

Life of P.D.P.s: Migrant Learners at the Crossroad of Disadvantage and Disability

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Abstract:

The present contribution aims at understanding the role of globalization in shaping the meaning of Special Educational Needs. One of the many facets of global mobility enticed by globalization is the need for State school systems to accommodate S.E.N. students with a migratory background. The present proposal focuses on the understudied area of Disadvantage category within S.E.N. discourse, focusing on students with a migratory background.

Italy adopted the one-classroom approach to Special Education by introduction of Law 517 in 1977. Concomitantly, Italy's commitment to European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights, art. 14, and United Nation Convention on Rights of People with Disability, introduced in 2006, mandated the importance of inclusive education for all learners. Elaborating a working definition of inclusivity and inclusive education remains, however, challenging both within and across countries, as it shall consider multiple differential axes intersecting S.E.N. Thus, the issues emerging from the concurring condition of being a Disadvantaged student – a particular category of Special Education in the Italian context, while carrying a history of migration, shall be approached with an intersectional lens.

At the national level, the Ministry of Education, University and Research issued a Directive in 2012 followed by Guidelines in 2013. These introduced the concept of Special Education Needs following UNESCO's 1994 Salamanca Statement. Italian Directive and Guidelines devote particular attention to pupils with migratory backgrounds, envisioning compensatory and dispensatory measures by drafting a Personalized Didactic Plans (P.D.P.s). The proposal presents the course P.D.P.s drafted for Lower Secondary students: from assessment procedure to implication on student population.

Data were gathered during ethnographic fieldwork: semi-structured interviews with school personnel in Lower Secondary schools in the peripheries of Turin, Northern Italy, will be presented. Constructivist grounded theory and theoretical sampling were used in the process of participant selection and data gathering. Data analysis, carried out through the individuation of recurrent meanings, originated by the constant comparison of interviews, shows how 1) temporary Disadvantages are stabilized within P.D.P.s usage, thus creating a steady Disadvantage; 2) inclusive education for all shifts to inclusivity being premised on perceived learners' individual deficit.

The data are discussed adopting a Disability Critical Race Theory perspective, pointing to teaching practices that can generate disablement despite inclusive purposes. Disability Studies in Education are beneficial to the Italian system, as a reflection on how school inclusion is eschewed by coopting Special Education discourse, laden with medicalization and deficit-thinking towards migrant students and their families. Finally, a counter-understanding of disablement is proposed, based on the Foucauldian concept of apparatus. Describing the entanglement of discursive practices, an apparatus consists



in the linkage of knowledge and power to organize population according to biopolitical needs. Central to biopolitics is the distribution of ability/disability, in what Shelley L. Tremain has called the apparatus of disability: through the notion of deficit, fostered by a subtractive view of migrant students and their cultural resources, migrant learners are made continuous subjects to Special Education.

Keywords: S.E.N., migrant students, disadvantage, DisCrit

