IN-CON-TRA
DIDATTICA E PEDAGOGIA DELL'INCLUSIONE
26

SILVIA **GUETTA**
STEFANO **COSTANTINI**
MARCO **TIBALDINI**

REIMAGINING EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

THE SENSEI PROJECT: A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE ON TEACHER TRAINING AND CULTURAL COEXISTENCE

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Non c'è nulla che sia ingiusto
quanto far le parti eguali fra disuguali.

— Don Lorenzo Milani

La Collana intende valorizzare la dimensione educativa e formativa in ottica inclusiva e della convivenza pacifica. In tal senso la Didattica e la Pedagogia speciale, in correlazione col panorama più ampio della Pedagogia generale e sociale e delle Scienze dell'educazione, si configurano come ambito privilegiato entro cui dibattere attorno a tematiche e problematiche relative ai processi d'inclusione, d'intercultura e di pace, per poterli analizzare e comprendere, a livello teorico-pratico, creando spazi d'incontro e di confronto necessari e fondamentali in prospettiva di valorizzazione delle differenze e di accettazione della diversità, intesa come categoria caratterizzante l'individuo.

Costruire reticolarità e integrazione fra i diversi saperi e tra le varie dimensioni dell'identità (corpo, mente, emozioni, contesti, culture e religioni) dell'essere umano, costituisce la base fondativa e la finalità dei volumi di questa Collana che intende porsi in un confronto nazionale ed internazionale per fare dialogare le Scienze dell'educazione col territorio ed i saperi locali e contribuire a promuovere integrazione scolastica e sociale, dal Nido all'Università, entro ed oltre la scuola, la famiglia ed i diversi contesti educativi.

Classificazione Decimale Dewey:
370.113 (23.) EDUCAZIONE PROFESSIONALE

Soggetto:
JNMT. Formazione degli insegnanti

Qualificatore:
1D. Europa

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ISBN
979-12-218-1752-2

PRIMA EDIZIONE
ROMA 24 APRILE 2026

«A good class is not a regiment marching in lockstep; it is an orchestra performing the same symphony. Each student plays their own instrument, there is no way around that. The real challenge lies in knowing our musicians well and finding harmony among them.»

Daniel Pennac

SUMMARY

Reimagining Education for Social Inclusion and Human Development
ISBN 979-12-218-2574-9
DOI 10.53136/97912218257491
pp. 11-14 (aprile 2026)

INTRODUCTION

Silvia Guetta
Stefano Costantini
Marco Tibaldini

The School EducatioN for Sustainable and Equal Inclusion (SENSEI) project, implemented between 15 June 2023 and 14 June 2026, was launched at a time when European education systems are required to undertake a profound re-examination of the aims, practices, and cultural foundations of teaching. The increasing complexity of contemporary societies, the diversification of student identities, and the persistence of educational inequalities require investing in teacher education and in the capacity of schools to provide inclusive learning environments. In this framework, SENSEI results in an innovative and systemic initiative designed to advance the transformation of history education through an approach that integrates inclusion, sustainability, and high-quality teacher professional development. Eleven partners,[1] coordinated by EuroClio (European

(1) In addition to EuroClio, European Association of History Educators (Netherlands) - coordinator of the SENSEI project - the Consortium also included the following institutions: Associação de Professores de História (Portugal); Clio '92, Associazione di insegnanti e ricercatori sulla didattica

Association of History Educators), SENSEI project explicitly contrasted the formal and non-formal dimensions of education. On the one hand, it engaged schools and universities responsible for initial teacher education and in-service professional development; on the other, it incorporated organisations active in non-formal education, working through participatory, community-based, and workshop-oriented methodologies. This dual perspective strengthened the professional competences of educators and of teachers of history and citizenship, valuing both the institutional frameworks of formal training and the pedagogical innovation characteristic of non-formal contexts. EuroClio's European scope functioned as both an organisational anchor and a pedagogical–epistemic resource, with history—taught through comparative and dialogic approaches—providing a shared space for engaging plural identities, narratives, and memories. The project adopts a broad, policy-aligned understanding of inclusion, treating it not as a set of targeted measures for specific groups but as a structural principle guiding the entire educational process. Diversity is addressed across multiple dimensions, including learners with special educational needs, high-achieving students, those with migration backgrounds, members of national, cultural, or religious minorities, students from socio-economically disadvantaged contexts, and LGBTQI+ learners. Inclusion is understood as a continuous process aimed at removing barriers to presence,

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della storia (Italy); Centar za stručno usavršavanje u obrazovanju u Leskovcu (Serbia); Global Impact Institute (Czech Republic); Historielærerforeningen (Denmark); Euskal Herriko Ikastolak (Spain); Labyrinth School in Brno (Czech Republic), Scoala Gimnaziala "Otilia Cazimir" in Iasi (Romania); Universitá di Firenze - FORLIPISI Department, University of Florence (Italy); Uniwersytet Wrocławski (Poland).

participation, and learning, rooted in a shared cultural and institutional transformation. SENSEI articulated its vision through three concise strategic aims: developing an initial teacher education module based on flexible and innovative methodologies adaptable to diverse school contexts; designing an international blended learning programme for continuous professional development that uses historical knowledge to foster inclusive classroom practices with potential transferability across subjects; and mobilising a broad, reliable network of history and citizenship teachers able to sustain a stable professional community grounded in collaboration and transnational exchange. It relied on a set of functional components, including interactive training modules, blended learning platforms, networking tools, feedback and evaluation mechanisms, repositories of inclusive practices, translation and subtitling services, certification procedures, and a coordinated management structure, ensuring quality, accessibility, and coherence. Its sustained attention to accessibility, across both digital and in-person formats, reinforced the embedding of inclusion as a structural principle rather than a merely declarative aim. The methodological framework is presented in highly condensed form as a collaborative model linking teachers, trainers, researchers, and institutions. History—because of its role in shaping identities and collective narratives—served as a bridging discipline for testing pedagogies that embrace multiple perspectives, question dominant narratives, and cultivate democratic citizenship. Through streamlined training pathways, professional communities, and the trial of innovative didactic tools, SENSEI project sought to generate sustainable improvements in the quality of history education in Europe by strengthening shared

competences, practices, and professional cultures. This volume offers a concise and coherent reflection on the project's theoretical foundations, methodological choices, and implications for teacher education. Inclusion is presented as an epistemological and pedagogical stance that permeates every phase of knowledge construction, from content selection to activity design, from educational relationships to the shaping of learning environments. In this perspective, teacher education emerges as a domain of cultural and political responsibility, shaping the role of education within the pluralistic societies of the twenty-first century. It is from this vision that the pathway presented in the following pages takes shape.

PART I

INNOVATING HISTORY TEACHING

Reimagining Education for Social Inclusion and Human Development
ISBN 979-12-218-2574-9
DOI 10.53136/97912218257492
pp. 17-50 (aprile 2026)

CHAPTER I

SENSEI PROJECT FOUNDATIONS

Stefano Costantini*

> "The student is the one who builds their own path, and the teacher is the one who accompanies them along the way".
>
> Lev Semënovič Vygotskij

1.1. The most recent literature on educational and social inclusion

In the educational contexts of industrialized countries, classrooms are becoming increasingly heterogeneous and reflect ongoing social transformations, embodying the features of a "social microcosm" that condenses within itself the dynamics of globalized markets(1). The effects of globalization have led teachers to engage with students whose cultural backgrounds, experiences, and needs differ widely, prompting reflection on individual learning processes, competencies,

* University of Florence.

(1) UNESCO (2020). *Inclusion and education: All means all. Global monitoring report*. Paris: UNESCO; Cf. UNESCO (2020). *Towards inclusion in education: Status, trends and challenges. The UNESCO Salamanca Statement 25 years on*. Paris: UNESCO.

and expectations. This growing diversity requires an educational approach that ensures equal opportunities and recognizes the influence of cultural models on learning processes[2]. In parallel, schools are increasingly configured as relational environments that contribute to students' personal and social well-being, taking on the characteristics of an educating community capable of dynamically adapting to the needs of its members[3]. Within this framework, inclusive education emerges as a democratic value that involves the entire school community and is enacted across everyday practice, with teachers as its key interpreters and protagonists through the pedagogical choices they implement in daily school life[4]. Inclusive education, in fact, not only promotes openness and reciprocity, but must also be able to recognize and counteract the mechanisms that generate exclusion and discrimination[5]. It therefore becomes essential for teachers to analyse the causes of marginalization and to design everyday educational practices oriented toward three objectives: 1. preventing exclusion; 2. fostering respect for rights and responsibilities; 3. creating welcoming and participatory environments[6]. From this perspective, the principle

(2) Costantini, S. (2025). *Competenze socio emotive e drop out. Un'analisi dei vissuti scolastici di giovani studenti di origine cinese*. Roma: Aracne, 1-256.

(3) Pantic, N., & Florian, L. (2021). *Developing Teachers as Agents of Inclusion and Social Justice*. «European Journal of Teacher Education», 44(1), 4-19.

(4) Guetta, S. (2015). *Educare a un modo futuro. Alleanze interculturali, dialoghi interreligiosi e sviluppo della cultura di pace.* Franco Angeli: Milano; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2022). Teacher Professional Learning for Inclusion. EASNIE.

(5) Coelho, F., Blázquez, F., & Cubo, S. (2017). *Teacher training, attitudes and inclusion*. International Journal of Technology and Inclusive Education, 6(1), 1032-1040.

(6) Sabol, T. J., Pianta, R. C. (2022). *The Role of School Climate in Supporting Student Development.* Child Development Perspectives, 16(1), 30–36.

that "*every young learner counts equally*"[7], means that the vision of inclusive education aims to facilitate access, presence, participation, and achievement for all students within the educational system[8]. Historically, attention to educational inclusion emerged within the field of disability and subsequently expanded to address the needs of students who are linguistically or economically disadvantaged[9]. The Salamanca Statement (1994) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) subsequently reinforced the idea of a school responsible for removing barriers and promoting meaningful learning experiences capable of broadening students' cultural and personal horizons. The literature shows that, a few years after the publication of these international documents, in most school systems in industrialized countries, inclusion and exclusion have come to represent opposing processes with significant social and democratic implications. Comparative analyses indicate that educational exclusion not only amplifies social and economic inequalities but also reproduces value systems and pedagogical practices that sustain structural and cultural injustices. Conversely, theoretical models and inclusive practices outline a democratic educational system grounded in equity and equal rights, and conceived as an ecological model in which communities, families, educational services, teachers, and students cooperate responsibly, fostering a shared

(7) UNESCO (2021). *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education*. UNESCO. OECD (2023). *Education at a Glance 2023*: *OECD Indicators*. OECD Publishing.

(8) Benavot, A., & Naidoo, J. (2018). *A new era for education in the global development agenda*. Childhood Education, 94(3), 10-15.

(9) OECD (2017). *The OECD handbook for innovative learning environments*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

awareness of inclusion as both a personal and collective value[10]. The SENSEI project identifies respect for differences, collaboration, and community engagement as the foundations of an inclusive education that recognizes every young learner as an active participant. This implies that teachers critically examine their own ideas and practices, adopting a flexible pedagogy attentive to students' needs. Professional reflection makes it possible to identify the representations and social categories that hinder participation, thereby requiring an analysis of the cultural frameworks that shape the construction and transmission of school knowledge[11].

1.2. The SENSEI inclusive methodology as a framework for equity and school inclusion

Thanks to the joint efforts of the eleven Consortium members coordinated by EuroClio, the SENSEI project has developed an experimental methodology to promote inclusion within classroom groups, particularly by prioritizing the use of History-related disciplinary content and a pedagogy attentive to the selection of themes, the criteria for choosing and presenting materials, and, more broadly, an educational vision grounded in equity. Underpinning this approach is the conviction that the learning environment is crucial for the development of everyone's potential. The methodology is designed to respond to the needs

(10) Slee, R. (2019). *Belonging in an Age of Exclusion*. Routledge.

(11) Deroncele-Acosta, A., Ellis, A. (2024). *Overcoming Challenges and Promoting Positive Education in Inclusive Schools*, Education Sciences, 14(11); Cavendish, W., Barrenechea, I., Young, A., & Moscoso, M. (2025). *Teacher Reflexivity and Equity Pedagogy in Inclusive Classrooms*. «Teaching Exceptional Children», 00400599251357953.

of students with disabilities, with migratory backgrounds, belonging to cultural or religious minorities, coming from socioeconomically disadvantaged contexts, or identifying as part of LGBTQIA+ communities.

1.2.1. *Students with special educational needs*

Over the past two decades, within contemporary pedagogical debate, inclusion has come to be understood in its broadest sense as the full support of all students' participation in public schools, regardless of ability, gender, language, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, disability, or sexual orientation[12]. Promoting the inclusion of students with special educational needs entails a cultural and systemic–organizational transformation that enables genuine and sustainable participation for all, moving beyond merely compensatory approaches and fostering learning environments that are truly equitable and participatory[13]. The concept of SEN has undergone a significant evolution, shifting from a medical model of disability to a biopsychosocial perspective[14]. The WHO defines disability as a condition involving physical, psychological, and social dimensions, shaped by the interaction between the individual and the environment[15]. The

(12) Slee, R. (2018). *Defining the scope of inclusive education*.

(13) Lambert, N., Frederickson, N. (2023). *Inclusion for children with special educational needs: How can psychology help?.* Educational psychology (pp. 68-90). Routledge.

(14) EUROPEAN AGENCY FOR SPECIAL NEEDS AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION (2018). *Evidence of the Link Between Inclusive Education and Social Inclusion*. Odense: EASNIE.

(15) WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION. (2001). *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* (ICF). Geneva: WHO; UNITED NATIONS (2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD). New York: United Nations.

OECD considers students with SEN to be those who cannot benefit from mainstream education without additional adaptations to content or teaching methods[16]. Nevertheless, substantial inequalities persist: many children and adolescents with disabilities continue to encounter barriers in accessing education, healthcare, transportation, and social participation, particularly in developing countries where stigma and discrimination are more widespread[17]. The inclusion of students with SEN represents a complex challenge that demands coordinated action across the system, the school, the family, and the wider community. Education plays a crucial role in personal development and in social and occupational participation, contributing to the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities and fostering inclusivity beginning within the school context[18]. This does not coincide with the mere physical presence of students in the classroom; it also requires teachers and educators to adopt educational strategies and support tools such as the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), differentiated instruction, and, where appropriate, assistive technologies that enable students with SEN to fully participate in school activities, supporting their psychological well-being and ensuring access to an equitable curriculum[19]. From this perspective, inclusive education is

(16) OECD. (2005). *Students with Disabilities, Learning Difficulties and Disadvantages: Statistics and Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

(17) Angelkoska, S. (2015). *Education of Students with Special Educational Needs and Their Inclusion in the Community*. Bulgarian Comparative Education Society.

(18) Ainscow, M. (2020). *Promoting inclusion and equity in education: Lessons from international experiences.* Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy, 6(1), 7–16; Florian, L. (2021). *Reimagining Special Education: Why New Approaches Are Needed*. Frontiers in Education, 6, 1–10.

(19) OECD. (2022). *Equity and Inclusion in Education: Finding Strength through Diversity*. Paris: OECD Publishing; EUROPEAN AGENCY FOR

grounded in three fundamental principles: 1. the *recognition of diversity*, whereby students bring with them cultural, linguistic, cognitive, and learning-pace differences that can be valued through culturally responsive teaching practices and differentiated instructional approaches; 2. *equity*, since the construction of inclusive school communities depends on two central dimensions: the social dimension, linked to the school climate, and the interpersonal dimension, based on relationships and socio-emotional aspects, which requires adaptations in materials, timing, and tools, as well as the guarantee of an accessible physical environment[20]; 3. *the creation of a positive learning climate*, built on relationships that respect diversity and on cooperative methodologies that foster participation while reducing social barriers[21]. The involvement of families and the wider community further enhances the educational process, broadening the resources available and deepening the understanding of students' needs. However, the implementation of inclusion still presents significant challenges: limited financial resources, gaps in professional training, unfavourable attitudes, rigid curricula, and regulatory inconsistencies. Overcoming these obstacles requires a systemic approach involving local policymakers, school leaders, and teachers, oriented

SPECIAL NEEDS AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION. (2023). *Inclusive Education in Action: Empowering Learners and Building Resilient Communities*. Odense: EASNIE.

(20) UNESCO (2020). *Inclusion and education: All means all. Global monitoring report.* Op. cit.; OECD. (2022). *Equity and Inclusion in Education: Finding Strength through Diversity*. Op. cit.; EUROPEAN AGENCY FOR SPECIAL NEEDS AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION. (2023). *Inclusive Education in Action: Empowering Learners and Building Resilient Communities*. Op. cit.

(21) Nilholm, C., Göransson, K. (2017). *What Is Meant by Inclusion? – An Analysis of High Impact Research in North America and Europe*. European Journal of Special Needs Education, 32 (3): 437–451.

toward targeted policies supported by adequate investment and toward the development of a school culture that values diversity. Only coordinated and systemic commitment can ensure quality education for all and effectively support diversity within educational contexts[22]. Indeed, recent literature shows that students with SEN placed in inclusive settings achieve better academic outcomes, develop more meaningful social relationships than their peers in segregated environments, gain broader future opportunities, and experience a strengthened sense of self. Well-being — linked to self-esteem and socio-emotional dimensions — constitutes a central indicator of inclusion[23]. Since children and adolescents spend a substantial part of their lives at school, it is essential to ensure equal opportunities and an inclusive climate, supporting students with disabilities under the same conditions as their peers. From this perspective, inclusive education is understood as a systemic approach that adapts the school environment to students' needs, rather than the other way around. The effective inclusion of students with SEN depends on a set of interconnected factors involving: 1. *educational dimension*, which reaffirms the pedagogical and formative value of school inclusion and encompasses the most effective methodologies such as balanced class composition, the adoption of differentiated teaching practices, the use of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), co-teaching, assistive technologies, and the placement of students with SEN in mainstream classes where they achieve significantly better academic outcomes than peers in segregated settings;

(22) Damyanov, K. (2024). *Educational Interventions for Children with Special Educational Needs: A Path Towards Inclusivity*. Cineforum, 64 (3), 88, 100.

(23) Hunt, P. F. (2019). *Inclusive education as global development policy*. The SAGE handbook of inclusion and diversity in education, 116-129.

2. *relational dimension*, which concerns the decisive role of teacher support, the quality of peer interactions, and family involvement, whose attitudes significantly influence the inclusive climate and students' participation[24]; 3. *individual dimension*, which highlights how educational policies affect the overall well-being of students with SEN, influencing not only academic outcomes but also the social, psychological, and practical aspects of their experience. In inclusive settings, moreover, students without SEN also benefit, showing significant effects such as increased acceptance, cooperation, and reduced prejudice, with positive implications for social cohesion[25]. The strategic adoption of differentiated and continuously updated teaching approaches for students with SEN represents a key element in effectively responding to the variety of learning needs present in contemporary classrooms. Such approaches make it possible to offer materials aligned with the curriculum and learning pathways tailored to individual potential, thereby supporting the authentic participation of all students[26].

1.2.2. *Students with migratory backgrounds*

Profound social, political, and economic changes, together with natural disasters, are recurring factors underlying

(24) Jose, P. E., Ryan, N., & Pryor, J. (2012). *Does social connectedness promote a greater sense of well-being in adolescence over time?.* Journal of research on adolescence, 22(2), 235-251; Paseka, A., & Schwab, S. (2020). *Parents' attitudes towards inclusive education and their perceptions of inclusive teaching practices and resources*. «Eur. J. Spec. Needs Educ». 35, 254–272.

(25) Brussino, O. (2020). *Mapping policy approaches and practices for the inclusion of students with special education needs*. OECD Education Working Papers.

(26) Dewi, A. E. R. (2024). *Effectiveness of implementing inclusive education: Challenges and opportunities in culturally diverse classrooms*. Journal of Pedagogy, 1(3), 1-7.

global migratory movements[27]. In response to these dynamics, host countries are called upon to identify effective strategies to address the multiple needs of migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers[28]. One of the most evident consequences of these movements is the increasing cultural heterogeneity of school classrooms worldwide.

In this context, schools are assigned an increasingly central role in fostering the inclusion of students with a migratory background across all dimensions of school life[29]. However, despite a student population that is diversifying at a steady pace, the composition of the teaching workforce has not evolved at the same rate and has often been unprepared to adequately reflect ongoing demographic changes[30]. The inclusion of students with a migratory background in education systems presents significant challenges, particularly in improving academic outcomes and promoting social inclusion. Special education strategies, therefore, play a central role, as they make it possible to address the specific needs of these students and to support learning pathways often marked by linguistic barriers, complex cultural transitions, and educational discontinuities. These factors negatively affect both academic performance and processes of integration within the school

(27) Nieto, S. (2023). *Language, Culture, and Teaching: Critical Perspectives*. Routledge.

(28) Dervin, F. (2022). *Towards Post-Intercultural Education*. Springer. UN COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (CRPD), *General comment No. 4 (2016), Article 24: Right to inclusive education, 2 September 2016*, CRPD/C/GC/4; UNHCR. «Education». 2019.

(29) Vassallo, B. (2024). *The role of the school leader in the inclusion of migrant families and students*. Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 52(1), 171-188.

(30) OECD (2023). *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining an Effective and Diverse Teaching Workforce*. OECD Publishing.

community. This highlights the need for educational policies that place inclusion at the centre of their priorities, creating the conditions for greater equity and for strengthening social cohesion[31]. In a context characterized by increasing heterogeneity within the student population, education — not only as a fundamental right — plays a decisive role in the inclusion processes of children and adolescents with a migratory background, helping to reduce social and economic disadvantage and supporting life trajectories often marked by vulnerability. Recent research shows that many approaches to inclusion remain anchored in a *deficit logic*, focused on students' shortcomings rather than on their actual needs, assuming that it is they who must adapt to the demands of the school[32]. Alternatively, a socio-ecological perspective proposes a paradigm shift, interpreting inclusion as the result of the dynamic interaction between individual characteristics and educational contexts, encompassing cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions that manifest both inside and outside the classroom[33].

Despite progress in European policies toward intercultural education, teaching practices still do not guarantee equal participation for second-language learners, who face challenges such as *acculturation stress*, shaped by cultural

(31) Van Der Velden, R., & Wolbers, M. H. J. (2022). *School segregation, educational inequality and social cohesion: Evidence from European education systems*. European Sociological Review, 38(2), 245–262.

(32) Nilholm, C., & Göransson, K. (2023). *Inclusive education and the problem of the 'deficit model': Rethinking support for students with diverse backgrounds*. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 27(4), 389–406.

(33) De Leeuw, R., Zijlstra, H., & Van Der Veen, I. (2022). *A socio-ecological approach to inclusive education: Understanding how classroom, school and community factors shape students' participation and well-being*. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 26(14), 1520–1538.

distance and mitigated by inclusive school environments and adequate social support[34]. Empirical evidence shows a significant correlation between high concentrations of students with a migratory background and lower academic outcomes. Comparative analyses based on international assessments such as TIMSS, PIRLS, and PISA confirm that high levels of segregation are associated with marked score gaps between native and migrant students, gaps that cannot be attributed to other individual or family-related factors[35]. *School segregation* often mirrors residential segregation and is reinforced by housing patterns, family choices, and institutional dynamics, producing negative effects not only for migrant students but also for native students, with significant implications for educational quality, inequality, and social cohesion[36]. This underscores the need for policies aimed at reducing segregation and fostering school environments that are more equitable, inclusive, and socially diverse[37]. In this light, it is essential to identify and remove the barriers that limit access to quality education, while at the same time strengthening ties with the community. Relationships among teachers, students, families, and the local context represent a crucial element in creating inclusive

(34) Sierens, S., Van Avermaet, P., & Slembrouck, S. (2023). *Multilingual learners' participation in classroom interaction: The role of inclusive teaching practices and socio-emotional support*. Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 44(5), 421–438.

(35) Schnepf, S. V. (2022). *Educational outcomes of immigrant students: A comparative perspective*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

(36) Alegre, M. A., Benito, R., & González-Balletbó, I. (2022). *Reducing school segregation through education policy: Evidence, challenges and future directions*. Journal of Education Policy, 37(6), 857–875.

(37) Nusche, D. (2009), *What Works in Migrant Education?: A Review of Evidence and Policy Options*, OECD Education Working Papers, No. 22, OECD Publishing.

environments[38]. The absence of social support — particularly for students belonging to minority groups — can perpetuate forms of exclusion and widen inequalities in learning experiences. Within this framework, relationships with peers, teachers, and other actors in the school system play a central role[39]. Among the most effective practices are the use of differentiated materials, activities that value students' prior knowledge, cooperative methodologies applied in pairs or small groups, and flexible classroom management. Evidence shows that such strategies improve school satisfaction, sense of belonging, and academic outcomes, while also helping prevent early school leaving without compromising students' cultural identity[40]. Alongside instructional practices, peers and mentoring programmes play a crucial role, particularly in school contexts with limited resources. In these cases, interactions among students create the conditions for mutual support and reciprocal learning, with positive effects on communication skills, socio-emotional development, and, more broadly, academic performance. In culturally heterogeneous classrooms, peer support is a key element for improving collective behaviour and enabling teachers to respond more effectively to students' individual needs. Collaborative practices enhance school engagement, facilitate language acquisition, and promote socio-emotional

(38) Fejes, A., Chamberland, M., & Sultana, R. G. (2022). *Migration, educational and career guidance and social inclusion*. International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 22(2), 347-361.

(39) Lykourinou, A. (2025). *Inclusive Education and Migrant Students' Sense of Belonging: Challenges and Teaching Practices in the Greek School Environment.*

(40) Allen, K., Kern, M. L., Vella-Brodrick, D., Hattie, J., & Waters, L. (2018). *What Schools Need to Know About Fostering School Belonging: A Meta-analysis*. Educational Psychology Review, 30, 1–34.

well-being, creating the conditions for the development of interpersonal competencies such as empathy, cooperation, and self-confidence. These dynamics contribute significantly to the construction of a more inclusive classroom climate[41]. However, the effectiveness of mentoring programmes depends on their design; interventions that are not adequately structured may produce unintended effects, such as marginalization or the reinforcement of perceptions of difference and incompetence. From this perspective, targeted investment in teacher education – both through specific training for future teachers and through professional development programmes for in-service staff – is essential to ensure sensitive, effective practices that are genuinely oriented toward the needs of students with a migratory background[42]. In the context of developing effective inclusive-education interventions, the literature underscores the importance of well-designed practices, strong professional competencies, and community networks that sustain school environments oriented toward educational success, social integration, and equity. Authentic inclusion, however, requires a systemic transformation that reshapes teaching practices, school relationships, and professional attitudes, moving beyond deficit-based logic and promoting an educational culture grounded in the valorisation of diversity[43].

(41) Messiou, K., & Azaola, M. C. (2018). *A peer-mentoring scheme for immigrant students in English secondary schools: a support mechanism for promoting inclusion?.* International Journal of Inclusive Education, 22(2), 142-157.

(42) Guilherme Leite, M. Alves Martins, S. Gaitas, R. Laranjeira, C. Alves & T. Sarabando (2025) *Can peer mediation foster migrant students' inclusion in mainstream classrooms? An exploratory case study,* International Journal of Inclusive Education, 29:14, 2471-2484.

(43) Arvaniti, F. (2025) *The effectiveness of special education interventions in promoting the academic and social integration of migrant children*, Knowledge. International Journal Vol.69.2.

1.2.3. *Students belonging to cultural or religious minorities*

In contemporary social contexts, religion plays a central yet ambivalent role: it can foster social cohesion or, conversely, fuel intergroup divisions depending on how it is incorporated into social, political, and cultural systems[44]. On the one hand, it contributes to the construction of shared identities and a sense of community; on the other, it can generate tensions, discrimination, and conflict, particularly when different religious traditions coexist. Understanding these dynamics is crucial, as recognising the profound inequalities affecting ethno-cultural and religious minorities is as significant as the capacity to promote peaceful coexistence and inclusive national identities, an essential educational imperative today[45]. This concerns both the long-term sustainability of societies and the immediate challenges faced by school systems, where such disparities persist. These inequalities manifest in low academic achievement, disproportionate disciplinary exclusions, episodes of racism among peers or by teachers, and forms of de facto segregation, highlighting the urgency of genuinely inclusive educational policies.

The growing ethno-cultural and religious diversity within educational settings raises central questions for liberal democracies: how can the recognition of differences be reconciled with the construction of a shared identity? How can citizens be educated to live in pluralistic societies?

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(44) Cerna, L., Mezzanotte, C., Rutigliano, A., Brussino, O., Santiago, P., Borgonovi, F., & Guthrie, C. (2019). *Promoting inclusive education for diverse societies: A conceptual framework.* OECD Education Working Papers No. 260.

(45) OECD (2019), *Education at a Glance. OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

Why do educational inequalities linked to diversity persist, and how can they be addressed? These issues are embedded in broader debates on managing difference and including "newcomers" with responses varying across national contexts[46]. The analysis draws on three main theoretical frameworks. *Social capital theory* emphasizes how networks, trust, and shared norms constitute essential resources for cooperation: religious communities may act as "bridges," fostering interfaith dialogue, or as "barriers" when they remain closed and reinforce sectarianism.

Religious pluralism theory highlights that the coexistence of different traditions can foster tolerance and minority participation but may also produce fragmentation in contexts marked by suspicion or hostility. Finally, the *intergroup-relations perspective* sheds light on the role of religion in dynamics between social groups: mutual perceptions, historical legacies, and political and economic factors shape interreligious interactions. Many religious traditions promote values such as peace, justice, and tolerance, and religious leaders and institutions can contribute to conflict mediation and the strengthening of social cohesion[47]. Despite the international framework formally recognising the right to equitable and inclusive education — as established by Sustainable Development Goal 4 and by OECD definitions of equity — students with migratory backgrounds or belonging to cultural and religious minorities continue to experience significant educational

(46) Gholami, R., & Costantini, G. (2025). *Educating for living diversity: 'Migrant' identities, belonging and community-centred pedagogies for social justice*. British Educational Research Journal, 51(1), 25-48.

(47) Rizwan, M. (2024). *The relationship between religion and social cohesion in multicultural societies.* Journal of Management and Social Sciences Review, 2(2), 8-23.

disparities, with widening gaps following the COVID-19 pandemic[48]. In advancing genuinely inclusive educational policy, it is essential to support the full potential of all students, fostering belonging, self-esteem, and the capacity to engage constructively within culturally complex societies. Recent studies indeed show significant differences in the school experiences of students belonging to minority groups and underscore the decisive role of teachers' attitudes. The *Systems View of School Climate* (SVSC) model proposed by Rudasill et al. (2018)[49], grounded in Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1989)[50], expands the analysis of school climate by showing how dimensions such as ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation influence relationships within the school. These factors, together with cultural norms and the broader community context, must be integrated into interpretative models to more fully understand how school systems function[51]. A broad conception of equitable and inclusive education must support the full developmental potential of all students, promoting belonging, self-esteem, and the competences needed to interact in complex societies. This perspective recognizes the role of education in counteracting inequalities and fostering social cohesion. The pedagogical dimension of inclusion is grounded in approaches based

(48) EUROPEAN COMMISSION, (2024). *Education and training monitor 2024: Comparative report.* Publications Office of the European Union.

(49) Rudasill, K. M., Snyder, K. E., Levinson, H., & L. Adelson, J. (2018). *Systems view of school climate: A theoretical framework for research.* Educational Psychology Review, 30(1), 35-60.

(50) Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). *Ecological models of human development.* International encyclopaedia of education, 3(2), 37-43.

(51) Navarro, J. L., & Tudge, J. R. (2023). *Technologizing Bronfenbrenner: neo-ecological theory.* Current Psychology, 42(22), 19338-19354.

on care and responsiveness to diversity, rooted in sociocultural and constructivist theories that conceive learning as an active, situated process deeply shaped by relational contexts[52]. Effective teaching requires intentionally connecting disciplinary content to students' experiences, valuing diversity as a resource, and recognising the specific contribution of teachers from underrepresented groups. The literature shows that such teachers adopt particularly effective practices, including maintaining high expectations, building caring relationships, acting as cultural mediators in everyday school life, using culturally relevant pedagogy, and explicitly addressing discrimination related to cultural or religious differences[53]. Culturally responsive pedagogies, often adopted by teachers belonging to minority groups, include the use of linguistic and interactional patterns aligned with students' communicative styles, together with a greater willingness to address issues of power, inequality, and discrimination linked to cultural or religious differences. These practices, widely documented in the literature, contribute to creating learning environments that are more equitable and sensitive to diversity[54]. They constitute forms of emancipatory pedagogy, made possible by an awareness of the "permanence of racism"[55]. Within this framework, the role of teachers emerges as crucial in

(52) Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Harvard University Press.

(53) Villegas, A. M., & Irvine, J. J. (2010). *Diversifying the teaching force: An examination of major arguments*. The Urban Review, 42, 175–192.

(54) Thompson, A. (2004). *Caring and colortalk*. In Siddle Walker, V. & Snarey, J. Eds., *Race-ing moral formation African American perspectives on care and justice*, pp. 23–37. Teachers College Press, New York.

