

Integrazione Scolastica in Italy:
A Compilation of English-Language Resources

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Abstract

Italy has a long history of placing students with disabilities in general education classes, referred to as *integrazione scolastica*. Since Italy relies less on special education schools and classrooms than many other similarly developed countries, its practices and policies continue to be of interest internationally. Following introductory information, this compilation of English-language resources about *integrazione scolastica* is divided into four main parts: (a) a glossary of terms, (b) a timeline of events, (c) an annotated bibliography (2000-2012), and (d) key lessons learned. It also includes three appendices: (a) a bibliography of earlier resources on *integrazione scolastica* (1987-1999), (b) a bibliography of related resources (1991- 2011), and (c) Italian and European web sites pertaining to *integrazione scolastica*, inclusive education, and disability.

Keywords: inclusive education, *integrazione scolastica*, attitudes, educational policy

Italy is among the most visited countries in world -- renowned for its art and design, architecture and engineering, culture, food, and *la dolce vita* (the sweet life). A founding member of the European Union and member of the G8, G20, and NATO, as of 2011 it was ranked as the world's 23rd most developed country, high on the United Nations Human Development Index (0.854), 8th in the world rankings on the International Quality of Life Index, and with a high public education and literacy level of nearly 97%. What is less known to the general public outside of Italy is that for approximately four decades this popular Mediterranean country has reported including among the highest proportion of its students with disabilities in general education classes and among the smallest use of special classes and special schools in the world. Therefore, Italian policies and practices have been, and continue to be, of interest to the international community involved in extending inclusive educational opportunities for children and youth with disabilities and other special educational needs.

Background Information and Context

This English-language resource compilation was initiated as a foundational step in preparing for a three-month sabbatical stay in Italy (September-November 2011) to study the policies and practices of including students with disabilities in general education classes, historically referred to in Italy as *integrazione scolastica*. Recently there have been conversations within Italy about whether a term such as *inclusive education* should replace *integrazione scolastica*. For some people the terms are considered almost synonymous and are used interchangeably. For others the phrases have quite different meanings especially from a cross-cultural perspective.

Among those who see the terminology as different, there is not agreement about which choice of language reflects a higher level of practice. Some have argued that *integrazione scolastica* focuses exclusively on students with disabilities, whereas inclusive education encompasses a wider range of diversity (e.g., disability, special educational needs, economic differences, use of non-dominant language, immigration, adoption); yet even this is complicated by the fact that no single definition of inclusive education has been agreed upon nationally or internationally. People do seem to agree that regardless of what you call it, it means much more than simply placement of a student with a disability in a general education class. Although agreeing on terminology can be helpful, it is more important to ensure that the types and qualities of the practices are put in place to operationalize quality education for all students.

Purpose and Potential Limitations

Our initial purpose in compiling and reviewing English-language resources about *integrazione scolastica* was to gain a preliminary understanding of this social policy initiative so that it might inform our observations and interactions while in Italy. Since *integrazione scolastica* was initiated and developed within a highly specific cultural and historic context, it is uniquely Italian. Our hope was that better understanding the successes and challenges of *integrazione scolastica* could help us reflect on educational challenges we face in our own country.

As we began to collect and organize these English-language resources a secondary purpose emerged, namely to make this work available to others. Having access to a summary resource such as this document would have been very helpful to us as we prepared to visit Italy and study *integrazione scolastica*; so we hope that it will be helpful to future visitors interested in this topic. Our purpose has never been to critique *integrazione scolastica* as a policy or to conduct a cross-

cultural comparison, but rather to compile English-language resources that would extend what is currently available and to better understand elements of *integrazione scolastica* that might inform our own practices.

We recognize that relying on English-language literature is a significant limitation to understanding *integrazione scolastica*, since certainly the Italian-language literature on this topic is far more extensive and nuanced. Yet we felt it most appropriate to limit our compilation to literature that was in our primary language in an effort to minimize errors associated with translation and cultural meaning. Secondly, in reference to the timeline of events, it is important to recognize that although the information was gleaned from peer-reviewed or otherwise reputable sources, these were secondary sources, since the primary sources (e.g., national laws) were written in Italian. Third, while we have taken steps to ensure the accuracy of the content presented (described in the Methods section), another potential limitation of this resource compilation is that there may be gaps in the content and other missing elements. Therefore, although the content is quite extensive and wide ranging, it should not be considered comprehensive.

Organization of Compiled Resources

This resource compilation fills a series of gaps in the English-language literature about *integrazione scolastica* in Italian schools by addressing four main parts: (a) a glossary of key terms, many of which are not described in the English-language literature or are minimally described; (b) a 50-year timeline of educational events (e.g., legislation); (c) an annotated bibliography of research scholarship (2000-2012); and (d) key lessons learned about collecting information and gaining insights in a foreign country. It also includes three appendices: (a) a bibliography of earlier resources on *integrazione scolastica* (1987-1999), (b) a bibliography of related resources (1991- 2011), and (c) Italian and European web sites pertaining to *integrazione scolastica*, inclusive education, and disability.

It is our hope that the compilation of these resources will assist others who are interested in exploring *integrazione scolastica* in Italy by providing an accurate summary of the currently available English-language resources. Perhaps learning lessons from its history and contemporary status will inform practices elsewhere where people are striving to improve inclusive educational opportunities and outcomes for students. Additionally, it is important to note that we have undertaken this exploration of *integrazione scolastica* at a time of serious economic challenges globally, and particularly in Italy. In part this means that some of what was written just a few years ago may be different today as a result of economic hardships and the changing political landscape that have affected funding, resources, and policies in Italian schools.

Method

The following subsections describe the methods used to gather and verify the information presented in resource compilation's four main sections and three appendices.

Glossary entries

The glossary entries reflect a combination of information gleaned partially from the reviewed English-language literature and more substantially from conversations and interactions with over a hundred Italian colleagues (e.g., university faculty, provincial ministry of education personnel, school administrators, teachers, special educators, agency personnel, parents of

children with disabilities) in September, October and November of 2011 as we visited four universities and 16 schools in five regions of Italy (i.e., Lazio, Lombardia, Puglia, Sicilia, Veneto) and met with people at conferences in two other regions (i.e., Toscana, Emilia-Romagna). In addition, a subset of 14 of these colleagues (listed in the acknowledgements) reviewed the entries for accuracy.

Timeline and bibliographic entries

The scholarship used to build the timeline of events and develop the three sections that include bibliographic entries (i.e., annotated bibliography, Appendix A, Appendix B) were identified using five primary methods: (a) basic internet web browser searching using phrases such as "integrazione scolastica" and "inclusive education Italy", (b) searching relevant online databases such as the Web of Science/Social Science Citation Index, Google Scholar, and ERIC; (c) examining reference lists in identified sources for additional possibilities, (d) soliciting recommendations from colleagues in the US and other countries (e.g., Canada, Finland, Malta, UK, Malta) who had visited Italian schools and/or worked with Italian colleagues regarding the education of students with disabilities, and (e) soliciting recommendations from Italian university faculty in departments of psychology and educational sciences during our time in Italy.

We identified English-language sources about *integrazione scolastica* published between 1987 and 2011. Given the limited number of English-language resources we included a wide range of sources such as books, book chapters, peer-reviewed journal articles, newsletter articles, and web-published reports that we divided into three main categories. First, since much of the identified literature from 1987 to 1999 ($n=12$) recounts the early history of Italy's transition to general class placement for students with disabilities and has been repeated in part or whole by several authors, we have listed but not annotated sources from this time period in Appendix A. We captured and summarized many key points raised in this earlier literature in a subset of the glossary entries (e.g., *classi differenziali*, *integrazione scolastica*, *inserimento selvaggio*) and in the timeline of events. Since the timeline events were identified from secondary sources, we only included events that were consistently mentioned in multiple sources and also were verified as relevant and accurate during the review by Italian colleagues.

Second, we provide an annotated bibliography for more recent sources about *integrazione scolastica* published from 2000 to 2012 ($n=22$). Authors of these sources included primarily Italian scholars ($n=22$), as well as a few non-Italian Europeans ($n=5$) and Americans ($n=6$) who either collaborated with Italian colleagues or who visited and studied *integrazione scolastica* in Italy. Third, in Appendix B we have included a list of related sources ($n=25$) from 1991 to 2011 that are not explicitly about *integrazione scolastica* in Italy, but which provide contextually relevant information (e.g., teacher education in Italy, international trends in inclusive education, international policy comparisons, cross-cultural comparisons of disability, quality of life issues, European and Italian statistics on disability).

Web site entries

Web sites (see Appendix C) were identified almost exclusively based on recommendations from Italian colleagues, reflecting the web sites associated with organizations in Italy and Europe addressing issues of education for children and youth with disabilities. While the European web sites are in English, we also included many Italian language sites given the availability of the web-based translation options (e.g., translate.google.com). Although these types of translation options have limitations, being aware of key Italian web sites will assist in finding additional

information from the Italian perspective.

Glossary of Key Terms

Asilo nido

This refers to *nursery* or daycare for children from 3 months up to 3 years of age.

Assistente

An assistente (*assistant*) for a student with a disability in Italian classrooms can be referred to in a variety of ways. For example, they are sometimes referred to as an OSA (Operatore Socio Assistenziale), OSS (Operatore Socio Sanitario), or ASA (Assistente Socio Assistenziale). Training can be obtained in vocational high schools to become an assistant. These individuals are funded and provided through the health system, though some work in schools. In some regions these assistants do not work primarily in schools, but support individuals with disabilities in their homes, at a CDD (Centro Diurno Disabili/Disability Daycare Centers), or at a CSE (Centro Socio Educativi/Social Educational Centers). The stated role of these types of assistants in schools is to provide primarily personal care supports such as feeding, dressing, mobility, and bathroom assistance for students with disabilities. In these cases, their roles are explicitly designed to be noninstructional.

Based on a 1999 collective agreement called the *Contratto Collettivo Nazionale Lavoro* [Collective Contract of National Work] between the National School Trade Union and the Italian Ministry of Public Instruction, in some schools custodians, called *collaboratori scolastici* (school collaborators), who primarily have roles cleaning and maintaining the school, also provide personal care supports like dressing, mobility and bathroom assistance for students with disabilities. In the past these personnel were referred to as *bidelli* (janitors). Although this term is still in use, many individuals in this role do not favor it. School collaborators are one part of a larger designation of school support personnel referred to as ATA (Assistente Tecnico Amministrativo) that can include administrative assistants and others who provide technical, administrative or auxiliary supports in schools.

Some assistants have roles to provide educational, social/behavioral, or communication supports for students with disabilities, such as those referred to as AEC meaning either Assistente per l'Educazione e la Comunicazione (Assistants for Education and Communication), Assistente Educativo Culturale (Educational Cultural Assistants), or by other regional titles. While these individuals often engage in some of the same noninstructional roles as the previously mentioned types of assistants (e.g., personal hygiene, mobility), they may also be asked to provide some level of instructional support or provide supports designed to advance student autonomy. These types of assistants are often recruited and hired by local organizations called *Cooperative Sociali* (Social Cooperatives). Individuals engaging in this role do not necessarily have a standard training to prepare them for this work and have a wide range of credentials. All of these types of assistant roles typically receive a low wage.

