of integrating diverse voices into assessment and planning processes. The study offers implications for educational practice, policy development,



and future research, particularly in strengthening participatory approaches that meaningfully include students with disabilities in their life planning trajectories.

Keywords: Educational Transitions; Inclusive Education; Perceptions; Life Pathways; Self-Determination



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GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR INCLUSION
AND THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Breakout Session 3

Inclusion in Early Childhood Education

Time: 10:30 – 12:00

Location: Level 1, Meeting Room 103

Chair: Mr Jefflyn Grech

Paper I

Authors:

Prof. Alessia Signorelli – University of Perugia, Italy

Prof. Morganti Annalisa – University of Perugia, Italy

Dr Francesco Marsili – University of Perugia, Italy

Title: Strengthening Inclusive Education in Early Childhood: Research Tools and Frameworks from the European Project EDUSKILLS+

Abstract: Research on inclusive education in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) increasingly emphasises the need for empirically grounded tools that support teachers in designing, implementing, and evaluating inclusive practices. The EDUSKILLS+ project contributes to this field by developing and testing evidence-based, inclusive pedagogical resources and research instruments to strengthen teachers' professional competencies and support equitable participation in early childhood settings. The primary aim is to examine how structured guidance and systematic evaluation tools can enhance inclusive practices across diverse European ECEC contexts.

Despite strong policy commitments to inclusion, empirical research indicates that inclusive practices in ECEC remain fragmented and inconsistently implemented, largely due to the limited availability of validated tools tailored to early childhood settings. In addition, the preschool sector is still underrepresented in European competence frameworks and in comparative research on inclusive education. This gap constrains the development of shared indicators and methodological approaches for studying inclusion in early childhood contexts, underscoring the need for accessible, research-informed resources that can be applied across countries.

EDUSKILLS+ (Erasmus+, 2023–2026) is a transnational research and development project involving universities, early childhood institutions, and associations from Germany, Croatia, Slovenia, and Italy. The project adopts a mixed-methods, design-based research approach, integrating theoretical perspectives on inclusive education with iterative co-design processes involving ECEC teachers. Within this framework, the University of Perugia, in collaboration with the University of Rijeka, developed two core outputs: (a) inclusive Guidelines for ECEC teachers, aimed at operationalising inclusive principles in everyday practice, and (b) a standardised data collection tool designed to support systematic reflection and evaluation of inclusive educational activities.

Early research insights from the design and initial testing phases highlight the importance of clearly defined indicators for operationalising inclusion in early childhood contexts and supporting teachers' reflective practice. Co-design activities suggest that shared frameworks and



common evaluative criteria may enhance coherence in the interpretation and enactment of inclusion across diverse educational settings.

The study highlights the relevance of methodologically robust and transferable tools for advancing research on inclusion in early childhood education. EDUSKILLS+ offers a research framework that can inform cross-national studies, support evidence-informed policy development, and contribute to more inclusive ECEC systems.

Keywords: Inclusive ECEC; Early Childhood Inclusion; Inclusive Pedagogical Practices; Teacher Competence; Research-Informed Tools

Paper II

Authors: Frimannslund Marit – Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway

Title: When small gestures speak: How children build peer communities in a superdiverse ECEC setting in Norway

Abstract: In this paper, I explore how children aged 3 to 5 experience and express community and togetherness in a superdiverse ECEC setting, with a particular focus on interactions in which communication is not primarily verbal. While previous research has documented how peer communities among toddlers (aged 1-3) emerge through bodily and affective engagements (e.g. Johansson & Berthelsen, 2019; Løkken, 2000; Pursi et al., 2020), studies of slightly older children tend to concentrate on verbal expressions of togetherness (Lin & Jin, 2024; Nilsen, 2015). Consequently, we still know relatively little about how community takes shape among 3 to 5-year-olds in superdiverse groups when interactions unfold through modes other than speech.

Drawing on participant observations from a case study of superdiverse early childhood groups in Norway, this study examines how children themselves form and sustain peer communities through multimodal and intersubjective interactions. The guiding research question is: What characterises children's intersubjective interactions when verbal language is not the main element of the encounter?

To ensure ethical conduct of participant observation, the children's ongoing assent was continuously interpreted and assessed by the researcher in collaboration with the pedagogues who knew the children well. Particular attention was given to the children's expressive responses when the researcher was nearby or observing a specific situation.