(55) Duncan, K. E. (2020). *"That's my job": Black teachers' perspectives on helping black students navigate white supremacy.* Race Ethnicity and Education, 25(7), 978–996.

promoting the inclusion of students belonging to cultural or religious minorities. Cultural competence refers to the ability to interact effectively with individuals from different backgrounds and, in educational settings, encompasses behaviours, attitudes, and policies that enable teachers and school leaders to recognize students' cultural needs, critically reflect on their own biases, and adapt instructional practices to create genuinely inclusive environments. This competence — which entails knowledge of inclusive and multicultural education — allows for the coherent integration of pedagogical practices, institutional policies, and broader educational aims[56]. It can be developed through *culturally competent educational practices* adopted by teachers[57]. Indeed, teachers' everyday actions are decisive in making the frameworks of inclusive and multicultural education complementary. This requires recognising how cultural influences shape cognitive styles, communication patterns, and relational dynamics that characterize students' school experiences. Cultural competence goes beyond the mere acknowledgement of diversity; it requires the active integration of different cultural perspectives into the curriculum, teaching strategies, and school policies, with the aim of creating educational contexts in which all students feel valued and supported[58]. From this

(56) Perry, T., Steele, C., & Hilliard, A. G. (2003). *Young, gifted, and Black. Promoting high achievement among African-American students.* Boston: Beacon Press.

(57) Hidayat, A., & Winarso, W. (2025). *Approaches to Fostering Religious Diversity in Schools: A Literature Review from Inclusive and Multicultural Education Perspectives.* Al Qalam, 42(2), 122-137.

(58) Raza, H. (2024). *Cultural Competency in Education: Fostering Inclusive Learning Environments.* Makran Journal of Educational Research, 1(02), 116-132.

perspective, culturally competent education contributes to improving academic outcomes — particularly for students from marginalized groups — by adapting teaching methods to diverse learning styles.

It promotes democratic citizenship and human rights, aiming not only to enhance cognitive performance but also to build inclusive environments in which students can develop and preserve their cultural, ethnic, and religious identities while learning mutual respect. This process is especially relevant during adolescence, a developmental stage in which the understanding of ethno-racial identity is shaped through learning and the sharing of peer experiences[59]. Culturally competent education requires the design of inclusive teaching practices that integrate students' cultural backgrounds and recognize the identities of marginalized groups, while also considering internal differences within those groups. This implies a pedagogical approach capable of valuing the plurality of experiences and adapting instruction to the diverse cultural needs present in the classroom[60]. Such plurality helps overcome the limitations of Eurocentric and monocultural frameworks still present in many schools, making the educational environment more inclusive and representative. More broadly, the literature shows that educational policies attentive to diversity, combined with culturally aware everyday teaching practices, are essential for supporting students belonging

(59) Umaña-Taylor, A. J. (2023). *Promoting adolescent adjustment by intervening in ethnic-racial identity development: Opportunities for developmental prevention science and considerations for a global theory of change.* International Journal of Behavioral Development, 47(4), 352-365.

(60) Türken, S., Oppedal, B., Ali, W. A., & Adem, H. A. (2024), *From Avoidance to Competence? How the Identity Project Inspires Teachers to Engage with Ethnicity and Culture with Their Students*, Identity, 24:4, 379-398.

to cultural or religious minorities and for building school contexts that are genuinely equitable and inclusive[61].

1.2.4. *Students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds*

Educational inequalities — affecting students and socioeconomically disadvantaged contexts — are sustained in contemporary societies by the interaction of economic, cultural, and structural factors. These deeply intertwined elements contribute to reproducing cycles of exclusion and marginalization and represent a persistent obstacle to social development, making it difficult to achieve equity and justice within education systems[62]. Despite international measures aimed at reducing such inequalities, students from low-income families, students with disabilities, and those belonging to ethno-cultural minorities continue to encounter systemic barriers that limit access to quality educational opportunities[63]. These challenges are especially significant in contexts where social mobility depends heavily on educational attainment, and where territorial differences — for example, between rural and urban areas — further amplify disparities in resources and academic outcomes[64].

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(61) OECD (2018). E*quity in Education: Breaking Down Barriers to Social Mobility*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

(62) UNESCO (2020). *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020*: *Inclusion and Education – All Means All.* Op. cit.

(63) WORLD BANK (2018). *World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise*. Washington, DC: World Bank; UNESCO (2020). *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020*: *Inclusion and Education – All Means All.*, Op. cit.; OECD (2023). *Education at a Glance 2023*: *OECD Indicators*, Op. cit.

(64) OECD (2020). *Education at a Glance 2020*: *OECD Indicators*. Op. cit.

Educational inequalities stem from a combination of family, economic, and school-related factors, as highlighted by Bourdieu's theory of capital[65]. Families' economic, social, and cultural capital constitutes a decisive factor in access to learning opportunities and in students' academic performance[66]. Evidence shows that academic success is strongly influenced by family socioeconomic status (SES), recognized as one of the most robust predictors of educational outcomes. A high SES tends to provide stimulating learning environments and broader support systems; conversely, limited access to quality educational resources lowers academic expectations and may push students into disadvantaged trajectories that tend to perpetuate over time[67]. Educational equity is a global priority, as young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds continue to face significant barriers in accessing quality education. The specific difficulties associated with poverty generate chronic stress, housing instability, and

(65) Bourdieu, P. (1986). *The Forms of Capital.* In Richardson, J. (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241–258). New York: Greenwood Press.

(66) Bourdieu, P. (2018). *The forms of capital.* In *The sociology of economic life* (pp. 78-92). Routledge; Erikson, R., & Rudolphi, F. (2022). *Parental education and children's educational attainment: The role of family resources and expectations.* European Sociological Review, 38(1), 1–17; Sirin, S. R. (2022). *Socioeconomic status and academic achievement: A meta-analytic review (*updated edition). New York: Routledge.

(67) UNICEF. (2017). *Inclusive Education: Every Child Has the Right to Quality Education.* New York: UNICEF; UNESCO. (2020). *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and Education – All Means*. Op. cit.; Stanley, L., & Olumuyiwa, A. (2023). *Parental education, socioeconomic status and students' academic performance: Revisiting pathways of intergenerational inequality*. Journal of Education and Human Development, 12(1), 45–60; Um, H., & Mincy, R. B. (2025). *Parental education, family resources, and intergenerational mobility: New evidence from longitudinal cohort data.* Journal of Family and Economic Issues, 46(1), 112–130.

early family responsibilities, factors that negatively affect well-being and concentration in school settings, widening the gap for many students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds who often struggle to keep pace with their peers[68].

Available evidence highlights the need for comprehensive support systems and a genuinely inclusive approach capable of ensuring accessibility to teaching methods, spaces, services, and transportation. Expanding access alone is insufficient to produce adequate learning outcomes: structural reforms, sustained investment, pedagogical innovation, and a long-term political vision are indispensable.

Educational policies oriented toward equity aim to reduce gaps in academic achievement, ensuring that educational success depends on individual abilities rather than socioeconomic background[69]. Educational policies oriented toward equity aim to reduce gaps in academic achievement, ensuring that educational success depends on individual abilities rather than socioeconomic background. Recent evidence shows that targeted interventions - such as needs-based resource allocation, the creation of inclusive school environments, and the adoption of flexible teaching practices - improve access to quality educational experiences. At the same time, persistent structural challenges in many contemporary contexts require strong community engagement at institutional and societal levels to counter

(68) Goldberg, J. M., Sklad, M., Elfrink, T. R., Schreurs, K. M. G., Bohlmeijer, E. T., & Clarke, A. M. (2019). *Effectiveness of school-based interventions on students' mental health and inclusion: A meta-analysis*. Educational Research Review, 27, 90–103.

(69) Heberle, A. E., & Carter, A. S. (2020). *The impact of socioeconomic and contextual adversity on children's development: Implications for inclusive and equitable* education. Educational Psychologist, 55(3), 165–180.

socioeconomic inequalities. This implies identifying the deep roots of such disparities — often linked to limited economic investment in education and technology — and adopting a complex analytical approach that integrates historical dimensions, current conditions, and future intervention strategies[70]. In a genuinely inclusive and rights-based perspective, capable of addressing the structural roots of inequality and ensuring equitable, welcoming, and culturally sensitive school environments, the everyday role of teachers is central. School policies aimed at redistributing resources, supporting schools in disadvantaged areas, and promoting equitable learning environments must be complemented by teaching practices attentive to students' socioeconomic conditions.

Through educational relationships grounded in care, high expectations, and attention to learners' specific needs, teachers can help mitigate the effects of structural inequalities and foster pathways of participation, success, and social mobility[71]. More broadly, the inclusion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds requires an integrated approach that combines systemic educational policies with culturally and socially competent everyday practices, capable of transforming schools into spaces of genuine opportunity for all. Parental involvement plays an equally important role: participation in school life, support with homework, and communication with teachers are associated with better academic outcomes and stronger cognitive

(70) Zekaj, E. (2024). *The impact of school interventions on educational equity and academic performance of economically disadvantaged children* (Doctoral dissertation).

(71) Sianipar, G. (2025). *Social Inclusion in Education: A Study of Access and Equality among Marginalized Groups.* Socious Journal, 2(3), 78-84.

development, whereas low parental engagement — common among marginalized families — increases the risk of academic difficulties, low motivation, and socio-emotional vulnerability[72]. Parents' educational level directly affects children's academic performance by shaping available cultural capital, educational expectations, and the capacity to provide learning support; lower levels of parental education tend to perpetuate intergenerational disadvantage and reduce opportunities for social mobility.

In this context, investing in quality education represents a strategic choice for social, economic, and cultural development, as it enables individuals to acquire the knowledge, skills, and critical capacities needed to navigate complex environments. Looking ahead, educational and technological innovations constitute essential tools for addressing entrenched socioeconomic challenges. Their potential to reduce educational gaps translates into more flexible and personalized teaching practices capable of overcoming the limitations of traditional models.

A vision oriented toward sustainability and inclusivity — engaging all actors within the educational system — is essential to ensure equitable resource management. In this framework, interdisciplinary collaboration, grounded in the integration of scientific expertise, ethical reflection, and mentorship pathways, plays a decisive role in improving educational practices[73]. The combination of education and technological innovation thus emerges as a promising

(72) Li, S., & Omar, M. K. (2024). *Principalship Experiences on Inclusive Education: A Systematic Review*. Open Journal of Social Sciences, 12(2), 189-204.

(73) Chari, S. G. (2024). *Bridging gaps, building futures: Tackling socio-economic disparities through education and technology.* London Journal of Research. In Humanities and Social Sciences, 24(16), 1-12.

strategy for addressing contemporary socioeconomic challenges and promoting a more equitable and inclusive future. Since educational inequalities arise from the interaction between family conditions, economic resources, and school-level characteristics, a systemic and multi-level approach is required to effectively counter these disparities and prevent their reproduction over time.

In this scenario, education plays a decisive role in promoting well-being and social cohesion: inclusive education systems can reduce social divisions and create the conditions for all students to fully develop their potential and participate equitably in social and cultural life[74].

1.2.5. *Students from LGBTQIA+ communities*

The growing visibility and acceptance of LGBTQIA+ identities worldwide[75] — together with legislative progress in several countries, such as the recognition of marriage equality, adoption rights, and anti-discrimination laws — does not eliminate the persistent forms of discrimination faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals and continues to represent a structural challenge within global education systems[76]. Analyses of educational inequalities affecting LGBTIQ+ students show that school systems remain marked by structural

(74) Nwachukwu, E. L., Chukwuma, V. A., Ubani, G. A., Nwokorie, G. C., & Joseph, C. C. (2025). *The Impact of Exclusion on Minoritized Learners: Promoting Educational Equity as an Imperative for Sustainable Development*. Transformative Pedagogies, 1(4), 21-29.

(75) Jones, A. (2023). *Inclusive education and equitable learning environments: Strategies for supporting diverse learners*. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 27(6), 745–762.

(76) EUROPEAN UNION AGENCY FOR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS (FRA). (2020). *A long way to go for LGBTI equality*.

discrimination, implicit bias, and exclusionary institutional practices[77]. European data indicate that these groups continue to be among the most vulnerable, reporting lower educational outcomes and greater exposure to violence and marginalization[78]. International evidence likewise confirms that LGBTQIA+ identities encounter significant difficulties in social and school relationships[79] with repercussions extending into the labour market, including wage disparities, obstacles to career advancement, and hostile treatment by colleagues and supervisors[80]. These inequalities manifest as structural violence fuelled by inadequate school policies, entrenched stereotypes, and multifactorial dynamics such as homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic bullying, aggravated by the lack of specific staff training on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Insufficient training increases the risk that teachers may unintentionally reproduce cultural and gender biases[81]. These approaches highlight that discrimination

(77) Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., Truong, N. L., & Zongrone, A. D. (2020). *The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth in Our Nation's Schools. A Report from GLSEN*. Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). 121 West 27th Street Suite 804, New York, NY 10001.

(78) Van Der Star, A., Pachankis, J., & Bränström, B. (2018). *LGBT bullying at school across 28 European countries: the impact of bullying and structural stigma on later life satisfaction*. European Journal of Public Health.

(79) Davidson, M. (2016). *Seeking Safe Space: Transgender Students and the Politics of Inclusion in Education*. In V. E. Bloomfield & M. E. Fisher (Eds.), *LGBTQ Voices in Education: Changing the Culture of Schooling* (pp. 89–104). New York: Routledge.

(80) EUROPEAN COMMISSION/EACEA/EURYDICE. (2023). *Equity in School Education in Europe: Structures, Policies and Student Performance*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

(81) Macias, C., Genz, H., & Resvoll, T. (2020). *Queering Educational Spaces: Challenges and Opportunities for LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Schools.* In K. H. Robinson & C. Jones Díaz (Eds.), *Diversity and Inclusion in Educational Settings* (pp. 121–138). London: Routledge.

should not be interpreted as isolated incidents but as manifestations of broader social systems that reproduce exclusionary dynamics[82]. In school contexts, LGBTIQ+ students are among those most at risk, often experiencing rejection, bullying, and social isolation, with negative consequences for self-esteem, well-being, and socio-relational development. Homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic bullying is associated with lower grades, absenteeism, alienation, and reduced self-esteem[83]. In response to these inequalities, inclusive education emerges as a transformative paradigm grounded in the universal right to equitable, high-quality schooling. This approach aims to ensure equal opportunities for participation and success for all students by improving the accessibility of learning environments and promoting meaningful educational outcomes, regardless of personal or social circumstances[84].

Operational challenges remain numerous, beginning with teacher training, which represents a central concern: many teachers lack the competencies needed to respond to the diverse needs of students, with negative consequences for their educational and personal development[85]. Additional barriers include rigid curricula, lack of time, and overcrowded

(82) Chiappelli, T. (2025). *Educazione inclusiva e giustizia sociale: studi queer e femministi e decoloniali per contrastare violenza e discriminazione a scuola*. Culture di Genere. Corpi, Desideri, Formazione, 65-74.

(83) Chen, R., Li, G., & Wang, Y. (2022). *School climate, peer support, and mental health among LGBTQ+ students: Implications for inclusive educational practices.* Journal of LGBT Youth, 19(4), 512–530.

(84) Ainscow, M. (2020). *Promoting inclusion and equity in education: Lessons from international experiences*. Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy, 6(1), 7–16.

(85) Materechera, E. K. (2020). *Teachers' perspectives on inclusive education: Challenges and opportunities in diverse classrooms*. African Journal of Disability, 9, 1–9.

classrooms, all of which limit participation and require systemic infrastructural interventions[86]. Despite these challenges — present across most European school systems — recent scientific evidence shows that LGBTQIA+ students involved in inclusive programmes report lower victimisation, greater perceived safety, fewer absences, improved academic outcomes, and a stronger sense of connection with peers[87]. Within these programmes, digital spaces play an increasingly important role, providing forms of social support that strengthen self-esteem and sustain identity-related socialization processes, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of inclusive interventions[88]. A systemic perspective, however, requires the involvement of all actors within the school system and conceives sexuality education as a process of community empowerment supported by educational policies aimed at overcoming cultural resistance. For inclusive programmes designed to promote collective reflection on gender stereotypes to have a meaningful impact, it is necessary to engage all school stakeholders and integrate the use of digital spaces as environments for support and socialization. These spaces contribute to strengthening more inclusive communicative practices and supporting transformative educational pathways[89]. According to the World Health

(86) Zagona, A. L., Kurth, J. A., & Macfarland, S. Z. C. (2017). *Teachers' views of their preparation for inclusive education and collaboration*. Teacher Education and Special Education, 40(3), 163–178.

(87) Day, J. K., Fish, J. N., Grossman, A. H., & Russell, S. T. (2020). *Gay-straight alliances, inclusive policy, and school climate: LGBTQ youths' experiences of social support and bullying*. Journal of research on adolescence, 30, 418-430.

(88) Mitchell, K. J., Ybarra, M. L., Korchmaros, J. D., & Kosciw, J. G. (2014). *Accessing sexual health information online: use, motivations and consequences for youth with different sexual orientations*. Health education research, 29(1), 147-157.

(89) Eleuteri, S., Girardi, M., Spadola, R., & Todaro, E. (2024). *Inclusion Goals: What Sex Education for LGBTQIA+Adolescents.* Children, 11(8), 966.

Organization and the World Association for Sexual Health, sexuality education is a learning process aimed at providing children and adolescents with knowledge, skills, and values oriented toward equality, non-discrimination, and freedom of expression[90]. A central element of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is inclusivity, understood as the recognition and valorisation of sexual and gender diversity. *International guidelines* emphasize the need to integrate content related to LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences into curricula to promote understanding, respect, and acceptance, thereby contributing to the reduction of discrimination and the improvement of LGBTQIA+ well-being. In this regard, the *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* constitutes an authoritative reference for designing inclusive, evidence-based programmes that ensure a comprehensive, equitable, attentive, and respectful approach to diversity[91].

1.3. Competences, contexts, and practices for an inclusive teaching professionalism in the 21st century

But what kind of preparation do teachers need to support inclusive teaching? The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, for example, identifies four key values for teacher professionalism: 1. *Supporting*

(90) WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION. (2017). *Sexual health and its linkages to reproductive health: An operational approach.* WHO; Cf. World Association for Sexual Health. (2021). Standards of Care for Sexuality Education. WAS.

(91) UNESCO, UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, & WHO. (2018). *International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach.* UNESCO Publishing.

the academic, social, and emotional learning of all students through effective practices in heterogeneous, multicultural, and multilingual contexts; 2. *Working with others* (collaborating with parents and families to engage them effectively in their children's learning, as well as with other education professionals, including co-teaching with colleagues); 3. *Valuing the diversity of all students as a resource*, grounded in principles of equality and human rights. From this perspective, every student constitutes a resource within the daily life of the classroom community; 4. *Engaging in continuous professional development based on critical reflection*. In this view, initial teacher education becomes the cornerstone of ongoing professional learning, supported by systematic self-reflection that enables teachers to identify their training needs and develop specific or disciplinary competences when required. The framework proposed by the European Agency is consistent with the advocacy efforts of other major international organizations, including the UNESCO-IBE indicators[92] and those developed by the IDA[93]) and emphasizes the need for educational systems to be reformed so that teachers possess the knowledge, skills, and competences required to recognize and respect the diverse individual and social characteristics of students as part of human diversity. European and international guidelines converge on the need to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to design flexible learning pathways based on students' strengths, highlighting the importance

(92) UNESCO International Bureau of Education. (2016). *Global Monitoring of Curriculum Reforms*. UNESCO-IBE.

(93) Kirchschlaeger, P. G. (2024). *Securing a peaceful, sustainable, and humane future through an International Data-based systems Agency (IDA) at the UN*. Data & Policy, 6, e78.

of curricular reforms that promote personalized and adaptable trajectories capable of ensuring participation, well-being, and educational success for all, in line with the competences required in the twenty-first century. Inclusive approaches require teachers to adopt a *student-centred perspective*, defining measurable learning objectives and valuing the strengths of learners with disabilities, specific difficulties, or socio-emotional vulnerabilities[94]. In this sense, inclusive education: 1. concerns the right of every child to be a valued member of society and to have equal opportunities to participate in, and actively contribute to, all areas of learning[95]; 2. recognizes disability and all specific learning difficulties as forms of human diversity, welcoming and valuing diversity as a resource rather than a problem[96]; 3. requires the implementation of teaching practices that value all children and encourage them to reach their full developmental potential[97]. Its implementation rules out a notion of personalized education detached from its context and instead now relies on the combined action of school culture, policies, and practices, which can either facilitate or hinder equitable participation[98]. In educational

(94) Kubacka, K., & D'addio, A. C. (2020). *Targeting teacher education and professional development for inclusion*. *国際教育協力論集*, *22*(2), 89-106.

(95) Cumming, T., & Wong, S. (2019). *Towards a holistic conceptualisation of early childhood educators' work-related well-being*. Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 20(3), 265-281.

(96) González-Afonso, M. C., De Los Ángeles, P. L. C., Zeus, P. C., Cabanilla-García, J. L., & Pérez-Jorge, D. (2026). *Presence, Participation and Learning in Educational Inclusion: A Systematic Mapping Review of Barriers in School Contexts According to Booth and Ainscow*. Education Sciences, 16(1), 95.

(97) UNESCO. (2023). En*suring inclusion and equity in education: Principles, practices and directions for policy.* UNESCO Publishing.

(98) Arroyo-González, M.j.; Berzosa-Ramos, I. (2021), *Twenty years of research on immigration and school in Spain: Taking stock of some of the lessons learned*. Culture and Education, 33, 597–632.

settings, every individual difference represents a meaningful element that each child or adolescent brings through their lived experience and personal culture. Within this multidimensional perspective, inclusive teacher action begins with an analysis of the physical environment, closely connected to cultural dimensions, representations, and the discourses that emerge in everyday interactions between teachers and students. In a constructivist, multi-level view of learning, knowledge is formed within the sociocultural contexts in which individuals live. The school environment — like any social setting — is shaped by ongoing relational interactions that play a central role in learning, with each student bringing a distinct cultural background that actively contributes to the collective construction of knowledge[99]. Moreover, inclusive methodologies such as group work and cooperative learning are frequently used because they enhance individual problem-solving abilities and foster constructive attitudes in the classroom. For example, cooperative methods such as Cooperative Learning and Peer-to-Peer approaches promote positive interdependence, social skills, individual accountability, monitoring, and processing. Operational tools for effective classroom management — such as Jigsaw, Think-Pair-Share, Controversy, and STAD (Student Team-Achievement Divisions) — strengthen the teacher's mediating role and make it decisive for inclusion, as they rely on tools that incorporate language, symbols, and educational materials[100].

(99) Vygotsky; L.S. (1987). *The collected works of L.S. Vygotsky*: Volume 1, Thinking and speech. New York: Plenum Press; ROGOFF, B. (2021). *Learning as participation in cultural communities*. Human Development, 65(2), 65–78.

(100) Hennessy, S., Rojas-Drummond, S., & Barrera, M. J. (2022). *Supporting collaborative learning in diverse classrooms: A sociocultural perspective.* Learning, Culture and Social Interaction, 33, 100–115.

In most European school systems, inclusion is now an explicit objective of all school planning and concerns every student. This perspective requires each teacher to assume pedagogical responsibility grounded in daily critical reflection on their role and on the relational dynamics that unfold in the classroom. Professional self-reflection enables teachers to recognize how internalized knowledge and social representations may influence educational interactions, fuelling categorization processes that risk hindering inclusion. In educational contexts, inclusion means ensuring that every student can fully participate in school life, recognizing individual differences as resources for coexistence, personal well-being, and the collective growth of the school community. Within this environment, each learner must be able to perceive themselves as an integral part of the whole[101], finding the conditions necessary to express their own uniqueness.

(101) Messiou, K. (2017). *Research in the field of inclusive education: Time for a rethink?* International Journal of Inclusive Education, 21(2), 146–159.

Reimagining Education for Social Inclusion and Human Development
ISBN 979-12-218-2574-9
DOI 10.53136/97912218257493
pp. 51-75 (aprile 2026)

CHAPTER II

SENSEI AND INCLUSIVE HISTORY EDUCATION

Marco Tibaldini*

2.1. Inclusion and Teaching of History: foundational premises

The SENSEI Project is funded by an Erasmus 2027 grant, obtained by the European Associations of History Educators (EuroClio) to meet the needs of its associates and their demand to give impetus to a debate about the inclusiveness of history education. Within the framework of EuroClio, the SENSEI Project gathered various kinds of specialists from different countries in Europe to work on the inclusiveness of history education. The project features teachers, historians, and pedagogists, and in this article, its general theoretical basis is presented, together with the reflections and evaluations of the project staff collected through 11 individual interviews. The following ideas, expressed by professionals who have been working as history teachers and history educators in Italy, Germany, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, Denmark, and

* Clio '92.

Romania, are here compared with the academic literature currently available that explores the concept of inclusion in history education. Interestingly, while some concepts and ideas mentioned in academic literature are complementary to those expressed by teachers during the interviews, others were common, albeit autonomously developed by the SENSEI project's members during their professional experience. The materials collected have been sorted and organized by the author, an expert in the field of history didactics, in a general framework that can be useful to understand the aims and goals of the SENSEI project, and how it moves in the intersection between pedagogy and history, theory and practice, school and academia. Among the most current trends in Education, inclusion is surely one of the hottest. Despite the breadth of pedagogical and educational studies, it crosses the whole sector. Inclusion is indeed an attitude and approach that is horizontal across disciplinary and sectoral studies, and teachers are increasingly expected to design, identify, implement, and adopt inclusive teaching methods within the discipline they teach. This rightful request was brought to educational systems by civic societies in various countries around the world, with varying degrees of success.

This shift towards a more inclusive education was demanded by parents, minorities, institutional stakeholders, associations (internal or external to educational systems), but also by teachers, scholars, and national or international institutions. This led to the dismantling of the previous system of segregated schools for disabled people, leading to *The Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education*, issued by UNESCO in 1994[1], and to

(1) UNESCO (1994). *The Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education*.

the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* issued by the United Nations in 2006[2]. A general picture of the situation was lately provided by UNESCO, which in 2020 issued its *Global Education Monitoring Report on inclusion in education*, comparing laws, policies, and acts undertaken by most of the world's countries to foster inclusivity in education over the last few decades[3]. The report clearly shows the willingness of governmental bodies to adopt more inclusive policies, but also underscores their challenges and limits, as well as the selective approach to inclusion adopted by many governments, which prioritize sectoral interests and target only some categories of people, leaving others excluded. Generally, inclusion policies focus on those categories that are already considered as part of society, but are somehow disadvantaged, and tend to ignore, remove from debate, or repulse those elements that are considered too different from the majority or from the perceived 'standard' and thus seen as frightening or threatening for the integrity of the society. This attitude is grounded in the natural need for social cohesion, which we have been used to thinking of as a duality of the us-them relation. But in democratic societies, grounded on values and civic rights rather than on ethnic origins, religious beliefs, or linguistic nuances, inclusion is crucial. People imbued with democratic values and who experience this sense of juridic equality in various aspects of everyday life feel the need to be accepted, considered, and valued by the socio-political-economic system in which they live.

(2) UNITED NATIONS (2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

(3) UNESCO (2020). *Global education monitoring report, 2020*: *Inclusion and education: all means all.*

In democratic societies, citizens expect their rights to be respected independently by the elements that make them different from the perceived standard, or, more fairly, unique. Especially in democratic societies and even within the framework of the us-them duality, it emerged how complex it is to define even just one of these terms, and how multifaceted they are: who is really 'us', and on which basis is this category grounded? It follows that the border between 'us' and 'them' is quite fluid and may change according to the perspective and need of the moment. The current political debates in Europe and the United States attest to how complex and delicate it is to define the border that splits the 'us' and the 'them', and the extent to which reality, expectations, and perceptions may diverge. History education is deeply implicated in this debate, as well as in shaping a nation's sense of identity; for this reason, it is difficult and delicate, yet crucial, to reflect on the inclusiveness of history education. Considering these premises concerning the relationship between inclusion and history education, the next step in guiding the reader into the core themes addressed by the SENSEI project is to examine the point at which this relationship unfolds into values, ideals, and identitarian implications. In general terms, this move towards a more inclusive attitude is part of that process through which the societies of the late 20th and early 21st centuries self-acknowledged their internal complexity and discovered to be more multifaceted than expected.

But societies evolve more rapidly than the representations they have of themselves: when European history curricula were designed, in the second half of the 19th century, nationalism was a leading trend and permeated also history courses. Especially in central and western Europe,

history curricula were designed to educate people to think of themselves as the descendants of the indigenous people who lived in that region before the Roman conquest[4]. Despite the artificial nature of these links, contemporary European nations were presented as directly connected with ancient Gauls, Germans, Britons, Lusitanians, and Iberian tribes, with a direct impact on the perception people had of their national identity. This process set the idea that nations are and have always been culturally and ethnically homogeneous. The most iconic sample is given by the refrain *Nos ancêtres les Gaulois*, which for decades was recurrent in French formal and informal education, in the mainland and in its overseas domains, whose people could hardly feel connected with ancient Gauls.

In the period characterized by the rise of nationalism, history was one of the elements that grounded the separation between the 'us' and 'them', and national identities were allegedly based on historical facts. The outcomes of this educational approach and narrative were already evident at that time, when cultural or religious minorities were stigmatized and eventually suppressed, even in democratic France[5]. But it was during the two World Wars that the political use of history reached its peak and contributed to the dehumanization of the enemy, and to tragic acts aimed at physically excluding, segregating, and eliminating those who were seen as 'them' by the regimes within and outside their borders. Eighty years later, as

(4) Tibaldini M., Bertoli M., (2026). *Teaching Antiquity throughout the centuries: evolution, issues, perspectives, and topics*. In Barsch S., Tietz W., *Ancient History and historical thinking*, University of Kiel, forthcoming article.

(5) A clear example of it is the *Affaire Dreyfus*, and its aftermaths in the French public debate.

stated by the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe (OHTE) General Report issued by the Council of Europe, European history curricula are still focused on military and diplomatic events(6), and their narratives are still centred on political leaders and oriented towards the celebration of national glories(7). In addition, despite the recommendations given by major institutions and specialists, history teaching continues to focus on the transmission of content, mostly through frontal lessons, instead of focusing on cognitive competencies and skills(8). This pattern continues to present the contents of history curricula as given, rather than selected, and fosters the wrong idea that history narration is objective and immutable. Fortunately, the same report also underlines that the sensibility of teachers is changing and that, differently from the past, history education is conceived to teach students how to think instead of what to think, and that fostering students' critical thinking is one of the major concerns of European history educators(9). This tendency, albeit not yet majoritarian, has already been detected by scholars, who noticed how, in some cases, History classes dismissed the identitarian narrative to focus on students' historical skills and competencies(10).

The Council of Europe also clearly stated that the goal of history education is to provide "Knowledge and critical

(6) Observatory On History Teaching In Europe (OHTE), 2023. *General Report on History Teaching in Europe*: 8; 43; 78; 80; 81; 100; 137; 142; 145.

(7) OHTE Report: 100, 104-5.

(8) OHTE Report: ch. 7.

(9) OHTE Report: 7, 29, 75, 106, 142, 148.

(10) Körber, A. (2018). *Transcultural history education and competence: Emergence of a concept in German history education*. History Education Research Journal, 15(2), 276–291.

understanding of the world"[11], and its OHTE remarked this concept: "Viewed though this lens, knowledge of the past becomes important not only for its own sake but also, perhaps primarily, for developing young people's analytical and critical thinking skills, not just providing them with factual information but also developing their historical thinking. In turn, this should allow them to become informed, active citizens, thus playing a crucial role in building and maintaining democratic societies"[12].

This attention to methodologies derived from active pedagogy and to nuances in historical narrations opens the possibility of having more inclusive history curricula. But due to the identitarian implications of history education, the debate about its inclusiveness started quite late in relation to other disciplines, like as the STEM ones. The research in the field of inclusive history education is, in fact, barely two decades old[13].

2.2. Defining objective and scope: interview with SENSEI Team

The first challenge of the project's members was to define what inclusion should be in relation to history education, and the perspective to adopt in formulating this definition. A good definition expressed by a SENSEI's teacher is that inclusion should mean to foster students'

(11) COUNCIL OF EUROPE (2018). *Quality history teaching education in the 21st century. Principles and Guidelines*: 26-7.

(12) OHTE (2023). *General Report on history teaching in Europe*: ch. 7

(13) Degner, B., Franz, E.-K. & Hinz, A. (2017). *Inklusions-Material Geschichte Klasse 5-10*: Sekundarstufe I. Berlin: Cornelsen. Barsch S. (2025). Inclusive history education: 7-11

equity, involvement, and participation in the learning process[14].

In a focus group led by the Italian association of history teachers, Clio '92, during the development of the SENSEI project[15], according to high-school students' perspective, feeling included means to "know that your opinion can be listened to" or "be aware that you are valued as you are", broad definitions which encompass various potential situations that students experienced in their social life.

From the interviews with the colleagues, and especially with the teachers involved in the SENSEI project, it also emerged a different approach of the European educational systems towards inclusion in defining the aim and the addresses of inclusive policies. For example, in Italy, those schools that are equipped to provide the best quality of education for disabled students are called '*plesso potenziato*', which means 'empowered (school) complex', while in Romania are called '*școală incluzivă*', which means 'inclusive schools'. From these preliminary discussions, inclusion emerged as a priority and as a necessity, but its implication in history teaching remained quite unexplored on both the theoretical and practical terms. In this context, it is useful to recall the analysis of the situation outlined by Sebastian Barsch, scholar and specialist in History Didactics:

In summary, the concept of inclusion […] can be outlined as follows:

(14) Interview with Ștefana Opria, 27/10/2025

(15) Pan-European Gathering of History Teachers, Bergamo-Brescia, 23-25 November 2023. Organized by EuroClio, Clio '92 and the Evens Foundation.