Bisogni educativi speciali (BES)

The phrase *special educational needs* has been introduced in Italy as a general category referring to students who are not labeled as disabled, meaning they do not possess an Italian *Certificazione di Disabilità* (*Certificate of Disability*) (see glossary entry), but who experience difficulties in learning and who may require individualized learning supports or interventions. Presently some scholars in the field use this term, though it is not commonly used by very many teachers.

Certificazione di disabilità

A *certification of disability* is issued by a medical/legal board at the local health authority to establish that a student has an eligible disability under Italian law and regulations based on the assessment of a team of professionals from various disciplines. This makes the student eligible and entitled to receive an individually determined program and services in school from a support teacher called an *insegnante di sostegno* (see glossary entry) and other identified service providers. Under the Italian system, students may be identified as "disabled" under the following categories: (a) deaf or hearing impaired, (b) blind or visually impaired, and (c) "psicofisico" including orthopedically impaired, intellectually impaired, and multiply impaired; in a small number of cases students with severe learning disabilities or emotional disturbance are certified as disabled under this umbrella category and receive the support of an *insegnante di sostegno*. Increasingly the identification relies on the World Health Organization's *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* (ICF); see Appendix C. The current process for the assessment and identification of disabilities is described in Law 185/2006 and in the *Guidelines for the School Integration of Students with Disabilities* (Linee guida per l'integrazione scolastica degli alunni con disabilità); see Appendix C.

Notably, Italy does not generally consider students with "learning disabilities" (as the term is used in the United States) to be "disabled". Similarly, Italy does not have a separate disability category for "emotional disturbance," although students may be identified with any variety of behavior disorders based on diagnoses from the DSM-IV (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*) or the ICD-10 (*International Classification of Diseases*). Typically such a classification does not qualify a student as "disabled" and entitled to the support of an *insegnante di sostegno*. Many students considered to have high-incidence or mild disabilities in the US are not labeled "disabled" in Italy, resulting in only approximately 2% to 2.5% of the school-aged population being labeled disabled and therefore entitled to special educational services in Italy (Meijer & DeJager, 2001; Palladino et al., 1999). Although as stated earlier, mechanisms do exist for these students to be certified as disabled in a relatively small number of situations.

Classi differenziali

Throughout the 1950's and into the 1970's, prior to the movement referred to as *integrazione scolastica* (see glossary entry), there was substantial migration of Italian families from the southern to central and northern regions of the country and from rural to urban areas. The numerous and distinctive regional dialectics present in Italy at that time led to learning problems for many relocated children. Initially the Italian response was to establish separate, *differential classes* for students with learning difficulties such as dialectical language and writing differences. Most of these students were not disabled as we think about the term today, though some had learning and behavioral problems and some may also have had disabilities. Many of these children were socioeconomically disadvantaged. The number of these classes steadily increased throughout the 1960's, reaching a high of 4,743 classes by the 1968-69 school year (Canevaro & de Anna, 2010). Such classes were dismantled and have not existed in Italy since the 1977 (Law 517).

Disturbo specifico dell'apprendimento (DSA)

Specific Disorders of Learning are what would commonly be referred to in the US as "Specific Learning Disabilities". In Italy students identified through assessment as DSA are taught in general education classes and are not certified or considered "disabled" within the

Italian education system. They are not entitled to special education, although new legislation in 2010 (Law 170) is designed to ensure that general education teachers make necessary accommodations for these children, such as those with dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia.

Diversamente abile

Differently-abled is phrase that some people are using in an effort to encourage the idea that all people, not just those with disabilities, have a range of skills and needs that effect their ability to participate in various activities and which require interdependence with others in the society. It encourages the recognition that all people have some abilities. The phrase is in limited use among a few organizations in Italy and sometimes appears in the popular press. It has received mixed acceptance; while some see it as a positive progression in language use, some disability organizations and others oppose the use of the term, perceiving it as simply a euphemism for current and older terminology (e.g., disabled, handicapped).

Educatore

An educatore (*educator*), in the broadest sense of the word, may refer to anyone who is involved in education and therefore it does not necessarily reflect a specific level within the profession. Commonly in Italy the term is used to refer to some types of personnel whose role is to work with individuals who have special needs of various types (e.g., disability, economic disadvantage) both in school and nonschool settings. This title is associated with wide variation in both roles and preparation based on student needs, context, and localities. It should be noted that when the term educatore is used in this way, it refers to an individual who is different than a teacher -- the roles are not interchangeable and follow different preparation paths. Educatori are not trained or certified as primary or secondary teachers or in a subject area (e.g., math, science, history, language). They are assigned to work directly with a student who has disabilities for a designated number of hours per week to provide supports with the aim of advancing student autonomy. Unlike teachers and insegnante di sostegno, educatori are not employed by schools; they are typically funded by local municipalities, often through local social cooperatives. For students in primary schools, some educatori may spend some time at school as well as after school. For students in secondary school, educatori more commonly work with a student after school hours. In the best case scenarios they serve as a facilitator or bridge between the school, community, work, and home by assisting with homework, sports activities, social events/interactions, community travel (e.g., use of public transportation), and providing respite for families. Educatori do not necessarily always work in situations that advance integrazione scolastica or inclusive education. Some work with older adolescents and adults in day centers that serve only or primarily individuals with disabilities.

Some individuals referred to as educatori have a high school education and minimal additional preparation (e.g., a workshop) specifically for their role. In some regions (e.g., Sicily), individuals can receive training to be educatori in secondary schools. Others have university degrees through programs offered in Departments of Educational Sciences throughout Italy following one of two primary paths: (a) disability across the life span, or (b) individuals with psychosocial concerns. The disability related path offers training on topics such as: (a) historical and cultural foundations, (b) development across the life span, (c) characteristics of disabilities, (d) working with families, and (e) learning strategies/processes. Depending on a student's characteristics, some educatori may also have specific training, such as in applied behavior analysis for students with autism or pertaining to sensory disabilities (e.g., Italian sign language

for individuals who are deaf, orientation and mobility training to assist individuals who are blind). Some localities only hire educatori with university degrees in Educational Sciences, Psychology or related fields while others do not.

Typically, municipalities, regional, or provincial governments pay for the educatori (directly or indirectly through cooperatives or other agencies), though sometimes they are funded by disability-related organizations such as those for persons who are blind. Despite higher educational levels of some educatori, their compensation is lower (e.g., €6 to €7 per hour, in some cases more) than that of teachers and insegnante di sostegno. The role of an educatore should not be confused with an insegnante di sostegno (see glossary entry), although at times when both are involved with the same student (often employed by different organizations) role confusion reportedly may result.

Insegnante di sostegno

An insegnante di sostegno is a *specialized support teacher* who is assigned to support one or more general education classrooms where students with certified disabilities are present. By design, the intention is for the insegnante di sostegno to be a support to the classroom, and in a broader sense to the whole school, rather than being assigned exclusively to an individual student; the law does not limit how they can be deployed. They are assigned to provide the same amount of instructional time as their general education counterparts. The remainder of their time is dedicated to planning, instructional preparation, collaboration with team members, and other duties. Although, their primary role is to support the classroom teacher in teaching and including the student with a disability, they may also provide support to other students, such as those with special educational needs who are not certified as disabled (e.g., DSA; see glossary entry), and they can also work with children who do not have special needs in effort to free up classroom teachers to interact directly with students who have disabilities, thus avoiding stigmatizing students with disabilities.

Historically, the amount of training for insegnante di sostegno has paralleled the training requirements for general classroom teachers based on their grade level, primary or secondary, plus additional training to be an insegnante di sostegno. This meant that up until approximately five years ago insegnante di sostegno for elementary schools took a two-year training course post high school because, at that time, one could be an elementary teacher in Italy without a university degree. Undoubtedly, some individuals in this role had educational levels that exceeded the minimum requirements. Insegnante di sostegno in middle and high schools took the same two-year training, but after a Bachelor's degree, because that was the requirement to teach in the middle and high school grades at that time.

Currently, insegnante di sostegno at all grade levels are required to have a bachelor's degree and be a certified teacher, after which they take an additional year of study to be an insegnante di sostegno based on a set of nationally established training topics. Changes which increased the requirements to be an insegnante di sostegno coincided with new laws and structures that established the formation of Departments of Educational Sciences in Italian universities that were charged with the primary responsibility for preparing insegnante di sostegno.

Historically, insegnante di sostegno have chosen training in one of two paths: (a) physical or sensory disabilities with further distinction between preparation to support students with vision or hearing impairments, or (b) intellectual disabilities. They may take additional studies to gain specializations related to the needs of students with specific types of disabilities (e.g., autism). As of October 2011, the Ministry of Education is in the process of developing new rules

for the preparation of *insegnante di sostegno*, which currently are not available. During this waiting period university training programs to prepare new *insegnante di sostegno* are on hold and will take a couple of years to phase-in once they are initiated. Training requirements for engaging in the role of *insegnante di sostegno* continue to evolve. Current law limits the caseload of *insegnante di sostegno* to a maximum of four students with disabilities, though the national average is closer to two, with regional variation. Given current economic pressures, there is concern that this may be changing.

There is substantial turnover among *insegnante di sostegno* because many in this role move on to become general education classroom teachers after 5 years. This pattern of turnover is associated with Italy's national system for placing teachers in schools (see *scuola* glossary entry). If teachers work as an *insegnante di sostegno* for 5 years, they are given preference for general education teaching positions that otherwise might not be available to them for many years. This means that while there are certainly many *insegnante di sostegno* who choose the profession because they have a long-term commitment to teaching students with disabilities, others choose this path with the intention of serving in the role for five years and then moving out of the special education subfield of the profession.

Inserimento selvaggio

Wild insertion refers to the period between 1971 and 1977. Based on a grassroots movement in Italy to close segregated special schools and psychiatric hospitals, the percentage of students with disabilities placed in general education classes rose from estimates of 20% to 30% to approximately 98% (Cornoldi, Terreni, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 1998; Palladino, Cornoldi, Vianello, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 1999). Law 118 aided the widespread shift of students with disabilities from special schools and classes to general education classes. This reportedly led to challenges in schools because wholesale shifts were made without necessarily having sufficient transition plans, supports, and trained personnel in place; though as special schools closed their specialized teachers, with skills and knowledge of children with disabilities, were placed in some schools as supports.

Some scholars have argued that this period of wild insertion was necessary because if they delayed implementation until they had fully developed plans, the implementation for such a wide range of students may have never happened. Scholars suggest that wild insertion forced school personnel to figure out how they would solve the new challenges they confronted and created the conditions for subsequent progress. This challenging period stimulated the conversations and ideas that ultimately led to the passage of the landmark Law 517 in 1977. It provided a series of service delivery parameters to support *integrazione scolastica* such as: (a) specially trained support teachers (*insegnante di sostegno*) were to be paired with classroom teachers with the intention that they would work together to improve educational opportunities for all students, thus mitigating stigma for students with disabilities; (b) no more than 20 students were to be in classes that included a student with a disability, and (c) extracurricular activities must provide access for all students.