In the early phase of the analysis, thematic analysis (Van Manen, 2016) was applied. Merleau-Ponty's (2012) phenomenology of the body subsequently served as the analytical lens for exploring children's expressive and embodied engagements. Emerging findings suggest that such interactions often arise spontaneously and may be brief yet meaningful. They are frequently initiated not through explicit verbal invitations but through bodily responses such as imitation, mirroring, and playful vocalisations, including animal sounds and other onomatopoeic expressions.



In this paper, I discuss how close attention to children’s multimodal expressions can deepen our understanding of community formation in early childhood and foster more child-initiated and inclusive practices in superdiverse ECEC environments.

Keywords: School well-being; Superdiverse Early Childhood Education (ECEC); Multimodal Communication in Early Childhood; Embodied and Intersubjective Interaction; Peer Community Formation

Paper III

Authors:

Dr Virginia Benedetti – University of Roma Tre and University of Macerata, Italy
Prof. Ines Guerini – University of Roma Tre, Italy
Prof. Fabio Bocci – University of Roma Tre, Italy

Title: Referral Pathway in Childhood and Adolescence. Analysis and Description of “Good Referrers” Based on the Results of an Exploratory Survey in the Roman Hinterland.

Abstract: In this paper, we explain part of a research project entitled “Referral Pathway and Inclusive Processes”. As is known, the term Referral Pathway (RF) refers to the institutional process that leads from a student's difficulty or problem to the activation of network interventions.

After an exploratory phase, focused on knowledge about RP and the perceptions of its usefulness among teachers (Benedetti & al., 2025), this phase of the research focused on the role of the referrer, the practices and communication methods adopted in the school-family-services triangulation at the time of referral and in the subsequent stages.

To this end, the “Referral Pathway 2 Questionnaire - Reporting and Procedure” (QueRefeP-2-SI) was created by our research group in collaboration with school and healthcare staff to identify how teachers and schools respond when they recognise a difficulty or disorder in students, how and to whom they report it and how they follow the subsequent institutional process (specialist visit, diagnostic assessment process, assessment results and possible diagnosis, feedback to the family and school). The issues examined concern at least two of the key areas of the research: the question of inconsistencies in procedures between different areas and schools; and the question of the time that elapses between the identification of the difficulty, its reporting to the family, its reporting to the services, the response of the services, the assessment-diagnostic process, the outcome, and the communication of the outcome to the family and school. The resulting intervention in terms of educational and teaching activities. With other research on RP (Penge, Bocci & al., 2003), although not in the pedagogical field and rarely in developmental age, we hypothesize that the presence of a “good referrer” is able to act positively on the timing of the process and that this consequently favours the quality of the intervention at a multidisciplinary (educational-didactic and medical-specialist) and multidimensional level (school, family, Local



Child Neuropsychiatry Services). During the panel discussion, we'll explain the general structure of the research, the QueRefeP-2-SI, and the first survey outcomes.

Keywords: Referral Pathway; Inclusive Processes; School, Local Child Neuropsychiatry Services

Paper IV

Authors:

Ms. Macarena Andrea Saavedra Olguín – University of Cádiz, Spain

Prof. Erika Marie Pace – University of Salerno, Italy

Prof. Dr. Víctor Manuel Amar Rodríguez, University of Cádiz, Spain

Title: Teaching with the Heart: The Vocation of Special Education Teacher. A Narrative Study

Abstract: Special education requires teaching practice grounded in a deep vocation to accompany diverse and complex learning processes, both in children and adults. In this context, educators working in this field often build their professional identity based on personal experiences, educational trajectories, and professional experiences that reinforce their commitment to inclusion and educational equity.

This research aims to understand the role of vocation in the selection, retention, and professional development of the special education teacher. Specifically, the research objectives are to understand, through the teacher's personal and professional narratives, how they integrate pedagogical, social, and emotional knowledge into daily practice; to know how the teaching vocation is nurtured through reflective inquiry (inquirere) in educational practices; and to understand the humanistic dimension of the teacher as a polymath, capable of combining sensitivity, ethics, and creativity in their educational work.