- *There are no homogeneous learning groups. Classes are always characterised by diversity;*
- *Making diversity visible reveals categories of difference that challenge learning: disabilities, socio-economic differences, language challenges, talents;*
- *Inclusive history education aims to create opportunities for historical learning that promote mutual understanding and shared experiences among diverse groups;*
- *Teaching needs to be open enough to allow for different learning pathways, while providing guidance so that learners can follow the pathways that are accessible to them;*
- *Teachers need to reflect on their own view of diversity in schools and, ultimately, on their understanding of history: Which stories should be covered in the classroom, for whom, and how?*[16]

The different definitions provided by teachers, students, and scholars are compatible and complementary to each other, and their nuances shed light on the differences between educational systems and on the different perspectives from which we can reflect on the topic. This variety reminds us that if on one hand, it would be useful to reach a common definition so as to clarify the common goal we are aiming for, on the other hand, inclusion means also rejecting the idea of aiming at homogeneity. So, we must accept that the concept of inclusion goes along with that of diversity, and fostering inclusive behaviours also means celebrating diversity, which is something that history curricula have always neglected, in terms of both content and methods. The recipients of inclusive history-education

(16) Barsch S., (2025) op. cit. p. 6.

policies, as identified by the SENSEI team, constitute a crucial element for understanding how the project operationalizes the concept of inclusion. Discussions with the professionals involved have highlighted how each participant tends to orient themselves toward different categories of students who might particularly benefit from a more inclusive approach to the teaching of history, thereby revealing the plurality of educational needs at stake. In these terms, the confrontation between the members of the project led to personal and professional enrichment, because the final resume of the interviews encompasses cases and situations overlooked by individuals.

In the end, emerged that a wide variety of students might need and benefit from inclusive history education:

– *Disabled or impaired students, paying attention to the nature of the disability, which may be physical or cognitive*[17],

(17) This category is the one that attracted most the academical attention: Degner, B., Franz, E.-K. & Hinz, A. (2017). *Inklusions-Material Geschichte Klasse 5-10: Sekundarstufe* I. Berlin: Cornelsen. Barsch, S. (2022). *Leichte Sprache – eine leichte Methode zum Erfassen historischer Quellen?*. In S. Handro & B. Schönemann (Eds.), Sprachsensibler Geschichtsunterricht. Geschichtsdidaktische Forschungsperspektiven und -befunde (pp. 103–123). Münster: Lit. Rein, F. (2021). *Historisches Lernen im Förderschwerpunkt geistige Entwicklung. Eine Studie zur Sinnbildung durch die eigene Lebensgeschichte*. Göttingen: V&R. Wilkening, J. (2025). *Schüler: innen mit Lernschwierigkeiten konstruieren Geschichte. Teilhabeorientierte Praktiken einer inklusiven Geschichtsdidaktik*, Göttingen: V&R. Ciullo, S., Collins, A., Wissinger, D. R., Mckenna, J. W., Lo, Y.-L. & Osman, D. (2020). *Students with learning disabilities in the social studies: A meta-analysis of intervention research*. Exceptional Children, 86(4), 393–412. Barsch, S. & Barte, B. (2020). *Historisches Denken von Schüler_innen mit sonderpädagogischem Förderbedarf: Einblicke in die Forschung*. In B. Alavi, S. Barsch, C. Kühberger & M. Lücke (Eds.), *Handbuch Diversität im Geschichtsunterricht. Zugänge zu einer inklusiven Geschichtsdidaktik* (pp. 188–201). Frankfurt a. M.: Wochenschau. De La Paz, S. (2013). *Teaching and learning in history: Effective and reform-based practices*

may need different methodological approaches or material supports.

- *Ill students, with chronic or latent pathologies like diabetes, epilepsy, or other forms of illness that may require a different scheduling of learning activities or avoiding particular environmental conditions.*
- *Socially or economically disadvantaged students*[18].
- *Ethnic minorities*[19].
- *Cultural minorities*[20]*, meant with various articulations:*
  - *Without reference to a foreign state:*
    - *With a presence confined to a single state, like the Corsicans in France.*
    - *With a localized international presence, like the Basque in Spain and France, and the Sami in Scandinavia.*
  - *Officially, linguistically or culturally linked to other nations like the South Tyrolians in Italy, Hungarians in*

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for students with learning disabilities. Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal, 11(1), 89–105. Okolo, C. M. & Ferretti, R. P. (2014). *History instruction for students with learning disabilities*. In H. L. Swanson, K. R. Harris & S. Graham (Eds.), *Handbook of Learning Disabilities* (pp. 463–488). New York: Guilford Press.

(18) Mentioned also in: Richardson, J. T. E., Mittelmeier, J. & Rienties, B. (2020). *The role of gender, social class and ethnicity in participation and academic attainment in UK higher education: An update*. Oxford Review of Education, 46(3), 346–362.

(19) Mentioned also in: Tajic, D. & Bunar, N. (2020). *Do both "get it right"? Inclusion of newly arrived migrant students in Swedish primary schools*. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 1–15. Kohvakka, T. (2024). *The Inclusion of Minorities and the Sámi People in History Education in Finland*, Åbo Akademi.

(20) Mentioned also in: Ahonen, S. (2001). *Politics of identity through history curriculum: Narratives of the past for social exclusion – or inclusion?* Journal of Curriculum Studies, 33(2), 179-194. Alexander, C. & Weekes-Bernard, D. (2017). *History lessons: inequality, diversity and the national curriculum.* Race Ethnicity and Education, 20(4), 478–494. Mansfield, A. (2022). *Increasing inclusion for ethnic minority students by teaching the British Empire and global history in the English history curriculum.* Oxford Review of Education, 48(3), 360–375.

Serbia, Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia, Russians in Latvia, and Turks in Romania.
  - *Widely spread, like the Jewish and Roma people, who are present in all European countries and are both deeply integrated with the local institutional and social system, but also connected among themselves on a larger international scale.*
- *Gender minorities*[21].
- *Migrants who planned to move with their families with a long-term perspective*[22].
- *Students with mixed parents.*
- *Refugees who moved in emergencies without planning.*
- *Students with a post-colonial background, for example, descendants of Angolese people in Portugal.*
- *Commuting students living in the countryside and traveling a long time to get to school.*
- *Re-migrant students, who were born and educated abroad to parents who, after some years, decided to go back to their country of origin.*
- *Gifted or passionate students who need more challenging educational activities*[23].

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(21) Mentioned also in: Omercajic, K. & Martino, W. (2020). *Supporting transgender inclusion and gender diversity in schools: A critical policy analysis*. Frontiers in Sociology, 5, 27.

(22) The disadvantage of the students belonging to this category (often jointed with migrant background) in rapport to other students, in general terms, was presented also by: Frederico, F.& Orsolini, M. (2021). *Child Migration and School Achievement*. In M. El Alaoui-Faris, A. Frederico & W. Grisold (Eds.), *Neurology in Migrants and Refugees*. Sustainable Development Goals Series (pp. 67–79). Vadivel, B., Alam, S., Nikpoo, I. & Ajanil, B. (2023). *The Impact of Low Socioeconomic Backround on a Child's Educational Achievements*. Education Research International, 1–11. Barsch S., Rein F., Wilkening J.C. (2025). *Beyond the Individual Cognitive Perspective: A Framework for Inclusive History Education*. Panta Rei. p. 3.

(23) Mentioned also in: Barsch S., Rein F., Wilkening J.C. (2025) ibid. p. 3.

– *Undiagnosed and potentially disruptive students, whose behaviour disturbs the learning activity of other students to various degrees, but whose parents refuse the idea that they need support.*

Some categories in this list overlap and it is not rare to find students who fit into two or more of these categories, bringing further difficulties to their educational success. According to the SENSEI team, the role of the teacher in an inclusive history lesson emerges as a decisive factor in understanding how inclusion can be translated into concrete pedagogical practices. Teachers are involved in every stage of the educational process: from selecting content to choosing and using specific materials, from adopting accessible language to ensuring that each student can, in some way, see themselves reflected in the history curriculum. Alongside these aspects, which will be examined in the following sections, the interviews highlighted another significant element: teachers themselves may belong to ethnic, linguistic, cultural, or sexual minorities, or may be migrants or refugees.

This "dimension of diversity", embedded in their personal and professional profiles, can serve as a valuable resource for fostering genuinely inclusive history teaching and enriching students' learning experiences. From the interviews with the staff of the SENSEI Project also emerged that history could be more inclusive in terms of both method and content. But since the methods of its teaching were designed according to the pedagogical aims of history education during the 19th century, they are deeply intertwined with the contents. This connection is so deep that modifying one of these two elements implies

the modification of the whole paradigm. The unwillingness of teachers, accustomed to relying on the traditional method, to move from their comfort zone might be one of the elements that oppose the implementation of inclusive history education on a large scale. Terminological and linguistic choices represent a primary methodological and content-related issue within the framework of inclusive history education.

As previously noted, traditional teaching methods based predominantly on the teacher's verbal exposition remain widely used. Within this context, the language employed by teachers and textbooks plays a central role, as it simultaneously affects both how history is taught and what is taught. On the content level, certain linguistic choices may contribute to excluding specific actors from the historical narrative, rendering groups, experiences, or minority perspectives invisible. On the methodological level, language that is not sufficiently accessible can pose a significant barrier for students with cognitive difficulties or limited linguistic skills, such as migrant pupils or children from linguistically mixed families[24]. These aspects, which will be examined in the following sections, demonstrate how the linguistic dimension constitutes a structural element in the development of genuinely inclusive history teaching.

Historical contents are complex and require a high level of abstraction, but also the knowledge and direct experience of social and civic life. Basic concepts that are crucial for the understanding of human history, like 'culture', 'society', 'economy', and 'institutions', might be difficult to develop, even for students with cognitive disabilities.

(24) Barsch, S., (2025) Ibid. 6.

About the methodology has been noticed that: "*Theories of historical thinking and learning are still distinctly cognitively charged, academia-based, and language-oriented, as has been noted by various authors*[25]*. In particular, people with intellectual disabilities and their historical learning and thinking processes are usually excluded*"[26].

It seems clear that the first step towards a more inclusive history teaching is refining the language used and focusing on the development of some concepts before moving to historical content. Between methods and contents, the 'core concepts' in history learning represent a significant point of reference for understanding how history education can become more inclusive and effective. Within this framework, the traditional lecture format requires substantial rethinking to capture the attention of the entire class and to convey concepts and information more efficiently; it also calls for reflection on classroom organization and on the learning tools employed. One possible direction is to shift from a lesson centred on the teacher's exposition to one structured around practical activities carried out individually or in small groups. This methodological change makes it possible to enhance the discipline's core concepts through hands-on experiences, fostering more active and inclusive student participation and making historical content more

(25) Okolo, C. M., Ferretti, R. P. & Macarthur, C. A. (2007). *Talking about history: Discussions in a middle school inclusive classroom*. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 40(2), 154–165. REIN, F. (2021). Historisches Lernen im Förderschwerpunkt geistige Entwicklung. Eine Studie zur Sinnbildung durch die eigene Lebensgeschichte. Göttingen: V&R. Völkel, B. (2017). Inklusive Geschichtsdidaktik: Vom inneren Zeitbewusstsein zur dialogischen Geschichte. Schwalbach: Wochenschau.

(26) Wilkening J.C., Barsch S., Rein F., (2025). *Beyond the Individual Cognitive Perspective: A Framework for Inclusive History Education*. Panta Rei. p. 2.

accessible. As remarked also by Barsch, students can work on the same topic or common object, even if each of them relies on a personal method[27]. The methodological variation reminds us very much of what is already implemented in other disciplines like science and mathematics, which are centred on experiential learning and practical activities. For example, mathematics has been taught through problems since the time of ancient Egypt[28]. History teachers have never been accustomed to thinking about their discipline in this way, but the availability of practical exercises and problem-like activities adapted to history courses can make room for individual initiatives and personalized learning methods, for the use of historical competencies, and for developing through personal experience those concepts that are at the base of historical knowledge.

The existence of 'core' or 'basic' concepts has been widely discussed in various disciplines[29], and they are also the subject of debate in the domain of history didactics[30].

This approach, through 'core concepts' rather than content, can facilitate students' comprehension, as 'conceptual knowledge' provides concepts, theories and models that can be applied in variable situations[31]. *Core Concepts* are indeed considered the foundation of history learning, also by Ivo Mattozzi, a specialist in history didactics, who

(27) Barsch S., (2025), Ibid. 12-13.

(28) Rhind papyrus, British Museum EA10057.

(29) Vollmer, H.J., Rothgangel, M. (2024). *General subject didactics. Comparative insights into subject didactics as academic disciplines*. Münster/New York. p. 175.

(30) Barsch S. (2025), ibid. p. 16.

(31) Kühberger, C. (2012). *Konzeptionelles Wissen als besondere Grundlage des historischen Wissens*. In: Kühberger, Christoph (eds.): Historisches Wissen. Geschichtsdidaktische Erkundungen zu Art, Tiefe und Umfang für das historische Lernen (p. 33–74). Schwalbach/Ts. p. 39.

presents them as the crucial concepts that students should acquire and learn through active pedagogy applied to history[32]. This method of 'teaching through concepts' can be implemented through practical activities that, starting from the analysis of the present, gradually introduce historical sources related to the same topic. The aim is to help students develop concepts that are crucial to understanding the entirety of human history and that provide valid supports for the analysis of each period and context.

Mattozzi presents them in pairs and considers the understanding of their relations as the first stage in the development of historical thinking, such as 'Environment-Territory', 'Time-Space', 'Society-State', and 'History-Historiography'[33]. This approach through concepts looks more attractive and inclusive for students because it allows them to co-construct the mental categories of historical thinking, independently of their level of cognitive competence and their social or cultural background, and is also immediately applicable in real life.

2.3. Toward an inclusive Pedagogy of History: methods, content, and critical perspectives

Considering the reflections and analyses that have emerged, a crucial question arises: in the contents proposed in History courses today, is it more appropriate to privilege

(32) Mattozzi, I., 2020. *I concetti fondanti nella Storia*. In Pera T. (ed), *La «Scuola Orchestra»: un modello tra presenza e distanza*, Mondadori Università. Pp. 189-211. Mattozzi, I., 1990. *Morfologia della conoscenza storiografica e didattica*, Faenza Editrice.

(33) Mattozzi I. (2020), ibid. p. 190.

the construction of cultural identity or the representation of contemporary reality? This question opens a central line of inquiry into how the selection of historical content contributes both to the formation of collective identity and to students' ability to interpret the present critically. The concept of national purity dates to antiquity, when ancient Greeks used to call anyone else '*barbarians*'. This idea of national homogeneity became more relevant during Modernity, when national states started to shape in Europe, and history education served their political agendas. This process took shape differently according to countries, and those elements that were considered fundamental to the national identity in a state weren't valid for others. Each European country adopted different criteria to mark the line between 'us' and 'them' and determine what should be represented, emphasized, or excluded from history curricula. If the criteria change, the constant element in history education was the promotion of the idea of a national homogeneity. This left a deep mark on history education, which is made evident by the generalist terms to indicate states and nations, empires and civilizations of every period relying on categories modelled on modern states, although no civilization of the past was linguistically, ethnically, or culturally homogeneous.

The cultural identity of ancient Romans, for example, was extremely articulated, and how they perceived themselves changed a lot during their history. A sample is given by Tertullian, who rejected the idea of aiming for a cultural stereotype and coined the term *Romanitas*, as the sum of all the habits and elements peculiar to Romans, with a negative connotation(34). Curiously, this synthesis was done

(34) Tertullian, De Pallio, VI.1

just in the 3rd century and remained an unusual term for the whole of Roman history. But today, the implication of history education in shaping national identities is so strong that, regardless of the country, every change to the curriculum is a matter of political debate(35).

This is determined by the fact that in Europe, since Modernity, history education has been used to ground national identities, independent of the nation or kind of political regime. Even after World War II, when the idea of teaching 'general history' took shape to report the history of mankind(36), it finally resulted in the presentation of military, political, and institutional history(37). This connection between politics and history education brought manuals to focus mostly on national history, on events of national relevance, and on the celebration of national glories.

This attitude is still remarkable, although to different degrees, in every country of Europe. The downside of this historical narrative is that it leaves out various portions of society who don't see themselves represented in history courses as ethnic or linguistic minorities, homosexuals, or migrants. This issue becomes even more relevant in

(35) As examples: Cajani, L. (2020). *I recenti programmi di storia per la scuola italiana.* Storicamente, vol. 52. Haydn, T. (2011). *Secondary History: current themes,* pages 30-45. In Davies I., *Debates of history teaching*, ed. Routledge. p. 37. British ministry of education (1952). *Teaching History*, pamphlet No. 23, HMSO, London. Debré, M. (1980). *Declaration at the Assemblée Nationale*, May 30th, 1980. In Historiens & Géographes, n° spécial 281, «Clio au Parlement». pp. 300-302.

(36) Tibaldini M., Bertoli M., (2026). *Teaching Antiquity throughout the centuries: evolution, issues, perspectives, and topics.* In Barsch S., Tietz W., *Ancient History and historical thinking*, University of Kiel, forthcoming article.

(37) Mattozzi, I. (2018). *La Storia generale scolastica: come rinnovarla.* In Coltri, L., Dalola, D., Rabitti, M.T. (eds.), *Una nuova storia generale da insegnare*.

countries like European ones, which are the destination of migrants from inside and outside the European Union. For societies that are becoming increasingly more intercultural, a move towards a more inclusive history teaching requires making the curricula more flexible, so that history courses can be representative of the different elements of the class. Moving the focus of history curricula from historical facts to historical processes, especially to those processes that are still active today, makes it possible to encompass all the students we have in our classes. The nation-centred narrative, in fact, removed from manuals historical processes that always existed, were relevant, and influenced the life of human societies, such as migration or intercultural exchange[38]. The legacy of 19th-century nationalism still affects our nation-centred historical narratives, and in many European states, manuals tend to present countries as ethnically or culturally homogeneous, and the effects of intercultural transmission are generally neglected.

Migration, one of the hottest topics in political debates, is somehow represented in history curricula, but again, just in relation to national history. For example, migration is a crucial topic for Italian, Turkish, and Hungarian history, but this phenomenon is rarely presented as a systemic human behaviour. Dealing with historical processes instead of focusing on facts gives students a larger perspective on history and allows them to include further historical narratives so that every member of the class is represented in

(38) Tibaldini, M., (2022). *Una didattica inclusiva per una storia multiculturale.* In F. Monducci, A. Portincasa (eds.), *Insegnare Storia*, Utet Universitaria. pp. 333-358. Tibaldini, M. (2023). *Per un insegnamento storico inclusivo e sostenibile*. In Donato D., San Martin Alonso A., Senent J.M., Valle Aparicio J.E. (eds.) *Investigacion en la educacion*, Univesity of Valencia. pp. 203-225.

the picture. Actually, no comparative study has been conducted about how the different educational systems represent the current cultural diversity in history courses, and to what extent the cultures presented in history manuals match the cultures represented by students.

Another feature of history curricula and manuals, which is clear to every history educator but not yet analysed with a systematic and scientific approach, is the recursive use of genderized terms. This habit is common to various languages and implicitly disregard the role played by women in human development: in French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, the singular male noun 'man' is used as a general term to indicate the whole of mankind, in expressions like: "*El hombre descubrió el fuego*" or "*o homem inventou a agricultura*". Apart from the implications that this linguistic choice may have on students' understanding of gender roles in current society, it is historically wrong, since it has been proven that the role played by women at the beginning of agriculture was much more relevant than that of males[39]. This attitude, together with the extensive representation of male protagonists, leads one to think that history is heavily genderized and was made mostly by men rather than by women or homosexuals.

This is true for historiography, which has been written mostly by males, and for political and military history, but it is not true for cultural, artistic, or economic history, where women have always had a crucial role. In the debate on narratives, counter-narratives, and historical research, a

(39) Inhetveen, H., (2002). *Women Pioneers in Farming: A Gendered History of Agricultural Progress*. Sociologia Ruralis. 38. 265 - 284. Macintosh A.A. et al. (2017). *Prehistoric women's manual labor exceeded that of athletes through the first 5500 years of farming in Central Europe*. Science Advances, 3 (11).

preliminary question arises: have these forms of recounting the past always existed? This issue introduces a central theme for understanding how history is constructed and transmitted. In history courses, diversity may be meaningfully valued or merely acknowledged; in both cases, however, the construction of a historical narrative requires the use of primary sources. Such sources are indispensable for grounding historical discourse in solid documentary evidence and for giving voice to perspectives that have been less represented. Diversity can be celebrated in history courses or simply mentioned. But in both cases, it takes primary sources to set up a historical narrative.

Some minorities have been stigmatized for centuries, like the Roma and Jewish people, homosexual and ethnic minorities, and for this have been represented in historiography. Today is possible to use those sources to restore their image and work on the topic with a remarkable historical depth. It is indeed possible to study and teach the story of Jewish communities in Europe, or how the consideration of homosexual behaviours changed in the past from Antiquity to the present. But some other categories of people have been almost completely bypassed by official historiographers and aren't even misrepresented, but simply unmentioned, like, for example, disabled people. This makes it more difficult to introduce the topic in a discrete way. Some kinds of disabilities are easier to spot: deaf people[40] have some famous representatives, like Beethoven, and blind people too, who have been attested since Antiquity

(40) Barsch, S. (2014): *Silent Stories of Exclusion – Teaching Deaf History.* In: International Journal of Research on History Didactics, History Education, And History Culture. Yearbook of the International Society for History Didactics 35, Schwalbach/Ts., 253-261.

with equally famous representatives, like Homer. But other kinds of disabilities have been totally neglected, such as autism, Down syndrome, and dyslexia. In many cases, they were discovered a few decades ago and couldn't be diagnosed before, but in other cases, they must have been visible also in the past, but for some reason, historiographers rarely reported about them, for example, paraplegic people. It is difficult to introduce elements related to them due to the lack of primary sources. As stated by the OHTE report[41], one of the major issues reported by history teachers is the limited quantity of time in relation to the number of notions and topics that should be presented and explained. For this reason, teachers often find it more practical to adapt to the standard teaching methods and traditional narrative rather than designing, testing, and implementing new methods and materials. This issue can be solved with the acknowledgement that the teaching and learning process should be aimed at the final educational result, instead of processes and mid-term assessments. Using a metaphor, we can compare this process to a funnel: it doesn't matter what a teacher pushes into it; what matters is what comes out of it. Being inclusive means paying attention to the individual level and taking care of our students' personal well-being. If we move the attention from the curriculum to students, we can dramatically change our perspective and notice that inclusive education needs to be tailored to specific educational needs. For this reason, the time constraints can become far less relevant if we decide to restyle the history curriculum according to the specific circumstances of the class. Clearly,

(41) OHTE (2023), ibid. 145-6.

it is impossible to introduce and explain all the countries of the world, but it is possible to deal at least with the macro-area from which our students come. It is difficult to restyle in total the nation-centred narrative, but at least it is possible to underline the points of contact between the national and international history, putting in light the situations and occasions when inclusion succeeded on a local or global scale. Also, most of the history curricula still focus on institutional and military history, but not all the battles and dynastic switches are relevant to understanding the present. In some cases, digressions in the field of economics, environmental, social, or cultural history can revive the interest of the students and allow them to pass from the generalist to the individual dimension and speak about nuanced figures whose lives can't exactly fit the 'us' and 'them' paradigm. Another element that recursively emerged from the interviews with the project's members is that teachers need materials to implement inclusive activities in their history courses. These materials should be accessible, printable, affordable, easy to connect with the current history curricula, but also innovative in terms of methods. This would save time and facilitate the adoption of inclusive practices by teachers, and suggest those historical processes and topics that can be presented as digressions. In conclusion, history education must equip students with the cognitive tools necessary to interpret the present considering the past; accordingly, curricula that fail to reflect the plurality and complexity of educational contexts are inadequate for explaining social reality. As briefly outlined in the previous chapters, history education is a subject of intense debates and is still influenced by ideological trends and social dynamics, and the total renewal

of European history curricula to adapt them to the current reality looks like a utopia now. But with reference to the concept of inclusion, we can say that a curriculum is not inclusive if it doesn't even allow the possibility to encompass all the students in a coherent narrative. If the teacher can't even vary the teaching methods or modify the selection of the topics to give space to every sensibility, because of some ideological position, or because of the systemic issues of overcrowded history curricula, it means that there is no room for inclusiveness. The SENSEI project, with the high-level professionals it involves, doesn't attempt to move the line that separates the 'us' and 'them', but moving around this line aims to show that making room for inclusiveness is possible, appropriate, and suitable, and for this reason, it addresses individual teachers. Inclusion can be a wide phenomenon and mark the life of an entire society, but everything starts at the individual level: an individual's choice of a teacher who decides to take care of an individual situation experienced by even a single student.

Reimagining Education for Social Inclusion and Human Development
ISBN 979-12-218-2574-9
DOI 10.53136/97912218257494
pp. 77-134 (aprile 2026)

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF SENSEI

Silvia Guetta*

> "He or she who dares to teach must never cease to learn".
>
> John Cotton Dana

3.1. The Relational Dimension of Inclusion in SENSEI Project: Conceptual Framework and Guiding Orientations

To grasp the underlying rationale and intellectual orientation of the SENSEI project, it is necessary to begin with its foundational documents. The *Grant Agreement* articulates a set of operational and value-based orientations which, although not framed in explicitly normative or prescriptive terms, may be read as de facto guidelines for the development of inclusive good practices in school settings. The document advances a coherent conceptual architecture within which inclusion is progressively construed as a structural principle of educational action, rather than as a

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repertoire of compensatory measures designed to address circumscribed situations of disadvantage[1].

First, inclusion is conceptualized as a structural and systemic process. The project's stated objective is to support both pre-service and in-service teachers in developing pedagogical competencies enabling them to differentiate instruction and to provide instructional "scaffolding." This orientation aims to render classroom learning experiences meaningful, accessible, and participatory for all students, with particular attention to learners with migrant backgrounds and those identified as having special educational needs. Inclusion is thus positioned as an integral component of ordinary, everyday instructional design and classroom practice, rather than as an emergency or remedial response to individual difficulties or to contexts deemed problematic[2].

A second central element concerns the project's conception of teacher professionalism. The *Grant Agreement* explicitly underscores the need to strengthen teachers' competencies through pathways of continuous professional development that are collaborative and transnational in scope. The construction of inclusive good practices is therefore linked to the recognition of the teacher as a reflective practitioner. This form of professionalism is characterised by the capacity to interrogate one's practices critically, to adapt methods, pedagogical languages, and tools to students' needs, and to work through professional networks

(1) Ainscow, M. (1999), *Understanding the Development of Inclusive Education,* Londra, Falmer Press; Ainscow, M., Booth T. Dyson A., (2006). *Improving schools, developing inclusion,* Londra, Routledge; Ainscow, M., & Sandill, A. (2010). *Developing inclusive education systems: The role of school leadership*. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 14(4), 401-416.

(2) Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education*. New York: Macmillan.

that connect teachers, educational institutions, and culturally diverse contexts. From this standpoint, inclusion is closely bound to the cultivation of an informed and self-reflective teacher professionalism, oriented towards dialogue and the co-construction of shared pedagogical knowledge.

A further relevant dimension pertains to the project's sustained attention to the plurality of learners. SENSEI explicitly assumes that contemporary European classrooms are increasingly marked by cultural, linguistic, and social diversity. Accordingly, inclusion requires educational practices capable not only of recognising such plurality, but also of valuing it as a constitutive feature of educational life. Within this framework, history education and citizenship education are identified as privileged curricular domains for fostering belonging, recognition, and participation. Such an approach is intended to counter homogenising or implicitly exclusionary models that may reproduce dynamics of marginalisation.

The *Grant Agreement* also evidences a clear concern with the accessibility of curricular content. Inclusive good practices are described as those able to make knowledge intelligible and meaningful through flexible methodologies, the use of diversified semiotic resources, digital tools, and hybrid modes of learning. Pedagogical innovation is not construed as an end, but as an instrumental strategy for reducing barriers to learning and participation, within a broader horizon of equity and the expansion of educational opportunities.

A transversal strand running through the document concerns the ethical and value-based dimension of inclusion. The project explicitly invokes the fundamental values of the European Union—human dignity, equality, human

rights, and the protection of minorities—as a normative horizon for educational action. Within this perspective, inclusive good practices are not confined to enhancing academic outcomes or improving instructional quality. They are also positioned as contributing to the formation of an informed, democratic, and intercultural citizenship.

Taken as a whole, the *Grant Agreement* suggests that effective school inclusion emerges from the interplay between teacher education, flexible instructional design, the recognition of differences, and the ethical responsibility inherent in educational work. This conceptual framing supports the development of educational practices that are transferable and adaptable across heterogeneous school and training contexts. Inclusion is thus treated as a complex empirical phenomenon, grounded to a significant extent in the relational dimension. This relational dimension does not merely connect discrete events. Rather, it produces circular interdependencies that resist a linear interpretation of educational reality based exclusively on cause-and-effect relations. From this vantage point, complexity enables the identification of emergent qualities arising from the interaction of multiple factors[3].

Adopting a complexity-oriented lens in the design and implementation of inclusive actions entails acknowledging that educational relationships are, in themselves, complex systems. They comprise personal worlds that can become mutually inclusive only insofar as conditions are actively created for such inclusion to occur. This calls for an inclusive mode of thinking that avoids exclusion, judgment, and discrimination, and can hold together seemingly opposing

(3) Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

elements within a dialectical process that renders their meanings intelligible. In this perspective, the educational relationship is constructed through encounters among persons who, guided by trust and by the acceptance of concrete differences, are able—or are educated—to recognise the value not only of agreement, but also of conflict as a constitutive dimension of educational experience.

In clarifying this point, it is necessary to recognize that the relational dimension constitutes the overarching framework within which both the educational relationship—understood as the institutional and professional form of encounter between teachers and students—and the helping relationship can be situated. The helping relationship can emerge within the educational relationship as a specific and situated relational stance. It neither replaces nor exhausts the educational relationship. Rather, it functions as an intentional modality that takes shape in response to a request for help, whether explicit or implicit, and it presupposes specific relational, empathic, and reflective competences.

Building on this conceptual distinction, the chapter examines how these relational levels intersect in concrete ways within the inclusive practices developed through the SENSEI project. It will address, in particular, the relational competences required of teachers to recognise and interpret requests for help in school contexts; the role of empathic communication and self-empathy in managing dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. The chapter will also consider how conflict—rather than being avoided—can be transformed into an educational resource, and, finally, the contribution of disciplinary matrices and SENSEI good practices in supporting a pedagogy of inclusion grounded in relational responsibility, professional reflexivity, and

the creation of educational contexts capable of accommodating complexity. From this perspective, inclusion will be further explored not as a sectoral or compensatory intervention, but as a multi-level relational process traversing disciplinary structures, teaching practices, and professional stances, thereby delineating a coherent framework for both initial teacher education and continuing professional development.

3.2. Inclusion as a multilevel paradigm: rights, relationships, narratives, design, and learning environments

Within contemporary pedagogical debate, the concept of inclusion has progressively consolidated as one of the central paradigms through which to rethink the aims, structures, and practices of educational systems. Consistent with the approach adopted within the SENSEI project, inclusion cannot be understood as a sector-specific domain, nor as a set of interventions addressed to categories of students. Rather, it constitutes a comprehensive perspective that interrogates the very meaning of education, the organisation of learning contexts, and the implicit representations that orient educational action. In this sense, inclusion assumes a transformative significance and is advanced as a structural principle of the entire educational system.

A first fundamental theoretical juncture concerns the shift beyond the model of integration towards the inclusive paradigm. Within the integrative model, prevalent until the final decades of the twentieth century, diversity was conceptualised as a deviation from an implicit norm, and educational intervention was oriented towards adapting

the individual to the existing system. The inclusive paradigm, by contrast, entails a reversal of perspective: it is the educational system that must reorganise itself to accommodate a plurality of differences, recognising them as a structural dimension of human experience and learning processes. This transition is not merely terminological; it implies a profound revision of school cultures, educational policies, and teaching practices.

Within this framework, inclusion is grounded in the recognition of fundamental rights and is configured as an ongoing process aimed at removing barriers that hinder participation and learning for all students. At the same time, it concerns students' own development of tools and strategies to identify what prevents them from accessing knowledge and achieving educational success. For this reason, an exclusively normative understanding of inclusion risks narrowing its educational scope. For inclusion to become effective, it must be assumed as a cultural and pedagogical principle capable of orienting the everyday decisions of educational actors.

This, in turn, entails a transformation of school culture, understood as a set of shared values, representations, and practices.

A second conception of inclusion, closely connected to the previous one, places the relational and communal dimension of education at its centre. From this perspective, inclusion is not reducible to formal access to curricular content, nor to methodological differentiation alone. It is realised, rather, through the quality of educational relationships and through the construction of learning environments capable of fostering well-being, a sense of belonging, and active participation. Inclusion thus becomes

an emergent property of educational contexts, dependent upon how persons are recognised, listened to, and meaningfully involved. To begin from the acknowledgement that inclusion processes are embedded in the construction of relationships also means valuing awareness of the spaces, rules, communicative practices, and exchanges through which such processes unfold. As a relational process, inclusion creates, for everyone, new dialogical contexts of exchange and knowledge that did not previously exist. In this view, an inclusive school constitutes an educational community in which every student is regarded as an active subject, a bearer of rights and resources, and capable of relating both to peers and to adults. These competences are acquired only insofar as students are intentionally enabled to experience and practise them.