Integrazione scolastica

In the 1970s a grassroots movement emerged protesting discrimination, inequalities, and segregation of people with disabilities that led to the widespread national closure of special education schools and classrooms across Italy in favor of general education class placement and education for students with the full range of disabilities; this came to be known as "integrazione

scolastica" (*scholastic integration*). This shift and associated supports were codified in a series of laws, the most foundational of which were: Law 118 (1971), Law 517 (1977), and Law 104 (1992). Philosophically, *integrazione scolastica* is meant to offer reciprocal interaction and mutual benefits for students with and without disabilities to learn together and from each other to contribute to a more inclusive society, consistent with the Italian constitution.

For many years, Italy has reported that approximately 98% of students with disabilities are educated in general education classes with the support of *insegnante di sostegno* (see glossary entry). In considering this statistic, it is important to understand what information it does and does not provide. The statistic indicates that 98% of Italian students with certified disabilities (approximately 2% of the school-aged population) attend general education classes in regular schools some percentage of the school day. These schools typically do not have full-day special education classes as a primary placement option. The statistic does not indicate the percentage of time students actually spend in those general education classrooms versus the percentage of time they spend outside general education classrooms receiving services individually or in groups with other students who have disabilities. Recent research in Italy has begun to clarify that fewer than 98% of these students spend all or most (at least 80%) of their day inside the general education classrooms (see Appendix C: *L'integrazione Scolastica nella Percezione degli Insegnanti: School Integration the Perceptions of Teachers*). These data are based on a sample of self-reports from school personnel. The approximately 2% of students with disabilities not included in general education classes are primarily students who are deaf, blind, or have the most profound/multiple disabilities.

Currently the term "*integrazione scolastica*" is widely used in Italy, yet some Italian scholars, school personnel, and families have encouraged the adoption of variation on the phrase "*inclusive education*" because they believe it more accurately reflects the next and higher level of integration of students with disabilities. Additionally, proponents of the term *inclusive education*, suggest that it may facilitate the development of shared language and meaning within the European community and internationally. Proponents of retaining the terminology of *integrazione scolastica* argue that it has cultural and linguistic meaning and a connotation that is different and more positive than *inclusive education* in the Italian language. Currently, there seems to be no national consensus on this issue. For some people it is a non-issue because they consider the terms synonymous, using them interchangeably. To these people, while they acknowledge that reaching agreement on terminology can be helpful, they are less concerned with the label and more concerned about the types and qualities of practices being used to ensure quality education for all students.

Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione per l'innovazione e la Ricerca Educativa (INDIRE)

This refers to the *National Institute of Documentation for Innovation and Educational Research*.

Istituto Nazionale per la Valutazione del Sistema di Istruzione (INValSI)

The *National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education System* is charged with developing a new system of school evaluation and gathering of data on school and student performance.

Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca (MIUR)

The *Ministry of Instruction of the University of Research* was formerly referred to as the

national Ministry of Education.

Orientamento scolastico

Vocational counseling in schools (or in private centers) refers to support provided by vocational counselors (consulenti di orientamento) or teachers with specific training, to assist individuals in choosing their subsequent level of schooling. For example, vocational counseling is provided as students are completing middle school (scuola secondaria I) to assist them in choosing the type of high school (secondaria II) they will attend (i.e., liceo, technical, professional). Similarly, as students complete high school (secondaria II), vocational counseling is provided to assist them in making decisions about attending university, other post-secondary education, or work and facilitating that transition. Recently, there has been more emphasis on embedding concept of “orientamento educativo” (vocational education) in general education programs by introducing vocational education earlier in a student's academic career to help them develop skills designed to prepare them to make those future choices. Vocational counseling is considered especially important for individuals with disabilities so they are prepared to make more informed and self-determined choices about their future.

Piano educativo individuale (PEI)

The *Individual Education Plan* is developed by a team for students with certified disabilities.

Scuola

School is divided into four levels, each described in subsequent entries: (a) scuola dell'infanzia, (b) scuola primaria, (c) scuola secondaria I, and (d) scuola secondaria II. There are several notable points that are unique to Italian schools. We address eight here that we thought most interesting. In considering the following points it is important to recognize that Italy's system of education is directed at the national level, not by regions or localities. First, school principals/headmasters (*presido*) are often responsible to oversee and lead multiple schools. Given Italy's economic situation the number of schools a single individual is asked to lead has increased in recent years. Second, although schools at the various levels are in session for students the same minimum number of hours per week, local schools in conjunction with families in their communities can decide whether students attend school more than the minimum number of hours as well as whether those hours are spread out Monday through Friday or Monday through Saturday. Sometimes multiple options are available within the same school. For example, some students may attend their classes five days a week and others at the same school may attend six days. In other schools, if a sufficient number of parents request it, there could be as many as four options, where students attend school varying numbers of hours (e.g., 24, 27, 30 or 40 hours per week), all in the same school. This is one of the key areas where schools and communities do have local control.

Third, although many students attend the schools closest to their homes, they have options to attend other public schools. Fourth, because of Italy's unique geographical and architectural history, while some new schools exist, it is not uncommon to find older historical buildings being used as schools. For example, sometimes schools are literally a palace (*palazzo*) -- being housed in former palatial residences. This offers both unique opportunities (e.g., historic art and architecture) and challenges (e.g., accessibility, upkeep) because the physical plant of the building and its maintenance often is controlled by a different entity than the school, such as the

local municipality. Fifth, all teachers within a school, regardless of their role (e.g., classroom teacher, insegnante di sostegno) have exactly the same number of instructional contact hours with students (e.g., 22 hours per week in primary school, 18 hours per week in secondary school).

Sixth, interscholastic sports do not exist in Italy. Children and youth, many of who do engage in sports, do so through club, church, or town teams. Seventh, support services (e.g., physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech/language pathology) typically are not part of special education services provided by schools. These services typically are provided for students after school hours by other agencies in nonschool settings. In a small number of cases, Italian law allows for students with severe disabilities to receive some of these therapy services during part of the school day (e.g., the first hour or two of the school day), but they are typically provided away from school at a health clinic or agency that provides services to individuals with disabilities. The extent of coordination and collaboration between the schools and these agencies varies widely. The supports provided may or may not be educationally necessary or relevant.

Eighth, Italy has a unique national method of assigning teachers to schools based a wide variety of criteria among licensed educators. We will not attempt to describe all the details of this process except to say that it differs quite substantially from typical hiring practices in some other countries. For example, there is no search committee or interview process and building principals or local boards do not make decisions about who will work in their school. Certified teachers are included on a single provincial list. They can make a request to be placed on a different provincial list for any variety reasons (e.g., more job opportunities, family move, personal preference), but can be only on one list at a time. If selected for a position at a school they can accept or reject this assignment. In some cases this can make it difficult for schools to plan ahead because they do not necessarily know who will be on their staff during an upcoming school year. Because the list generally favors teachers with more years of experience, though other factors are considered, some teachers may have 20 to 25 years of experience before they have stable teaching positions that are not in jeopardy of changing annually. For example, younger teachers may be offered a series of annual contracts and also may seek positions that are in different regions of the country (e.g., a teacher who lives in southern Italy may be seek a teaching job in northern Italy where positions are more abundant). Turnover can be especially pronounced for specialized support teachers (insegnante di sostegno). A substantial number of individuals choose this teaching role because more jobs are available and it provides a potentially faster path to gaining a stable general education teacher position. After being an insegnante di sostegno for a required 5 years, those individuals who then submit requests for general education teacher positions are given preference.

Scuola dell'infanzia

Preschool/Kindergarten (3 years) is available for children ages 3 to 6, though is not compulsory; it was formerly referred to as scuola materna.

Scuola primaria

Primary School (5 years) is for children ages 6 to 11; it was formerly referred to as scuola elementare (elementary school).

Scuola secondaria I

Secondary school I (3 years) is for youth ages 11 to 14; it was formerly referred to as scuola

media (middle school). As students complete the third and final year of scuola secondaria I (8th grade), a combination of assessment information about the student is used to orient them toward a recommended type of scuola secondaria II.

Scuola secondaria II: *Secondary School II* (5 years) is for youth ages 15 to 19; it was formerly referred to as Scuola Superiore (High School). These high schools include three basic types: (a) professional, (b) technical, and (c) liceo (e.g., classico [*classics*], musicale [*music*], scientifico [*science*], linguistico [*language*], umanistico [*humanities*]). Students do not necessarily attend the high school closest to their home. High school students attend class for 30 hours per week. This may be 6 hours each of 5 days, but more typically is 5 hours over 6 days, including school on Saturday.

A small percentage of high school students with moderate to severe or multiple disabilities spend less than 30 hours per week at school. These students may spend a full school day once a week or parts of each school day (e.g., 2 hrs.) at various types of centers serving only individuals with disabilities. There they may receive various types of training or support (e.g., communication support, physical therapy, occupational therapy, applied behavior analysis therapy, vocational preparation). Additionally, others may attend centers or participate in programs for individuals with disabilities run by local social cooperatives.

Under Italian law school is compulsory until age 16 for all students. If students leave school at 16, having not graduated, they may choose to work. In such cases, employers are obliged by law to provide a formative path of vocational development (e.g., training and mentoring in the profession) for two years. If students later decide to pursue university studies they must take and pass a state exam. Students with disabilities who meet state graduation requirements receive a scuola secondaria II diploma, whereas those who have not met those standards receive a certificate of attendance that is designed to look similar to a regular diploma, though it carries a different meaning.

Timeline of Key Events Related to Education and Integrazione Scolastica

The following 50-year timeline, 1960-2010, has an earlier context rooted Italy's 20th century history. In the adoption of the 1947 Democratic Constitution of the Italian Republic, Italy declared itself to be "built on the Resistance". In other words, the liberated political factions opposed to Mussolini during World War II sought to craft a constitution that was the antithesis of his fascist regime. The following are excerpts of key provisions from the Italian constitution related to education that later would help form some of the basis and legal support for integrazione scolastica.

Article 3:

All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinions, personal and social conditions. It is the duty of the Republic to remove those obstacles of an economic and social nature which, really limiting the freedom and equality of citizens, impede the full development of the human person and the effective participation of all workers in the political, economic and social organization of the country.

Article 30:

It is the duty and right of parents to support, instruct and educate their children...

Article 33:

Art and science are free and teaching them is free. The Republic lays down general rules for education and establishes State schools for all kinds and grades....

Article 34:

Schools are open to everyone....

Article 38:

Disabled and handicapped persons are entitled to receive education and vocational training.

1960 through 1969

The Italian Parliament passed a number of acts in the 1960's creating a segregated system of public education for students with disabilities (e.g., residential institutions, special schools, special classes). During this time Italy also experienced substantial internal migration from south to north and from the country to cities. Differences in regional dialects led to learning problems and the establishment of special classes and schools (see Glossary: *Classi Differenziali*). In 1963-64 the number of these special classes had risen to 2,247 and steadily increased throughout the decade, reaching 4,743 by 1968-69 (Canevaro & de Anna, 2010). In the mid 1960s only about 20% of students with disabilities were educated in general education classes. By the late 1960's a strong, grassroots, anti-segregation movement emerged as part of a political and social movement centered on guaranteeing fundamental human rights. A key figure during this period was Italian psychiatrist Franco Basaglia, who expressed intense criticism of the health system as a cultural stronghold of the existing political establishment that he and others identified as contrary to the good of the Italian people.