The study is based on the premise that teaching vocation, particularly in the field of special education, is not merely an individual disposition but a process that is continually redefined throughout one's life and professional trajectory. This vocation is nourished by values such as empathy, sensitivity to diversity, and commitment to the holistic development of learners. From this perspective, educational inquiry is understood not only as formal research but also as a reflective process that encourages teachers to ask questions, deeply understand others, and investigate their students' needs with sensitivity.

The research employs a narrative methodology, analyzing the testimony and experiences of a special education teacher to understand how their vocation guides the integration of pedagogical, psychological, social, and emotional knowledge into their practice.

In doing so, the study highlights the special education teacher as a humanistic polymath, whose ethical and committed engagement contributes to educational and social transformations. The findings underscore the importance of strengthening teacher training through vocation and reflective inquiry, and of further exploring in future research its influence on professional



resilience, pedagogical innovation, and the development of more inclusive educational communities.

Paper V

Authors: Jefflyn Grech – University of Malta

Title: Inclusive Practices in Maltese Childcare Settings

Abstract: Childcare in Malta has expanded rapidly to meet contemporary economic demands, yet research focusing specifically on the inclusion of infants and toddlers with disabilities within these settings remains notably scarce. This exploratory study addresses a critical gap by investigating the specific practices that support or hinder inclusion in local childcare centres, while simultaneously examining the influence of national policy frameworks.

The primary aim is to explore the lived experiences of stakeholders to provide a foundational starting point for enhancing inclusive quality and informing future policy development. Employing a mixed-methods research design, the study gathered qualitative insights through semi-structured interviews with five parents of children with disabilities and utilised online questionnaires to collect data from thirty-three childcare educators and managers.

Reflexive thematic analysis was applied to interpret these narratives, which were further triangulated with an in-depth analysis of the sector's major national policy documents. The findings reveal a stark inconsistency in inclusive experiences across different centres. Successful inclusion is underpinned by staff who possess positive inclusive beliefs, a strong ethic of care, and a commitment to collaborative planning with families and professionals.

Conversely, the study identifies significant barriers, including an inability to respond effectively to diverse needs, systemic inequities, and a pervasive lack of specialised training among staff. A key insight is the profound disconnect between theoretically sound policy documentation and the practical reality where centres are often "left to fend for themselves" without adequate resources or supporting structures. The study concludes with several implications for reform, proposing a shift toward a tier-based support model that integrates professionals directly into childcare "hubs". It further recommends auditing training programs to include practical coaching and increasing financial resources to bridge the policy-practice gap. Finally, future research is urged to incorporate the direct voices of children and multidisciplinary professionals to complete the understanding of early years inclusion in Malta.

Keywords: Early Years; Inclusion; Childcare; Disability; Policy



Breakout Session 3

Disability, Neurodiversity and Inclusive Educational Culture (II)

Time: 10:30 – 12:00

Location: Level 0, Meeting Room 2

Chair: Prof. Nicolina Pastena

Paper I

Authors:

Prof. Rosa M. Rodriguez-Izquierdo – Universidad Pablo de Olavide (ORCID: 0000-0002-9432-1280)

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Ana Benítez Jaén – Universidad Pablo de Olavide (ORCID: 0000-0003-1192-1211)

Title: From Policy to Practice: Tensions and Pathways in Inclusive Education Systems in Spain and Italy

Abstract: Inclusive education has become a core objective of international educational policy, framed as a fundamental right and a key pillar of social justice. This study aims to analyse and compare how inclusive education for students with intellectual diversity is articulated and implemented in Spain and Italy, with particular attention to the coherence between policy discourse, legal frameworks, and educational practices.

The comparative rationale is grounded in the markedly different trajectories of both countries. Italy is widely recognised as a reference model for inclusive education, while Spain has undertaken significant legislative reforms in recent decades that formally endorse inclusion while maintaining notable structural ambiguities. Exploring these contrasting approaches provides insight into the conditions that enable or constrain the development of rights-based inclusive systems.

The study adopts a qualitative comparative methodology based on documentary analysis of national legislation, policy documents, and international frameworks. Key dimensions examined include legal and regulatory structures, modalities of schooling, assessment procedures, professional support systems, and intersectoral coordination.