In this sense, it is necessary to understand the role played by families and by the cultural and social environments in which educational processes take place.

Dialogue with these contexts — leading to reciprocal recognition of differences in roles, educational competences, and transmitted models — assumes a central importance, insofar as education is understood as a shared social process. Teachers, as professionals of formation mediated through disciplinary knowledge and good practices of coexistence, are called to assume a transformative function that goes beyond the transmission of subject content and includes the care of relationships, the mediation of conflicts, and the construction of equitable learning environments. Inclusion thus appears as a collective responsibility and as an ethical dimension of educational action. A further relevant perspective links inclusion to narrative and to the construction of identity. Educational processes are

not neutral; they actively participate in the production of meanings, identities, and forms of belonging. Through curricula, language, and classroom practices, the school contributes to defining who becomes visible and who remains at the margins, which stories are recognised as legitimate, and which are silenced.

Viewed in this way, inclusion requires critical engagement with the dominant narratives that permeate educational systems. Historiographical reflection offers a particularly significant contribution to this analysis. Historical narratives, often presented as objective and natural, are in fact social and cultural constructions rooted in specific relations of power. Processes of national identity formation have historically produced dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, rendering marginal or invisible those subjects and groups constructed as "others." Inclusive education, in this sense, entails the capacity to interrogate sources critically, to identify silences and omissions within historical narratives, and to restore representational space to voices long excluded(4).

Narrative assumes a central pedagogical role, as it enables the exploration of identity in its complexity and supports an understanding of the processes through which otherness is constructed. Through narrative and dialogical practices, students can develop a critical awareness of exclusionary dynamics and recognise the historical and social character of identities. In this way, inclusion is closely intertwined with education for democratic citizenship, social justice, and the recognition of the other as a subject of equal dignity. Alongside these theoretical and critical

(4) UNESCO. (2017). *A Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education*. Paris: UNESCO.

perspectives, the debate on inclusion has produced operational models capable of translating principles of equity into systematic teaching practices. Among these, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) constitutes a central reference point also within the SENSEI project. UDL proposes an approach to instructional design that treats diversity as an ordinary condition of learning and invites educators to plan educational pathways from the outset in flexible and accessible ways. Grounded in the principles of engagement, representation, and action/expression, UDL aims to provide multiple means of accessing content, participating in learning activities, and demonstrating knowledge.

From this standpoint, inclusion is not conceived as a compensatory intervention, but as the outcome of intentional design that anticipates the removal of barriers that hinder educational success within learning experiences. This approach entails a redefinition of the teacher's role, understood as a designer of learning environments rather than merely a transmitter of knowledge.

For educational inclusion, as noted above, learning environments and spaces are fundamental both for awareness and for well-being. Pedagogical research has shown that physical space is not a neutral element but a structuring factor that profoundly shapes cognitive, relational, and emotional processes(5). Rethinking spaces from an inclusive perspective means, first, creating environments of trust through the progressive familiarisation with places, freedom of movement, and opportunities to contribute to their sustainability and improvement. 'Habitats of trust'

(5) Bamberg, M. (2016). *Narrative, identity, and the construction of otherness: A dialogical approach to storytelling in education*. Narrative Inquiry, 26(2), 213–230.

are constructed at both the human and the physical levels. Learning environments need to evolve into spaces that become progressively more familiar to learners, where a sense of safety is cultivated over time through sustained guidance, intellectual stimulation, and motivational support. Within this academic framing, inclusion encompasses the entire educational ecosystem, conceived as the dynamic interplay among individuals, disciplinary content, learning environments, technological tools, organisational cultures, and the material conditions that shape educational experiences[6]. The possibility of working across different spaces, alternating individual and collaborative activities, and modulating *time of learning* contributes to 'valuing students' autonomy and sustaining plural modes of learning[7].

Taken together, these different conceptions show that educational inclusion cannot be reduced to a single model or to a set of techniques. It is better understood as a complex, multi-level paradigm integrating normative, relational, narrative, didactic, and environmental dimensions.

For initial teacher education and continuing professional development, this implies recognising inclusion as an ongoing process of professional reflection that requires critical competences, openness to change, and ethical awareness. From this standpoint, inclusion is not merely a pedagogical issue, but a cultural and political choice that calls into question the very meaning of education within pluralistic societies.

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(6) Bozkurt, A., Sharma, R. C. (2021). *Emergency remote teaching in a time of global crisis: Educational ecosystem, learner wellbeing, and the importance of care.* Asian Journal of Distance Education, 16(1), 1–6.

(7) D'Alessio S. (2015), *La ricerca per l'educazione inclusiva a livello globale.* L'integrazione scolastica e Sociale, vol. 14, n. 3, pp 243-250.

3.3. From inclusion as a principle to inclusion as practice: teaching strategies, professional dispositions, and disciplinary architectures

As discussed in the previous chapter, educational inclusion cannot be understood as a set of technical measures, nor as a sector-specific objective. Rather, it should be conceptualised as a complex paradigm that permeates the entire educational system, including its cultures, narratives, and practices. Building on this *theoretical framework*, the present chapter examines the transition from inclusion as a guiding principle to inclusion as educational practice, focusing on the ways in which this paradigm takes shape in teachers' everyday professional work.

The underlying assumption, consistent with the arguments developed above, is that inclusion is not realised through declarations of intent, but through instructional decisions, pedagogical devices, and professional stances capable of exerting a concrete influence on processes of participation and learning[8]. From this perspective, the SENSEI project constitutes a particularly significant reference point, insofar as it integrates theoretical reflection, applied examples, and teacher education pathways designed to support a conscious transformation of educational practices.

A first operational dimension of inclusion concerns the distinction between presence, participation, and learning, already identified in the previous chapter as essential for moving beyond a merely formal understanding

(8) EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2018). *The European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

of inclusion. SENSEI materials clearly show that students' physical presence in the same space does not ensure meaningful participation nor effective access to learning processes.

In this regard, the case of a student with a migrant background who, despite demonstrating strong cognitive competencies, participates only marginally in group activities is emblematic. An inclusive approach does not interpret such a situation as an individual deficit; rather, it invites critical scrutiny of the structure of the proposed activity and the conditions for participation that it produces[9]. In line with a systemic conception of inclusion, attention shifts from an assumed "lack" on the part of the student to the implicit barriers generated by instructional design. Inclusion thus becomes a responsibility of the educational context, not a problem located in the individual[10].

A second axis of continuity with the previous chapter concerns the centrality of the relational dimension. If inclusion is understood as a matter of the quality of educational relationships and of the construction of learning environments grounded in recognition and belonging, the SENSEI materials make the operational implications of this perspective visible in classroom management and in the handling of conflictual dynamics[11].

The creation of safe spaces emerges as a non-negotiable condition for inclusion. Situations in which offensive jokes,

(9) Ianes D. (2005), *Bisogni educativi speciali e Inclusione. Valutare le reali necessità e attivare tutte le risorse,* Trento, Erickson.

(10) Jonas H. (1990), *Il principio di responsabilità. Un'etica per la civiltà tecnologica,* Einaudi, Torino.

(11) Demo H., (2014), *Dentro e fuori dell'aula: che cosa funziona davvero nella classe inclusiva?,* Italian Journal of Special Education for Inclusion, vol. 3, n.1, pp. 53-70.

discriminatory language, or identity-related micro-aggressions occur represent critical moments in which teachers' professional stance becomes decisive. Consistent with an understanding of inclusion as a dialogical process rather than as the mere enforcement of rules, the proposed approach prioritises the co-construction of classroom norms, guided dialogue, and the framing of conflict as an educational opportunity. From this standpoint, inclusion does not coincide with the absence of tensions, but with the capacity to transform them into opportunities for relational learning.

A third domain of inclusion in practice concerns equity-oriented instructional design, which in the previous chapter was discussed theoretically through reference to Universal Design for Learning (UDL)[12]. In the present chapter, this model is further specified through examples drawn from everyday teaching practice. The use of simplified or supported texts, visual organisers, concept maps, and digital tools, together with the possibility for students to demonstrate knowledge through different modalities, illustrates how common learning goals can be maintained while diversifying pathways. Consistent with an understanding of inclusion as system transformation, these practices are not reserved for students labelled as having "special needs," but are positioned as resources for the entire class. As argued in the previous chapter, equity is not equivalent to sameness, but to the creation of conditions that enable each learner to learn according to their own ways of accessing and processing knowledge. This perspective entails a redefinition of the teacher's role.

(12) Rao, K., Ok, M. W., & Bryant, B. R. (2021). *A review of research on Universal Design for Learning from 2012 to 2019: Implementation and impact*. Universal Access in the Information Society, 20, 319–332.

As anticipated in the previous chapter, the teacher is positioned as a designer of learning environments, capable of anticipating diversity rather than merely reacting to it. Inclusion thus becomes a reflective professional competence that integrates disciplinary knowledge, pedagogical sensitivity, and sustained attention to relational processes.

A further element of continuity concerns inclusion, understood as critical work on narratives and on processes through which otherness is constructed. SENSEI modules devoted to history education and the deconstruction of stereotypes show how this perspective can be translated into concrete instructional activities. The analysis of historical sources, colonial imagery, and racialising texts enables students to recognise the mechanisms through which otherness has been constructed and mobilised to legitimise inequalities, discrimination, and violence. The proposed approach does not stop at identifying stereotypes; it supports students in understanding their historical functions and their consequences in the present. In this way, inclusion is configured as education for historical consciousness and civic responsibility[13].

3.4. Disciplinary Matrices as Inclusive Devices: History as a Critical Space for the Construction and Deconstruction of Exclusion

As argued in previous chapters, educational inclusion cannot be reduced to compensatory practices nor to targeted interventions responding to contingent forms of disadvantage. It

(13) Morin E. (2015), *Insegnare a vivere. Manifesto per cambiare l'educazione,* Milano Raffaello Cortina Editore.

must be understood as a structural dimension of educational processes. This dimension concerns relational and institutional contexts, but it also concerns the disciplinary architectures through which schools organise, transmit, and legitimise knowledge[14]. Within this framework, the work carried out with students enrolled in the Master's programme in Teacher Education — within the degree track in School Leadership and Pedagogy for Inclusion at the University of Florence — was designed to challenge a still widespread assumption, namely that inclusion pertains primarily to "how to teach." The pathway demonstrated, instead, that inclusion also interrogates "what to teach," and, more fundamentally, the epistemological categories through which school disciplines construct knowledge and competence.

The decision to use history, historical research, and historiography as a field for methodological experimentation was deliberate. History occupies a paradigmatic position within the curriculum, as it contributes decisively to the construction of representations of the past, collective identities, and social forms of belonging. At the same time, school history may become a space in which processes of exclusion are naturalised, particularly when dominant narratives privilege politico-military events, armed conflicts, elite decision-making, and institutional dynamics, while relegating to the background the social, cultural, and existential consequences of historical processes. Work on didactic matrices began from this critical observation. Students were guided to recognise a recurring feature of textbooks and dominant historical narratives: the marginalisation or invisibilisation of subjects, groups, and experiences that fall outside

(14) AGENZIA EUROPEA PER I BISOGNI EDUCATIVI SPECIALI (2014), *Cinque messaggi chiave per l'educazione inclusiva. Dalla teoria alla prassi.*

the canon of "official" history. Within this approach, inclusion was not treated as an additional theme to be inserted into programmes, but as an interpretive lens capable of reorienting the structure of historical discourse itself. The matrices employed in the training pathway — particularly the *Planungsmatrix* — played a decisive role. They functioned as devices of epistemological mediation, enabling students to analyse systematically the relationship among historical content, learning objectives, methodologies, and inclusive implications. Through the planning grid, students were guided to formulate precise questions: they examined criteria for content selection, analysed which concepts of historical thinking were activated, and assessed which narratives were privileged and which remained in the background. A central dimension of the work involved decentring attention away from historical events understood in a narrow sense. Across the proposed case studies, the analytical focus progressively shifted from political and economic causes to individual and collective lived experiences, to social consequences, to family ruptures, to identity transformations, and to processes of stigmatisation. The case studies included internal migration in post-war Italy, Italian emigration to Belgium, immigration to Italy, and antisemitism. This shift did not weaken disciplinary rigour; on the contrary, it strengthened students' analytical capacity by making the complexity of historical phenomena more visible. The study of internal migration in Italy through the experiences of children involved in the "Trains of Welcome" proved particularly significant.

This choice made visible a layer of historical reality often absent from school textbooks. History was not presented as a sequence of political decisions or abstract economic flows, but as an intertwining of choices, suffering,

solidarity, and practices of welcome. In this way, the discipline of history became a space for reflecting on mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, both in the past and in the present. The matrices also supported a metacognitive reflection on the role of historical narration in the construction of knowledge. Students were encouraged to compare heterogeneous materials: primary and secondary sources, historiographical texts, media representations, and cultural products. This comparison made evident that every narrative is situated and carries a perspective.

The pathway thus challenged the notion of history as neutral and objective, opening space for a pedagogy capable of critically interrogating its own interpretive categories. In this sense, inclusion was addressed as an epistemic issue prior to being a methodological one[15].

The matrices demonstrated how disciplinary structures may function — often without explicit intent — as devices of exclusion, by selecting what is considered worthy of being remembered and what may be forgotten. Rendering these processes visible provided students with conceptual tools that are equally relevant for interpreting the present, particularly in relation to public and media discourses on migration, minorities, and stigmatised groups.

A further significant outcome of the work concerns the possibility of using history as a formative discipline for critical reading of the present. Analysing the social consequences of Italian migration to Belgium, or the representation of child poverty in the post-war period, enabled students to identify continuities and discontinuities with contemporary narratives about migration. In this way,

(15) Chiappelli T., *Imparare assieme per imparare a vivere assieme. Inclusione scolastica e coesione sociale negli scenari 2.0*, Nerbini, Firenze 2016.

history assumed a formative function oriented towards democratic citizenship, providing tools for understanding and deconstructing still-operational stereotypes.

The didactic matrices also fostered a coherent integration of content, method, and assessment. Meta reflection, explicitly embedded in each phase of planning, enabled students to evaluate the inclusive efficacy of their instructional decisions, recognising strengths and limitations. This step clarified a crucial point: inclusion is not an assured outcome, but a process requiring monitoring, adaptation, and critical awareness.

Overall, the matrices used in work with Master's students demonstrated that inclusion can be studied and practised within disciplinary structures themselves, without thematic distortions or marginal insertions. History, historical research, and historiography proved effective in making processes of exclusion and inclusion visible, while also providing a robust basis for developing critical competences transferable to other disciplinary domains.

In conclusion, the work on matrices highlighted that inclusive education should not be conceived as an emergency response to problematic contexts. It should instead be understood as an epistemological and pedagogical stance that traverses the process of knowledge construction. Studying the historical and social consequences of past processes equips students with tools for recognising analogous dynamics in the present and supports their capacity to imagine more conscious and responsible practices of inclusion. From this perspective, history becomes not only an object of instruction but also a privileged space for education towards complexity, responsibility, and democratic coexistence[16].

(16) Sant, E., & Gonzalez-Valencia, G. (2021). *Deliberative democratic education and the teaching of history: Promoting critical agency and*

3.5. From good practices to school cultures: teacher collaboration, interdisciplinarity, and educational partnerships in plural contexts

Processes of inclusion enrich and transform educational settings. They may be understood as generative experiences of mutual knowledge and recognition of otherness, as well as spaces in which shared humanity is constructed. In school life, such processes unfold along a double dimension.

The proximal dimension concerns those directly involved in the daily life of the school community. The distal dimension concerns actors who participate indirectly or through mediation, including families, specialized professionals, local services, and municipal or regional institutions. This relational network produces complex dynamics that intersect with disciplinary processes and contribute to shaping the overall educational climate.

Each classroom, understood as a microcosm of the school system, displays distinct levels of relational and organizational complexity. These levels affect both the interpretation and the management of helping processes and inclusive practices. Pedagogical scholarship often focuses on situations presented as emblematic "cases," as occurs also within the SENSEI project. Such situations, however, cannot be adequately understood if they are isolated from the relational, institutional, and cultural contexts in which they are embedded. Inclusion does not concern only the individual recipient of targeted interventions; it involves the entire educational community and its communicative and organizational arrangements. From this standpoint,

civic responsibility in complex societies. Journal of Curriculum Studies, 53(4), 503–519.

inclusive practices can become authentic learning experiences of learning to live together only insofar as they are conceived not as punctual or compensatory actions, but as diffuse relational praxes. They must accompany—structurally and continuously—the teaching–learning processes through which disciplinary knowledge is constructed, which constitute the primary task of schooling. This entails a further step: it is not sufficient to adopt theoretical and methodological models consistent with inclusion, nor to select appropriate disciplinary content. It becomes necessary to render explicit, shared, and progressively consolidated the communicative forms, everyday interactions, and professional behaviours through which inclusion is embodied in ordinary practice(17).

Considering the good practices identified within the SENSEI framework, it becomes evident that inclusion requires attention to a plurality of dimensions that exceed the mere adoption of inclusive teaching methods. Inclusion is built within a complex relational fabric that includes both vertical and horizontal relations: teacher–student relationships, collegial relationships, school–family relationships, and relations among educational staff.

The practices promoted by the SENSEI consortium show that the quality of these relationships constitutes a structural condition for learning environments that are accessible, participatory, and generative.

The training experiences developed within the project place particular value on collaborative work among teachers. Such collaboration is not framed solely as an

(17) Feuerstein R., Feuerstein R.S., Falik L.h., Rand Y.A., *Il programma di arricchimento strumentale di Feuerstein. Fondamenti teorici e applicazioni pratiche,* Trento, Edizioni Erickson, 2008.

organisational strategy, but as an educational device. In both initial teacher education and in-service professional development, co-designing inclusive teaching units and engaging in peer-to-peer dialogue made a decisive aspect visible: relational dynamics among teachers directly shape classroom practices. In this sense, inclusion is not presented as an individual competence of the single teacher, but as the outcome of a shared professional culture. In continuity with the previous discussion, a further crucial aspect concerns dialogue among disciplines. SENSEI good practices show that inclusive interdisciplinarity cannot be reduced to a formal and fragmented planning exercise organised around a topic addressed by different subjects. It is not sufficient for each teacher to intervene separately within closed disciplinary logics. The most meaningful experiences are those in which interdisciplinarity is lived through the co-presence of knowledges, co-taught activities, and practices of sustained dialogue among teachers from different fields.

In such contexts, students can observe and experience models of dialogue, argumentation, and the negotiation of meaning. These models operate as powerful devices for inclusive good practice. Within the pathways piloted in the project, this dimension emerged with clarity in activities centred on complex historical themes such as migrations, antisemitism, gender, and the construction of otherness.

In these activities, collaboration among historical, pedagogical, and social perspectives enabled content to be addressed in non-reductive ways. The contents were not treated only as objects of knowledge, but as occasions for critical reflection on dynamics of exclusion and inclusion, in both past and present. In this form, interdisciplinarity

acquired an explicitly formative function: it made visible the processes through which knowledge is constructed and countered simplifying or implicitly exclusionary approaches. Within this framework, teachers' roles appear central not only in didactic terms, but also on symbolic and relational levels. SENSEI training activities show that teachers function as implicit models for students through the ways they communicate, collaborate, manage conflict, and engage with diversity. This modelling function, however, often remains under-thematized in everyday practice.

The training pathways highlighted that many teachers are not fully aware of a crucial point: their daily actions convey values, attitudes, and representations that extend beyond the disciplinary content explicitly taught.

Educational theory provides robust foundations for interpreting this dynamic. John Dewey emphasised that education takes place through experience and social interaction, and that teachers therefore embody democratic values within educational contexts[18]. Lev Vygotsky highlighted the teacher's role as cultural mediator, capable of orienting learning through dialogue and the shared construction of meaning[19]. Carl Rogers stressed the importance of a relational climate grounded in authenticity and empathy[20]. Paulo Freire underscored the necessity of a critical and conscious educational stance oriented toward social transformation[21]. Albert Bandura demonstrated how

(18) Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education*. New York: Macmillan.

(19) Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Op. cit.

(20) Rogers, C. R. (1969). *Freedom to Learn.* Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company.

(21) Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

observational learning makes adult behaviour particularly influential in students' formation[22]. The experiences developed within the SENSEI project translate these theoretical references into practice. They show that inclusion cannot be promoted effectively if teachers do not themselves experience, within training contexts, practices of listening, recognition, and participation. Pre-service and in-service education must therefore enable reflective work on professional positioning, cultural implicit assumptions, and the group dynamics experienced in collaborative activities, so that embodied and reflective learning can be elaborated and transferred into classroom practice. From this perspective, it becomes useful to reverse the traditional question of inclusion. The issue is not only how to include students, but also how teachers understand their own need for inclusion within the educational community. SENSEI good practices suggest that generative educational communication is built when teachers live experiences of belonging, dialogue, and recognition. Inclusion, therefore, does not concern only the recipients of educational action; it involves the entire educational system, beginning with those who are called to design and inhabit it. In many contexts, a recurrent limitation of inclusion discourse lies in insufficient attention to the formation and presence of prejudices, to deficits of trust, and to the fragility of ethical reference points that may traverse the actors involved. Modes of thinking, relational difficulties, and communicative strategies that are activated — or inhibited — within educational relationships often remain implicit. Encounters with the other are not automatically positive: school proposals may

(22) Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

generate discomfort, resistance, or conflict. This becomes particularly visible in inclusion processes connected to migration experiences, where the imaginaries of children and young people entering unfamiliar environments — deprived of culturally familiar reference points and sometimes distant from relational models lived at home — become pedagogically salient.

Some research addressing so-called "false beliefs" or problematic representations in migration-related contexts does not focus primarily on prejudices against Italians. Rather, it examines expectations, implicit pedagogies, and interpretations of the role of school and teacher, as well as ideas about assessment, discipline, and guidance.

These frames may come into tension with the functioning of Italian schooling. A well-established strand of research explores school–family relationships in migratory contexts and the mutual misunderstandings that may follow. Within this line of inquiry, for instance, Chiara Bove and Susanna Mantovani have examined "implicit pedagogies" and reciprocal expectations in the dialogue between parents with migrant backgrounds and teachers, particularly in early childhood education[23]. These studies show how everyday communication may reveal often-unarticulated ideas about what it means to "educate well," about the authority attributed to teachers, and about the role of the family and the forms of participation expected.

When such frames remain implicit, they can generate misunderstandings and misattributions: limited

(23) Bove, C., & Mantovani, S. (2015). *Pedagogie implicite e aspettative reciproche nel dialogo tra genitori immigrati e insegnanti nella scuola dell'infanzia*. Rivista Italiana di Educazione Familiare, 9-31.

participation may be interpreted as disengagement, while requests for directive guidance may be read as distrust.

These mechanisms have direct consequences for students' educational trajectories. Related contributions converge on a recurrent point: difficulties cannot be reduced to language alone. They also concern communicative codes, institutional trust, and differing interpretations of rules and responsibilities between school and family.

Intercultural policy orientations issued at the ministerial level likewise stress the need to inform families accurately about school organization and educational programmes, including through cultural mediators.

This emphasis implicitly acknowledges that informational asymmetries and taken-for-granted interpretations can generate exclusion. A second research pole frequently discussed in international scholarship concerns the prejudices and implicit expectations held by school adults towards students with migrant backgrounds and other conditions that may be interpreted as a disadvantage.

This issue is not limited to what families "think"; it concerns what happens in the encounter itself. Expectations are relational dynamics: they are constructed in interaction and may mutually reinforce one another. Within educational settings, the literature identifies several recurring critical nodes. A first node concerns language, not only as Italian as a second language, but as access to disciplinary language: when academic Italian remains a barrier, under-participation increases and assessments of competence may become distorted. A second node concerns discontinuities in educational trajectories: late arrivals, grade repetition, and guidance decisions do not always recognise aspirations and competences. In these transitions the risk of

early school leaving increases, particularly in the move to upper secondary education. A third node concerns participation and belonging: in various contexts, students with migrant backgrounds report relational difficulties and a lower perception of support, which affects motivation and achievement; these aspects depend on school climate and the quality of educational relationships. A fourth node concerns school–family communication as an infrastructure of inclusion. The issue is not merely translation, but the construction of channels of trust, mediation, and reciprocity.

When families do not understand how schooling operates, or when schools interpret certain family behaviours through a deficit lens, misunderstandings increase and educational opportunities diminish.

3.6. Knowing how to include between helping relationships and care: empathic competencies, agency, and well-being in educational contexts

Building learning environments that are inclusive and oriented towards well-being requires a repertoire of competences that belong to the helping relationship.

Such competences are not confined to asymmetric relationships, such as those between adults and children or teachers and students. They may also operate within ostensibly symmetric relationships whenever needs for care, guidance, recognition, or support become salient. In general terms, the helping relationship may be defined as an intentional relationship aimed at supporting the other person in recognising, understanding, and mobilising their personal resources, without substituting for them

in processes of growth and change. It is not centred on the direct solving of problems, nor does it take the form of a prescriptive intervention. Rather, it seeks to facilitate autonomy, awareness, and the capacity for self-determination. Rogers and Carkhuff stress that an effective helping relationship depends on attending to a set of relevant conditions[24]. Alongside listening, attention should be paid to embodied involvement — posture, eye contact (which varies across cultural contexts), and the ways non-verbal communication is articulated. Equally crucial is the ability to communicate empathy through messages that "reflect" the other person's feelings and meanings, thereby allowing them to experience themselves as heard and understood.

Empathic listening is therefore central both to the helping relationship and to inclusive processes. This form of listening does not coincide with the mere gathering of information. It constitutes a professional stance that translates into accompaniment and orientation. Authentic listening becomes an essential instrument of help because it enables the other to feel recognised, legitimised, and welcomed within their lived experience.

These relational dynamics also implicate the educator, the teacher, and the trainer, and they require an ongoing work of self-knowledge. They demand awareness of one's limits and resources, as well as sustained attention to one's fears, relational automatisms, and the internal structure of one's prejudices. Empathic listening makes empathic

(24) Lockhart, W. H. (1984). *Rogers"Necessary and Sufficient Conditions' Revisited.* «British Journal of Guidance and Counselling», 12(2), 113-123; Carkhuff, R. R. (2000). *The art of helping in the 21st century* (Vol. 8). Human Resource Development.

responses possible, yet it also supports personalized responses capable of enhancing students' awareness of their potentials, tools, and competences, so that they can identify — also with increasing autonomy — possible solutions to the problems they encounter.

This theoretical framework, grounded in empathy, self-empathy, and empathic communication, offers a particularly fruitful interpretive lens for reading the inclusive dynamics promoted within the SENSEI project.

From this standpoint, the helping relationship does not coincide with a rigidly asymmetric structure. It may also occur among peers or colleagues, when the relational ecology of the context makes it possible. What defines a relationship as a helping relationship is the presence of a request for help, expressed by individuals in different ways. Although such a request is typically associated with conditions of need, vulnerability, discomfort, malaise, or disorientation, it remains crucial that those involved become aware both request itself and of the kind of help they require. This is necessary to avoid substitution processes in doing and acting, or relational arrangements that foster passivity and, consequently, negatively affect self-esteem.

This clarification is particularly relevant in educational and inclusive settings. In school and training contexts, requests for help do not always appear in direct or explicitly verbalised forms. They may emerge through indirect signals, including withdrawal, difficulties in participation, resistance, silence, or conflict. They may also appear through forms of hyper-adaptation that conceal discomfort.

Recognizing such signals requires a relational stance grounded in empathic listening, together with the ability

to read the complexity of educational situations, thereby avoiding reductive or deficit-oriented interpretations.

The good practices developed within SENSEI indicate that inclusion must be constructed as a sensitive and situated response to needs emerging in real contexts.

Within this frame, the helping relationship may be understood as a negotiated process. It takes shape when the other person perceives that they are recognised and listened to, and when they experience themselves as free to express their question, including when that question is articulated in non-conventional ways.

Within this approach, the contributions of Carl Rogers and Marshall Rosenberg are particularly pertinent. Empathic understanding — understood as the capacity to grasp the other person's standpoint without confusing it with one's own — creates the conditions for a request for help to emerge authentically. Yet, as Rosenberg emphasises, this capacity presupposes a preliminary work of self-empathy. Self-empathy consists of a conscious listening to the feelings and needs that arise within one's relationship to oneself and to others. An educator who develops this competence reduces the risk of projecting expectations and unsolicited solutions onto the other person and likewise reduces the risk of interpretations that do not correspond to the underlying request. According to Rosenberg, self-empathy is absent when critical thoughts, judgements, fear, shame, or guilt directed at oneself prevent one from seeing one's own capacities, uniqueness, and potential. In such states, one tends to perceive oneself as an object — often as an object defined by defects — thereby losing contact with reality and with others. When one evaluates behaviour in terms of unmet human needs, motivation for change arises

not from guilt, anger, or disappointment, but from a genuine interest in contributing to one's own well-being and that of others. By cultivating empathy toward oneself, one chooses to act according to human needs and values rather than out of duty, in search of external recognition, or to avoid an evaluation and reproach.

Empathy is not only the capacity to offer authentic listening to the other by suspending a preliminary assessment and prejudice so that connection becomes possible. It is also an act of presence that neither judges nor assumes responsibility for the other person's life, and that does not attempt to force change. Its power lies in generating well-being for both the receiver and the giver of empathy. Rosenberg argues that the more one connects with the feelings and needs behind other people's words, the less frightening it becomes to open oneself to them. The situations in which individuals are most reluctant to express vulnerability are often those in which they seek to maintain a "strong image," out of fear of losing authority or control. A helping relationship that takes these premises seriously makes it possible to develop reciprocity grounded in respect, trust, and mutual improvement. Roles may differ, yet the dignity of the subjects remains intact. The educator does not "decide" to help; rather, they make themselves available to help when the other requests it, recognising the other person's right to define their own need and their own timing.

The inclusive dynamics promoted by SENSEI align with this orientation. Attention to a plurality of voices, the co-design of teaching activities, and the valorisation of both students' and teachers' experiences indicate that inclusion is inseparable from a relational conception of help.

The aim is not to "include someone," but to construct contexts in which each person feels legitimised to ask for help, to express a need, and to participate without being required to conform to implicit normative models.

From this perspective, empathy and self-empathy become key competencies for inclusive education. They enable educators to recognise requests for help even when these are not formulated explicitly, and they support responses that do not substitute for the other. The helping relationship thus functions as a generative relational device: it sustains learning processes, strengthens a sense of belonging, and contributes to the construction of educational communities capable of accommodating complexity. Integrating this theoretical framework into training and teaching practices, as proposed within SENSEI, implies recognising that inclusion — grounded in principles of equity, accessibility to knowledge, improvement of living conditions, and well-being — is realised through relational processes that are fundamentally original.

These processes did not exist beforehand and could not exist independently of the persons involved and the contextual conditions that generate them.

In this way, the helping relationship becomes one of the central axes of a pedagogy of inclusion grounded in mutual recognition, shared responsibility, and the possibility for each subject to be an agent of their own improvement and of the distinctive originality that makes them unique. A further pedagogical presupposition of the helping relationship is, for Rogers, unconditional acceptance of the other person, or unconditional positive regard.

This condition is described as a genuine respect and acceptance of the individual as they are, without assessment,

or fixation on perceived lacks. To accept the other means to recognise their worth independently of behaviours, difficulties, or fragilities. In an authentic helping relationship, the other is not required to "earn" approval by adapting to the helper's expectations. This also supports self-acceptance, thereby fostering personal development. Only within such a relational climate can disorientation, fear, and weakness be addressed without fear of evaluation. As already noted, the helping relationship does not coincide with a relationship of reciprocal exchange. It entails a form of structural gratuitousness. The person acting empathically in interpersonal relationships cannot expect recognition or proportional responses to their investment. The other's commitment to the process depends on their freedom. Accepting this asymmetry means maintaining clarity about the ultimate aim of the helping relationship: not control over the process, but the strengthening of the other person's capacity to listen to themselves, understand themselves, and accept themselves, thereby developing competences of autonomy, self-empathy, and freedom that generate well-being and quality of life. Situating the helping relationship within educational contexts makes its connection to inclusive dynamics evident.

Inclusion is not achieved solely through organisational arrangements or methodological devices.

It requires educational relationships capable of recognising students' subjectivity, lived experience, histories, and needs, without reducing them to categories or labels.

In this sense, the helping relationship provides an essential theoretical and operational framework for inclusive education. In school settings, a teacher who adopts a helping stance does not merely transmit disciplinary content; they create relational conditions that enable each

student to feel entitled to learn, participate, and to make mistakes. Empathic listening, positive acceptance, and trust in developmental potential contribute to reducing emotional, relational, and symbolic barriers that hinder inclusion.