1970 through 1979

As the decade began protests continued against special schools as discriminatory and segregated while the number of special classes associated with regional dialectic and learning difference (*classi differenziali*) continued to rise, peaking at 6,790 in the 1973-74 school year (Canevaro & de Anna, 2010). The 1971 passage of Law 118 began the tradition of educating students with disabilities in general education classes in public schools, first at the primary and lower secondary school levels. It addressed the education system, as well as: (a) the establishment of Centers of Rehabilitation, Research and Prevention, (b) elimination of architectural barriers, (c) employment issues for persons with disabilities, and (d) a social benefits system for persons with disabilities (e.g., Disability Living Allowance). Although the result of the law led to the widespread closure of special education schools, it did not completely eliminate them. Section 28(i) of the law left open the possibility for some continued separate schooling: "*Compulsory education must take place in regular schools, in public schools, except in those cases in which the subject suffers from severe intellectual deficiency or from physical handicaps so great as to impede or render very difficult the learning processes in the regular classroom.*" In 1975 Ministerial Circular law (Circolare 227) explicitly stated that the severity of the disability must not prevent integration. Subsequent legislation would further strengthen the Italian commitment to general education class placement for students with disabilities.

Between 1971 and 1977 the percentage of students with disabilities placed in general education classes rose from estimates in the 20% to 30% range to over 90% (Cornoldi et al., 1998); this was referred to as the period of "wild insertion" (see glossary entry: *inserimento selvaggio*). This widespread shift of students with disabilities from special schools and classes to general education classes reportedly led to logically expected challenges because schools made

wholesale changes without necessarily having sufficient transition plans, supports, and trained personnel in place. Some scholars have argued that this rapid insertion was necessary because if they delayed implementation until they had fully developed plans, the implementation for such a wide range of students may have never happened. Scholars suggest that rapid insertion forced school personnel to figure out how they would solve the new challenges they confronted.

In 1977 Law 517 was passed establishing that schools cannot legally refuse any student with a disability and set forth a series of service delivery parameters such as: (a) no more than 20 students in a class that includes a student with a disability, (b) extracurricular activities must allow access for all students, and (c) specially trained support teachers (*insegnante di sostegno*) were to be paired with classroom teachers with the intention that they would work together to improve educational opportunities for all students, thus mitigating stigma for students with disabilities. One implication of the law was that the supportive aspects did not apply to classes where students with disabilities were not enrolled, meaning other classes, many likely to include students with other types of special learning needs (e.g., learning disabilities, children of migrant workers, economically disadvantaged) would be in larger classes and without special education personnel support. In 1979 Ministerial Circular 199 established that an *insegnante di sostegno* (specialized support teacher) could serve up to a maximum of four students with disabilities.

1980 through 1989

Although there was some criticism of Law 517, the 1980s continued a period of ongoing clarification and development in support of *integrazione scolastica*. By 1984 the training of *insegnante di sostegno* had shifted from dedicating approximately half its time to teaching about the medical aspects of disability to a quarter, thus creating more training time to focus pedagogical theories of practice. In 1987 the Ministry of Public Instruction Circular Letter 159: (a) required closer collaboration among persons providing services in local communities; (b) established new regional centers to meet the needs of students with the most severe disabilities (lowest 10% of those with disabilities) and (c) modified syllabi and training of support teachers that shifted away from a medical model toward effective educational skills. Also in 1987 the Constitutional Court issued a judgment granting the full and unconditional right for all pupils with disabilities, including those with more severe disabilities, to attend secondary schools. This ruling established schooling for all students with disabilities as compulsory.

1990 through 1999

In 1992 landmark Law 104 represented the next major step in the civil rights and integration of people with disabilities in Italian schools and social life. Law 104 outlined a series of principles meant to develop the cognitive, linguistic, and social potential of individuals with disabilities, as well as develop their personal and social autonomy. Some of the key principles included:

Article 1a

Rights of freedom and dignity of disabled people and their full integration in family, school and society

Article 1b

Duty of society to anticipate and remove all obstacles to autonomy, self-help and full inclusion of the disabled in society

Article 1c

The social responsibility of providing knowledge and care for primary and secondary

prevention

Article 5

The necessity to grant health care and rehabilitation services in cooperation with families and family associations

Article 12

The awareness that the aim of social inclusion is the development of disabled people's potential in relationship, communication, learning and social processes.

The right of disabled children to attend all mainstream classes of school institutions of any order or rank, including university.

The right to education cannot be hindered by either learning difficulties or any other kind of problem such as poverty, low social-cultural level of families, lack of parent's care, ethnicity...

Article 13

Integrazione scolastica is realized through a network among schools, municipal boards, health units, families, and local associations.

Article 15

The "gruppi di lavoro per l'integrazione scolastica" [work group for scholastic integration] are teams composed by a variety of individuals at different levels: class, school, local administrations, and local representatives of the Ministry of Public Instruction. They work together to improve the inclusion of students with disabilities and collaborate with other units (e.g., health agencies, municipalities) to realize specific "accordi di programma" [programmatic agreements].

Law 104 also included operational elements such as: (a) the functional diagnosis to qualify a student as "disabled" entitling him or her to an individualized educational plan and support from an insegnante di sostegno, (b) a functional dynamic profile designed to describe the characteristics of the student that have an impact on learning, and (c) the elements of an Individual Educational Plan. Under Law 104 families of students with disabilities have an important, active, collaborative roles as team members.

In 1994 more than 300 participants representing 92 countries (including Italy) and 25 international organizations meet in Salamanca, Spain at the World Congress on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality (hosted by Spain's Ministry of Education and Science Spain and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: UNESCO), to discuss the objective of "Education for All". They unanimously adopted the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* (see Appendix C), which affirmed the principle that ordinary schools should accommodate all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic, or other conditions. The Salamanca Statement called on all governments to adopt, as a matter of law or policy, the principle of inclusive education by enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise, and to give the highest policy and budgetary priority to improving national education systems so that they cater for all children regardless of individual difference or difficulties. In 1995, at its 145th session the UNESCO Executive Board, adopted decision 5.2.5 entitled, *World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality*, in support of the appeals made in the Salamanca Statement.

In 1995, Article 13, Ministerial Ordinance 80, distinguished between evaluation of students with physical and sensory disabilities only (without cognitive impairments) who are supplied with access accommodations and are assessed based ministerial (general education) program

standards the same as those without disabilities. Those functioning below typical class level (e.g., students with intellectual disabilities) are judged according to their IEP and their grades are identified as such.

By 1996 approximately 98% of students with disabilities in Italy were attending general education classes in regular schools as their primary placements (Cornoldi et al., 1998). The Autonomy Law 275/1999 provided additional funding for schools based on: (a) projects fostering *integrazione scolastica* of students with disabilities and other 'disadvantaged' groups (e.g., students from migrant families) and (b) agreements among networks of local organizations (e.g., health units, municipal boards, voluntary organizations, other schools). As the decade of the 1990s came to a close Law 68/1999 supported inclusion in the workplace for people with orthopedic, psychological, sensory and intellectual disabilities. Businesses were required to hire one person with a disability for every 15 nondisabled employees or pay a fine. Additionally, government incentives (e.g., tax breaks, salary reimbursements) were offered for hiring people with more significant disabilities.

2000 through 2011

With the basic framework of *integrazione scolastica* in place, major events in the 2000's added refinements and adjustments to the system as well as data collection. To aide in this process the government began following progress of students with disabilities after graduation. The Ministry of Education transformed the library of pedagogic documentation into the Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione per l'Innovazione e la Ricerca Educativa (INDIRE – the National Institute of Documentation for Innovation and Educational Research). The Istituti Regionali di Ricerca, Sperimentazione e Aggiornamento Educativi (IRRSAE – the Regional Institute for Research, Experimentation, and Educational Development) was changed into the Istituti Regionali di Ricerca Educativa (IRRE – the Regional Institutes for Educational Research).

Law 26/2001 and the Local Action Plan measure of Law 328/2000, sought to maintain relatively stable levels of resources for the *integrazione scolastica* for "vulnerable" groups of students in regular schools. In 2003, Law 53, known as the Moratti Reform law, re-defined the levels of schooling to be: Scuola Primaria (5 years of elementary school), Scuola Secondaria I (3 years of lower secondary or middle school), and Scuola Secondaria II (5 years of upper secondary or high school). During this time period additional reforms incorporated the principle of "personalizzazione" (personalization) as a way to reinforce formative assessment in more Italian classrooms at the lower secondary level, as well as differentiation of curricular content and tasks to address learning and cultural differences and special educational needs. The bill emphasized the "laboratorio didattico" (learning laboratory) as a way to individualize teaching methods and provide students with learning support. By 2005 Decree 227 addressed the development of new teacher training requiring all general education teachers to attend courses pertaining to *integrazione scolastica* for students with disabilities. In 2006 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the text to the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (opens to signatures in 2007). Throughout the first decade of the new century Italy experienced an influx of immigration from eastern Europe, Africa, and Asia. This has led to new challenges in Italian schools, particularly the increasing number of students who speak a wide variety of primary language other than Italian -- some of these children also have disabilities or other special needs.

During the 2007-2008 school year, previous legislative measures that had established the ratio of 1 specialized support teacher for every 138 students of total of school population and

caseload parameters for insegnante di sostegno were rescinded. Although it is not the law, a ratio of one support teacher for every two students with certificates of disability remains the national average with regional variability. Now without an established ratio, support teachers are meant to be appointed depending of the real needs of the school based on the referrals from schools and certification of disability provided by local health units. In conjunction with European Union standards, codes of impairments in the disability certification process were changed to reflect the World Health Organization's *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* (ICF).

In 2007 both Italy and the European Union signed the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. In 2008 it took effect after the 20th country ratified this landmark treaty. In 2009 Italy ratified both the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and the *Optional Protocol*, a side agreement to the Convention that allows its parties to recognize the competence of the *Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* to consider complaints from individuals; the European Union ratified in 2010. In 2010 Law 170/2010, recognized dyslexia, dysorthography, dysgraphia and dyscalculia as a specific learning disorders. While these are still not considered "disabilities" in Italy they are recognized as problems faced by some students that require instructional accommodations by their general classrooms teachers and creates opportunities for teachers to receive training on these topics. The law covers all school levels, including university.

In the past few years Italy has experienced significant economic challenges resulting in austerity measures that have reduced funding for public schools. As of November 2011 Italy is undergoing political transitions following the resignation of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi that will undoubtedly have an impact on public education policies and resources. The nature, extent, and impact of this change remain to be seen.

Annotated Bibliography about Integrazione Scolastica 2000-2012

Balboni, G., & Pedrabissi, L. (2000). Attitudes of Italian teachers and parents toward school inclusion of students with mental retardation. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 35, 148-159.