The findings indicate that both countries have transitioned from segregated models towards more inclusive frameworks, albeit with substantial qualitative differences. Italy has consolidated a coherent model of full inclusion, characterised by the early elimination of segregated schooling, strong intersectoral coordination, and a biopsychosocial approach to assessment focused on identifying support needs rather than determining placement. In contrast, Spain is characterised as a model of inclusion in transition and under strain. Despite the normative advances, persistent inconsistencies remain, including the maintenance of a dual system of mainstream and special education, the expansion of segregated classrooms within mainstream schools, and psycho-pedagogical assessments linked to schooling decisions. These tensions are compounded by insufficient resources and funding, which limit the effective removal of barriers.



The study highlights that inclusive education requires more than normative commitment; it demands structural coherence, sustained investment, and alignment with international human rights standards. The findings have relevant implications for educational policy, practice, and future research on inclusive education systems.

Keywords: Inclusive Education; Comparative Education; Disability Policy; Educational Legislation; Spain and Italy

Paper II

Author: Dr Przemyslaw Eugeniusz Kaniok – Opole University (ORCID: 0000-0002-0792-4260)

Title: Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities in Poland in the Context of Global Learning: Challenges and Future Directions

Abstract: Since Poland ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2012, the implementation of inclusive education has become a key objective of national educational policy. However, the transition toward inclusive education in Poland began earlier, with the enactment of the Education System Act of 1991, which established a legal framework allowing children with disabilities to attend special, integrated, or mainstream schools in accordance with their individual developmental and educational needs.

Prior to the 1990s, the Polish educational system predominantly operated under a segregated model, in which children with disabilities were educated separately from their non-disabled peers. Despite the predominance of segregation, the founder of special education in Poland, Maria Grzegorzewska, emphasised the inherent worth and potential of individuals with disabilities. Her famous assertion, “There is no cripple — there is a human being”, remains a widely cited phrase among Polish special educators and reflects the personalist perspective underpinning special education. Notwithstanding the ongoing implementation of inclusive education within the Polish educational system, significant challenges persist in ensuring both equitable access to and the effectiveness of educational provision for children with disabilities at the primary and secondary levels. Therefore, this paper provides a policy analysis, including challenges identified in the literature, statistical data, and available research. It further examines inclusive education in Poland within the broader context of global educational practices. The final section outlines potential future directions for its development and addresses the complexities of implementing it in Poland.

Keywords: Inclusive Education; Children with Disabilities; Educational Policy; Global Learning



Paper III

Authors:

Dr Marianna Valente – Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Italy (ORCID: 0009-0002-3600-1163)

Dr. Alessio Schiavone – Università degli Studi di Roma Tre, Italy

Dr Susanna Zanella Cavallero – Universität Münster, Germany and Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Italy

Prof. Marina Chiaro – Link Campus, Italy

Prof. Amalia Lavinia Rizzo – Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Italy

Title: Promoting the Inclusion of Neurodiversity: Study Skills and ADHD in Lower Secondary School

Abstract: Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), despite average cognitive abilities, is associated with marked difficulties in attentional control and behavioural self-regulation (APA, 2022). These vulnerabilities, closely related to executive functions, result in significant obstacles in sustaining attention over time (Barkley, 1997), organising schoolwork and monitoring one's own learning, with negative consequences for continuity of achievement (Langberg et al., 2013), academic attainment and participation in classroom life (Loe & Feldman, 2007).

For these students, study skills represent a key competence for the development of autonomy and support the capacity to continue learning throughout the lifespan (Council of the European Union, 2018). From primary school onwards, pupils should be guided to become aware of how they learn and to construct a personal study method (MIUR, 2012), but it is especially in lower secondary school – characterised by an increased disciplinary workload and greater demands for independence – that it becomes crucial to introduce structured and interdisciplinary pathways based on evidence based teaching strategies (Cornoldi & De Beni, 2001), capable of sustaining the inclusion of students with different functioning profiles and forms of neurodiversity. This paper presents a research training project designed to promote effective study skills in first-grade lower secondary classes, with a particular focus on students with ADHD. The study adopts a quasi-experimental design and started in September 2025; it involves 10 comprehensive schools in the Lazio and Abruzzo regions, for a total of 29 first grade classes, divided into 18 experimental and 11 control classes (592 students overall, 364 in the experimental classes and 218 in the control classes), with the presence of students diagnosed with ADHD in each school. In the experimental classes, teachers participate in a training programme and implement an evidence-based instructional kit to promote study skills. Pre and post intervention assessment, using standardised tests (AMOS battery, Cornoldi et al., 2005), is intended to document the impact of the intervention on the study competences of the whole class group and, more specifically, of students with ADHD, providing transferable indications for teacher education and curriculum design from an inclusive perspective.