This is especially significant for students in conditions of vulnerability, with migrant backgrounds, or with special educational needs. The helping relationship also enables a shift from a deficit-oriented logic to a resource-oriented logic. To facilitate without substituting; to accompany without directing; to recognise without normalising: these stances sustain inclusive dynamics and strengthen a sense of belonging within the educational community. As a final pedagogical consideration, it is fruitful to introduce the category of care as articulated by Luigina Mortari, insofar as it also invokes the person's well-being within the horizon of inclusion discussed above. This move allows a more theoretically robust account of what makes a learning context genuinely "habitable," and why certain practices, though formally inclusive, do not necessarily generate experiences of participation and belonging. Since the 1980s, several scholars have argued that care is neither an external ethical addition to education nor a generically benevolent attitude. It is, rather, a fundamental phenomenon of human experience: without care, existence "cannot flourish," and no community can secure a sufficiently good quality of life unless it is grounded in practices of mutual care[25]. From this standpoint, care is not merely a value-content, but an ontological and pedagogical key. It defines the human

(25) Mortari L. (2019), *Aver cura di sé,* Milano Raffaello Cortina Editore.

condition as relational, fragile, and vulnerable, and it renders intelligible the nexus between education, well-being, and responsibility toward the other. Mortari proposes understanding care as a "practice", that is, as a concrete and situated action: one can speak of care when an intention, a thought, or a project becomes recognisable in gestures and words, namely in an acting that is "visible and sensible." Care, in other words, does not coincide with an inner disposition alone; it takes shape in the organisation of time, attention, language, and choices, and in the way one responds to one's own vulnerability and that of others. This definition is particularly relevant for inclusive education because it helps avoid two frequent reductions: the reduction of inclusion to a declaration of principles, and the reduction of inclusion to technique. If inclusion is a multi-level relational process, care describes the concrete quality of that process and its everyday "holding," precisely where accessibility of devices and formal correctness of procedures are insufficient to generate recognition and participation.

Care is further defined by Luigina Mortari as a practice guided by the intention to "procure benefit," for oneself and/or for others[26]. This intentionality allows care to be connected to the projective dimension already present in the SENSEI architecture: care is not emotional spontaneism, but an intentional choice that orients educational action toward conditions that make learning and participation possible. Within this framework, the double direction of care becomes central: care of the self and care of the other. These directions are not separable. One does not learn

(26) Mortari L. (2023), *La cultura della cura: sguardo, ascolto, e responsabilità,* Milano, Asmepa Edizioni.

to care for oneself without having received care, and one cannot care competently for the other without being capable of caring for oneself. For teacher education, this point is decisive because it makes it possible to thematise the professional dimension of self-regulation, reflexivity, and the sustainability of educational work.

Care of the self is not an individualistic privatization of well-being, but a condition of possibility for competent care of the other; conversely, care of the other is not unlimited self-sacrifice, but a form of work that requires time, energy, virtues, and the willingness to welcome needs and necessities. This approach resonates directly with the "relational dimension" assumed as the chapter's overarching frame. Care makes explicit that educational relationships are not simple channels through which disciplinary content passes, but sites in which subjects' ways of being take shape and in which their possibility of flourishing is either enabled or inhibited.

Drawing on Heidegger's philosophical account, care lies at the heart of the human condition, defining it as an "ontological structure of Dasein" and as a necessary mode of living: throughout life, human beings must attend to themselves, to others, and to the world. This thesis clarifies why inclusion cannot be framed as a compensatory intervention or an optional supplement. If human life is constitutively relational and grounded in care, then exclusion is not simply the absence of appropriate "adjustments," but a wound to relationality itself, and thus a disruption of the basic conditions that make education possible. Inclusion must therefore also be understood as the capacity of the educational context not to reduce individuals to categories, deficits, or functions, but to safeguard subjectivity and

dignity through coherent relational practices. At this point, a structural connection emerges with both the educational relationship and the helping relationship. The chapter has clarified that the helping relationship does not necessarily coincide with an asymmetry established by institutional roles; rather, it constitutes a situated stance that takes shape in response to a request for help, explicit or implicit. The category of care allows this passage to be specified further: care describes the intentional horizon and the criterion of quality for educational action; the helping relationship describes a particular configuration that may emerge within that horizon when a need becomes manifest, and a question becomes recognizable. In this perspective, care helps prevent paternalistic drifts. It does not authorize the educator to decide the other's good in their place; instead, it orients the educator toward creating conditions in which the other can return "to the centre of their own existence", reopening spaces of possibility and sovereignty over the self. The criterion is not substitution but accompaniment; not control, but the restitution of agency and the safeguarding of dignity. The SENSEI framework, as reconstructed in the preceding sections, is fully compatible with this reading. On the one hand, SENSEI stresses the construction of contexts in which students and teachers can feel legitimised to express needs and to participate without conforming to implicit normative models. On the other hand, care provides a vocabulary for naming what makes such legitimation possible: attention, time, listening, responsiveness, vigilance toward micro-exclusions, and the capacity to recognise vulnerability when it manifests indirectly. Within this frame, care does not coincide with neutralising conflict, but with the ability to remain with tensions

without turning them into exclusion, which connects directly to the chapter's discussion of inclusion and conflict.

Care is oriented toward good and toward the protection of life, one's own and that of others; it is "proactive and protective," insofar as it seeks benefit and protects from harm. This definition helps interpret conflictual dynamics not as inconveniences to eliminate, but as signals requiring care — that is, interpretation, containment, and transformation. In schools, this means recognising that jokes, micro-aggressions, stereotypes, silences, and withdrawals are not only "disciplinary problems," but manifestations of relational vulnerability and unrecognised needs.

Care, as practice, asks educators not to reduce such events to individual blame or deviance, but to treat them as educational material, to be addressed with languages and devices that preserve dignity and reopen possibilities of belonging. In this direction, care is also a practice of truth and responsibility. Mortari invokes *parrhesia* as a gesture of care: a form of truth-telling that names what produces suffering or injustice and attempts to initiate change, even when it entails risk for the speaker. In teaching practice, this translates into the capacity to name exclusionary dynamics, interrupt discriminatory language, make mechanisms of othering visible, and do so not as an exercise of power, but as the safeguarding of the educational bond and the common good of the classroom[27]. Mortari also stresses the relationship between care and equality. Equality, understood relationally, is not only the claim of abstract rights, but may be interpreted as "equality in the responsibility of care for others". This move enables a precise graft

(27) Galtung J. (2006). *La trasformazione dei conflitti con mezzi pacifici,* Torino, Centro Studi Sereno Regis,

onto the SENSEI lexicon, which recalls European values as a horizon for educational action and invites their translation into transferable practices.

Inclusion, from this perspective, is not only the guarantee of access, but the shared assumption of responsibility: the responsibility of those who teach, the responsibility of peers, the responsibility of institutions, and the responsibility of curricular and assessment devices.

It is here that care connects also with the "disciplinary matrices" discussed in the chapter. To adopt care as a criterion means interrogating content choices, dominant narratives, what is rendered visible and what remains marginal, recognising that the architectures of knowledge may produce exclusion or, conversely, open spaces of recognition. For teacher education, introducing care within the chapter thus enables the articulation of a professional stance consistent with the overall argument: a stance that combines educational intentionality, relational responsibility, and reflexivity.

Operationally, this means preparing teachers capable of reading contexts as complex relational systems, recognising vulnerability as an ordinary dimension of school experience, welcoming requests for help in their non-conventional forms, and responding with coherent, visible, and assessable actions, avoiding both normative abstraction and technicism. This becomes even more necessary insofar as inclusion is understood, throughout the chapter, as a process never definitively completed and always exposed to regressions.

Care, precisely because it is a continuous practice, provides the appropriate lexicon for naming the continuity of educational work and its ethical dimension. Placed within the chapter's argumentative sequence, the category of

care can also function as a connective principle across sections. It consolidates a link among the relational dimension, the educational relationship, and the helping relationship, already identified as the overarching frame. At the same time, it prepares the ground for the parts devoted to empathic and communicative competences, the transformative management of conflict, and the use of didactic and disciplinary devices — especially in history education — as instruments of inclusion. In this way, care is not introduced as a parallel theme, but as a principle of intelligibility that traverses the SENSEI project and strengthens the chapter's terminological unity, sharpening its central thesis: inclusion becomes real when educational action assumes responsibility for care as an intentional, relational, and transformative practice.

3.6.1. *Critical Issues in Inclusive Processes: School Dropout, Motivational Fragility, and Educational Reorientation*

Since inclusive processes, as discussed, should not be understood as a set of additional responses to be activated only when difficulties arise, but rather as a structural principle that guides everyday educational action, it is necessary to foreground certain critical issues that may compromise — indeed, undermine — inclusive practices. In particular, reference should be made to the phenomena of school dropout and to those conflict dynamics that, instead of being addressed through a transformative approach, may escalate into forms of violence. Both represent significant indicators of fragility within educational contexts and call for careful reflection on preventive measures and intervention strategies capable of sustaining participation, well-being,

and the acquisition of knowledge and competences oriented toward peaceful coexistence[28].

Within a chapter devoted to educational inclusion, school dropout may be regarded as an especially telling indicator of the criticality of the inclusive process as a whole, insofar as it makes visible — often abruptly and dramatically — the breakdown of the educational pact and the disruption of those conditions for meaningful access to learning that, in a full sense, define inclusion itself. It is not merely an "exit" from the system, but a breach of the right to education, one that challenges the school as an educational community and implicates the quality of relationships, the organisation of teaching and learning, assessment practices, and guidance and counselling provision, alongside the social and familial factors that contribute to multiple forms of vulnerability. From this perspective, early school leaving cannot be read solely as an individual outcome; it is a complex and layered phenomenon that requires an analysis capable of weaving together subjective and contextual dimensions, avoiding both psychologising reductions and, conversely, sociological determinisms. In this sense, it is meaningful to assume that every time a school "loses" a student along the educational pathway, it becomes, in turn, "more alone" and "more wounded," because dropout concerns not only the individual who leaves but also redefines the institutional and communal responsibility of the education system.

Situating school dropout within an inclusion framework first and foremost entails recognising that inclusion

(28) INSTITUTE FOR ECONOMICS & PEACE & GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR EDUCATION. (2024). *Key Findings from Analyses on the Relationship Between Education and Peace*.

does not coincide with mere physical attendance at school or with the formal fulfilment of compulsory schooling requirements, but rather with the substantive possibility of accessing a high-quality education capable of fostering learning that meaningfully contributes to life skills and broader capabilities. In this regard, scholarly reflection on educational poverty helps to elucidate how trajectories of underachievement and withdrawal may develop even before attendance has ceased, through more subtle forms of marginalisation: declining motivation, disinvestment in schooling, a perceived lack of purpose, fragility in self-regulation competences, diminished self-efficacy, and difficulties in constructing a coherent life project. This perspective clarifies why dropout often constitutes the final stage of a longer process rather than a sudden event: it is incubated within school dynamics that fail to "hold" students in pathways of meaning-making, recognition, and belonging, and within individual and family conditions that heighten vulnerability (for instance, a pervasive sense of inadequacy, early academic failure, anxiety, low parental educational attainment, or limited expectations regarding schooling).

Dropout can be interpreted as evidence of the *failure of inclusion,* but this requires clarifying the nature of the failure at stake. It reflects not merely (or not primarily) an individual shortcoming, but the *breakdown of an educational dispositive* that, at specific junctures, proves unable to transform difficulty into an opportunity for redesign and renewed planning.[29] It is precisely here that subjects per-

(29) Guetta S., Chiappelli T., (2020). *La scuola abbandonata. Il contrasto alla dispersione scolastica attraverso l'orientamento formativo. Riflessioni su una ricerca e strategie di intervento*, Roma, Aracne.

ceived as "unmotivating" acquire decisive analytical relevance. When the curricular structure appears rigid and insufficiently capable of engaging students at the relational and emotional level, when rote learning predominates and assessment practices tend toward standardisation, schooling risks generating disengagement and distance. Under such conditions, difficulty in specific subject areas is not experienced as a manageable and developmentally ordinary passage, but as an identity trial that confirms a self-image of being "incapable" or "out of place." The perception of failure gradually sediments, intertwines with experiences of frustration, and may lead progressively to strategies of withdrawal: absenteeism, partial disengagement, oppositional behaviour, and ultimately discontinuation. A pedagogical reading of dropout, therefore, calls for re-centering the motivational dimension and the student's "activation" as an agent of their own learning: enabling learners to recognise and articulate their knowledge and competences — rather than positioning them as passive recipients of content — is a necessary condition for strengthening intrinsic motivation and reducing the risk of educational disengagement[30].

Within this framework, the practice of educational reorientation assumes a strategic role, because it makes it possible to intervene precisely at the point where the school risks turning difficulty into a label. Reorientation, understood as a formative practice (rather than a merely bureaucratic reallocation), enables the educational pathway to be rethought without producing stigma or consolidating the notion of "personal failure." It can instead become an instrument

(30) Ghione V., (2005). *La dispersione scolastica. La parola chiave*, Carocci editore, Roma.

of educational continuity, offering students a structured means of interpreting themselves — their resources, interests, and aptitudes — and guiding them toward goals that are both more realistic and meaningful. From this perspective, it is particularly important to situate reorientation within a broader conception of "educational success," one that does not coincide solely with school success measured by grades or promotion, but also includes the decision not to drop out, the possibility of progression to subsequent levels, and, crucially, the possibility of reorienting toward a pathway better aligned with one's aptitudes and capabilities[31].

For reorientation to be genuinely inclusive, it must be designed as an intentional and supported process, grounded in an educational relationship capable of recognising and re-signifying the experience of difficulty. This is where the key point to be highlighted emerges: in cases in which subject areas are experienced as unmotivating or only partially accessible, it is not sufficient merely to "remediate" content gaps. What is required is a structured pathway that fosters a deeper awareness of one's own knowledge and competences, helps to formulate clear and specific goals, encourages the search for new and realistic strategies, and restores to the student a sense of agency over their educational trajectory.

This entails working on metacognition and self-efficacy, but also on the narrative dimension of identity: the student should not come to "tell" their story as one of failure, but rather as one of reconfiguring their project in ways more closely aligned with their possibilities and aspirations. In this sense, reorientation functions as a form of secondary

(31) Morin E. (2000), *La testa ben fatta. Riforma dell'insegnamento e del pensiero,* Milano, Raffaello Cortina editore.

prevention: it intervenes when risk is already discernible, yet before it becomes irreversible.

For such a process to be feasible, however, the school must be equipped with observation and monitoring mechanisms capable of identifying early signals of vulnerability and, above all, of supporting the most critical junctures of the pathway — particularly transitions between educational stages. The activation of tools ensuring informational continuity regarding students' educational trajectories — whether through simple digital or paper-based instruments — responds precisely to this need: it enables a longitudinal reading of pathways, supports more informed class formation, allows ongoing monitoring of progress, and makes it possible to intervene, when necessary, through targeted support and/or formative reorientation. In other words, reorientation cannot be left to improvisation or to the goodwill of individual teachers; it requires an organisational culture that recognises it as a legitimate practice for safeguarding the right to education and as a structural component of inclusive educational policies.

From this follows, coherently, the importance of targeted prevention that educators and teachers can develop through an integrated analysis of dropout and inclusion. Prevention, indeed, is not effective if it remains generic or episodic; rather, it requires schools to grasp the phenomenon both quantitatively and qualitatively, triangulating indicators (age, gender, migration or socio-cultural background, levels of satisfaction, early subject-specific outcomes, and the alignment between students' expectations and the educational offer) and activating territorial networks capable of sharing responsibility and information. This perspective is decisive also because inclusion cannot be reduced to a set of measures

confined to the classroom: it is realised, instead, as an ecosystem of alliances among schools, families, services, local communities, and institutions, according to a "educational community" logic that assigns each actor a role in sustaining educational pathways[32].

In conclusion, integrating a reflection on school dropout as a critical issue of inclusion entails holding together three levels. The first is the ethico-political level of rights: dropout constitutes a breach of the educational promise of equal opportunities. The second is the pedagogical–didactic level: schools must interrogate which aspects of their practices (curriculum, assessment, relationships) may foster disengagement and marginalisation, especially when learning is experienced as lacking meaning. The third is the operational–organisational level: reorientation, when understood as a formative and non-stigmatising practice, represents a crucial measure for avoiding the internalisation of failure, promoting awareness of resources and competences, defining goals and strategies, and reopening possibilities for personal and educational projects; yet, to be effective, it must be grounded in early monitoring, informational continuity across transitions, and targeted prevention built by educators and teachers through rigorous knowledge of the phenomenon.

3.6.2. *Educational Relationships and Generative AI in Inclusive Processes: Opportunities, Risks, and Critical Frameworks*

Within the broader reflection on inclusive processes, it is necessary — even if only in a concise form — to introduce

(32) Morin E. (2001), *I sette saperi necessari all'educazione del futuro,* Milano Raffaello Cortina Editore.

the issue of the relationship between educational relationships and the use of generative artificial intelligence. It is increasingly evident that these tools have become firmly embedded in students' everyday communicative practices and, to a growing extent, within school contexts as well, thereby reshaping the ecosystem in which meanings, senses of belonging, and forms of participation are constructed. From this perspective, it is not sufficient merely to acknowledge the diffusion of such technologies; rather, it is essential to critically interrogate the ways in which social networks and AI-enabled devices are used, the communicative grammars they foster, and the nature of the contents that circulate through them, since these factors contribute to configuring conditions that can significantly affect the success or failure of educational actions aimed at students' engagement and participation(33).

A key theoretical issue — widely discussed in philosophy of science and in studies of cognition — concerns the presumed neutrality of technical instruments. This is not a merely abstract question. It requires clarifying whether technologies can be regarded as mere means, indifferent to ends — thereby locating full responsibility for their effects solely in human use — or whether, conversely, the very architecture of the device incorporates operational logics, constraints, and incentives that orient the production of outputs, configuring forms of machine-guided interaction that may also facilitate unintended or inappropriate behaviours. Put differently, the problem lies in understanding whether and to what extent artificial intelligence shapes, supports, and at times substitutes personal choices and

(33) Elliot A. (2021), *La cultura dell'intelligenza artificiale,* Torino, Codice Edizioni.

decisions, thereby redefining the boundaries of autonomy, responsibility, and reflective awareness in human action. In educational contexts, these dynamics acquire particular salience because the rapid emergence of new tools and digital environments — virtual applications, adaptive learning systems, profiling devices, and algorithms that tend toward the "de-personalisation" of experience — affects not only modes of access to content, but also the relational processes that constitute the very infrastructure of inclusion. The risk, therefore, lies not merely in technology as such, but in its adoption as a substitute solution that displaces educational responsibility: entrusting the effectiveness of inclusive interventions solely to algorithmic tools may alter the foundational premises of formative relationships, privileging logics of optimisation and prediction over those of care, recognition, and reciprocity.

At the level of values, moreover, attributing "quasi-human" traits to the machine may generate a form of responsibility removal, weakening awareness of the links between cognitive processes, decisions, and consequences, as if action — and its effects — belonged to the technical apparatus rather than to the subject who uses it.

From this follows the need to conceptualise artificial intelligence, at least in socio-pedagogical terms, as an actor endowed with a specific mediating capacity that intervenes in the construction of identities, communicative practices, and educational relationships, either strengthening or jeopardising the conditions for the effectiveness of inclusive actions. In continuity with what has been discussed regarding curricular choices and teaching practices — namely what is taught, how it is taught, and which contents are selected to sustain meaningful learning and the

well-being of the class group — it becomes indispensable to extend the analysis to the decisions that govern the use of AI. This entails rigorous inquiry into the purposes, timing, modalities, and intended users of these tools, as well as into their effects in terms of participation, agency, and recognition. In parallel, it becomes necessary to make explicit and to design forms of critical accompaniment (digital citizenship education, data literacy, ethical reflexivity) to prevent technological innovation from translating, paradoxically, into new forms of exclusion or educational inequality. At the same time, AI-related tools can open significant opportunities for the personalisation of learning pathways, improved access to instructional resources, and, more broadly, the optimisation of teaching–learning processes in support of inclusion.

A particularly consequential domain is that of adaptive learning, understood as an approach that employs algorithmic models and machine-learning techniques to modulate content, pacing, levels of difficulty, and types of exercises on the basis of each student's responses and progress. From this perspective, the educational promise is twofold: on the one hand, to offer pathways more attuned to diverse learning rhythms and styles; on the other, to identify early signals of difficulty and specific educational needs, thereby guiding more targeted forms of instructional support. The underlying assumption is that learning does not unfold uniformly and that teaching may therefore benefit from tools capable of providing analytical indicators of the process (for instance, recurring errors, response times, or persistent impasses). However, it is precisely here that a pedagogically decisive tension emerges. Digital monitoring of performance and study behaviours, while potentially

useful for diagnostic and formative purposes, does not automatically activate the metacognitive and affective–motivational dimensions of learning. The fact that a platform records the "what" and the "how much" of an exercise does not amount to understanding the "how" and the "why" of a student's learning or blockage, nor does it render explicit the internal processes that accompany comprehension, frustration, perseverance, a sense of self-efficacy, and the construction of meaning. Put differently, the risk is to conflate the observability of data with the intelligibility of lived experience: learning — especially within an inclusion-oriented perspective — remains a situated process that requires pedagogical interpretation, attentive listening, and relational work, none of which can be replaced by algorithmic outputs.

Consequently, the decisive professional competence does not consist merely in "knowing how to use" AI tools, but in being able to integrate them critically within intentional instructional design. At present, such competence remains relatively marginal within training and in widespread practice — not only for technical reasons, but because it demands epistemic literacy (understanding what a system measures and what it does not), awareness of biases and limits to generalisation, the capacity to interpret data without reifying it, and linguistic and conceptual mastery in interacting with generative systems. In the absence of such mediation, a further risk is amplified: standardisation. If algorithms tend to produce "probable" outputs and stabilise standard solutions, unreflective use may flatten the plurality of learning pathways and weaken precisely what inclusion ought to value — namely difference as a resource. In this sense, even the ability to formulate requests

and task prompts should not be regarded as a mere technical skill, but as a form of critical thinking: making constraints, aims, criteria, and contexts explicit entails exercising cultural responsibility over the generated output. From a pedagogically sustainable standpoint, AI should therefore be regarded as a complement to teachers' work rather than as its substitute: a resource for collaboration, the co-construction of materials, and the differentiation of learning opportunities, provided that its use is anchored in criteria of quality, transparency, and educational intentionality. It may, for example, support the design of differentiated activities, the preparation of multimodal resources, the generation of graduated exercise prompts, or the creation of simulation environments conducive to learning; yet it remains the teacher's responsibility to ensure meaning-making, mediation, formative assessment, and the care of relationships.

Within this framework, one may also anticipate a reconfiguration of cooperative practices: digital tools and AI can broaden spaces for collaboration and shared production, insofar as innovation does not reduce cooperation to the mere aggregation of individual outputs, but instead strengthens positive interdependence, dialogue, and mutual responsibility. Nevertheless, one non-negotiable point remains: education and formation are grounded in a high-quality relationship that is forged through learning processes and cannot be replaced by algorithmic mediation devoid of affective experience, moral responsibility, and the capacity for recognition. Educational interaction entails listening, care, conflict management, attribution of meaning, and the building of trust — dimensions that cannot be exhausted by informational communication and

that are central to inclusion. For this reason, and in continuity with dialogical pedagogical traditions, the use of AI must remain embedded within a logic in which knowledge is co-constructed, and learning is relational, rather than the mere reception of answers produced by an external system[34]. In conclusion, in the current phase of rapid diffusion of artificial intelligence, the key issue is not a binary choice between "technology yes" or "technology no," but the deliberate design of integrative forms between digital tools and relational processes.

This requires countering the anthropomorphisation of devices — which may foster delegation and responsibility removal — and promoting, instead, reflexivity and autonomy. Only within such a framework can AI contribute to supporting inclusion and educational quality, without becoming an additional factor of inequality, standardisation, or the weakening of the pedagogical bond.

3.6.3. *Transforming Conflicts within Inclusive Processes: Inclusion as a Space of Change, Tension, and the Prevention of Violence*

Within processes of educational inclusion, conflict should not be understood as an incidental disruption, but rather as a structural and foreseeable component of change.

Every inclusive endeavour, in fact, entails transformation: of instructional arrangements, relational routines, the group's implicit rules, and the ways in which voice, recognition, and learning opportunities are distributed. As a transformative process, inclusion necessarily engages

(34) Galtung J. (2008), *Affrontare il conflitto. Trascendere e trasformare*, Plus, Pisa

expectations, needs, identities, and roles; it inevitably generates frictions, resistance, symbolic competition, fears of loss, and questions of legitimacy. Failing to recognise this dimension often leads to two symmetrical outcomes: on the one hand, the removal of conflict (which allows it to sediment and harden); on the other, its reduction to a disciplinary issue to be contained.

Both drifts are pedagogically costly, because they deprive conflict of its formative potential and propel it toward escalation. Johan Galtung's perspective makes it possible to frame with clarity both the educational nature of conflict and the critical threshold beyond which it deteriorates into violence. The underlying premise is that the root of conflict lies in contradiction—that is, in the incompatibility between goals pursued by different parties. Conflict, therefore, belongs to the normal physiology of relationships, whereas the problem arises when it is addressed through violence, which is only one possible — and the most regressive — way of "handling" a contradiction. In educational terms, this entails a decisive shift: the task is not to eliminate conflict, but to develop competences to read it, sustain it, and transform it.

For Galtung, transformation does not amount to superficial pacification, but to intentional work on the deeper causes of contradiction and on the conditions that make a cooperative and durable outcome possible. In this regard, the triangular ABC model (Attitudes–Behaviour–Contradiction) provides an interpretive device that is particularly valuable in school settings, because it helps to distinguish levels that, in everyday practice, tend to be conflated. When schools intervene exclusively at the level of visible behaviours — for example, by suppressing

aggressiveness or sanctioning an act of intimidation — they risk applying a "band-aid" that neither addresses the contradiction sustaining the conflict nor engages the attitudes that rigidify it. Such reduction often produces a false calm: behaviour may be temporarily normalised, yet the contradiction remains intact and, with it, frustration. In this dynamic, Galtung's radical formulation is crucial: "It is the inability to transform conflicts that leads to violence"; every act of violence may thus be read as a monument to that inability. The inclusive school, therefore, cannot limit itself to demanding "order" or "respect"; it must become a laboratory of transformation, capable of mobilising empathy, nonviolence, and creativity as formative competences and as criteria for educational design. The interplay among empathy, nonviolence, and creativity constitutes, in Galtung's lexicon, the operational grammar of transformation: empathy serves to "soften" attitudes, nonviolence prevents the further hardening of behaviours, and creativity unlocks the contradiction and redefines the situation in non-incompatible terms. This point is crucial for inclusion: insofar as inclusion entails a reconfiguration of conditions of access and participation, it necessarily produces a rebalancing of established arrangements; without empathy and creativity, change is experienced as a threat, and responses tend to become defensive and polarising, ultimately legitimising — directly or indirectly — violent practices. Violence, moreover, is not exhausted by its manifest dimension.

Galtung distinguishes direct, structural, and cultural violence: the first is visible and intentional; the second operates through the habitual normalisation of inequalities; the third justifies and renders the other two "good and right"

by acting through symbols, discourses, and criteria of legitimation. In school contexts, this triad helps to recognise that violence does not coincide solely with physical or verbal aggression: there is also a form of structural violence embedded in practices that produce exclusion and inferiorisation (for example, systematically low expectations, informal segregation, or assessment and disciplinary diapositives that repeatedly target the same students), as well as cultural violence that normalises such processes through blaming narratives, stereotypes, or 'trivialized' hate speech.

Within this framework, conflict becomes a privileged opportunity for learning not because it is desirable, but because it brings to the surface what often remains implicit in classroom life: unrecognised needs, contradictions in the rules of participation, and misalignments between what the school declares and what it effectively enacts. For this reason, an inclusive school must be capable of promptly recognising the signs of incomplete transformation: when tension is not processed, it tends to shift from the original conflict to a meta-conflict — that is, a spiral of hatred and counter-violence centred on defence and destruction, in which the initial reasons become increasingly invisible while identity-based superstructures ("who is wrong," "who wins") become increasingly dominant. It is precisely at this juncture that inclusion risks turning into its opposite: instead of expanding belonging and recognition, labels, scapegoating, and exclusion become entrenched. At this point, Marshall Rosenberg's contribution becomes particularly fruitful, because it allows conflict transformation to be articulated at the micro-relational level — namely, at the concrete level at which students (and adults) interpret events, attribute intentions, construct judgements,

and respond. Within the framework of nonviolent communication, a central issue concerns responsibility: delegating one's emotional state and one's experience of dissatisfaction to the other generates de-responsibilisation and fuels the circuit of violence, insofar as it produces control, marginalisation, and coercion.

The proposed alternative is a practice of self-listening and self-empathy, capable of recognising feelings and linking them to needs, without either nullifying or repressing them. In educational settings, this translates into an essential competence: transforming language from an instrument of judgement into an instrument of understanding and requesting. Rosenberg insists on a point that is decisive for inclusion: the quality of relationships changes when requests replace demands. The clarification of needs — mediated through an adequate emotional vocabulary — enables the formulation of requests in positive, affirmative, and clear language; by contrast, a demand, even when expressed in ostensibly "polite" terms, constrains the other and implicitly signals punishment or blame in the event of refusal. It is precisely this slippage — from request to demand — that, in school life, rapidly turns a difficulty into a confrontation: the student perceives an identity threat (being judged, humiliated, labelled) and responds defensively; the adult, in turn, interprets the reaction as disrespect and responds by hardening their stance. In a short time, the conflict no longer concerns its object (a task, a rule, a frustration) but rather the relationship and the distribution of power, with the risk that management becomes violent — namely, centred on punishment and exclusion[35].

(35) Rosenberg, M.B. (2003). *Le parole sono finestre oppure muri. Introduzione alla Comunicazione Nonviolenta,* Reggio Emilia, Esserci edizioni.

When the two perspectives are brought into dialogue, a robust theoretical point emerges: transforming conflict in inclusive settings requires, simultaneously, work on contradiction (Galtung) and work on communication and the recognition of needs (Rosenberg). Behavioural regulation alone is insufficient; empathy alone, if it is not translated into institutional and pedagogical creativity, risks remaining a mere intention.

It is their integration that reopens the horizon of possibilities and prevents escalation. More operational analyses of conflict dynamics further corroborate this need for integration, showing how escalation often arises from selective perceptions, misunderstandings, and ineffective communication, and how the first necessary action is to identify such components to prevent conflict from turning into disputes and, ultimately, into "struggle" — that is, violence. In school contexts, this entails developing emotional and communicative literacy: recognising emotional contagion (fear–anger–fear), reading distrust as a slow construction that is difficult to reverse, and clarifying ambiguous messages before they become attributions of malevolent intent. From this standpoint, a teacher capable of transformation is not one who "controls" conflict, but one who makes it speakable, keeps it within the domain of thought and dialogue, and prevents it from sliding into the logic of mutual delegitimation. Finally, one aspect must be stated with clarity: the inability to address conflicts empathically and transformatively does not merely produce episodes of direct violence; it also risks consolidating subtler and more pervasive forms of structural and cultural violence — precisely those that render inclusion fragile or merely formal. If school culture, even implicitly, legitimises the

idea that conflict is something to be "won" or that divergence is resolved through humiliation, exclusion, and competition, then violence becomes practicable and, in a sense, "rational" in students' eyes. This is why Galtung invites us to consider direct violence as a belated signal of unsustainable structural and cultural conditions. Educational inclusion, precisely because it calls for profound change, requires a pedagogy of transformation that operates before the threshold is crossed, making the school a context capable of constructing alternatives rather than merely reacting to crises[36]. It follows that competence in conflict transformation is not an "add-on" to educational professionalism, but one of its constitutive dimensions.

It becomes visible in the capacity to recognise contradictions and needs, to distinguish conflict from violence, to cultivate a language of request rather than demand, and to design dispositions that expand alternatives and thereby reduce the likelihood of violent outcomes. As a guiding criterion for inclusive schooling, the quality of an educational context can also be measured by the ways in which people learn to inhabit conflict without reproducing violence, transforming it into an opportunity for human development and community improvement.

(36) Galtung, J. (2018). *Violence, peace and peace research*. Organicom, 15(28), 33-56; Galtung, J., & Höivik, T. (1971). *Structural and direct violence: A note on operationalization*. Journal of Peace research, 8(1), 73-76.

PART II

GOOD PRACTICES FROM THE SENSEI CONSORTIUM

Reimagining Education for Social Inclusion and Human Development
ISBN 979-12-218-2574-9
DOI 10.53136/97912218257495
pp. 137-146 (aprile 2026)

COORDINATING INCLUSION
EUROCLIO'S ROLE IN SHAPING THE SENSEI VISION

Ivan Milovanov[*]

When the SENSEI project began in June 2023, under the framework of the Erasmus+ programme's Teacher Academies grant and with the trust of the European Education and Culture Executive Agency, we knew that we were embarking on more than a three-year collaboration among eleven international partners. We were stepping into a shared responsibility to rethink how education can become a space where every learner finds recognition, dignity, possibility and accountability, while each teacher can access knowledge and resources.

As the coordinating partner, EuroClio – the European Association of History Educators – has, for decades, worked on history education, democratic citizenship and professional community building. SENSEI allowed us to bring these efforts together in a way that was new to our partners and us. The project's full title – School EducatioN for Sustainable and Equal Inclusion – expresses both

[*] EuroClio.

ambition and commitment. The strong consortium of this project also demonstrated a cooperative evolution, as we researched, learned together, and supported each other through the inevitable challenges that arose during our journey. We quickly understood how considerable our challenge was – and we knew that working with the community was the only effective way forward. Thus, inclusion and education during the SENSEI community's growth and efforts are neither a checkbox nor a fix appended to existing practice. With the risk of sounding pretentious, inclusion in education – in its immensity – is a guideline for rethinking education, a structural principle to dictate decision making on all levels, a professional stance that needs advocacy, and a cultural choice, consistently proven through history to lead to wide-ranging societal benefits, even when it requires significant resources.