This quantitative study explored potential difference in attitudes of Italian teachers ($n=560$), special educators ($n=118$), and parents of children without disabilities ($n=647$) toward the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities and sought to determine if certain variables (e.g., age, experience, socioeconomic status) were related to their attitudes using exploratory factor analysis and ANOVA. Significant differences were identified between the three groups, with special educators reporting the most favorable attitudes, though all groups reported positive attitudes on the majority of variables. Findings also indicated that factors such as age (e.g., younger teachers), socioeconomic status (e.g., parents with higher socioeconomic status), and experience with inclusion (e.g., teachers) reported more positive attitudes. The authors suggest that more positive attitudes of elementary teachers than high school teachers may result from secondary inclusion being a more recent phenomenon in Italy, thus teachers have had less experience with it. The authors highlight experience, namely direct opportunities to teach students who have intellectual disabilities, as a malleable variable that may positively influence teacher attitudes by providing opportunities for teachers develop more accurate and non-stereotyped conceptualizations of students with intellectual disabilities. The authors conclude that improving teacher and parental attitudes can be further advanced by providing adequate information about students with disabilities related to their needs in inclusive classrooms,

highlighting the advantages of inclusion for students without disabilities, having teachers acquire appropriate teaching strategies to facilitate inclusion, and improving schoolwide supports.

Begeny, J. C., & Martens, B. K. (2007). Inclusionary education in Italy: A literature review and call for more research. *Remedial and Special Education, 28*, 80-94.
doi:10.1177/07419325070280020701

This article provided a review of English-language research (1983-2003) related to inclusive education in Italy. Thirteen of the sources were studies characterized by the authors as addressing: (a) individuals' perceptions about inclusion in Italy (e.g., effects of inclusion, attitudes of acceptance, adequacy of training or supports), (b) perceptions of persons with disabilities presumably effected by Italian inclusion, or (c) educational or behavioral outcomes as a result of inclusion. These included eight articles and five abstracts (where the full text was in a different language). The authors conclude that parents, teachers and school administrators generally recognize positive aspects of inclusive educational practices, though the studies reported mixed perceptions regarding attitudes and outcomes of including students with disabilities in general education classes.

The remaining 26 articles were intervention studies addressing the deceleration of maladaptive behaviors or the acquisition of adaptive behaviors for Italian students with disabilities or other special educational needs, including 12 articles and 14 abstracts (where the full text was in a different language). Although the article's title suggest the review is about "inclusionary education in Italy", notably the authors report that only two of the 26 intervention studies collected at least some of the data in general education classrooms, the remaining studies collected data in clinics and segregated schools.

The authors conclude there is little systematic research available on best practices in inclusive classrooms in Italy, particularly in secondary schools and called for additional research on the practices and outcomes associated with inclusive education in Italy. The authors further suggest Italy will have limited impact on international practices without more data and called for international collaboration regarding research on inclusive education in Italy.

Canevaro, A. (2002). Pedagogical, psychological and sociological aspects of the Italian model: A methodological preamble. In *Conference proceedings: Mainstreaming in education (Southern Europe Disability Committee, 5th Plenary Meeting)*. Rome: Consiglio Nazionale sulla Disabilità. Retrieved from: www.edscuola.it/archivio/handicap/canevaro.html
Note: On the web site an Italian version is followed by a translated English version.

In this report presented during the 5th plenary session of the Southern European Disability Committee in Rome, Canevaro offered a description of the evolution of integration in Italian schools. He highlighted the complex realities (e.g., political, economic, cultural) that were associated with the movement from segregated to integrated education for students whose families migrated from southern to northern Italy, as well as those with disabilities. Canevaro described the challenges associated with the movement from segregation to integration including: (a) a lack of teacher readiness, (b) the resistance of trade unions, and (c) the uncertain legislative situation during the 1960s and 1970s.

Canevaro described the instructional opportunities that emerge from integrated school systems, namely that the adaptive and cognitive approaches necessary to teach students with identified disabilities can also be helpful for students who experience educational difficulties, but are not eligible for special education services in the Italian model (e.g., students with dysgraphia,

dyslexia). Finally, Canevaro highlights the reciprocal benefits available for students with and without disabilities in integrated models. He concludes this piece by encouraging professionals from a variety of countries to work together to continue the development of practices necessary for integrated education to be beneficial for all children.

Canevaro, A., & de Anna, L. (2010). The historical evolution of school integration in Italy: Some witnesses and considerations. *ALTER, European Journal of Disability Research*, 4, 203-216. doi:10.1016/j.alter.2010.03.006

The two authors, both with extensive and long-term involvement with promoting *integrazione scolastica* in Italy, offer an historical overview based on their experiences, perspectives, and the literature. They express the concern that the Italian model may not be fully understood internationally, and therefore offer this article in an effort to facilitate that understanding. They are firm in their perspective that Italians cannot allow problems or points of criticism to endanger the country's policy of "integration" that has been implemented since the 1970s. They describe the approach as based on: (a) a welcoming culture in the school context that values diversity as "a point of strength" (p. 205), (b) a system of relations and supports around the person with a disability, (c) attention to learning rather than teaching, (d) understanding the diversity of students in a class rather than the oneness of the teacher, and (e) reciprocal enrichment that provides learning opportunities for nondisabled students, allowing students to develop different ways of learning and living together. The authors remind us of historical tragedies that were spawned when people have been marginalized or dehumanized, arguing that this is an important reason to embrace *integrazione scolastica* in an effort to develop a more caring society.

Contardi, A. & Gherardini, P. (2003). Together at school: Mainstream school in Italy, from kindergarten to high school. *Down Syndrome News and Update*. 3(1), 11-15. Retrieved from: www.down-syndrome.org/news-update/3/1/dsnu-3-1.pdf

This newsletter article summarizes a presentation given at the Luxembourg Symposium on Inclusion (March 2003) based on the research of Paola Gherardini and Salvatore Nocera for the *Associazione Italiana Persone Down*. The article provides a substantial amount of background information about the history and structures of inclusive educational efforts in Italy. The article asserts that inclusion has contributed to positive cultural changes in the society (e.g., greater tolerance, new ways to consider diversity), while highlighting ongoing concerns associated with the adequacy of teacher preparation and acknowledging problems with high school inclusion efforts. The article summarizes data from 385 cases documenting positive structures, processes and outcomes (e.g., independence, metacognition, language, reading, writing, mathematics, logic, socio-affective skills) resulting from inclusive education efforts, where students with Down syndrome have achieved previously inconceivable progress. They point to international research showing a decrease in IQ among people with Down syndrome as they age, but indicated this is not so in Italy -- they believe due to inclusive educational opportunities. The authors advocate for placing no pre-defined or rigid limits on expectations of what students with disabilities are capable of learning. They stress the importance of family involvement, the role of classmates, and the high level of human resources as contributors to inclusive educational success. The authors conclude that progress to improve inclusive education can benefit individuals with disabilities and society and we will continue to learn new and better approaches as we progress down this path. Most importantly, they leave us with the message that so long as

necessary structures and processes are provided, people with Down syndrome will continue to amaze us.

D'Alessio, S. (2007). "Made in Italy": Integrazione scolastica and the new vision of inclusive education. In L. Barton and F. Armstrong (Eds.). *Policy, experience and change: Cross-cultural reflections on inclusive education* (pp. 53-72). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer Netherlands Science + Business Media B.V. doi:10.1007/978-1-4020-5119-7_4

This chapter addresses three primary components. First, D'Alessio addresses the challenges associated with the attempted translation and interchangeable use of the terms "integration" and "inclusion" from an international perspective. She points out that the two terms have different cultural and linguistic connotations. From an Italian perspective, "integration is used to refer to the education of disabled students, while inclusive education is concerned with all pupils" (p. 57). D'Alessio suggests that it is time to use the term "inclusion" in Italy as a more accurate description of the current political and social developments, as, in her opinion, the term "integration" has become too narrow.

Second, D'Alessio draws upon her own experiences as a support teacher and as a university tutor, to share her perspectives of integration at the classroom level. She describes the challenges associated with implementing *integrazione scolastica* including: (a) lack of classroom teacher ownership, (b) lack of collaboration, (c) isolation of students with disabilities within the classroom, (d) low expectations, and (e) lack of a systemic approach to supporting diversity.

Lastly, D'Alessio presents external barriers to *integrazione scolastica* and inclusive thinking that may occur as a result of the Moratti Reform (Law 53/2003). Essentially the law re-defined the levels of schooling to be primary school (4 years), secondary I (3 years), to be followed by secondary II (5 years). At the beginning of the secondary II level students decide between a vocational education path (professional or technical schools) and university path (liceo). D'Alessio identifies potential unintended consequences, especially the potential tracking of students with disabilities who are already disproportionately enrolled in the professional and technical schools.

D'Alessio, S. (2008). The Italian example. *UNESCO Policy Briefs: Inclusion*, No. 3, p. 2.

Retrieved from unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0016/001613/161315e.pdf

In this short article, D'Alessio highlights the Italian example of *integrazione scolastica* as evidence that including the full range of students with disabilities in general education classrooms is more than a utopian ideal but is, and has been, a practical reality in Italy. Based on a human rights perspective, all students are welcomed in their neighborhood schools. There are no waiting lists; all students can register at any time of the school year without screening measures, and without any risk of being rejected.

D'Alessio, S., (2009). *Integrazione scolastica 30 years on. Some critical reflections and suggestions for the development of inclusive education in Italy. La nouvelle revue de l'adaptation et de la scolarisation [New Review of Adaptation and Education] Edition Spécial: L'éducation inclusive en France et dans le monde [Special Edition: Inclusive education in France and the World, HS5 Hors série no. 5, 35-65.*

D'Alessio provides a series of critical reflections concerning potential contradictions that arise from the implementation of the policy *integrazione scolastica* at the school level and examines the extent to which *integrazione scolastica*, as historically and currently conceptualized, can be considered an inclusive policy that leads to inclusive education in Italy. In

discussing these issues she acknowledges that the term *integrazione* has strong social and community-based dimensions in the Italian language that the English word "integration" does not possess. D'Alessio presents an argument that foundational legislation, Law 118/1971, was not focused on pedagogical and organizational issues, but on issues related to finance, transportation, special services, and the removal of architectural barriers. She asserts that micro-exclusion still exists in Italian schools and that support teachers (i.e., *insegnante di sostegno*) are often used as the only teacher for the student with disabilities because of a lack of collaboration with classroom teachers and lack of pedagogical ownership by general educators. She proposes the need to reform the Italian education system in order to foster the more inclusive participation of all pupils, including those with disabilities, special educational needs, and other oppressed minorities. D'Alessio describes *integrazione* as both liberating and oppressive. She honors the history and progress that has stemmed from policy of *integrazione scolastica* (e.g., closure of segregated schools; participation of students with disabilities in regular schools) and simultaneously expresses concern that participation of disabled people occurs within an uncritical conceptualization of disability that stems from a special needs education paradigm. In order to achieve more inclusive education D'Alessio challenges educators within the Italian system to recognize that important pedagogical work remains to be done, that local solutions need to be encouraged, and that teacher preparation needs to be continually improved. She expresses concern that recent reforms will reduce resources in schools and exacerbate inequities.

D'Alessio, S. (2010). Is the policy of *integrazione scolastica* an inclusive policy? Challenges and innovations in a lower secondary school in Italy. In N. Bélanger, & H. Duchesne, H. (Eds.), *Des écoles en mouvement* (pp.187-233). Ottawa, Canada: Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa.