Keywords: ADHD; Study Skills; Self-Regulated Learning; Inclusive Education; Lower Secondary School



Paper IV

Authors:

Prof. Rosa Sgambelluri – University of Salerno, Italy (ORCID: 0000-0002-1943-0989) Mrs Francesca Placanica – University of Macerata and University of Reggio Calabria, Italy (ORCID: 0009-0002-1771-6163)

Title: Invisible Barriers and UDL-Oriented Inclusive Design in Specialist Support Teacher Education: A Mixed Methods Study

Abstract: Specialist support teacher education represents a key lever for strengthening inclusive school cultures capable of recognising barriers—particularly the “invisible” ones embedded in everyday routines—and of translating attention to learner variability into sustainable design choices. Within special education pedagogy, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provides a planning framework that anticipates variability through multiple means of engagement, representation, and action/expression (CAST, 2018), with established connections to students’ agency and self-determination (Sgambelluri & Placanica, 2025b). These perspectives resonate with transition-sensitive approaches and with life project thinking across the life course (Savickas et al., 2009; Sgambelluri & Placanica, 2025a).

This paper reports on an ongoing study involving trainee teachers enrolled in an Italian specialisation programme for support teaching. The study aims to explore the relationship between (a) sentiments, attitudes, and concerns regarding inclusion and (b) trainees’ representations of inclusive design developed through practicum experiences, including how transitions are incorporated into these representations.

A convergent mixed methods design is adopted. Data collection combines (1) the standardised SACIE R questionnaire (Forlin et al., 2011) and (2) six open ended prompts addressing: invisible barriers identified during practicum (relational, organisational, communicative, environmental, and expectation related); changes in understandings of inclusive planning; perceived usefulness of inclusive design; intended UDL integration; anticipated implementation challenges; and references to students’ educational and vocational trajectories. Quantitative analyses include descriptive statistics and exploratory associations among SACIE R dimensions; qualitative data are examined through reflexive thematic analysis. Integration brings SACIE R profiles into dialogue with practicum-based narratives. This work discusses emerging evidence and outlines a preliminary interpretive framework structured around: typologies of invisible barriers; ways in which trainees translate UDL principles into design decisions; perceived tensions between inclusive intentions and contextual constraints (time, assessment, coordination); and the extent to which self-determination and transitions are explicitly addressed when envisioning learners with disabilities. The study is intended to inform reflection on implications for both initial preparation and in-service lifelong learning of specialist support teachers, including tools for making invisible barriers discussable, transferable UDL-oriented design criteria, and avenues for embedding life project and transition perspectives into everyday planning.

Keywords: Teacher Education; SACIE-R; Universal Design for Learning; Invisible Barriers; Lifelong Learning



Breakout Session 3

Teacher Education and Professional Identity (IV)

Time: 10:30 – 12:00

Location: Level 0, Meeting Room 3

Chair: Prof. Alessandro Romano

Paper I

Authors:

Dr Carmine Sessa – University of Salerno, Italy

Prof. Aiello Paola – University of Salerno, Italy

Title: From Automatic Judgments to Reflective Practice: Exploring Inhibitory Processes in Inclusive Teacher Education

Abstract: This paper presents the initial empirical developments of a theoretical framework that conceptualises inclusive teacher education as a process of cognitive reconfiguration rather than solely as the acquisition of strategies or techniques. Instead of framing inclusive competence as the accumulation of prescriptive responses to learner diversity, the framework explores the hypothesis that professional expertise may be supported by transformations in cognitive and metacognitive regulation, with particular attention to the function of cognitive inhibition. Drawing on neurocognitive models of inhibitory control (Houdé, 2015) and the principle of simplicity (Berthoz, 2012), inclusion is tentatively examined as a practice that involves regulating automatic interpretative processes in situations of pedagogical complexity.

An exploratory study was conducted with 177 pre-service teachers enrolled in specialist training programs for supporting students on the autism spectrum (Sessa & Aiello, 2025). Participants engaged in a video-based reflective task designed to make spontaneous interpretative inferences visible and to encourage their temporary suspension. While observing a short film without verbal interaction, they were invited to record their immediate interpretations and subsequently respond to guided prompts to foster descriptive attention and reflective monitoring.