Nearing the end of these eventful three years and looking back, we don't see mere outputs – dedicated events, a curriculum recommendation for teacher training institutes, a self-paced course for anyone willing to learn about inclusivity, research insights, educational resources, a dedicated conference, and a whole, active network of like-minded professionals who are willing to move the topic forward world-wide. What we see is a synthesis and dissemination of scientific progress and cultural emancipation. We see educators who are ready to grow together with their students. The story of SENSEI is, in many ways, the story of this paradigm.

The original project summary identified four central objectives: to build a reliable network of teachers, to produce tailored training programmes for pre-service and in-service educators, to upscale existing inclusive methods

in education, and to develop transferable models for continued professional development.

These objectives guided our coordinated work since the beginning, yet what the project charter could not entirely predict was the human dimension of this collaboration: the conversations in meeting rooms in Den Haag, Sofia, Leskovac, Bratislava and Brussels, the debates about semantics, practical effects, localisation, and all the out-of-scope efforts we contributed to SENSEI – such as this very publication. The careful negotiation of classroom realities across Czechia, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain, across continental Europe and even worldwide, as we had people collaborate from Asia, Africa and the Americas. All this human care and hard work paid off as a major step towards our larger objective: to offer ways for self-organising communities of practice to coordinate the challenging, transnational efforts to make education inclusive and – just as importantly – participatory.

EuroClio's role as coordinator was not simply administrative. Yes, we are accountable for reporting, financial oversight, compliance and communication with all stakeholders. However, more fundamentally, we were entrusted with holding the project's vision together: facilitating coherence between research and practice, between national contexts and European aspirations, between ambition and feasibility.

Coordination means listening as much as leading, if not more – especially when leading by example in a project about inclusive education. This means recognising that the project partnership needed to learn to meet the challenge, even if all of us are experts in our respective fields. It also means that we need to be truly inclusive – a task that is daunting at first to

anyone who understands how colourful diversity truly is, and how challenging it is to equitably and fairly include everyone participating in traditionally, often organically developed systems. When a partner's or practitioner's local expertise illuminated a blind spot in our collective understanding, it meant mediating among educational cultures and methodologies without sacrificing SENSEI's principles. It meant constantly returning to the question: what does inclusion look like in the lived reality of a classroom? What does it mean for educators, and how can they meet the sometimes contradictory needs of our ultimate target group – their learners?

We have been particularly attentive to how inclusion intersects with the teaching of history. History classrooms (and those subjects that utilise history as a methodology) are never neutral spaces. They are learning environments in which identities, however constructive or destructive, are affirmed or marginalised, narratives are centred or silenced, and students learn about their place in the present through a certain vision of the past.

The work carried out by the project consortium has shown that inclusive history education requires deliberate choices: choices about which voices are represented in source materials and how, choices about how national narratives and authoritative opinions are framed, choices about how sensitive and contested topics are facilitated, and choices about how students' diverse backgrounds are recognised as active resources. The SENSEI inclusive approach emphasises that equity is not achieved through uniformity. Differentiation, multiperspectivity, scaffolding, culturally responsive pedagogy, and attention to socio-emotional well-being are not optional techniques – they are professional (and, arguably, ethical) responsibilities.

In our coordination meetings, we often returned to a simple but demanding principle: every learner counts equally. This principle required us to consider students with special educational needs (including high-achieving learners), students with a migratory background, students belonging to ethnic, cultural or religious minorities, students from socioeconomically diverse contexts, students whose identities challenge dominant norms (like those belonging to LGBTQIA+ communities or female students in conditions of unequal participation), and traumatised students. It also required us to consider classrooms with significantly different profiles (for example those comprising different age groups or speakers of mutually unintelligible languages) or those operating under extreme external stress (such as natural catastrophes or social conflicts). It required us to avoid reducing these barriers to individual challenges of practitioners or subjects, and instead to understand them as structural features of educational systems.

The consortium's work across these dimensions has made clear that inclusion is not a static goal but a constant, dynamic process requiring attention and care. It involves continuous reflection, adaptation and dialogue. As coordinator, EuroClio has sought to cultivate exactly this culture for the project.

EuroClio's coordination role included a perhaps ironic balancing act to make sure the consortium's diversity did not fragment the project's identity. We worked to weave together the efforts of research, methodology and practice into mutually supportive yet distinctive educational events and products. For example, both the curriculum recommendation and self-paced online course that emerged stand as a testament to this effort: thorough points of entry

for those interested in the project's subject matter, or a way to explore this interest more deeply, building on existing knowledge and practice. One of the key challenges we found, Europe-wide, was that knowledge gaps are practically omnipresent. Thus, with a course so open to interdisciplinary application, we strove to find a workable balance between developing a comprehensive skill set and avoiding overwhelming students.

We also understand that our outputs are neither conclusively exhaustive nor the origin of inclusive education, nor have we ever had that ambition. We recognise all the efforts out there doing similar and excellent work in the field. Our clear goal, however, was to encourage transparency and a more active connection among these network clusters, and to help European society (and beyond) learn from and support one another without being in the dark about each other's existence.

One of the project's core ambitions was to create and strengthen a network of history, citizenship and educators at large, capable of supporting one another across borders, systems and cultures. This ambition reflects EuroClio's long-standing mission, yet SENSEI offered an opportunity to expand that network around a shared, very much needed thematic focus: sustainable and equitable inclusion. The shift from "Equal" in the title to "equitable" in practice, and the focus on participation as much as inclusion, demonstrates how an improved understanding of widespread needs matures through the process from planning to realisation.

In this light, the network we built and continue to build through SENSEI extends beyond the project's formal end date in June 2026. Relationships built through

collaborative work tend to outlast contractual obligations, but they also need support. Teachers who piloted inclusive practices will continue to refine and share them. Institutions that co-designed the modules will continue to adapt them. The consortium will work with the SENSEI Network (our community of interest and practice) on ideas, tasks and events. In this sense, SENSEI has planted seeds whose growth cannot be fully measured within the project's official timeframe. Though the measurements of the impact we do have clearly show how much a dedicated community treasures attention and resources, and how much it can give back to society.

Beyond our concrete outputs, the SENSEI community invites contributors to a wider European conversation about the purpose and reputation of education and those who make it happen. In a time marked by polarisation, informational chaos and indicators of democratic decline, education occupies an essential role. Depending on how it is handled on a policymaking level, the institutions and organisations that provide it, and the individuals that deliver it, it can either entrench divisions or empower critical, empathetic, informed and, ultimately, citizens accountable for their collective decisions, not bound to the will of minorities that, historically, constantly attempt to strip that power away – starting with defunding education and exerting strict constraints on it from top-down.

The work documented in this volume demonstrates that inclusive education, especially when informed by history, strengthens democratic resilience. When students encounter multiple perspectives, when their identities are acknowledged, when they can take a walk in the shoes those less fortunate, or the very human decision makers, when

barriers to participation are actively reconstructed into aids and community building, they are more likely to develop a sense of belonging, agency, they can more likely explore self-fulfillment and, simply, be happier human beings.

SENSEI reaffirms that teacher professionalism is central to this endeavour. Inclusive practice cannot be mandated solely through policy – and while it must be supported by lawmaking that provides fertile grounds for multiple identities to bloom without the fear of ridicule or worse, it must also be embodied by educators equipped with competencies, confidence, kindness and support networks. The educational profession in Europe, in most countries, is unfortunately still not taken seriously, it is disrespected, defunded and even ridiculed. It often ends up being the refuge profession of those who had less luck in other fields, which, in itself, is not something that shouldn't be embraced by society. Whoever becomes an educator, be it because it's a difficult job market or because they feel the high calling of education, society should support them with a rich, well-developed professional development offer, with enough capacity to lead healthy private lives, and official narratives and financial support that honours their fundamental role in one of the core endeavours of humanity that is forwarding our accumulated knowledge. We need more dignified educators with motivated agency. By investing in both initial teacher training and continued professional development, SENSEI openly advocates for the profession to be inclusive and appropriately included across sectors, from a lifelong learning perspective.

Moreover, SENSEI underscores the value of cross-border cooperation. Educational challenges are rarely confined to national boundaries. Migration, social inequality,

environmental unsustainability, digitalisation and disruptive technologies are complex factors affecting the whole continent. Adding to these issues, our richly varied cultural and personal values are shared European realities – but also qualities. Collaborative projects such as SENSEI, other Teacher Academies and transnational projects allow educators to learn from one another's contexts, to avoid working in isolation, and to cultivate solidarity.

As coordinator, EuroClio extends its deepest gratitude to all consortium partners and all the wonderful people we collaborated with and who genuinely contributed to our shared success. Each individual and institution brought expertise, commitment, passion and creativity.

We also acknowledge the trust and support of the European Education and Culture Executive Agency. The Erasmus+ framework made this collaboration possible, not only through financial support but through an emphasis on European cooperation and shared values. Such values are what we need to move society forward, and as such, we need to secure and propagate them.

We are also indebted to the students whose classroom experiences informed our reflections, their voices, questions, and insights are the ultimate measure of the project's relevance. Their better future is why we do what we do.

Finally, we recognise the often-unseen labour of project managers, administrative staff and coordinators across partner institutions. Their meticulous work was invaluable in transforming wonderful ideas into efficient action.

As SENSEI formally concludes, it does not end. The inclusive methodologies developed through this collaboration remain open to adaptation. The SENSEI Network of educators continues to grow. This continued work promises to

reinforce a conviction that has guided our work for many years: education matters profoundly for the health of our democracies. A classroom in which some students are invisible, unheard or unsupported cannot fulfil its democratic potential. Inclusion is not a peripheral concern but a defining criterion of educational quality. Modern democracy depends directly on the participation of all its subjects. It is a demanding political reality, but one very well worth being prepared for.

The metaphor quoted at the beginning of this volume – of the classroom as an orchestra rather than a regiment – captures the spirit of SENSEI. Harmony does not imply uniformity. It requires attentive listening, mutual adjustment and respect for different instruments. Teachers are conductors, but they are also learners within a broader ensemble.

Through SENSEI, we have sought to contribute to that harmony. We have not solved all the challenges of educational inclusion. No single project could. But we have advanced a shared understanding, strengthened a European community of practice, and provided concrete tools for teachers committed to solidarity and equity.

In this sense, SENSEI stands as both achievement and invitation: an achievement in collaborative, research-informed, practice-oriented work, and an invitation to continue reimagining education for social inclusion and human development. On behalf of our partnership, we remain committed to carrying this work forward – in partnership, in dialogue and in solidarity with educators and decision-makers across Europe and worldwide. We are always here, so feel invited to connect with us.

Reimagining Education for Social Inclusion and Human Development
ISBN 979-12-218-2574-9
DOI 10.53136/97912218257496
pp. 147-162 (aprile 2026)

CHAPTER IV

INCLUSION IN EDUCATION

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4.1. Inclusion in Education

Inclusion has become an inevitable part of everyday life in upper secondary education. Whereas students in the past typically came from highly literate homes, today's student population is far more diverse: academically, socially, and culturally. This places new demands on both teaching and support structures. Teachers' understanding of what it means to include students in a teaching where they feel seen, heard, and recognized is also being challenged.

What inclusion is, and how students can be included in teaching and education, are the two central questions addressed in this chapter. To answer that, the chapter begins by defining who the students should be included in teaching, followed by a presentation of how we at Danish Highschool Vejen Gymnasium and Erhvervsskole work with these issues in practice.

[*] Historielærerforeningen.

4.2. Who needs to be included?

Very often, when teachers talk about inclusion, the talk ends with a focus on students with special needs or very weak students. But if schools should include only students with special needs or weak students, then we say that we don't need to include other students; we are assuming that other students are strong enough to include themselves. This part of the chapter is questioning that assumption.

The UNESCO organization, for example, asserts that boys are not equal in education around the world by writing on their website:

> In some contexts, boys require targeted support to stay engaged in education. While girls still face greater barriers to accessing education and are more likely than boys to be out of school at the primary level, boys are more at risk of repeating grades, failing to progress and complete their education, and not learning while in school. Globally, 139 million boys are out of school, more than half of all out-of-school youth, and more than the 133 million girls, who are also out of school.(1)

So, there is gender inequality. If we want gender equality, we should make educational systems suitable for boys too. What about students who are not good readers? More students have disabilities with reading:

> Dyslexia alone affects around 5-10% of the population, as noted by the International Dyslexia Association.

(1) https://www.unesco.org/en/gender-equality/education/boys

> Research shows that in the U.S., about 20% of children experience significant reading difficulties by the fourth grade, which can hinder academic success in other subjects.(2)

Should we just say that it is a student's problem if they are not able to read and understand well what they are reading? The percentage is high, and with an increasingly digitalized world, it is growing. So educational systems should find ways to support students in how they can read math proofs or history texts and understand them. In that way, whole classes are helped by not holding back on the development of the class. If students have problems doing their homework but don't have anyone at home who can help them do their homework, schools should be the ones who provide help. In some countries, it is common for students to pay privately for their lessons. A school system that provides education where many students take private lessons besides school is a system that provides inequality. Students whose families can't afford private lessons would have a harder time learning and developing.

Students who have origins other than the majority at school often have social, economic, cultural, and maybe even educational issues. Also, several of them need help, and schools very often do not help them specifically, because of complexity, not knowing how to do it, and not having the extra time that it requires. This assertion is based on the author's research on the school during her master's education. It is possible to read more about it on

(2) https://metaoh.org/understanding-learning-difficulties-statistics-causes-and-support-strategies/

online article: How can a high school empower students with multicultural backgrounds?[3]

What about quiet students who are shy about discussing and practicing their understanding of topics, or talented students who are surrounded by students who constantly need help? Do they need help to be included in active teaching and development? Schools and, most of all, teachers should be able to help with all those different needs of students. For if schools don't do it, it is left to families and circumstances, and too many will fail. How is that possible, and how we try to work on it in the Danish educational system would be discussed in later chapters but let us first see how teachers see inclusion and when students experience being included.

This clearly shows that gender inequality exists. If we want gender equality, educational systems must also be designed to support boys.

Another group that requires attention is students who struggle with reading. An increasing number of students experience reading difficulties. According to the International Dyslexia Association, dyslexia alone affects around 5–10% of the population. Research from the U.S. shows that about 20% of children face significant reading challenges by fourth grade, which can hinder their academic success across subjects.[4]

Should we simply say that it is the student's own problem if they cannot read or understand what they read? No, the percentage is high, and in an increasingly digitalized

(3) (https://euroclio.eu/2023/11/23/article-how-can-a-high-school-empower-students-with-multicultural-backgrounds/ visited January 2dt, 2026)

(4) (https://metaoh.org/understanding-learning-difficulties-statistics-causes-and-support-strategies visited January 1st, 2026)

world, the number is growing. Educational systems must therefore find ways to support students in reading mathematical proofs, historical texts, and other complex materials. When we do this, the entire class benefits, because teaching does not have to slow down extra to accommodate reading difficulties.

Similarly, if students struggle with homework but have no one at home who can help them, schools should provide that support. In some countries, it is common for students to pay for private tutoring. An educational system in which many students rely on private lessons is a system that reproduces inequality. Students whose families cannot afford private tutoring face significantly harder conditions for learning and development.

Students with minority backgrounds often face social, economic, and cultural misunderstandings that affect their educational path. Many of them need targeted support but due to complexity, lack of knowledge, or lack of time, schools often fail to provide it. This observation is supported by the author's own research conducted during her master's studies. More can be read in the online article *How can a high school empower students with multicultural backgrounds?* (5)

There are, of course, many other types of students not mentioned here. As society changes and new student profiles emerge, additional groups will continue to appear. The conclusion must therefore be that there are many kinds of students, each with their own needs to be included. In the next part of this chapter, the focus shifts from categories of students to individual learners. It argues that inclusion is not only about types of students but about supporting each

(5) (https://euroclio.eu/2023/11/23/article-how-can-a-high-school-empower-students-with-multicultural-backgrounds/ visited January 2nd, 2026)

individual so they can participate from the point where they are academically, socially, and personally.

Schools and teachers must be able to address this wide range of needs. If schools do not take responsibility, the burden shifts to families and circumstances, and far too many students will be left behind. However, when schools *do* take responsibility for this, it places a heavy and complex workload on teachers, who are expected to manage all these demands simultaneously. How this can be done in practice, and how we work with these challenges in the Danish educational system, will be discussed later. First, we will examine how teachers understand inclusion and when students themselves experience being included.

4.3. Students' View on Inclusion

The author of this chapter worked with two different classes to explore how students perceive their own inclusion. One was a first-year class that created a video for online teacher-course about inclusion, and the other was a second-year student who presented at an international teacher conference about what inclusion means for Danish students. The main findings from these activities are summarized below.

4.4. The Video Project

Together with a mathematics class at Vejen Gymnasium, the author created a short video about inclusion. The video is available in an online course developed by the SENSEI team.

The video is divided into four parts, each produced by a group of students from the class. In this way, the entire class participated in the process of creating the video, even though not all students appear on camera. This, too, is a form of inclusion. Some students are shy about speaking English or being filmed, but by allowing them to choose how they wished to contribute, they were included at a level that felt comfortable and meaningful for them. In this sense, the project itself became an example of inclusive practice.

Two parts of video focus on student's responsibility for including one another in meaningful and active learning. One section highlights the importance of creating a positive class atmosphere. When students feel included by their peers, a sense of well-being emerges, allowing them to feel more comfortable and confident in their academic development. This reflects the social dimension of inclusion and how students can include one another in everyday classroom life. To support this, teachers can create spaces where different students work together, talk together, and experience success together. Later in this chapter, concrete examples of such practices will be presented. Another section of the video focuses on how students include one another in the learning process itself by helping each other understand the subject matter, supporting the teacher's efforts, and contributing to a safe and encouraging learning environment.

Taken together, the students' message is clear: ideal inclusion requires not only teacher-led initiatives but also students' active participation and empathy toward one another. However, teachers remain adults and professionals in the room, meaning that teachers must support students

and design didactical spaces where students can grow together and develop the capacity to support one another. Later in this chapter, concrete examples of such didactic approaches will be discussed.

The third part, created by the students, focuses on what schools, as organizations, can do to support the inclusion of students in the educational system. One example concerns the physical learning environment. Classroom layouts matter. Traditionally, desks were arranged in two or three straight rows, with students sitting two by two behind one another. Experiments conducted by the author during international teacher seminars in Egypt showed that such an arrangement signals that teaching is primarily a dialogue between the teacher and individual students. This setup does not support the ideas presented in the first two student contributions, where students emphasized the importance of being able to include and support one another. In contrast, round tables in common areas or horseshoe- or group-based arrangements in classrooms create a physical environment that better supports peer interaction and collaboration. These layouts make it easier for students to help one another and to participate actively in shared learning processes. Of course, inclusive teaching involves much more than furniture, but the physical environment can either support or hinder inclusion.

The final part of the video was created by a group of boys who chose to contribute by talking about music. Allowing them to express their ideas in a way that felt natural to them (even if the audience or teachers might not be familiar with musical terminology) is itself an example of inclusion. The boys filmed their segment in the music room using real instruments and discussed the concepts of

input and output. They also needed to explain their ideas in a way that teachers across Europe, who do not know them or their school context, could understand their message. The message was that good music requires a balance between what you put in and what comes out. So, meaningful inclusion depends on balance: what you give and what you receive from others must align.

The conclusion from this segment and entire video is that teacher's task is to help students understand that their contributions and their experiences are interconnected. What students offer to the community influences what they gain from it. The same applies to teachers: the inclusion, understanding, and atmosphere that teachers bring into the classroom shape what students learn and ultimately what they give back.

4.5. Presenting Inclusion at a Conference for Teachers

Another class worked with the author of this text on the question of how students experience inclusion in practice, and how their perspective differs from that of teachers. While teachers often categorize students into types and groups, students describe inclusion based on their own feelings and everyday experiences in the classroom. The teacher's perspective presented here was developed by SENSEI's diverse team of specialists in education. The students' perspective was developed by a former student with a minority background named Mira, in connection with an international conference in Georgia in 2024. At the conference, Mira presented the Danish school system and the student perspective on inclusion to 400 Georgian teachers, together with her

teacher that is author of this text. Mira's presentation was based on conversations with her classmates.

Mira explained that being an active participant in class and experiencing a sense of unity contribute significantly to student's feelings of inclusion. In this context, unity grows out of the relationships between students. Therefore, teachers should focus on activating students and strengthening the relationships that exist across the class. This point closely mirrors what the first-year students expressed earlier in this chapter. It is important to note that there are two years between these two projects, and the students involved were unaware of each other's work, yet their conclusions are remarkably similar.

Mira also emphasized that students are different and therefore learn in different ways. It follows that they also have different ways of feeling recognized. She further noted that when students are heard in class, it gives them a sense of relevance, a feeling that their presence and voice matter. In other words, inclusion involves organizing the classroom so that students take ownership of it, feel motivated to contribute, and have the space and confidence to speak and be heard. It also means being recognized as individuals, not as "a student with an immigrant background, a female student, a noisy student, a student with difficulties in reading or math, but simply as themselves.

Students' experiences and feelings provide important insight into what creates inclusion in everyday school life. At the same time, this section shows that students and teachers often have very different starting points when thinking about inclusion. Teachers tend to divide students into groups and then work with each group individually. Students, however,

want to be seen as a community of individuals with different needs and identities, but equal rights.

Furthermore, while teachers may focus on one specific group at a time, many students belong to several groups simultaneously. For example, a student may struggle with reading and understanding texts and be a quiet girl who does not feel confident speaking in class, *or* a boy who needs more physical movement to concentrate. On top of this, the same student may come from a home where the parents are not highly educated and therefore find it difficult to help with homework.

Teachers, like adults and professionals, are the ones who must identify individual student needs at given moment. This is a demanding task. Teachers work with several classes every day, and it is not always possible to achieve feelings of inclusion for everyone in practice, but what could be the ideal approach to teaching that enables students to feel included?

4.6. How Can Teachers Work with Inclusion in the Classroom?

After establishing that all students must be included from the point where they are and understanding how students themselves perceive inclusion, we can now look at what teachers can do in their daily practice to meet student's needs.

Up to this point, it has been shown that working with inclusion in the classroom requires the teacher to attend to the individual student and to the class's shared learning environment. As students' prerequisites, relationships, and needs change over time, the teacher's practice must be

continuous, reflective, and constantly adapted. Inclusion is therefore not a method that can be fixed in a formula, but a dynamic process in which the teacher continually adjusts their approach in step with the development of the class.

One important idea is to give students access to the language of the subject they are learning. Subject language functions as an entry ticket to the academic community, and without it, students are quickly left behind. When students work with reading strategies, their understanding is activated, and they gain insight into what they have and have not understood. When they subsequently discuss their completed charts in groups, they can explain concepts to one another, argue for their choices, and practice the subject language that will later be required in exam situations. In this way, working with subject language becomes both a support for the individual student and a means of creating a shared academic foundation in the class.

Teachers can support this process by introducing reading strategies and creating space for meaningful discussion in the classroom. Such strategies vary from subject to subject and depend on the student's level, but allocating time and structure for reading and understanding texts enables students to approach their homework more independently. In mathematics, this might involve giving students a minute to read and attempt to understand proof before the teacher explains it for whole class. Giving a minute or two several times throughout the proof and doing it for other proofs later, provides a structure for reading and understanding that students gradually learn to follow and internalize. Over time, they become able to work through proofs on their own at the blackboard instead of waiting passively for the teacher's explanation. This way of working also supports the

development of more active students, which aligns with the wishes expressed by the students earlier.

Teaching students how to read historical texts may involve providing empty boxes for causes and consequences that students can fill in using their own words and understanding. In this way, students focus on identifying causal relationships as they read, and they become active participants in the learning process. The teacher can also ask students to sketch a map of the ancient period students were reading about and identify where those regions were located and what they are called today. Here again, students engage actively with the material, work together to construct meaning, and the teacher's role becomes that of a coach who supports and guides the process rather than delivering all explanations directly. These small, structured activities help students engage actively with the material and develop the linguistic and conceptual tools needed to participate fully in the subject.

At the same time, subject-specific methods play an important role in creating structure and transparency for all students. Analytical models, reading strategies, and taxonomies provide students with a common framework within which to work, regardless of their academic starting point. When students collaborate on filling out charts, categorizing historical perspectives, or discussing causes and consequences, differences in prior knowledge become less decisive. The methods function as a shared language that makes it easier for students to participate actively and develop from their own level. These approaches are not new in themselves, but focusing on them makes a difference for student's experience of being able to take part.

A third area of great importance for inclusion is the development of a shared identity within the class. Students

who experience themselves as part of a community participate more actively and develop greater academic confidence. Active learning forms, where students move, collaborate, and solve tasks without books and computers, can create a physical and social space in which students naturally discuss academic issues and use subject language in practice. When group compositions vary over time, students have the opportunity to meet one another in new constellations. Changing groups randomly from lesson to lesson is therefore also a didactical tool.

This strengthens relationships across the class and helps build precisely the kind of community that both the students in the video project and Mira in her presentation highlighted as crucial for their experience of inclusion. Taken together, these experiences show that inclusion in teaching is not about creating separate initiatives for specific groups of students, but about building structures, language, and communities in which all students can develop from their own starting point. When the teacher works consciously with subject's language, subject's methods, shared identity, and student's learning zones, a learning environment is created in which diversity is not an obstacle but a resource, and in which all students can feel part of the shared project that teaching represents. Working with student's learning zones can further support this process. Many students refrain from speaking in class not because they lack knowledge, but because they fear being asked follow-up questions or revealing uncertainty. When the teacher works explicitly with the model of the comfort zone, anxiety zone, and learning zone, uncertainty can be normalised as a natural part of learning. Students gain a shared understanding that development requires stepping

out of the comfort zone, and that everyone regardless of academic level faces the same challenge. When this becomes a collective insight in the class, students can support one another in speaking up, listening, and offering constructive corrections. This strengthens both their academic development and their social connection to the class. You can see a picture of the model online[6].

When this understanding becomes shared within the class, students can support one another in speaking up, listening, and offering constructive feedback. This creates a learning environment in which students not only develop academically but also strengthen their social confidence and sense of belonging. In this way, working with learning zones becomes a tool that supports both the individual student and the class as a whole.

4.7. Conclusion: Inclusion as a Collective Project

Taken together, the chapter shows that inclusion in teaching is not about creating separate initiatives for specific groups of students, but about building structures, language, and communities in which all students can develop from their own starting point. Today's classrooms are diverse, and teaching must therefore be flexible, reflective, and continuously adapted.

When teachers work consciously with subject language, subject-specific methods, shared identity, and student's learning zones, they create a learning environment

(6) https://static.vecteezy.com/system/resources/previews/053/240/472/non_2x/comfort-zone-to-fear-zone-learning-zone-and-growth-zone-vector.jpg (visited January 1st, 2026).

in which diversity becomes a resource rather than an obstacle. Students gain opportunities to participate actively, support one another, and experience themselves as meaningful members of a shared academic community. Inclusion thus becomes not an additional layer on top of teaching, but the very way teaching is organized. It is a collective project between teachers and students, where everyone contributes and everyone can succeed.

It is also essential that inclusion is anchored at the school level and not only in individual classrooms. School environments, such as the images displayed in hallways or on websites should represent the full diversity of the student body rather than only a narrow selection of "accepted" student types. Schools should offer development opportunities that support both talented students and those who need help with homework or reading. Just as students should have access to support in understanding their homework texts, there should also be spaces for students who enjoy reading to meet, discuss books, and develop their interests together.

Finally, the broader point emerging from this chapter is that student's circumstances and needs change constantly. This requires teachers to reflect continuously on what kind of inclusion is needed, both for individual students and for the class as a whole. Inclusion is therefore an ongoing, dynamic process that evolves alongside the students it aims to support.

Reimagining Education for Social Inclusion and Human Development
ISBN 979-12-218-2574-9
DOI 10.53136/97912218257497
pp. 163-180 (aprile 2026)

CHAPTER V

FROM SILENCE TO INCLUSION: AFRO DESCENDANTS IN PORTUGUESE HISTORY

Miguel Monteiro de Barros[*]

5.1. Introduction

The history of Portugal is inseparable from its maritime expansion, imperial ventures, and colonial legacies. Yet, within the national narrative, the presence of Afro-descendants, men and women whose lives were shaped by slavery, forced labor, and resistance, has often been rendered invisible or relegated to the margins. This erasure is not accidental. It is the product of centuries of dehumanization and racialization, processes that not only justified enslavement but also ensured the long-term exclusion of Black people from the nation's collective memory and school curricula. In recent years, educators and historians have been rethinking how to include Afro-descendants in historical narratives, not as passive subjects of European action but as active agents, contributors to Portuguese society since at least the mid-fifteenth century. This shift requires confronting the

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painful pasts of slavery and colonialism, recognizing their ongoing impact, and dismantling the myths that sustain racial inequalities today. This article examines the historical roots of exclusion, the mechanisms of dehumanization, the persistence of colonial racism, and the ways these processes have shaped, and continue to shape, Portuguese historical education. It also outlines strategies for building a more inclusive narrative that fully acknowledges the role and humanity of Afro-descendants in Portugal's past and present.

5.2. Historical roots of exclusion

5.2.1. *Medieval and early modern racialization*

Long before the large-scale Atlantic slave trade began, ideas about hierarchy and exclusion were already embedded in Iberian societies. The concept of *purity of blood*, which emerged during the Christian Reconquista, initially targeted Jews and Muslims by linking religious identity to hereditary traits. Over time, these prejudices expanded to encompass skin colour and African descent. By the sixteenth century, racial categories such as *Moor*, *Mulatto*, and *Jew* were being used to define legal and social status. Prejudice against Black people was not a new phenomenon, having been documented in Mediterranean societies since antiquity; however, Portuguese maritime expansion both intensified and institutionalized such attitudes. In 1452, the papal bull *Dum Diversas* granted the Portuguese crown, specifically to King Afonso V (r. 1438 to 1481), the right to enslave non-Christians, in perpetuity:

> [We grant you power] over the Saracens, pagans, and other infidels and enemies of Christ, whoever they may be and wherever they may be found – over their kingdoms, duchies, counties, principalities, and other dominions, lands, places, towns, castles, and any other possessions (…). We grant you the right to invade, conquer, subdue, and reduce their persons to perpetual slavery.(1)

By 1444, the port of Lagos (in the Algarve, Southern Portugal) witnessed the arrival of the first large group of captives from West Africa. In his account, the chronicler Gomes Eanes de Zurara classified these captives according to skin tone, ranging from *a fairly light complexion* to *as black as Ethiopians*, associating lightness with beauty and blackness with ugliness. This form of classification helped lay the groundwork for racialized thinking in the centuries that followed.

> When they were all placed together in that field, it was a marvellous thing to behold. Among them, there were some of a fairly light complexion, handsome and well-formed. Others were less light, tending towards brown. Others were as black as Ethiopians, so misshapen in their faces and bodies that it almost seemed to the men who guarded them that they were seeing images from the lower hemisphere.(2)

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(1) MONUMENTA MISSIONARIA AFRICANA: ÁFRICA OCIDENTAL (1342–1499) (1958). 2.ª série, vol. I, p. 269. Includes: *Bula Dum Diversas de Nicolau V.* (18.06.1452).

(2) Zurara, G. E. de. (1978). *Crónica dos feitos notáveis que se passaram na conquista da Guiné por mandado do Infante D. Henrique.* vol. 1, cap. XXV, pp. 107-108. Academia Portuguesa de História.

5.2.2. *The sugar plantation model*

The Portuguese were pioneers in adapting enslaved African labor to sugar production, first on Madeira and later, under a fully developed plantation regime, on the island of São Tomé. These plantations became laboratories for chattel slavery, where people were treated as property, a system later exported to Brazil. This economic model reinforced the view that African labor was both indispensable and inherently servile.

> The places where sugar is produced with great activity and skill are large estates, and the process is as follows: first, after the cut cane has been brought to the aforementioned places, it is placed beneath a water-powered millstone, which, by crushing and grinding the cane, extracts all its juice. Here, vessels are arranged in sequence, and in each of them the juice extracted from the cane is kept boiling for a certain time; it is then transferred to other vessels, where, over a gentle fire, it is skillfully cooked until it reaches such a thickness that, when later poured into clay molds, it can harden. The foam that forms during the boiling of the sugar is poured into barrels, except for that which comes from the first boiling, as this is discarded; the rest, which is preserved, closely resembles honey.(3)

(3) Giulio Landi (c. 1530). *Descrição da ilha da Madeira*. In A. Vieira. (1996), p. 68.

5.3. Dehumanization in practice

5.3.1. *Law and commodification*

Legal codes treated enslaved Africans not as persons but as goods. The *Manueline Ordinances* (1521) allowed buyers to return enslaved people if they were sick or lame, applying the same conditions used for livestock, and valued the recovery of runaway white or Asian slaves (mainly Indian, Bengali, Chinese, and Japanese) at higher rates than Black ones.

> **How slaves and animals may be rejected for being found sick or lame**: any person who buys, or in any other way acquires, a slave from Guinea – whether from the trader responsible for the said Guinea trade, or from a merchant who purchases such slaves, or part of them, in order to resell them – and who wishes to prove that, at the moment of delivery, the slave was already sick or lame, due to the illness or defect from which he suffers at the moment he is rejected, may reject the said slave from Guinea and require the person who delivered him to take him back and to refund what was paid for him.(4)
>
> And if what is thus found should be a captive slave, the finder shall inform the slave's owner, or the judge of the head customs office of the district in which he is found (…) and to the person who holds such a slave by authority of justice there shall be given, for his maintenance, ten reais for each day; and for the days during which he makes use of the said slave, nothing further shall be owed

(4) *Ordenações Manuelinas*. (1984 [1521). Livro IV, título XVI, pp. 48-49.