In this report, D'Alessio points out the difficulties of conducting international research on the topic of inclusive education because there is not a single agreed upon definition and culture context influences its meaning. She offers a definition of inclusive education that envisions including all children without any need to identify and categorize them as different on some dimension (e.g., disability) in order to include them. She encourages the reader to consider the culture, history and social contexts of each school when examining inclusive education. She emphasizes the importance of understanding the impact of language (e.g., integration, inclusion, mainstreaming) as facilitating or impeding understanding of the realities of different social and cultural contexts around the world.

D'Alessio offers a description of the historical evolution of the policy of *integrazione scolastica* from a more traditional social inclusion approach to a more contemporary emphasis that blends social outcomes while ensuring access to general education curriculum and instruction. She suggests that *integrazione scolastica* has fallen short of a necessary transformational shift to move away from a deficit-based medical model toward a social model of education that is supported by changes in curriculum and assessment. Finally, within this report D'Alessio shares a case study example highlighting practical implications of the policy of *integrazione scolastica*.

D'Alessio, S. (2011). *Inclusive education in Italy: A critical analysis of the policy of integrazione scolastica*. Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Stemming from her dissertation research, D'Alessio relies a social model of disability, as opposed to the medical model, to offer a critical analysis of the policies of *integrazione scolastica* in Italian schools. D'Alessio examines both the history and modern practices of *integrazione*

scolastica. The text highlights educational, structural and cultural constraints that require a student to receive a certification of disability in order to receive special education supports from an insegnante di sostegno. She offers an explanation and evidence of what she refers to as "micro-exclusion" in Italian schools and classrooms, whereby students who are theoretically benefitting from integrazione scolastica may be isolated within the classroom with the insegnante di sostegno or an assistant, rather than part of typical class activities facilitated by the classroom teacher.

The eight chapters in the book begin with from an examination of the underlying history of integrazione scolastica, move to data collected in two Italian schools, and culminate in a critical analysis of policies and practices that support and impede integrazione scolastica. D'Alessio strongly suggests that there needs to be a refocusing on the original intent of integrazione (i.e., the development of mainstream settings). Finally, she offers suggestions for improvement at the political, social and classroom levels.

D'Alessio, S. (in press). Integrazione scolastica and the development of inclusion in Italy: Does space matter? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*.
doi:10.1080/13603116.2012.655495

In this article, which drew on qualitative research findings from two studies, D'Alessio examined the relationship of space and place in schools, and the impact on the separation of students with and without disabilities. Although integrazione scolastica is the policy throughout Italy, micro-exclusion in the forms of spatial separation (e.g., special classes, special units, and specially designated spaces) is still common. She concludes that students with disabilities regularly experience micro-exclusion caused by a student being physically in a general education classroom, but sitting in a space apart from peers and not included in the academic or social life of that classroom. In addition, D'Alessio notes, that while support teachers are theoretically available for all of the children in the school and classroom, in her experiences and research they are more often linked exclusively with a student with severe disabilities.

D'Alessio provides definitions for the terms integrazione scolastica, integration, and inclusion. She then uses these definitions to inform her own analysis of observations and interviews associated with her research, presenting two major findings. First, the social divide between student with and without disabilities continues in Italian schools. She suggests that this may be, at least in part, a result of the students with disabilities being isolated within the classroom surrounded by "an invisible wall" and others who are physically separated in "special units" and "specialised areas" designated only for teaching students with disabilities (p. 12). Her second finding is that the distinctly separate preparation of specialist teachers and classroom teachers is problematic. She notes that the separate preparation at the pre-service level is reproduced in the classroom where there is little shared understanding of pedagogy, curriculum and assessment practices. Finally, D'Alessio challenges her readers to examine more closely the relationship between the use of space and place for students with disabilities in general education classrooms and the impact on school culture, pedagogy, curriculum and assessment.

Devecchi, C., Dettori, F., Doveston, M., Sedgwick, P., & Jament, J. (2011). Inclusive classrooms in Italy and England: The role of support teachers and teaching assistants. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*. Advance online publication.
doi:10.1080/08856257.2011.645587

This article explores some of the complexities of supports provided for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) by describing and comparing the roles and experiences of support teachers (*insegnante di sostegno*) in Italy and teaching assistants in the UK. The authors suggest that despite different histories and educational systems, the roles and responsibilities of support teachers in Italy and teaching assistants in the UK share some similarities, and that they also share feelings of being treated as "second-class" members of school staff, which adversely affects their ability to support inclusive education. The comparisons are based primarily on three earlier studies conducted by the authors. They are particularly interested in how to provide effective support for the inclusion of children with SEND in an era of budgetary cuts to education and educational reforms that have reduced services.

The authors explore the reasons why there is so much turnover in support teacher positions in Italy. *Insegnanti di sostegno* frequently ask for redeployment as general education classroom teachers after only a few years after gaining their qualification to work with students who have disabilities, leaving many children without qualified support while local authorities try to fill vacant positions. Examples of concerns expressed by *insegnante di sostegno* in Italy included: (a) feeling blamed by teachers and parents if students do not progress adequately, (b) questioning their own professional abilities and self-efficacy to meet students' educational needs, (c) challenges collaborating with medical team members outside the school, (d) heavy workloads, (e) unclear roles and unresolved discrepancies in expectations among school personnel and families, (f) administrative discontinuity in annual assignments that interfere with them working with the same children, and (g) collaboration challenges with classroom teachers, especially when some still want the *insegnante di sostegno* to take the student with a disability out of the classroom to receive support. Contrary to the spirit of the law, some support teachers report that they are not perceived as part of a team, but as specifically designated to teach only the child with disabilities and they do this in isolation and frequently outside the classroom. Although parents reported general satisfaction with the work of support teachers, it is the absence of references to the classroom teacher that was a noted concern of the authors, who suggest that too often students with disabilities and the adults that serve them (both assistants in the UK and *insegnante di sostegno* in Italy) experience exclusion and marginalization within general education classrooms. Italian support teachers report it is the lack of classroom teachers' engagement with the students who have disabilities that proves to be a main concern in combination with systemic problems that fail to support their work. Ironically, it seems that preparing *only some* teachers to work with children with SEND may create a divide between teachers, reinforcing classroom teachers' views that working with children with SEND is a matter of specialized knowledge which they do not have and are not qualified to provide -- this leads the authors to the conclusion that training all teachers to work with students who have SEND is warranted.

Ferri, B. (2008). Inclusion in Italy: What happens when everyone belongs. In S. L. Gabel & S. Danforth (Eds.), *Disability and the politics of education: An international reader* (pp. 41-52). New York: Peter Lang Publishers.

In this chapter, Ferri offers a comparison of US and Italian inclusion policies (e.g., legislation) and practices such as the difference between Italy's rapid insertion approach beginning in the 1970's compared to the incremental approach to inclusion of students with disabilities in the US. She explains how Italian law ensures that students cannot be excluded

based on the severity of disability and that it established service delivery standards to facilitate education of students with disabilities in regular classes (e.g., class and configuration parameters, caseload size). She also describes how Italian students with characteristics that would be considered high-incidence or relatively mild disabilities in the US (e.g., specific learning disabilities) are not identified as "disabled", though their need for support is recognized. She quotes teachers she encountered during her travel to Italy as sharing, "... we expect variation in speaking, writing, reading, etc." (p. 43). Therefore, the general expectation is that the classroom teacher will make necessary accommodations for students with learning disabilities and other mild learning problems. These students do not receive have an individualized educational plan and are not entitled to the support of an insegnante di sostegno (Support teacher).

Ferri describes the attitudes of Italian teachers as being predominantly in favor of including students with disabilities in typical education classes, while simultaneously expressing concerns about the need for more and better resources. In Italy, the classroom is often described as a family where, "Of course you include everyone -- you wouldn't push someone out of your family. Why would we push them out of the classroom?" (p. 47). She goes on to explain that the question of *will inclusion pass or fail* is not one that typically would be asked in an Italian context because it is not a policy built on achievement scores, but rather one rooted in ethics of care and concern. The underlying premise is that everyone belongs and that including students with disabilities in typical classes is the right thing to do for all members of society. She contrasts US assumptions rooted in both an individual civil rights orientation and a remedial framework with different assumptions in Italy. She quotes an Italian colleague, Giancarlo Cottoni, as saying that they begin their work with a assumption that, "the child is fine and that it is the school that needs to remediate itself." (p. 50).

Giangreco, M. F., Doyle, M. B., & Suter, J. C. (in press). Demographic and personnel service delivery data: Implications for including students with disabilities in Italian schools. *Life Span and Disability*.

Recent research in inclusion-oriented schools in the United States has begun to document how a variety of demographic and service delivery variables (e.g., percent of students identified as disabled, percent of time in regular class, personnel utilization) can hinder or support innovations in curriculum, instruction, and social/behavioral interventions. After providing some contextual information about Italian and American special education and describing key findings from the US research exploring service delivery variables in inclusion-oriented schools, the current study presents school demographic and service delivery data collected in 16 schools in five regions of Italy. The findings indicate substantial variation across schools on a variety of variables. The authors pose a series of questions prompted by the data and invite Italian researchers and practitioners to offer their analysis, interpretation, and insights about the meaning and potential implications of these data for improving inclusive educational opportunities for students with disabilities.

Ianes, D. (2006). The Italian model for the inclusion and integration of students with special needs: Some issues. *Transylvania Journal of Psychology, Special Issue No. 2, Supplement No. 1*, 117-127.

Ianes begins by drawing a distinction between students with "disabilities" and those with "special educational needs" (SEN) (p. 117). He emphasizes the importance of better functional assessments as a means of improving individualized educational plans for students with

disabilities. Improvements need to allow for examination of both educational and functional impacts of disability. He suggests that such an approach is likely to have the added benefit of supporting students who experience learning difficulties, but are not on educational plans, because consideration would be given to the context. Ianes describes five areas related to inclusive education that are in need of improvement: (a) better connection between the PEI (Piano Educativo Individuale; Individual Education Plan) and classroom curriculum, (b) increased involvement with nondisabled peers, (c) integrating behavioral strategies into the classroom, (d) metacognitive teaching and learning, and (e) increased use of technology. Although he describes the complexities of including students with disabilities as "challenging, hesitating at times, full of lights and shadows", he concludes that after 35 years of inclusion in Italy "the balance is definitely and most largely positive." (p. 127).

Nota, L., Ferrari, L., & Soresi, S. (2006). Facilitating school inclusion. *International Journal on Disability and Human Development*, 5, 323-332. doi:10.1515/IJDHD.2006.5.4.323

Nota, Ferrari and Soresi reviewed existing research suggesting that direct positive experiences affect attitudes. Studies have documented that when parents of children with disabilities start to experience the advantages of school inclusion, they also start to have consistently more positive attitudes toward inclusion than parents of children in special education schools. They also acknowledge the importance of educating parents who have nondisabled children about the value of inclusion, by pointing to the research demonstrating that the attitudes of these parents has an impact on the attitudes of their children. Although teachers tend to agree about the value of inclusion, they also lament the challenges that seem to increase with the presence of a student with a severe disability.

The authors state that placement of a student with a disability in a typical class is insufficient to ensure success. They identify training, positive attitudes, and high expectations as facilitators for inclusive education in the Italian context and the opposite are barriers. Nota and her colleagues indicate that actions related to school inclusion continue to be insufficient and fragmented. They assert that instructional interventions are often not chosen based on proven practice, but are chosen as a result of teacher improvisation. They suggest an increased emphasis be placed on implementing proven educational practices and encourage collaboration among team members (including parents), peer interactions, and self-advocacy.