Preliminary analyses suggest three tendencies. First, participants frequently relied on rapid mentalistic attributions and deficit-oriented explanations during the initial phase of observation, indicating the salience of intuitive interpretative patterns in professional reasoning. Second, when prompted to slow down and re-examine their assumptions, many participants produced more descriptive accounts and demonstrated greater differentiation between observation and interpretation. Although these shifts cannot be interpreted as stable changes in competence, they point to the potential relevance of structured inhibitory prompts in supporting reflective awareness. Third, qualitative reflections indicate that some participants experienced uncertainty not only as a source of discomfort but also as a condition that allowed reconsideration of initial judgments and exploration of alternative meanings.

These findings should be interpreted cautiously, given the exploratory design and the absence of longitudinal measures. However, they offer preliminary indications that inclusive professional



judgment may be linked to the capacity to identify and regulate automatic cognitive tendencies. Within this perspective, inhibition appears less as suppression and more as a temporary suspension that creates space for epistemic monitoring and more analytically grounded reasoning.

Rather than proposing definitive claims, this study aims to contribute to ongoing discussions on inclusive pedagogy by suggesting that teacher education might benefit from attending not only to instructional strategies but also to the regulation of cognitive and attentional processes. Inclusion, in this view, may involve not only adapting to learners' differences but also cultivating reflective awareness of one's own interpretative patterns in contexts characterised by diversity and uncertainty.

Keywords: Cognitive inhibition; Metacognitive regulation; Reflective practice; Teacher cognition

Paper II

Authors:

Dr Giuseppina Rita Jose Mangione – INDIRE – National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research (Italy)

Marinella Muscarà – Kore University of Enna (Italy)

Prof. Alessandro Romano – Kore University of Enna (Italy)

Fabrizio Schiavo – INDIRE – National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research (Italy)

Title: Making Multigrade Didactics Visible: the PLURITEC Project for the Development of Good Teaching and Organisational Practices

Abstract: This study aims to investigate how structured visual documentation and comparative professional reflection can support the re-signification of multigrade didactics as an inclusive pedagogical configuration rather than a compensatory organisational solution. It seeks to analyse how teachers interpret and transform core didactic categories—curriculum, grouping, space-time organisation and digital technologies—through reflective inquiry.

Multigrade classrooms are prevalent in rural and demographically fragile areas and constitute distinct pedagogical ecosystems characterised by structural heterogeneity (Cornish, 2021; Pridmore, 2007; Mangione, 2023). While often framed as marginal adaptations, research highlights their potential for inclusive and student-centred practices (Mulryan-Kyne, 2007). However, little attention has been paid to how teachers critically reinterpret their practices through situated and comparative reflection across contexts.

The study adopts a qualitative, practice-based research design grounded in reflective inquiry (Schön, 1983) and teacher professional agency theory (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015). The research was conducted as part of PLURITEC (Digital methods and technologies for managing multi-grade classes), a project funded by the international MOVETIA programme,



which involved the University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland (SUPSI), the Bellinzonese e Tre Valli School Inspectorate, INDIRE and the Kore University of Enna in the creation of a transnational network. The project aims to promote the exchange of experiences and the development of good teaching and organisational practices by connecting small schools in Sicily (Italy) and the valleys of Canton Ticino (Switzerland). The research combines photo-elicitation (Harper, 2002) and visual ethnographic principles (Pink, 2013) with inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During reciprocal visits, teachers produced photographic documentation structured around four analytical categories: curriculum models (including spiral approaches; Bruner, 1996), grouping strategies, spatial-temporal configurations, and digital integration (Veenman, 1995; De Santi, Mangione, 2025). Post-debriefing sessions and guided written reflections were analysed to identify emergent dimensions of professional meaning-making.

Three macro-dimensions emerged: (1) transformation of professional gaze and metacognitive awareness; (2) re-signification of didactic categories, with space recognised as pedagogical mediator, differentiation articulated within shared thematic coherence, and flexible grouping functioning as inclusive infrastructure; (3) intentional projection toward practice change centred on student autonomy and collaborative professionalism.