> for that maintenance. Moreover, the said finder shall receive, for his finding, if the said slave is Black, three hundred reais, and for a white slave, or one from India [a broad category used to designate enslaved persons of Asian origin], one thousand *reais*.(5)

5.3.2. *Segregation and control*

Everyday life in early modern Portugal, and especially in Lisbon, reflected this process of dehumanization. Public fountains and spaces of trade were segregated by race and social status, and Black women were prohibited from selling goods in public squares and markets, where they were accused of disruptive and inappropriate behaviour towards white women. Language itself also internalized and reproduced assumptions of Black inferiority, both in popular usage and in literary culture.

> **Provision that there be no Black female street vendors**:
> We, the King, were likewise informed that there were many Black female street vendors, who traded in fruit and other goods, and that, being unruly, they mingled excessively with many honorable and respectable women, thereby dishonoring and offending them; and that, in addition, there were many other inconveniences. For these reasons, we were requested to make provision in this matter as well, and to order that there be none such – which seems proper to us.
> Accordingly, we hereby command that in this city there shall be no Black female street vendors of fruit or of any

(5) ORDENAÇÕES MANUELINAS. (1984 [1521]), Livro V, título XLI, pp. 119-120.

> other goods for sale in the public square. When they wish to trade and sell, they may do so at the doors of their masters, and nowhere else. Any woman found acting otherwise shall forfeit all that is found with her for sale, and shall furthermore pay five hundred reais, to be enforced by imprisonment.(6)

Even *The Lusiad*, the Portuguese national epic written by Luís Vaz de Camões in 1572, contributed to the naturalization of such modes of reasoning:

> **The Lusiad**
> Here Christian Europe lifts the regal head.
> Afric behold, alas, what alter'd view!
> Her lands uncultur'd, and her son's untrue;
> Ungraced with all that sweetens human life,
> Savage and fierce they roam in brutal strife;
> Eager they grasp the gifts which culture yields,
> Yet, naked roam their own neglected fields.
> Lo, here enrich'd with hills of golden ore,
> Monomotapa's empire hems the shore.
> There round the Cape, great Afric's dreadful bound,
> Array'd in storms (by you first compass'd round),
> Unnumber'd tribes as bestial grazers stray,
> By laws unform'd, unform'd by reason's sway:
> Far inward stretch the mournful sterile dales,
> Where, on the parch'd hill-side, pale Famine wails.
> On gold in vain the naked savage treads;
> Low, clay-built huts, behold, and reedy sheds,
> Their dreary towns. Gonzalo's zeal shall glow

(6) CASA DA ALMOTAÇARIA. Livro 1º. (1703-1745). Livro I, f. 163. AML-AH.

> To these dark minds the path of light to show:
> His toils to humanize the barb'rous mind
> Shall, with the martyr's palms, his holy temples bind.(7)

5.3.3. *Exploitation of bodies*

Perhaps the most disturbing expressions of dehumanization are found in the systematic breeding of enslaved Black people, a practice explicitly likened to animal husbandry. Within the House of Braganza, certain enslaved men were reserved exclusively for the impregnation of enslaved women, with their offspring treated as commodities and sold for profit.

Dehumanization persisted even beyond death. At least until the second half of the sixteenth century, the humanity of many enslaved Africans continued to be denied, as their bodies were discarded in rubbish heaps or left exposed – practices formally regulated in a Lisbon municipal ordinance of 1515.

> There [in the grounds of the House of Braganza, in Alentejo, south of Portugal] is the breeding of Moorish slaves, some of whom are kept solely for the impregnation of large numbers of women, like stallions, and records are kept of them as of horse breeds in Italy. These women are allowed to be mounted by whomever wishes, since the offspring always belongs to the owner of the enslaved woman, and it is said that there are many who are pregnant. The Moorish stallion is not permitted to mount women who are already pregnant, under penalty of fifty lashes; he may cover only

(7) William Julius Mickle. (1877). *The Lusiad; or, the discovery of India. An epic poem*, {325} – {326}.

those who are not, because the resulting offspring are then sold for thirty or forty escudos each. There are many such herds of females in Portugal and in the Indies, solely for the sale of offspring, as stated.[8]

We are informed that the slaves who die in that city [Lisbon], both those belonging to the Guinea traders and others, are not properly buried, as they should be, in the places where they are disposed of; rather, they are thrown onto the ground in such a way that they remain uncovered, or entirely exposed on the surface, with nothing to cover them, and that dogs eat them. We are also informed that most of these slaves are thrown onto the rubbish heap located beside the cross on the road leading from the Gate of Santa Catarina to Santos, as well as in other places across the surrounding estates. And although you have already made provisions in this matter, with penalties and regulations as far as possible, the situation has not been remedied as it should be. And because it is necessary that this be properly addressed, given the corruption that would result from the putrefaction of the said bodies, we consider that the best remedy will be the digging of a pit, as deep as possible, in the place that is most convenient and least troublesome, into which the said slaves shall be thrown; and that, from time to time, a certain quantity of quicklime be thrown into the said pit, so that the bodies may decompose more effectively and so that, as far as possible, the aforementioned corruption may be avoided. And that around the mouth of this pit a wall of stone and lime shall be built; and that any person

(8) Venturino Da Fabriano, G. B. (1571).

> who throws, or orders to be thrown, any slave in a place other than the said pit shall pay a certain penalty, as you shall deem appropriate.(9)

5.4. Continuities: forced labor and colonial racism

5.4.1. *From slavery to coercive labor systems*

The abolition of slavery in Portugal and its empire was a complex and uneven process. A decree issued in 1761 prohibited the entry of enslaved people into mainland Portugal, but it did not abolish slavery itself, which continued to be legally practiced in the colonies. Enslaved people already living in Portugal, as well as their children, did not automatically obtain freedom under this measure, although subsequent legislation, notably a decree of 1773, sought to grant freedom to children born in Portugal to enslaved mothers.

Slavery and the transatlantic slave trade persisted in the Portuguese colonies, well into the nineteenth century. The slave trade was formally ended in the 1830s, while slavery itself was only abolished throughout the Portuguese Empire in 1869. However, this legal abolition did not mark the end of coercive labour systems. In the colonies, slavery was effectively replaced by regimes of forced labor that endured until 1961. Reflecting this continuity, colonial officials in the 1940s and 1950s described working conditions as bearing what one inspector called "the musty stench of slavery".

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(9) LETTER FROM KING MANUEL I TO THE SENATE OF LISBON. (1515), *Livro 1° do Provimento da Saúde, doc. 43, fl. 51r*. Arquivo Municipal de Lisboa. In J. de Castilho. (1940), v. IV, p. 152. Câmara Municipal de Lisboa.

> "Treated like wild animals," shackled, whipped, beaten, "rounded up in the bush," with high mortality rates during transport, kept for decades far from their families – to whom they were sometimes returned in a "state of being dead while standing upright" – "pregnant women and women with children monstrously beaten for abandoning work": the descriptions and observations found in reports of the Portuguese colonial administration are shocking for their brutality and for the normalization of what an inspector, in 1949, called "the musty stench of slavery".(10)

5.4.2. *Colonial violence*

Resistance to these systems was consistently met with brutal repression. Among several similar episodes, the 1961 Baixa do Cassanje cotton workers' strike in northern Angola was violently suppressed through aerial bombardment, killing thousands.

> In the ensuing repression, the Portuguese army used napalm in the bombing of local populations, causing the deaths of between 10,000 and 20,000 people and razing entire villages (…). In this conflict, indigenous populations were forced to cultivate cotton, which they were required to sell to the company Cotonang, owned by Portuguese and Belgian capital. Holding a monopoly over both cotton cultivation and commercialization, the company sold seeds to farmers and purchased their production at prices far below market value. The result was the destruction of subsistence crops, replaced by cotton

(10) *E manda ainda o Senhor Deus pretos a este mundo*. (29 dezembro 2018). Diário de Notícias.

> monoculture, leaving African farmers dependent on Cotonang and on harvest outcomes that, in bad years, condemned entire populations to famine.(11)

5.4.3. *Pseudo-scientific racism*

These practices were justified through pseudo-scientific theories of racial superiority, integrated into nationalist ideologies. Colonial discourse fixed African identity as static and inferior.

> If other races are unable to progress beyond the hunter or pastoral stage (…), this one [the Black race], in its development, reaches higher forms of collective life: it has cities, cultivates fields, works metals; yet all of this remains stagnant and primitive, merely a sketch, because an infantile intelligence does not allow it to draw from these premises the evolutionary conclusions recorded in the history of the superior races. Thus, the Black man is not, evidently, like the Polynesian, for example, a senescent and degenerate being. The robustness and physical configuration of the type express the truth of his history: he is a more or less primitive man. The Guinean or the Mina are the finest examples of the Black race, which has in the Niger Delta the center of its present area.(12)

(11) Raquel Varela; João Carlos Louçã. (2016). *Trabalho Necessário*, nº 24. «De que é feito um império? Trabalho forçado nas colónias portuguesas».

(12) Oliveira Martins, J. P. (1955). *As raças humanas e a civilização primitiva*, p. 166. Guimarães & C.ª Editores.

5.5. Erasure from historical narratives School curricula before and after 1974: selective memory and national identity

In pre-democratic Portugal, school textbooks tended to portray slavery primarily as an economic system, emphasizing trade routes and plantation production while largely ignoring the lived experiences of enslaved people. Abolition was framed as a humanitarian achievement led by Portuguese statesmen, with little or no reference to African resistance or agency. Although the democratization of education after 1974 introduced some reforms, significant narrative gaps persisted, and Afro-descendants remained largely absent from the broader national historical narrative.

The enduring myth that Portugal is not a racist society rests in part on this selective historical memory. By celebrating explorers while overlooking the violence and exploitation that underpinned their achievements, school curricula sustained a sanitized vision of the past. This sanitized narrative shaped Portuguese self-perception and obscured the country's long and brutal history of slavery, with lasting consequences for how that past is understood and debated in the present. Well into the first decade of the twenty-first century, textbooks continued to reproduce these silences and distortions.

Change began to emerge through public debate, driven in particular by Afro-descendant movements alongside other social movements, which challenged dominant narratives and demanded greater historical accountability. These pressures first led to partial revisions in some textbooks and, from 2016 onwards, to more systematic change with the

introduction of a revised History syllabus. This syllabus began to address the previously sanitized portrayal of the past, laying the groundwork for a broader transformation in how Portuguese history is taught and understood.

5.6. Towards inclusion

5.6.1. *Reframing language*

From 2016 onwards, the revision of the History syllabus, carried out by the Portuguese History Teachers Association at the request of the Ministry of Education, introduced a series of small yet significant changes. Among these was the adoption of the term *enslaved person* in place of *slave*, as well as the inclusion of the concept of *forced labor,* which had previously been entirely absent. The syllabus also began to explicitly acknowledge the violence exercised by the Portuguese against other peoples, contributing to a reframing of historical interpretation. Further changes introduced by the *History Essential Learnings* include the recognition of missionary activity as a form of cultural colonialism, rather than as a purely civilizing or religious endeavour. The revised syllabus also emphasizes that the forced and voluntary migrations of enslaved people were not only experiences of displacement but also processes that profoundly influenced cultural practices, contributing to the societies and cultures of the places to which these populations were forcibly relocated.

Taken together, these shifts reinforce the understanding that slavery was a condition imposed upon individuals, rather than an inherent or defining identity, and that

colonial systems shaped economic, cultural, and social relations in lasting ways. Within this revised framework, the following *Essential Learnings* were established:

- Recognize the violent subjugation of various peoples and the trafficking and enslavement of human beings as realities of imperial expansion.
- Recognize missionary activity as a form of cultural colonialism.
- Analyze how migratory movements, whether voluntary or forced, have influenced cultural practices.
- Identify and apply the concepts of human trafficking; enslaved person; missionary activity / cultural colonialism.
- Recognize that the replacement of slavery with forced labor is linked to colonial economic policies.
- Identify and apply the concept of forced labor.

5.6.2. *Decolonizing History education: inclusion, memory, and critical skills*

Including Afro-descendant histories in Portuguese education requires integrating Black presence across all historical periods, from medieval Portugal to twentieth-century labor movements, while highlighting not only oppression but also resistance, creativity, and processes of integration. This approach moves beyond marginal references and places Afro-descendants at the center of historical narratives as active historical agents.

At the same time, developing heritage awareness demands an honest engagement with painful pasts. Acknowledging the trauma of slavery and forced labor, as well as their

long-term social and cultural consequences, fosters empathy, challenges prejudice, and contributes to the construction of a democratic culture grounded in historical responsibility and inclusion.

Finally, this process depends on the development of critical historical skills. Students must learn to identify processes of racialization in historical sources, to question silences and biases in narratives, and to critically analyze how power relations shape historical knowledge. By combining inclusive content, memory work, and critical inquiry, history education can become a powerful tool for dismantling inherited inequalities and promoting social cohesion.

5.7. Conclusion

The persistent exclusion of Afro-descendant histories from Portuguese school curricula is not a neutral omission, but the continuation of long-standing processes of dehumanization and racialization that once legitimized slavery, forced labor, and colonial domination. Addressing this exclusion is therefore not merely a matter of adding content or correcting historical inaccuracies; it requires a profound transformation of how history is taught, interpreted, and mobilized within education. Genuine inclusion begins with recognizing that Black presence has been an integral part of Portuguese society for over five centuries and with confronting the violence, exploitation, and silences that shaped both the past and its transmission. Only by rejecting myths of harmony and embracing a complex, shared, and often painful history can education contribute to a democratic culture that honors all histories and all people.

This transformation demands more than revised terminology or isolated curricular adjustments. It involves rethinking interpretive frameworks, pairing narratives of oppression with those of resistance, survival, and cultural contribution, and equipping students with critical historical skills to identify processes of racialization and challenge inherited prejudices. Because educational exclusion mirrors broader social, economic, and cultural inequalities, schools must actively diagnose and address the mechanisms that produce marginalization. Inclusive education must therefore operate on multiple levels: preventing exclusionary processes, educating for rights and responsibilities, and creating learning environments that are welcoming, participatory, and transformative for all learners.

It is precisely within this context that participation in the SENSEI project becomes essential. SENSEI directly responds to widely recognized European challenges: the persistent gap between the ethical imperative of *education for all* and everyday educational practice; the growing diversity of classrooms; and the documented lack of initial and continuing teacher training in inclusive education. By focusing on history and citizenship education, SENSEI addresses a critical space where narratives of belonging, exclusion, and identity are constructed and contested.

Through the creation of a transnational network of teachers and institutions, the development of tailored and adaptable professional development programmes, the upscaling of proven inclusive practices, and the design of transferable models for hybrid teacher training, SENSEI provides concrete tools to translate inclusive principles into daily pedagogical practice. In doing so, it supports teachers in moving away from exclusionary responses and

towards inclusive classrooms where diversity becomes a resource rather than a challenge.

Ultimately, SENSEI contributes to more than improved teaching competences. By enabling educators to engage critically with difficult pasts, to integrate silenced voices into historical narratives, and to foster empathy, intercultural understanding, and civic responsibility, the project helps link past exclusions to present inequalities. In this sense, SENSEI is not only a professional development initiative, but a crucial step toward dismantling systemic racism through education and toward building a shared democratic culture grounded in inclusion, historical justice, and European values.

Reimagining Education for Social Inclusion and Human Development
ISBN 979-12-218-2574-9
DOI 10.53136/97912218257498
pp. 181-209 (aprile 2026)

CHAPTER VI

TRACING CHANGE IN INCLUSION PROJECTS: FROM NORMATIVE GOALS TO MEASURABLE IMPACT

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6.1. Introduction: Why Impact Measurement in Inclusion Requires Methodological Rigor

Inclusive education has become a central normative objective in contemporary educational policy and practice. International organisations and research-oriented policy discourse increasingly frame inclusion not merely as the integration of learners with disabilities, but as a systemic commitment to equity, diversity, accessibility, and participation for all learners within shared educational environments.(1) This normative expansion has substantially increased expectations placed on teachers and teacher education systems, which are now required to respond to

[*] Global Impact Institute.

(1) Ackers, J. (2018). *All Children in School Together: The Quest for Disability-Inclusive Education*. IIEP-UNESCO. UNESCO (2025). *Inclusion in Education;* Cf. https://www.unesco.org/en/inclusion-education.Observatory of Educational Innovation (2023). *Teacher Training for Inclusive Education*. Tecnológico de Monterrey.

heterogeneous learning needs within mainstream educational settings.

This broadened understanding of inclusion, however, has not been accompanied by an equally robust development of methodologies capable of assessing whether and how inclusion-related initiatives actually generate meaningful change. While empirical research provides strong evidence that teacher training can positively influence pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and reduce concerns related to teaching diverse learners,[2] systematic reviews of inclusion interventions repeatedly underline the difficulty of translating such findings into consistent, comparable, and methodologically sound impact evidence across projects and contexts.[3] As a result, inclusion initiatives often operate with a gap between normative ambition and evaluative capability.

In many education projects—particularly those funded through international or supranational programmes—evaluation remains dominated by output-oriented indicators such as participation numbers, activities delivered, or satisfaction ratings collected immediately after an intervention. Methodological literature on education indicators has long warned that an over-reliance on such measures provides an incomplete and potentially misleading basis for judging effectiveness, as outputs document implementation rather than change.[4] In the field of teacher

(2) Umesh, S., Forlin, C., and Loreman T. (2008). *Impact of Training on Pre-Service Teachers' Attitudes and Concerns about Inclusive Education and Sentiments about Persons with Disabilities.* Disability & Society 23 (7): 773–785.

(3) Mendoza, M., et al. (2022). *A Systematic Review of Studies of Inclusive Education Interventions: What Can We Learn from Implementation-Focused Research?* International Journal of Inclusive Education.

(4) Vos, R. (1996). *Educational Indicators: What's to Be Measured?* Inter-American Development Bank.

professional development, this critique has been articulated particularly clearly: participation and positive reactions do not, in themselves, demonstrate changes in professional knowledge, beliefs, or classroom practice.(5)

These limitations are especially consequential in inclusion-related professional development. Inclusion is not a discrete skill that can be transmitted through a single training activity; rather, it involves complex cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioural dimensions that develop over time and are strongly shaped by institutional and cultural context. Empirical research on inclusive practices among pre-service educators shows that beliefs, self-efficacy, and perceived competence are stronger predictors of inclusive practice than exposure to content alone, underscoring the inadequacy of purely output-based evaluation approaches.(6) Consequently, changes in inclusive practice cannot be inferred directly from participation counts or short-term feedback instruments.

Against this background, the challenge is not simply to measure more, but to measure differently. Impact-oriented evaluation in inclusion projects requires methodological approaches that acknowledge indirect effects, intermediate mechanisms, and temporal dynamics of change. Theory-based evaluation literature emphasises that credible impact assessment depends on making assumptions about change explicit and tracing plausible pathways between activities and outcomes, rather than relying on simplified linear

(5) Guskey, T. R. (2002). *Does It Make a Difference? Evaluating Professional Development*. Educational Leadership 59 (6): 45–51.

(6) Umesh, S., Sokal, L., Wang, M., and Loreman T. (2021). *Measuring the Use of Inclusive Practices among Pre-Service Educators: A Multi-National Study*. Teaching and Teacher Education 107: 103506.

cause–effect models.[7] In complex social interventions such as teacher education for inclusion, such approaches are widely regarded as essential for balancing methodological rigour with real-world feasibility.

This chapter responds to these challenges by presenting and critically reflecting on the impact assessment methodology developed within the SENSEI Teacher Academy project. Rather than reporting project results, the chapter uses SENSEI as a methodological case to illustrate how impact in inclusion-oriented teacher education initiatives can be conceptualised, operationalised, and assessed in a structured and transparent manner. In doing so, it draws on a Theory of Change framework and a multi-indicator measurement strategy to bridge the gap between normative inclusion goals and empirically grounded evaluation practice.[8]

6.2. From Outputs to Impact: Conceptual Challenges in Inclusion Evaluation

6.2.1. *Limitations of Output-Based Evaluation*

Evaluation practice in education projects has traditionally relied on output-oriented indicators such as the number of activities delivered, participants reached, or materials produced. These indicators play an important role in

(7) Weiss, C. H. (1997). *Theory-Based Evaluation: Past, Present, and Future*. New Directions for Evaluation 1997 (76): 41–55.

(8) CENTER FOR THEORY OF CHANGE. n.d. *What Is Theory of Change?* Accessed January 17, 2024; Geneva Global. (2023). *Why Your Theory of Change Is Critical to Your Organization's Impact*. December 11, 2023.

documenting implementation and ensuring administrative accountability. However, evaluation research has long cautioned that outputs describe *what was done*, not *what changed*, and therefore offer only limited insight into the effectiveness of complex educational interventions.(9)

This limitation becomes particularly evident in projects addressing inclusion. Inclusion-oriented interventions aim to influence beliefs, attitudes, pedagogical practices, and institutional cultures — dimensions of change that are not directly observable through participation counts or event statistics. Research on teacher professional development consistently shows that attendance at training activities or positive participant reactions do not, in themselves, constitute evidence of professional learning or behavioural change.(10) As a result, output-focused evaluation risks overstating success while remaining largely silent on whether intended educational transformations actually occur.

Moreover, output-based evaluation implicitly assumes a degree of standardisation that rarely exists in inclusion projects. Activities differ substantially in duration, intensity, and pedagogical design, ranging from short online webinars to multi-day seminars or longer-term learning formats. Treating these activities as equivalent "units of delivery" obscures their fundamentally different potential to influence participants and undermines meaningful comparison across interventions.

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(9) Vos, R. (1996). *Educational Indicators: What's to Be Measured?* Op. cit.

(10) Guskey, T. R. (2002). *Does It Make a Difference? Evaluating Professional Development*. Op. cit.

6.2.2. *What "Impact" Means in Inclusion Contexts*

Moving beyond outputs requires a more differentiated understanding of impact in the context of inclusive education. Impact cannot be reduced to immediate post-intervention effects, nor can it be understood as a single, linear outcome. Instead, inclusion-related impact unfolds across multiple dimensions and temporal horizons.

At the individual level, impact may involve changes in teachers' understanding of inclusion, their attitudes towards diverse learners, or their perceived self-efficacy in addressing heterogeneity in the classroom. Empirical research demonstrates that such variables are central to inclusive practice and that they mediate whether and how teachers translate training content into everyday teaching.(11)

At the organisational and relational level, impact may manifest in altered collaboration patterns, shared professional norms, or the gradual emergence of inclusive cultures within schools or training institutions. These forms of change are typically indirect and cumulative, making them difficult to capture through short-term measurement instruments. At the systemic level, longer-term impacts may include changes in training provision, policy discourse, or resource allocation related to inclusion — effects that often extend beyond the formal duration of a project.

Crucially, these different dimensions of impact are temporally differentiated. Short-term effects may be observable shortly after an intervention, while medium- and

(11) Umesh, S., Sokal, L., Wang, M., and Loreman T. (2021). *Measuring the Use of Inclusive Practices among Pre-Service Educators: A Multi-National Study*. Op. cit.

long-term changes require sustained engagement and favourable contextual conditions. Treating impact as a single endpoint, therefore, misrepresents its inherently processual nature, particularly in the field of inclusion.

6.2.3. *Methodological Implications for Impact Assessment*

The conceptual characteristics of inclusion-related impact have direct methodological implications. First, they challenge the adequacy of single-indicator evaluation designs. Because impact manifests across cognitive, attitudinal, behavioural, and structural dimensions, credible assessment requires triangulation across complementary indicators rather than reliance on a single measure.

Second, attribution must be handled with caution. Inclusion projects typically operate within complex educational systems shaped by multiple interacting influences, including institutional policies, school cultures, and broader societal discourses. Evaluation research therefore, emphasises contribution rather than attribution, focusing on whether observed changes are plausibly linked to project activities rather than claiming direct causal effects.[12]

Finally, impact assessment must balance methodological ambition with practical feasibility. Projects are constrained by limited time, resources, and participant availability, and many intended impacts materialise only after funding periods end. These constraints necessitate evaluation designs that are both theoretically grounded and adaptable to real-world project conditions.

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(12) Weiss, C. H. (1997). *Theory-Based Evaluation: Past, Present, and Future*. Op. cit.

Taken together, these considerations point to the need for explicit, theory-driven evaluation frameworks that articulate assumptions about change, differentiate between types and timelines of impact, and guide the selection of appropriate indicators. The following section introduces the Theory of Change approach adopted in the SENSEI Teacher Academy project as a response to these conceptual and methodological challenges.

6.3. Methodological Framework: Theory of Change as the Backbone of Impact Assessment

6.3.1. *Why a Theory of Change Was Necessary*

The decision to adopt a Theory of Change (ToC) framework in the SENSEI project was driven by two interrelated methodological challenges. First, the project combined a heterogeneous set of activities that varied significantly in duration, intensity, and pedagogical depth, ranging from short online webinars to multi-day face-to-face seminars and longer-term network engagement. Second, SENSEI addressed multiple target groups — teacher trainees, practicing teachers, teacher educators, consortium members, and wider professional networks — each expected to contribute differently to the overall objectives of the project.

Under these conditions, neither linear logic models nor output-based evaluation approaches were sufficient. Without an explicit articulation of how different activities were expected to contribute to different types of change over time, there was a substantial risk of fragmented

implementation and inconsistent interpretations of success across consortium partners. A Theory of Change was therefore required not only as an evaluation tool, but as a shared conceptual framework capable of aligning expectations, clarifying roles, and structuring decision-making throughout the project lifecycle.

6.3.2. *Structure of the SENSEI Theory of Change*

The SENSEI Theory of Change follows a classical but explicitly differentiated structure linking **inputs**, **outputs**, and **impacts** across short-, medium-, and long-term horizons. Inputs comprise the concrete activities and resources mobilised by the project, including the design and delivery of training formats, the development of learning materials, and the facilitation of professional exchange. Outputs refer to the immediate and verifiable products of these activities, such as the number of participants reached, the training modules developed, or network interactions initiated.

Impacts are conceptualised as changes occurring beyond these immediate outputs and are differentiated temporally. Short-term impacts focus on changes at the individual level, particularly in participants' understanding of inclusion, reflective capacity, and attitudes towards inclusive education. Medium-term impacts address changes in professional confidence, pedagogical practice, and cooperation, including the diffusion of inclusive approaches within institutions and professional networks. Long-term impacts extend beyond individual participants to encompass sustained communities of practice, changes in training provision, and potential resonance at policy or system level.

Crucially, the ToC makes explicit the assumptions underlying these change mechanisms. It assumes, for example, that increased understanding and reflective capacity are necessary preconditions for changes in practice, and that individual change must be supported by institutional and network-level processes in order to become sustainable. By articulating these assumptions explicitly, the ToC renders the project's internal logic transparent and open to scrutiny.

6.3.3. *Making the Theory of Change Operational*

To function as more than a conceptual diagram, the SENSEI Theory of Change was translated into an operational framework guiding both implementation and evaluation. Abstract objectives and intended impacts were broken down into concrete, observable dimensions and linked to indicators appropriate to different target groups and activity formats. This translation enabled the project to distinguish systematically between input, output, and impact indicators and to assign them to specific temporal horizons.

For performance interpretation, the SENSEI methodology aligned its impact logic with the OECD DAC evaluation criteria, particularly with regard to effectiveness and impact. Rather than treating these criteria as ex post judgment tools, they were used ex ante to structure expectations about what types of change could reasonably be anticipated at different stages of the project. This alignment supported proportionate interpretation of results and helped avoid over-claiming impact based on short-term data[13].

(13) OECD. 2019. *Better Criteria for Better Evaluation: Revised Evaluation Criteria*. Paris: OECD.

In this way, the Theory of Change functioned simultaneously as a planning instrument, an internal coordination tool, and the backbone of impact assessment. It provided a coherent framework within which heterogeneous activities, diverse target groups, and differentiated timelines could be integrated into a single, methodologically defensible evaluation logic.

6.3.4. *Visualising the Theory of Change and Interpreting Performance over Time*

To make the Theory of Change operational and transparent, the SENSEI project translated its conceptual framework into a visual matrix linking inputs, outputs, and impacts across short-, medium-, and long-term horizons (Figure X). This visualisation serves two purposes simultaneously: it makes the internal logic of the project explicit, and it provides a structured basis for interpreting performance over time.

The upper part of the figure displays the **impact level**, differentiated into short-, medium-, and long-term impacts. Short-term impacts focus on individual-level changes among teachers and teacher trainees, such as improved understanding of inclusive education, increased reflective capacity, and the initial mainstreaming of inclusive practices. Medium-term impacts extend this logic to professional confidence, cooperation, diffusion of practices within schools, and the emergence of a culture of inclusion. Long-term impacts address systemic dimensions, including the creation of sustained communities of practice, policy-level understanding of inclusion, and structural conditions such as funding availability and subject-specific training requirements.

Below the impact layer, the figure presents **outputs** and **inputs**, likewise organised along temporal horizons. Inputs refer to the concrete activities and resources mobilised by the project, while outputs capture their immediate and verifiable products. The vertical alignment of inputs, outputs, and impacts illustrates the underlying causal logic of the Theory of Change: inputs enable outputs, which in turn contribute — under specific assumptions — to different layers of impact.

A key feature of the visualisation is the **colour-coding of achievement levels**, which follows the OECD DAC evaluation logic. Dark green indicates *very good* achievement, green indicates *good*, yellow represents *fair*, and red denotes *poor* achievement relative to predefined benchmarks. Importantly, these colours do not represent absolute success or failure, but performance **in relation to what can reasonably be expected at a given point in time**.

This temporal interpretation is particularly critical for long-term impacts. Several long-term impact areas appear as weak or underachieved during the project duration. From a methodological perspective, this is neither surprising nor problematic. Long-term impacts by definition concern changes that require sustained time, institutional embedding, and often external enabling conditions beyond the control of a single project.

Impacts

Short Term	I1 Develop a better understanding of what is inclusive education and how they can contribute to its promotion
	I2 Develop an increased ability to critically reflect on their own approach to education and inclusion
	C1 Teacher and teacher trainees start to mainstream inclusive education approaches in their day-to-day practice, notably by offering differentiated and scaffolded tasks to their students.
	C2 Teacher and teacher trainees actively look for additional training opportunities on inclusive education
	C3 Consortium members and members of the SENSEI Network will add dedicated sessions on inclusive education in all the teacher training that they will design and propose
Medium term	I3 Augment their confidence in successfully promoting inclusive education and increase their ability to develop their own inclusive lesson plans.
	I4 Know better where to find more information regarding specific questions and challenges related to different aspects of inclusive education
	I5 Cooperate in the creation of new transnational projects and courses that focus on inclusion.
	C4 Teachers not only continue mainstreaming inclusive education in their own practice, but start asking that their colleagues do the same, creating a culture of inclusion in their own schools
	C5 Teacher trainers that were not directly involved in the project start developing own training courses on inclusive education, also with the aid of the deliverables of this project.
	C6 Within the network, sharing information not only about successful projects and ideas, but also about challenges faced and potential solutions becomes automatic.

Long term	I6 Create a long lasting community of practice focused on inclusive education
	I7 Policy makers will develop a better understanding of what is inclusive education and what is the role of policy making in promoting inclusion and diversity
	C7 Solutions to local and context-dependent problems are automatically looked for and found collaboratively in an international setting
	C8 Funds are regularly made available for further research and innovation in inclusive education and in teaching about inclusion.
	C9 All subject teachers receive subject specific training in inclusive education

Output

Short term	Medium-term	**long-term**

Inputs

Short term	**Medium-term**	**long-term**

The Theory of Change explicitly anticipates that such impacts will not fully materialise within the funding period and treats them as prospective outcomes rather than immediate evaluation targets.

By visualising achievement across time horizons in this way, the SENSEI Theory of Change avoids a common evaluation pitfall: penalising projects for not delivering long-term systemic change prematurely. Instead, it enables a differentiated and proportionate interpretation of results, aligned with OECD DAC principles, that recognises strong short- and medium-term performance as necessary preconditions for longer-term impact.

In this sense, the Theory of Change functions not only as a planning and evaluation framework, but also as a communication tool. It allows stakeholders to see at a glance where the project performs strongly, where progress is emerging, and where outcomes are intentionally deferred. This transparency strengthens both accountability and learning, and it illustrates how impact assessment in inclusion-oriented teacher education can be both methodologically rigorous and realistic.

6.4. Target Groups, Activities, and the Temporal Logic of Measurement

A defining characteristic of inclusion-oriented teacher education projects is the diversity of both their target groups and their activity formats. In SENSEI, this diversity was not treated as an implementation challenge to be standardised away, but as a core design feature that had to be reflected explicitly in the evaluation logic. Consequently, the Theory of Change was complemented by a differentiated approach to target groups, activities, and measurement timelines.

6.4.1. *Differentiation of Target Groups*

The SENSEI project addressed several target groups, each positioned differently within the overall change process. **Teacher trainees** and **practicing teachers** constituted the primary target groups for individual-level change, particularly with regard to understanding inclusion, developing reflective capacity, and strengthening professional

self-efficacy. These groups were therefore central to short- and medium-term impact expectations.

Consortium members and **teacher educators** played a different role. Rather than being the main recipients of training, they acted as multipliers and carriers of institutional learning. For this group, expected impacts related less to individual attitudes and more to changes in training provision, curriculum design, and the integration of inclusive education into future activities.