Reversi, S., Langher, V., Crisafulli, V., & Ferri, R. (2007). The quality of disabled students' school integration. *School Psychology International*, 28, 403-418. doi:10.1177/0143034307084132

Using two different questionnaires, the authors assessed the quality of integration for students with disabilities in three Italian cities. The qualities examined through the questionnaires were: (a) teachers' points of view related to social and syllabus integration, and (b) general education students' perceptions of their own loneliness relative to having a student with disabilities in their classes or not. Responses were collected from 85 teachers, 88 special education teachers, 102 students with disabilities, and 102 students without disabilities representing 91 different classrooms. Findings indicated that teachers had positive evaluations of the social and syllabus integration of the student with disabilities. In terms of loneliness, although in general students reported a low sense of loneliness, students with disabilities and students in classes where there was only one student with a disability reported slightly higher levels of loneliness than students without disabilities and students in classes where there was

more than a single student with disabilities. The authors offer potential explanations for these findings.

Sidoli, R. (2008). Inclusive policy in Italy. Milan: Catholic University of the Sacred Heart.

Retrieved from: centridiateneo.unicatt.it/it/cesi_Inclusive_policy_in_Italy_inglese.pdf

Sidoli describes educational inclusion as an embedded aspect of the larger efforts for societal inclusion at all levels (e.g., employment, economic, health). She offers a review of relevant Italian laws (i.e., 118/1971, 517/1977, 104/1992) that offer safeguards against discriminatory practices in schools. Sidoli goes on to describe the importance of students with disabilities participating in class activities with peers while consideration is given to their individualized goals and objectives. Finally, Sidoli promotes the importance of the active participation of parents of children with disabilities as decision-makers with equal status.

Vianello, R., & Lanfranchi, S. (2009). Genetic syndromes causing mental retardation: Deficit and surplus in school performance and social adaptability compared to cognitive functioning. *Life Span and Disability: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 12, 41-52. Retrieved from www.lifespan.it

Vianello and Lanfranchi examined the cognitive and adaptive profiles of students with genetically based syndromes (i.e., Down syndrome, Fragile X, Cornelia de Lange, Prader-Willi syndrome) who were included in general education classes in Italy. They found that the majority of the students performed better than expected, which they refer to as "adaptive surplus", based on their mental age in the areas of reading, writing, math, and social adaptability. They suggest that this may be attributed to inclusive educational placements of Italian students with these disabilities compared to students with the same genetically based conditions who live in countries with less access to inclusive schooling. It is noteworthy that this was not an examination of the impact of any specific intervention or package of interventions, but rather based simply on the students' lived, and presumably varied, experiences in general education classes. They concluded that "adaptive surplus" in academic and social performance seems to be greater where academic inclusion of students with disabilities is more widespread.

Vianello, R., & Lanfranchi, S. (2011). Positive effects of the placement of students with intellectual developmental disabilities in typical class. *Life Span and Disability: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 14, 75-84.

Following the publication of the earlier article by Vianello & Lanfranchi (2009) about deficit and surplus functioning, the journal editors invited four sets of authors with backgrounds in inclusive education from the US and Malta to write reactions and responses to the article that were published in subsequent issues of the journal. Full citations for each of the four articles (Giangreco, 2009; Scruggs & Michaud, 2010; Tanti-Burló, 2010; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010) are found in Appendix B. This article summarized some of the key points from the four invited articles. Overall, the articles supported the general notions that typical class placement of students with disabilities promotes: (a) positive psychological development (e.g., friendships, social acceptance, improved self-concept, higher levels of happiness), (b) higher academic achievement, (c) better adaptive functioning, and (d) does not harm or impede the development of peers without disabilities. Desired characteristics of inclusive classrooms are briefly discussed (e.g., welcoming attitude of teachers, in-class support, flexible instruction, teacher ownership for instruction of the student with a disability, age-appropriate participation, access to the general

education curriculum). Although a response article pointed out that some students in special classes can exhibit adaptive surplus, these authors noted that theoretically adaptive surplus in a typical class should exceed adaptive surplus in a special class. There was agreement that quality inclusion requires more than mere placement in a typical class, but also appropriately designed curriculum, instruction, and supports.

Zambelli, F., & Bonni, R. (2003). Beliefs of teachers in Italian schools concerning the inclusion of disabled students: A Q-sort analysis. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 19*, 351-366.

The intent of this quantitative study was to compare a purposefully mixed sample of Italian middle school teachers ($n=23$) from the Friuli-Veneto region, who were identified through an initial interview as having the following profiles about scholastic integration of students with disabilities: (a) positive attitudes with experience, (b) positive attitudes without experience, (c) negative attitudes with experience, and (d) negative attitudes without experience. The study was based on the premises that scholastic integration of students with disabilities is more than simply placement in a general education class, but is a complex phenomenon that requires collaboration and teacher engagement and that due to limited training, attitudes teachers develop can constitute an obstacle to scholastic integration. Using 67-items in four categories: (a) concept of inclusion, (b) methods of conceiving teaching, (c) role of the disabled child's family, and (d) opinions regarding the role of the support teacher, the teachers were asked to engage in a Q-sort process to rate the items by level of agreement and their response were analyzed with factor analysis using varimax rotation.

Findings confirmed the hypothesis that different beliefs of teachers were distributed across different factors based on experience and attitudes toward inclusion. For example, teachers with both experience and positive attitudes were strongly opposed to special schools, considered the presence of a student with a disability enriching, and felt the support teacher should work with all students, not just those with certified disabilities. To the contrary, teachers with experience and negative attitudes thought Italian regulations were "hardly avant-garde" and that there are too few support teachers, did not consider family involvement of primary importance, and favored special schools because they had encountered "impossible" cases of integration. The authors provide these and additional findings along with related implications for practice (e.g., information sharing about the limits and risks of segregated education; ways to conceive teaching in inclusive classrooms, roles for support teachers, the nature of parental involvement). They conclude by encouraging all those involved in integrated education to focus their collective efforts on how to ensure quality and success for students in inclusive schools, rather than doubting the usefulness of inclusion and its realization.

Key Lessons Learned

Learning about the educational policies and practices in a different country offers rich opportunities to explore new ways of approaching shared issues and hopefully leads us to fresh insights that will advance practice in our home countries. At the same time it can be tempting, though ultimately ill advised, to engage in certain types of cross-cultural comparisons based on only a rudimentary understanding of another country. Therefore, it is important to exercise caution in an effort to avoid making overly simplistic interpretations of undoubtedly complex phenomena. In the following sections we share five key lessons we learned while studying

integrazione scolastica in Italy. These lessons are not specifically about integrazione scolastica, but rather are about collecting information and gaining insights in a foreign culture.

Lesson 1: Position yourself as a learner

Nearly everywhere we visited (e.g., schools, universities, conferences) we were asked for our opinions about Italian schools and their approaches to integrazione scolastica, sometimes privately and sometimes very publicly. Each time we resisted the temptation to make qualitative judgments, although we did share what we thought were similarities and differences. We repeated the same mantra in response to these frequent requests for our opinions, "We are not here to judge or evaluate your schools or integrazione scolastica. We are here to learn about your work and try to understand how it might inform our own work at home." We suspect that this was an unsatisfying response for at least some of our new colleagues. We were not trying to be evasive, rather we were trying to position ourselves as learners and as guests who had been generously welcomed everywhere we visited.

We found that the initial preparation we had done to become aware of the history, laws, and policies related to integrazione scolastica was appreciated by our Italian colleagues. It was a demonstration of respect for them and the valuable time they were taking to help us learn because we had reciprocated by taking our own time to study in advance. Part of taking the learner stance included being conscious of our own potential biases and being continually vigilant in our effort to avoid making premature judgments that could simply be inaccurate or potentially insensitive in the cultural context.

As learners, we saw our job as primarily asking questions, observing, gathering documents, and asking more questions in an effort to understand. Given that we were in another western culture, it would have been easy to assume that many things are the same, when in fact many foundational elements are quite different, such as how disability is defined, how teachers are prepared, and how schools operate. Although we knew in advance that we should not make assumptions, this became even clearer and more important the deeper we delved into our topic of study. We found it was most helpful to assume that we did not understand and keep asking the same or similar questions of the same people, then several different people, in several settings over time. Although this was not qualitative research in the formal sense, in essence we sought various forms of data triangulation to advance our understanding. This helped reveal the breadth and complexity of phenomena we wrongly presumed to be simple and further validated the value of taking a nonjudgmental learner stance.

Lesson 2: Understanding educational practices requires understanding culture and history

As we attempted to understand an education system that was foreign to us, metaphorically, our initial view was somewhat blurry. As each day of our three-month journey progressed, the image came increasingly into focus. We know that our understanding of the Italian education system and particularly integrazione scolastica is still incomplete, but what we can say with confidence is that it is much clearer to us today than it was when we began our journey. Several of our new Italian colleagues have confirmed for us that we have grasped many of the system's unique characteristics and reminded us that this new learning is no small feat, because as so many Italians told us about their education system, "it's complicated".

An essential aspect of attempting to understand Italian schooling and integrazione scolastica was learning about the history and culture. Learning about historical topics such as: (a) Italy's unification as a country in 1861, (b) the large number of dialects spoken regionally, (c) the

great waves emigration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, (d) its post WWII emergence as the Republic of Italy in 1946, (e) its new constitution crafted on a political philosophy espoused by the resistance to the fascist dictatorship of Mussolini, (f) the post war migration of Italians from the south to north and country to city, and (g) societal unrest and advocacy in the 1960s, are just a few of the many historical events that shaped current schooling and social policies such as *integrazione scolastica*.

During our time in Italy we immersed ourselves in the local culture and community. Not only was this incredibly enjoyable, it was essential to our understanding of schools and *integrazione scolastica*. We lived in apartment, shopped at the open-air vegetable markets, and befriended the local "bakery ladies" and the shopkeepers at our favorite cheese store. We spoke Italian as much as possible, which universally locals seemed to appreciate despite our extremely limited skills. We made our way around town on foot, on old sturdy one-speed bikes with baskets attached to the handlebars for groceries, and occasionally by electric tram or bus. As do most Italians, we traveled between towns and cities by train. We took every opportunity to spend time at local cultural events and with our local hosts and colleagues, most frequently over a delicious Italian meal or a simple espresso and *biscotti*.

Living in a foreign place following local patterns of daily existence offers learning opportunities that cannot be accessed in the cocoon of a rental car and hotel room. As much or more so than any visit to a school, university, or conference, it was during these less formal day-to-day interactions and experiences that what we began to understand the context within which Italian schools and *integrazione* exist. Conversations with friends and colleagues over meals were both enlightening and helpful. So were more distal experiences, like: (a) watching the interactions of a young mother on a bus as she attended to her two children, one with Down syndrome, under the watchful eye and occasional direction of Nona (Grandma); (b) seeing a young man with cerebral palsy descend the steep stairs of a medieval church after attending mass with his parents, nonchalantly using his father's shoulders for balance in this country where physical accessibility challenges are inescapable; (c) noticing how a young man with disabilities independently negotiated a crowded piazza with his family nearby, or (d) enjoying the exuberance of a toddler and mother covered in a messy rainbow of color as they created art together on a long strip of paper on the sidewalk at a street fair. Everyday experiences, seemingly unrelated to the focus of our work, were actually essential to it.