The findings suggest that visual-comparative reflective dispositifs can generate situated professional knowledge and strengthen teacher agency in multigrade contexts. For policy and teacher education, this implies the need to recognise multigrade classrooms as epistemic laboratories for inclusive futures and to support structured, evidence-informed professional learning models capable of sustaining diversity-responsive educational systems.

Keywords: Multigrade Education; Photo-Elicitation; Teacher Professional Learning; Inclusive Pedagogy; Qualitative Analysis

Paper III

Authors:

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Prof. Maurizio Sibilio –University of Salerno, Italy, (ORCID: 0000-0003-1322-7776)

Title: Music and Artificial Intelligence in the Construction of the Future Special Education Teacher’s Professional Identity: Results of an Exploratory Study

Abstract: The study explores the pedagogical potential of music generated through Artificial Intelligence as a mediating device for autobiographical reflection and the construction of an inclusive professional identity in the preparation of future special education teachers. Positioned at the intersection of digital transformation, narrative pedagogy, and inclusive education, the research responds to the growing need to understand how generative technologies can support the reflective, relational, and value-oriented dimensions of professional development beyond mere technical competencies.



The investigation employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design and involved 317 voluntary participants enrolled in special education teacher specialisation programs at the University of Salerno. The quantitative phase examined the emotional profiles elicited by AI-generated musical compositions using ordinal scales measuring joy, calmness, energy, nostalgia, tension, and frustration. The qualitative phase consisted of a thematic analysis of autobiographical narratives and reflections on the meaning of inclusion and the pedagogical potential of Artificial Intelligence, conducted in accordance with the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2017).

Findings reveal the predominance of regulatory-positive emotional states, with over 70 per cent of participants associating the musical experience with calmness, energy, and joy, while conflict-oriented emotions remained marginal. Correlational analysis indicates that regulatory states, particularly calmness, are associated with a higher density of inclusive language and stronger relational framing within narratives. Thematic analysis identifies four recurring dimensions: inclusion, as recognition of diversity and relational responsibility; emotion, as a catalyst for transformative reflection; identity and belonging within emerging professional trajectories; and AI, as a creative and participatory facilitator. Professional experience appears to moderate the translation of emotional activation into explicit pedagogical awareness.

The study suggests that AI-generated music may serve as a reflective mediator, fostering inclusive dispositions and professional agency among future special education teachers. Implications concern both initial and continuing teacher education policies and practices, advocating the structured integration of multimodal generative tools as reflective instruments within professional development pathways. Further research should examine longitudinal effects and applications across intercultural educational contexts.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Teacher Education; Special Education; Autobiographical Narratives; Music

Paper IV

Authors:

Dr Donatella Visceglia – Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Italy
Prof.ssa Ester Caparrós Martín – Universidad de Málaga, Spain
Prof.ssa Nieves Blanco Garcia – Universidad de Málaga, Spain
Prof.ssa Amalia Rizzo – Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Italy

Title: Narrative Construction of Teacher Identity and University Tutoring: A Case Study in the Primary Teacher Education Degree

Abstract: This contribution presents the continuation of research conducted within the PhD program in “Educación y Comunicación Social” at the University of Málaga, carried out in joint supervision with the PhD Program “Educational and Social Theory and Research” at Roma Tre University. The study aims to investigate the role of university practicum in shaping the



professional identity of future teachers, focusing on the relationship between the university tutor and the student in the Primary Teacher Education degree. Specifically, starting from comparison with the Málaga model, the study seeks to understand whether and how the practicum experience influences the narrative construction of teacher identity, identify the elements that characterise an effective educational relationship with the tutor, and analyse the processes that promote commitment, reflexivity, and professional development.

The adopted methodology is a narrative case study involving three third-year students in Primary Teacher Education. Field notes, observations, and semi-structured and narrative interviews were used to explore participants' subjectivity in depth and the reflective processes activated during the practicum.

Initial findings show that relational dialogue with the tutor, understood as a “significant other,” fosters conscious growth by supporting the ability to plan, act, and reflect in an integrated way. The practicum experience emerges as a dynamic space of care for oneself and others, in which the ethical and reflective dimension becomes central to the construction of professional identity. This leads to reflection on the need to strengthen tutoring models based on authentic and reflective relationships, enhance narrative as a formative tool, and promote university pathways capable of integrating theory, practice, and personal development within a lifelong learning perspective.

Keywords: Teacher identity; University practicum; Tutoring; Narrative approach; Reflective training