Lesson 3: There is not *one* Italian model

Italy's educational system is national. So as one might expect, there is a substantial amount of national influence over local practice. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to overgeneralize anything you learn about Italian schools or *integrazione scolastica*. In other words, because a school you visit or learn about in one town operates a certain way, you should not assume schools in another town operate similarly. Several of our Italian colleagues informed us that we should expect to notice regional differences. As visitors, some of the differences most noticeable to us were intra-regional -- from school to school within the same region (e.g., school buildings, percent of students identified as disabled, percent of students with disabilities included in regular classes, personnel utilization).

Local schools do have some nationally authorized control (e.g., schedules of operation) and sometimes make choices that bypass national rules. For example, at one point late in our trip we noticed that students in an elementary school were wearing uniforms, blue smocks with white collars. We asked about the uniforms because it was the first time we encountered them having

already visited several other elementary schools. Our hosts were quite surprised, because they said uniforms for children in elementary schools were required as part of a national law. They explained that uniforms helped decrease social stigma differences based on clothing -- especially in schools where there is a wide range of socioeconomic levels. Yet of the nine schools we visited where elementary school-aged children attended, this was the only one where students wore uniforms.

Our main point here is to recognize that even in a national system of education there is substantial variation among schools -- there is no *one* Italian model. Some aspects of Italian society are famous for bureaucracy, yet at the same time Italians take pride in not following rules -- one need only spend time behind the wheel of car or as a passenger in one for a memorable example. It makes for a lively and unexpected way of life. As one of our Italian colleagues explained, "Italy is a country of contradictions". This description might apply to most any country, but especially to a place like Italy with its long history of regional cultures and languages. So when seeking understanding of a policy or practice in a foreign culture, proceed with the recognition that a single national standard of implementation or interpretation is unlikely. You are more likely to uncover multiple realities -- in our case we experienced not one Italy, but many Italys.

Lesson 4: Even accurate information can be misleading

As we embarked on our sabbatical preparatory reading, limited to only English-language resources, temporarily we fell prey to the old adage, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." In retrospect, with the benefit of hindsight, it was interesting to note that although the information we were reading was accurate, after spending some time in Italy, we recognized that we had developed a somewhat inaccurate notion of *integrazione scolastica*. Our inaccurate notions were rooted in missing information about topics such as teacher preparation, employment practices, use of technology in schools, and a variety classroom practices.

The authors of the articles we read were not at fault; rather we had consciously or subconsciously filled in missing pieces of the puzzle based on our own cultural context and knowledge of our own educational system. No one journal article or book chapter can be expected to include all of the relevant contextual information required to understand something as complex as a national education system or a major policy initiative such as *integrazione scolastica* - especially for someone outside the culture. We had hoped that by reading many articles the critical pieces would be identified. Over time, through continued reading and direct experiences in the country, we came to understand that information may be accurate, important, and revealing, but what is missing may be most essential to understanding. We encourage those studying in other cultures to avoid our early misstep by continually seeking those missing pieces.

Lesson 5: Seek ways to share information without judgment and encourage dialogue

A month after returning from Italy, fully re-acclimated to our more typical work and home routines, we recognized that the completion of the sabbatical was a beginning -- not an end. This cross-culture exploration has led to several opportunities for continued learning with some of our new Italian colleagues (e.g., collaborative writing projects and research) and extending our professional networks (e.g., linking our US-based colleagues with colleagues in Italy; being introduced by our Italian colleagues to new colleagues around the world). In this section we focus on a specific example of how we conceptualized and operationalized a way to share

information we had gathered while in Italy in a nonjudgmental way that hopefully can open additional doors to cross-cultural exchange and dialogue.

During our stay in Italy we collected school demographic data at each of the 16 schools we visited. The data represented a subset of variables similar to those we had collected in US schools (e.g., total school population, class size, number of special educators, number of assistants, number of students with disabilities, number of students with disabilities placed in general education classes at least 80% of the school day). We wanted to share the data and better understand its meaning, yet at the same time we were hesitant to make the kinds of judgments we typically would undertake in the discussion section of a study for the reasons we mentioned earlier -- namely that our novice understanding of Italian public education and the culture could lead to unwarranted or potentially inaccurate interpretations of the data. Ultimately we found a way to share the data in a way that we hope might serve as an option for future cross-cultural research under circumstances similar to those we experienced.

During our stay in Italy, we had the opportunity to meet and spend time with three scholars (i.e., Santo DiNuovo, Renzo Vianello, Serafino Buono) who co-edit the journal, *Life Span & Disability* (see Appendix C). We were especially drawn to this journal for two key reasons: (a) it published all of its articles in both Italian and English, and (b) it provided open access to its contents online. These two features meant that information shared in this forum would be more widely available to an international audience interested in *integrazione scolastica* and disability issues.

Upon returning to the US we made a proposal to the editors that we would write an article to submit for peer-review and, if accepted, they would solicit responses from Italian scholars offering their interpretation of our findings. Our article: (a) provided a brief overview of key similarities and differences between the Italian and American special education context to assist the reader in understanding the service delivery data presented, (b) described key findings from a recent line of research exploring service delivery variables in inclusion-oriented schools in the United States; (c) presented findings about the school demographic data representing a subset of these variables collected in the 16 Italian schools, and (d) most notably did not offer interpretations of the findings, but rather posed a series of questions about what implications these data may have for improving practices in public schools in Italy. In reference to this final purpose, the article invited Italian researchers and practitioners who are knowledgeable about inclusion-oriented education for students with disabilities and other special educational needs to comment on the findings and offer their perspectives on their meaning and potential implications. As of this writing, our article has been accepted for publication (Giangreco, Doyle & Suter, in press; see heading labeled **Annotated Bibliography about Integrazione Scolastica 2000-2012**) and is slated for publication in June 2012. In subsequent issues of the journal we anticipate reading responses from Italian scholars offering their perspectives on the meaning and potential implications of these data. We hope this framework of offering conceptual information and data-based findings, then inviting interpretation from cultural insiders, opens a dialogue to facilitate international collaboration and extend our understanding about the roles service delivery data play in improving practices in inclusion-oriented schools in Italy, the US, and potentially other countries. Ultimately, we hope the five lessons learned we have shared about collecting data in a foreign country provide some assistance to others seeking new insights on any number of issues in new cultural contexts. *Buona fortuna e buon viaggio! (Good luck and good journey!)*

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Appendix A

List of Sources about *Integrazione Scolastica* 1987 to 1999

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Appendix C**European and Italian Web Sites Related Education, Inclusion, and Disability**

Note: The web sites listed here are in either English or Italian. Although this is an English-language resource compilation, we have included some Italian language sites given the availability of the web-based translation options (e.g., translate.google.com). Although these types of translation options have limitations, being aware of key Italian web sites will assist in finding additional information from the Italian perspective.

#	<i>Web Site Name</i>	<i>URL</i>
1	Academic Network of European Disability Experts	www.disability-europe.net
2	Associazione Italiana per la Ricerca e l'Intervento nella Psicopatologia dell'Apprendimento (L'AIRIPA) (Italian Association for Research and Intervention in Psychopathology of Learning)	www.airipa.it
3	Associazione per il Coordinamento Nazionale degli Insegnanti Specializzati e la Ricerca Sulle Situazioni di Handicap: L'Associazione (CNIS) (Association for the National Coordination of Specialist Teachers and Research on Handicap Situations)	www.cnis.it
4	Associazione Italiana Persone Down (Italian Association for People with Down syndrome)	www.aipd.it
5	ASTRID-OR Portfolio per l'Assessment, il Trattamento e l'Integrazione delle Disabilità - Orientamento (Portfolio for the Assessment, Treatment	www.giuntios.it/it/catalogo/DI002

	and the Inclusion of Disability - Vocational Guidance)	
6	Centro di Ateneo di Servizi e Ricerca per la Disabilità, la Riabilitazione e l'Integrazione (University Center of Services and Research for Disability, Rehabilitation and Integration)	dpss.psy.unipd.it/cda/ze-index.php
7	Coordinamento Italiano Insegnanti di Sostegno (CIIS) (Italian Coordination Support Teachers)	www.sostegno.org
8	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml
9	Diversabileonline	www.diversabileonline.com
10	Disabilità Intellettive (Intellectual Disabilities)	www.disabilitaintellettive.it
11	Disability Studies Italy	www.milieu.it/DisabilityStudiesItalyEN/DisabilityStudiesItalyEN.html
12	Educazione & Scuola (Education and School)	www.edscuola.it
13	European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education	www.european-agency.org
14	European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education: Inclusive Education in Action	www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/iea

15	Edizioni Centro Studi Erickson (Erickson Issues Research Center)	www.erickson.it
16	European Education Directory <i>Structure of Education in Italy 2005-2006</i>	www.euroeducation.net/prof/italco.htm
17	Federazione Associazioni di Docenti per l'Integrazione Scolastica (FADIS) (Federation Associations of Teachers for School Integration)	www.integrazionescolastica.it
18	Insegnanti di Sostegno (in deroga): Le Norme e le Questioni Costituzionali (Support Teachers [notwithstanding]: The Rules and the Constitutional Issues)	www.superando.it/content/view/4775/116
19	Integrazione – Disabilità: Centro di Documentazione (Integration Disability: Documentation Center)	www.integrazionedisabilita.it/disabilitamo
20	International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)	www.who.int/classifications/icf/en
21	ISTAT: Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (National Institute of Statistics)	www.istat.it
22	La Nostra Famiglia (Our Family)	www.lanostrafamiglia.it

23	Life Span & Disability: An Interdisciplinary Journal	www.lifespan.it
24	Linee Guida per L'integrazione Scolastica Degli Alunni Con Disabilità (Guidelines for School Integration of Students with Disabilities)	www.istruzione.it/alfresco/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/115c59e8-3164-409b-972b-8488eec0a77b/prot4274_09_all.pdf
25	L'integrazione Scolastica nella Percezione degli Insegnanti (Canevaro, D'Alonzo, Ianes & Caldin (2011) (School Integration the Perceptions of Teachers)	www.erickson.it/Libri/Pagine/Scheda-Libro.aspx?ItemId=39936
26	Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca (MIUR) (Ministry of Instruction of the University of Research)	www.istruzione.it www.istruzione.it/web/istruzione/disabilita
27	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development <i>Education at a Glance 2008: OECD Briefing Note for Italy</i>	www.oecd.org/dataoecd/21/17/41278806.pdf
28	Persone con Disabilità e Diritti (Persons with Disabilities and Rights)	www.handylex.org
29	Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education Adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality Salamanca, Spain, 7-10 June 1994	www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA_E.PDF

30	Sindrome di Down (Down syndrome)	http://www.sindrome-down.it
31	Superando (Surpass)	www.superando.it
32	UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization	www.unesco.org
33	UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre	www.unicef-irc.org
34	World Health Organization	www.who.int