Finally, **network members and wider institutional stakeholders** — including professional associations, universities, and policy-related actors — were primarily relevant for medium- and long-term impacts. Their role in sustaining communities of practice, facilitating knowledge exchange, and enabling structural change positioned them beyond the immediate scope of short-term measurement, while remaining central to the overall Theory of Change.

6.4.2. *Activity Types and Measurement Constraints*

In parallel to the differentiation of target groups, SENSEI employed activity formats with markedly different temporal and pedagogical characteristics. **Short activities**, such as online webinars, were designed to raise awareness, introduce concepts, and stimulate reflection. Their limited duration made them unsuitable for measuring deep or lasting change, but appropriate for capturing immediate learning and intention-related effects.

Medium-length interventions, including face-to-face seminars and structured training modules, allowed for deeper engagement, peer interaction, and practice-oriented learning. These formats justified more elaborate measurement

approaches and were expected to contribute to medium-term impacts related to confidence, cooperation, and pedagogical practice.

Long-term engagement formats, such as self-paced courses and network participation, were designed to support sustained learning and diffusion of inclusive practices. While their ultimate effects extend beyond the project duration, they form a critical bridge between individual change and longer-term systemic impact.

6.4.3. *Consequences for Evaluation Design*

This differentiation had direct consequences for the evaluation design. A uniform pre–post measurement approach across all activities and target groups would have been methodologically inappropriate and potentially misleading. Short activities do not provide sufficient exposure to justify pre–post testing of stable constructs, while long-term impacts cannot be meaningfully assessed within short project cycles.

Instead, the SENSEI methodology adopted a **differentiated measurement strategy**, aligning instruments with activity types, target groups, and expected timelines of change. This approach ensured proportionality between intervention intensity and measurement ambition and avoided over-interpretation of short-term data. Embedded within the overarching Theory of Change, it provided a coherent framework for capturing diverse forms of impact while respecting the temporal logic of inclusion-related change processes.

6.5. Multi-Indicator Impact Measurement Design

The Theory of Change provided the conceptual architecture for impact assessment in the SENSEI project. To translate this architecture into empirical evidence, the evaluation design adopted a multi-indicator approach. This decision reflects the recognition that impact in inclusion-oriented teacher education cannot be observed directly but must be inferred from patterns of change across complementary dimensions. Rather than relying on single metrics, the methodology seeks converging evidence from indicators capturing dispositions, attitudes, learning-related outcomes, and self-reported reflection.

6.5.1. *Rationale for a Multi-Indicator Approach*

Impact in the context of inclusive education constitutes a **latent construct**. Core dimensions such as openness, professional confidence, reflective capacity, or inclusive attitudes cannot be observed directly and are not expected to change uniformly or linearly. Measuring impact therefore requires indirect operationalisation through indicators that serve as theoretically plausible proxies for deeper change processes.

Relying on a single indicator risk leads to both over-simplification and misinterpretation. Apparent stability in one dimension may coexist with meaningful change in another, particularly in early stages of professional learning. The SENSEI methodology, therefore, combines multiple indicators that address different aspects of the Theory of Change and allows patterns of convergence and divergence to be analysed. Impact is interpreted not as the achievement of a

predefined score, but as a **configuration of changes** consistent with the project's change logic.

6.5.2. *Personality-Related Indicators: Openness (Big Five)*

One component of the measurement design focuses on personality-related dispositions, specifically **Openness to Experience**. Openness was selected as a relevant proxy because inclusive education requires receptiveness to diversity, willingness to question established practices, and tolerance for ambiguity. These traits are conceptually aligned with the capacity to engage constructively with inclusive pedagogies.

The SENSEI project operationalised Openness using the **Big Five Inventory (BFI)**, a widely used and publicly documented instrument developed at the University of California, Berkeley, which provides validated item formulations and guidance for use in cross-cultural research contexts.[14]

Rather than treating personality as a fixed attribute, the SENSEI methodology approaches openness as a **relatively stable but influenceable disposition**, particularly in professional contexts involving reflection and learning. The indicator was not used to assess individual suitability for inclusion work, but to detect shifts at the group level that may signal increased readiness to engage with inclusive practices.

To ensure reliability across linguistic and cultural contexts, the instrument was implemented using established

(14) John, O. P., & Srivastava, S. (1999). *The Big Five Trait taxonomy: History, measurement, and theoretical perspectives*. In L. A. Pervin & O. P. John (Eds.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (2nd ed., pp. 102–139). New York: Guilford Press.

item formulations and subjected to careful translation procedures. Back-translation and partner review were used to safeguard semantic equivalence, and analysis focused on aggregated patterns rather than individual-level diagnostics.

6.5.3. *Attitudes towards Inclusion*

Attitudes towards inclusion constitute a central mediating variable between knowledge acquisition and pedagogical practice. The SENSEI methodology therefore, included a dedicated attitudinal component, drawing on existing attitude scales while critically reflecting on their underlying assumptions.

A key concern was the prevalence of **deficit-oriented language** in established instruments, which often frame inclusion primarily in terms of burden, difficulty, or lack of preparedness. To address this, the project adopted a participatory item selection process involving consortium partners with expertise in inclusive education. Items were reviewed for conceptual clarity, normative framing, and relevance across national contexts.

This process resulted in a **reduced and refined item set** that balances positive and critical perspectives on inclusion without reinforcing deficit narratives. The reduction also served pragmatic purposes, minimising respondent burden while preserving conceptual coverage.

6.5.4. *Learning Outcomes as Impact Proxies*

In addition to dispositional and attitudinal indicators, the evaluation design incorporated **learning outcomes** as proxies for short- and medium-term impact. These

outcomes were co-constructed with project partners and aligned explicitly with the objectives articulated in the Theory of Change.

Learning outcomes were formulated to capture changes in understanding, analytical capacity, and pedagogical orientation rather than factual recall. To mitigate acquiescence bias, the instruments combined positively and negatively worded statements, requiring respondents to engage actively with the content of each item.

Depending on activity format, learning outcomes were integrated into either pre–post instruments or post-only questionnaires. In all cases, their interpretation remained embedded within the broader ToC logic, treating observed changes as contributory evidence rather than proof of causal impact.

6.5.5. *Post-Only Questions for Short Interventions*

For short interventions such as webinars, the use of pre–post designs were deemed methodologically inappropriate. Given limited exposure time, stable constructs such as attitudes or openness were unlikely to shift measurably, and pre-testing risked priming effects that distort responses.

Instead, the SENSEI methodology employed **post-only questions** focusing on perceived learning, reflection, and intention to change. These items were explicitly framed as subjective assessments and interpreted with caution. Their function was not to demonstrate impact in isolation, but to complement other indicators and to provide insight into early stages of the change process.

By combining pre–post measures, post-only items, and differentiated instruments aligned with activity types and

target groups, the multi-indicator design operationalised the Theory of Change in a methodologically proportionate and context-sensitive manner. This approach allowed the evaluation to capture complexity without over-claiming impact and provided a robust basis for interpreting the colour-coded performance patterns presented in the Theory of Change visualisation.

6.6. Indicator Logic across Short-, Medium-, and Long-Term Impacts

The differentiation of indicators across short-, medium-, and long-term impacts constitutes a core element of the SENSEI impact assessment methodology. Rather than treating impact as a single endpoint, the evaluation design reflects the temporal logic articulated in the Theory of Change and aligns indicators with the stages at which different types of change can reasonably be expected to occur.

6.6.1. *Short-Term Impacts*

Short-term impacts focus on changes that are plausibly observable immediately or shortly after participation in project activities. At this stage, the evaluation does not assume transformation of practice, but rather the emergence of preconditions for later change.

Indicators at the short-term level capture **understanding of inclusion**, **reflective capacity**, and **initial behavioural intentions**. Understanding refers to participants' ability to articulate core concepts of inclusive education and to distinguish inclusion from deficit-oriented or

segregating approaches. Reflective capacity captures participants' self-reported engagement with their own assumptions, practices, and professional roles. Initial behavioural intentions relate to expressed willingness to experiment with inclusive strategies or to seek further learning opportunities.

These indicators are interpreted as signals of cognitive and attitudinal activation rather than as evidence of sustained change. Within the ToC logic, they represent necessary but not sufficient conditions for medium- and long-term impact.

6.6.2. *Medium-Term Impacts*

Medium-term impacts address changes that require time, reinforcement, and contextual support to develop. At this level, the evaluation focuses on **confidence and self-efficacy**, **knowledge navigation**, and **emergent collaboration patterns**.

Confidence and self-efficacy indicators capture participants' perceived ability to apply inclusive approaches in their professional contexts. Knowledge navigation refers to participants' capacity to identify, access, and critically assess relevant resources, networks, and support structures related to inclusive education. Emergent collaboration patterns capture early forms of professional exchange, peer learning, and cooperation stimulated by project participation.

These indicators bridge the gap between individual-level change and broader institutional dynamics. They are particularly sensitive to activity format and duration and are therefore interpreted in relation to the differentiated measurement strategy outlined in the next paragraphs.

6.6.3. *Long-Term Impacts*

Long-term impacts extend beyond individual participants and concern structural and systemic dimensions of change. In the SENSEI methodology, these include **community of practice formation** and **institutional or policy-level resonance**.

Community of practice indicators relate to the sustainability of professional networks, continued exchange beyond project activities, and the embedding of inclusive education as a shared professional concern. Institutional and policy-level resonance refers to the uptake of inclusion-related concepts in training provision, organisational strategies, or policy discourse.

By definition, such impacts unfold over extended periods and are influenced by factors beyond the control of a single project. As a result, their measurement within the project duration focuses on early signals and enabling conditions rather than on full realisation.

6.6.4. *Benchmarks and Performance Interpretation*

Given the temporal and contextual variability of impact, the SENSEI methodology deliberately avoided the use of **absolute performance thresholds**. Fixed benchmarks risk misrepresenting progress, particularly in complex change processes where saturation effects and contextual constraints play a significant role.

Instead, performance interpretation relies on **relative change**, internal comparison across target groups and activity types, and alignment with the expectations articulated in the Theory of Change. Benchmarks are used as

steering instruments, supporting reflection and learning, rather than as judgment tools for pass–fail assessment.

This approach enables a differentiated and proportionate interpretation of results, avoids penalising projects for the limited visibility of long-term impacts within short funding cycles, and aligns impact assessment with the underlying logic of inclusive education as a sustained and multi-level change process.

6.7. Methodological Strengths, Limitations, and Transferability

The impact assessment methodology developed within the SENSEI project combines conceptual clarity with pragmatic adaptability. Its strengths and limitations are closely intertwined with the nature of inclusion-oriented teacher education and with the constraints under which such projects typically operate. Reflecting explicitly on these aspects is essential for both methodological transparency and transferability.

6.7.1. *Strengths*

A central strength of the SENSEI methodology lies in its **explicit causal logic**. By embedding all evaluation activities within a clearly articulated Theory of Change, the methodology avoids treating impact as an implicit or self-evident outcome of project implementation. Instead, it makes assumptions about change visible and traceable, enabling both internal learning and external scrutiny.

A second strength is the **scalability of the approach across heterogeneous activities**. The differentiated measurement

design allows short, medium, and long-format interventions to be evaluated proportionately, without forcing them into a uniform evaluative template. This scalability is particularly important in inclusion projects, where activity formats and intensities vary widely.

Finally, the methodology combines **quantitative and qualitative elements** in a complementary manner. Standardised instruments provide comparability and structure, while reflective and interpretative components support contextual understanding. This combination strengthens the robustness of findings without overstating precision in areas where change is inherently complex.

6.7.2. *Limitations*

Despite these strengths, the methodology also has clear limitations. Most fundamentally, it addresses **contribution rather than attribution**. Observed changes are interpreted as plausibly linked to project activities within the Theory of Change, but not as direct causal effects. This limitation is inherent to complex educational interventions and is addressed through transparency rather than methodological overreach.

A second limitation concerns the **reliance on self-reported data**. While self-report instruments are appropriate for capturing attitudes, reflection, and perceived competence, they are susceptible to social desirability and recall bias. The SENSEI methodology mitigates this risk through triangulation and cautious interpretation, but it cannot eliminate it entirely.

Finally, **long-term impacts extend beyond the project funding horizon**. Systemic change, institutional embedding,

and policy-level resonance cannot be fully observed within short project cycles. The methodology therefore focuses on early signals and enabling conditions rather than definitive long-term outcomes.

6.7.3. *Transferability to Other Inclusion Projects*

The SENSEI impact assessment model is transferable to other inclusion-oriented projects under certain conditions. It is particularly applicable where projects involve multiple target groups, heterogeneous activity formats, and normative goals that unfold over time. Its emphasis on Theory of Change, proportional measurement, and multi-indicator logic makes it suitable for complex educational interventions.

However, transferability requires adaptation. Contextual factors such as national policy environments, institutional cultures, target group composition, and resource availability must be reflected in the Theory of Change and in indicator selection. Instruments may need linguistic, cultural, or conceptual adjustment, and benchmarks must be recalibrated to local expectations.

When these adaptations are made explicitly and systematically, the methodology provides a robust and flexible framework for assessing impact in inclusion projects without sacrificing methodological integrity or practical feasibility.

6.8. Conclusion: Towards More Credible Impact Assessment in Inclusion Work

This chapter has presented a structured methodology for assessing impact in inclusion-oriented teacher education

projects, grounded in the recognition that inclusion constitutes a complex and long-term change process rather than a discrete intervention. The central methodological contribution lies in the systematic integration of a Theory of Change framework with a differentiated, multi-indicator measurement design capable of capturing indirect, intermediate, and temporally distributed effects.

By making assumptions about change explicit and by aligning indicators with short-, medium-, and long-term impact horizons, the methodology addresses a persistent gap in the evaluation of inclusion projects: the tendency to equate implementation with effectiveness. Instead of relying on output-based reporting, the approach demonstrates how impact assessment can remain both methodologically rigorous and proportionate to the realities of educational practice.

A key implication of this work is the need to treat inclusion as a sustained developmental process. Changes in understanding, attitudes, confidence, and professional practice unfold over time and are shaped by institutional, cultural, and policy contexts. Credible impact assessment must therefore adopt an evaluation logic that extends beyond immediate project cycles, recognises the provisional nature of early signals, and avoids penalising projects for the limited visibility of long-term outcomes within short funding horizons.

The SENSEI Teacher Academy is used in this chapter not as a model of best practice to be replicated uncritically, but as an empirically grounded example illustrating how theory-based evaluation can be operationalised under real-world conditions. The methodological principles outlined here — explicit causal logic, proportional

measurement, and cautious performance interpretation — are transferable across inclusion projects, provided they are adapted transparently to context.

In this sense, the chapter positions itself as a methodological reference for researchers, evaluators, and project designers seeking to move beyond output-oriented evaluation towards more credible and meaningful impact assessment in inclusion work. Rather than offering definitive answers, it provides a structured framework for asking better evaluation questions in a field where complexity, normativity, and long-term change are inherent features rather than methodological inconveniences.

Reimagining Education for Social Inclusion and Human Development
ISBN 979-12-218-2574-9
DOI 10.53136/97912218257499
pp. 211-224 (aprile 2026)

CHAPTER VII

FROM PAGES TO PRACTICES: NARRATIVE IDENTITY, HISTORICAL INQUIRY, AND NEURODIVERSITY IN EDUCATION

Greta Martini*

7.1. Humanities and special pedagogy in neuroeducation: designing for neurodiversity

The increase in diagnoses related to neurodevelopmental disorders and specific learning disabilities has reshaped the morphology of contemporary classrooms, prompting a structural reconsideration of relational and pedagogical dynamics(1). Situated within the broader horizon of global educational policy, this shift aligns with institutional frameworks that define inclusive education as a matter of equity and shared responsibility. The *OECD Learning Compass 2030* emphasizes student co-agency and the mobilization of diverse cognitive resources as integral to

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(1) Butcher, L., Lane, S., (2025). Neurodivergent student experiences of access and inclusion in higher education: an ecological systems theory perspective, Higher Education, 90, pp. 243–263.

meaningful participation in social life[2]. Within this landscape, inclusion has frequently been organized through medical vocabulary and compensatory adjustments, stabilizing access by identifying points of friction between learner and task. Diagnostic categories provide orientation, yet when they become the primary lens for evaluation, the educational gaze gravitates toward alignment with normative standards, leaving alternative cognitive architectures underexplored. Recent scholarship in special pedagogy and neurodiversity studies calls for an expanded vision that integrates support with the recognition of cognitive plurality as an educational asset[3].

A strengths-based perspective directs attention toward perceptual sensitivities, associative patterns, divergent intuitions, and interpretive capacities embedded within neuroatypical profiles. In this respect, the humanities offer a particularly fertile terrain. Literature and history are structured around multiplicity, interpretive tension, and sustained engagement with alterity; they cultivate the flexibility required to inhabit variance within a shared intellectual space[4]. When anchored in lived experience and dialogic practice, these disciplines become environments where empathy, reflective judgment, and cooperative meaning-making develop together, allowing cultural transmission to unfold as participatory signification rather than passive reception.

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(2) OECD (2019). OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030: OECD Learning Compass 2030, OECD Publishing, Paris.

(3) Cook, A., (2024). Conceptualisations of neurodiversity and barriers to inclusive pedagogy in schools: A perspective article, Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 24, pp. 627–636.

(4) Giusti, S., Tonelli, N., (2014). Comunità di pratiche letterarie: il valore d'uso della letteratura e il suo insegnamento, Loescher, Torino.

Narrative immersion activates processes of emotional and cognitive decoding that weave individual experience into collective memory, strengthening the learner's sense of agency within their educational trajectory[5]. Building communities of literary practice[6] capable of sustaining such plurality requires attention to spatial organization, material design, and instructional sequencing. Universal Design for Learning proposes anticipating human variability at the level of representation, expression, and engagement, embedding flexibility directly into the architecture of the lesson[7]. Conceived as a porous ecosystem open to differentiated rhythms and channels, the curriculum situates students with specific needs within a shared dynamic and expands access for the entire group. Within such an environment, neurological configurations circulate as intellectual resources, contributing to a common cognitive capital oriented toward attentive and responsible citizenship.

The connection between neuroeducation and the humanities becomes fully visible when these disciplines are approached as loci hermeneutici and spaces of empowerment. Engaging the neuroatypical mind within the classroom takes shape as an exercise in intercultural pedagogy, since literature and history expose learners to conflict, partiality, and perspectival positioning as structural features of

(5) Harker, S. et al., (2024). Adapting Programs for Autistic Adults across the Lifespan: A Neurodiversity-Affirming Approach, Healthcare, 12.

(6) Baum S.M. et al, (2021). To Be Gifted and Learning Disabled: Strength-Based Strategies for Helping Twice-Exceptional Students with LD, ADHD, ASD and More, Routledge, New York.

(7) Cast, (2024). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines, version 3.0, CAST, Lynnfield MA.

knowledge itself[8]. At this intersection, diverse perceptual frequencies enter the shared labor of interpretation, enriching collective inquiry and consolidating the classroom as a site where cognitive plurality acquires epistemic dignity.

7.2. Designing for neurodiversity

For inclusion to become pedagogically effective, reflection must enter the concrete grammar of classroom life: space, tempo, materials, and everyday interaction. Designing lessons through the mechanisms that summon and sustain attention requires anticipating variability at a structural level, shaping environments capable of holding differentiated rhythms while preserving rigorous engagement with disciplinary content[9]. Educational experience begins with the material encounter with texts[10]: books function simultaneously as intellectual artifacts and physical objects whose layout, typography, and spatial organization mediate access to meaning. When students become aware of their own reading mechanics and of the supports that stabilize perception, learning takes shape as a modifiable practice grounded in self-knowledge.

Providing differentiated editions, calibrated typography and spacing, or integrating digital formats alongside print affirms that a cultural object can be accessed through

(8) Guetta, S, Calò Livne, A.E., (2024). Laboratori e strategie di comunicazione attraverso le arti. Sentieri verso la pace con noi stessi e con gli altri, Aracne, Roma.

(9) Cottini, L., (2017). Didattica speciale e inclusione scolastica, Carocci, Roma.

(10) Arcangeli, L., (2019). Studenti con DSA: Pratiche di Empowerment all'Università, Carocci, Roma.

multiple perceptual pathways, transforming variation into shared intellectual capital. Attention to material design extends to the organization of space itself. A classroom conceived as a living ecosystem calls for intentional spatial and relational architecture: desk arrangements that encourage circulation, quiet corners for sensory regulation, permission for noise-reducing tools, and acknowledgment that brief movement or withdrawal can sustain participation. Shared space thus becomes a structure capable of holding diverse nervous systems within a common task.

A strengths-based orientation can assume tangible form through practices such as the "help wanted/skills offered" board described by Susan Baum and colleagues[11], where students articulate requests for mediation alongside explicit offers of competence. Over time, this visible map of resources fosters reciprocity and distributes expertise across the group. Structural thinkers, visual-spatial organizers, rapid readers, and analytical interpreters contribute distinct capacities to collective work, normalizing mediation as a mode of participation and allowing competence to circulate relationally within the class. Visual planning, sketching, and cognitive externalization accompany reading and writing, enabling imagery-oriented students to access demanding intellectual tasks through aligned channels, while verbally oriented learners sustain analytic trajectories. Meaning thus emerges through differentiated yet convergent expressive forms.

Within a neurodiversity-informed environment, visible movement, gaze aversion, silence, or fluctuations in attention enter the class's relational micro-language. Drawing on the premise that communication permeates every

(11) Baum S.M. et al, (2021). Op. cit., p. 309.

interaction[12], teachers and students learn to interpret bodily and behavioral signals as meaningful expressions within a shared system. Literary and historical narratives provide a protected terrain for rehearsing this literacy: asking which textual clues signal Cosimo's sensory saturation in Il barone rampante[13] trains students to infer states of mind, decenter perspective, and respond with calibrated awareness. Through this transfer from textual analysis to lived interaction, the classroom develops a vocabulary for navigating difference that strengthens both its internal cohesion and its civic orientation.

Olivia Fialho underscores the importance of preparatory scaffolding and artistic mediation in sustaining attention and interpretive engagement[14]. In the humanities, where interpretation entails inhabiting multiple viewpoints and revising hypotheses, cooperative redistribution of interpretive labor becomes structurally generative. Tasks organized horizontally allow students to assume differentiated roles — structural mapping, close reading, affective decoding, synthesis — integrating contributions into shared constructions of meaning[15]. The pedagogical aim concerns the redesign of access pathways so that demanding intellectual work becomes broadly reachable. Rendering cognitive trajectories visible supports self-monitoring and strategic recalibration,

(12) Watzlawick, P., Bavelas, J.B., D., Jackson, D., (1967). Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes, W. W. Norton, New York.

(13) Calvino, I., (1957). Il barone rampante, Mondadori, Milano 2019 ed. or.

(14) Fialho, O., (2012). Self-Modifying Experiences in Literary Reading, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

(15) Giusti, S., Tonelli, N., (2014). Comunità di pratiche letterarie: il valore d'uso della letteratura e il suo insegnamento, Op. cit.

strengthening resilient forms of self-determination[16]. Within this architecture, the teacher crafts a porous curriculum that preserves disciplinary density while multiplying entry points, allowing mediation and competence to function as constitutive elements of classroom culture.

7.3. Cognitive apprenticeship through narratives

Grounded in a conception of learning that understands meaning as an architecture students actively construct and inhabit, inclusion within the humanities acquires structural clarity. Educational inequality frequently emerges where mediating forms fail to enable learners to appropriate cultural content as lived experience; within this horizon, narrative theory offers a rigorous grammar for agency. As the mode through which human beings configure time, interpret events, and project possible futures, narrative operates simultaneously as epistemic structure and pedagogical instrument. Jerome Bruner's cultural psychology frames meaning as a situated achievement shaped by shared symbolic resources and by the stories through which individuals come to recognize themselves and others[17]. Within the classroom, literature and history thus function as disciplines that organize experience and sustain civic agency, cultivating interpretive patience, perspectival awareness, and the capacity to negotiate conflict within a shared world[18].

(16) Termine, C., Ventriglia, L., Staffolani, A., (2020) Didattica inclusiva e disturbi del neurosviluppo, Carocci Faber, Roma.

(17) Bruner, J., (1990). Acts of Meaning: Four Lectures on Mind and Culture, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.

(18) Sclavi, M., (2003). Arte di ascoltare e mondi possibili. Come si esce dalle cornici di cui siamo parte, Bruno Mondadori, Milano.

Paul Ricœur's hermeneutic perspective extends this framework by describing identity as a dynamic composition emerging from the interplay between lived events and narrated accounts[19]. Identity unfolds through continuity and transformation, through the dialogue between character and selfhood sustained by responsibility and recognition. Read through this lens, the classroom becomes a liminal space[20] in which learners can discern the plurality already active within their own identities, tracing the layered interplay between inherited descriptions and emerging possibilities. Diagnostic language finds its place within a broader horizon of meaning, and the self appears as stratified and evolving, continuously reconfigured through encounter with texts and through reflection on experience. In this sense, identity participates in what McAdams terms a "storied life"[21] open to revision and oriented toward dignity and agency. Sustained textual engagement thus supports processes of self-interpretation in which cognitive plurality acquires epistemic legitimacy rather than marginal status.

From this perspective, literary teaching becomes a structured practice of mediation. Giusti underscores the necessity of linking research, classroom experimentation, and cultural transmission within a coherent pedagogical trajectory[22], while the "communities of literary practice" developed with Tonelli frame reading and discussion as collective

(19) Ricœur, P., (1992). Oneself as Another, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

(20) Turner V., (1969). The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure, Aldine, Chicago.

(21) McAdams, D.P., (1993). The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self, Guilford Press, New York.

(22) S. Giusti, (2023). Didattica della letteratura italiana: La storia, la ricerca, le pratiche, Carocci, Roma.

interpretive labor[23]. Reading aloud exemplifies this mediation: the teacher's voice stabilizes executive demands and redistributes cognitive load, enabling students to direct attention toward structure, affective resonance, and interpretive depth[24]. Conceived as a space of co-production, the classroom aligns with strengths-based orientations in neurodiversity education, embedding inclusion within shared inquiry.

Empirical research on literary engagement further clarifies the transformative potential of such environments. Fialho describes literary experience as a traceable process through which interpretive habits and self-understanding undergo modification[25]. By integrating phenomenological accounts, linguistic analysis, and reader-response research, literary study emerges as a structured site of cognitive and affective work, particularly significant for learners whose educational trajectories have been shaped by deficit framings. Within this pedagogical architecture, aesthetic experience[26] functions as a mode of attention in which perception, anticipation, and interpretation converge. The encounter with literary form activates processes linking emotion and durable memory, so that the pleasure accompanying interpretation contributes to the consolidation of understanding. Schaeffer's reflections on the cognitive dimension of literary studies[27] reinforce this account of the

(23) Giusti, S., Tonelli, N., (2014). Comunità di pratiche letterarie: il valore d'uso della letteratura e il suo insegnamento, Op. cit.

(24) Batini, F., (2022). Leggere ad alta voce, Giunti EDU, Firenze.

(25) Fialho, O., (2024). Transformative Reading: Literary Engagement and Self-Modification, John Benjamins, Amsterdam.

(26) Dewey, J., (1934) .Art as Experience, Minton, Balch & Company, New York.

(27) Schaeffer, J-M., (2015). Piccola ecologia degli studi letterari, Loescher, Torino.

aesthetic as a domain that reorganizes perception and refines attention. Designing interpretive tasks with differentiated entry points preserves disciplinary density while accommodating varied cognitive rhythms[28], while emotional resonance strengthens empathy and reflective judgment[29], and learning acquires durability aligned with broader visions of *whole-person education*[30]. Cultural transmission thereby unfolds as mediated appropriation, as students integrate complex texts into lived repertoires and engage them through argument, reinterpretation, and sustained decentering within democratic life.

7.4. Usable activities for a meaningful education of the Humanities

Through deliberate encounters with cultural forms, students come to recognize themselves as capable of reading the world, shaping interpretations, inhabiting perspectives, and engaging in argument[31]. Authority materializes as pedagogical design: in the selection of texts, in the modulation of tempo, and in the calibrated space offered to each learner to enter a shared horizon through a distinct rhythm. Translating this orientation into everyday practice

(28) Immordino-Yang, M.H., (2015). Emotions, Learning, and the Brain: Exploring the Educational Implications of Affective Neuroscience, W. W. Norton, New York.

(29) Nussbaum, M.C., (2010). Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities, Princeton University P(ress, Princeton.

(30) Higgins, C., (2024). Undeclared: A Philosophy of Formative Higher Education, MIT Press, Cambridge MA.

(31) Goodman, N., (1978). Ways of Worldmaking, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis.

requires transferable structures that can travel across genres and historical contexts.

Inclusive sequences embed narrative and hermeneutic work within ordinary curricular time while anticipating variability at the level of task construction. Disciplinary depth, cognitive scaffolding, distributed interpretive roles, and moments of reflective consolidation converge within a coherent design that clarifies the logic of each activity. In such an environment, cognitive differences circulate as shared intellectual resources, and the classroom evolves responsively in relation to its own internal dynamics.

Activity 1: words of feeling, feeling words.

Dimension	**Description**
Context	Foreign language / Literature
Duration	60–90 minutes
Focus	Sensory language, embodiment, translation as mediation
Source Text	Donna Williams, *Notes*, in Not Just Anything[32]
Task Sequence	Close reading of the poem in the original language. Students underline words expressing physical or emotional contact with the page. Brief collective mapping of sensory vocabulary (touch, sound, texture, pressure). Individual translation, allowing students to prioritize meaning, rhythm, emotional tone, or structure. Creative extension: students add one stanza describing their own relationship with language or writing. Optional sharing (from desk or alternative classroom position).
Materials and supports	Noise-cancelling headphones Digital drafting tools Fidget objects

(32) Williams, D., (1995). Not Just Anything: A Collection of Thoughts on Paper, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London.

Learning Goals	Develop deep awareness of communicative mediation, actively engage embodied narrative learning to validate diverse physical processing styles,[33] explore synesthesia, and reflect on translation as a deeply relational act.

Activity 2: Writing rights

Dimension	**Description**
Context	History / Civic Education
Duration	80-120 minutes
Focus	Historical causality, political negotiation, perspective-taking, civic agency
Source Text	Declaration of the *Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, 1789. [34]
Task Sequence	Contextual framing of the 1789 Declaration, highlighting the fracture of the *Ancien Régime* and the contradictions of universal rights. Individual textual analysis mapping the explicit beneficiaries and the systemically excluded populations (women, passive citizens, enslaved individuals). Role assignment representing diverse historical demographics (bourgeois revolutionary, noble, dispossessed peasant, female intellectual, enslaved person). Mixed-role constitutional convention to negotiate and draft a "New Declaration" addressing the identified exclusions while maintaining strict historical coherence. Plenary debate evaluating the negotiation dynamics and how political power shapes the language of rights.
Materials and supports	Segmented excerpts Graphic organizers for clause analysis Written scaffolds preceding oral negotiation

(33) M. Jahadakbar, Y. Yao, (2025). Embodied narrative learning as an inclusive practice, Journal of Literacy Research, 57/1.

(34) NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF FRANCE, (1996). Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, Paris 1789; in L. Hunt (ed.), The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History, Bedford/St. Martin's, Boston.

Learning Goals	Develop historical reasoning through primary source analysis, understand universal rights as negotiated constructs, practice perspective-taking, and experience civic deliberation as structured disagreement.
Inclusive Architecture	Role differentiation empowers students to leverage strengths in analytical mapping, argumentation, synthesis, ethical reasoning, or structural organization. Written scaffolding preceding negotiation honours individual processing time. Role embodiment legitimizes diverse cognitive styles, while collective drafting redistributes the interpretive labour.

7.5. A school beyond cognitive disability

When pedagogical design anticipates human variability, the texture and rhythm of the classroom shift accordingly, as time, space, mediation, and role distribution are orchestrated with awareness that learners process language, emotion, and abstraction through differentiated channels. Cognitive diversity becomes structurally embedded within classroom life, and inclusion consolidates as a premise of shared inquiry capable of preserving disciplinary rigor while widening access to it. Historical education responds with particular clarity to this orientation. Every document bears the imprint of conflict, negotiation, exclusion, and perspective; constitutional charters, chronicles, diaries, and testimonies emerge from voices positioned asymmetrically within structures of power. Engaging foundational texts through role assignment and collective drafting renders visible the contingent formation of rights and the labor through which language crystallizes political interests. Students refine judgment, deepen contextual awareness, and situate civic agency within an articulated narrative of responsibility.

Literary study intensifies this movement. Translation, interior monologue, and perspectival shifts confront

learners with the density of human experience, where meaning emerges through sustained interpretation and revision. Narrative identity is exercised as an ongoing practice in voice, distance, and empathetic recognition, and the plurality within the self finds articulation through encounter with textual alterity. Across the humanities, mediation provides the structural thread binding these processes together. Texts approached as living matter invite interaction, and tasks calibrated to redistribute interpretive labor enable demanding material to be accessed through differentiated contributions.

The educator's craft unfolds within this orchestration. It requires reflective judgment, metacognitive awareness, and theoretical literacy: professionals capable of reading themselves in and on action, and of understanding classrooms as dynamic systems. The viability of inclusive schools rests largely on the preparation and sustained formation of such educators. For this reason, the role of the scientific community remains decisive, as only sustained dialogue among researchers, teacher educators, and practitioners[35] can translate pedagogical insight into durable practice.

Within this framework, historical reasoning and literary interpretation converge in cultivating attention, deliberation, and the capacity to inhabit unfamiliar perspectives. Neurodiversity, understood as an expression of human plurality, sharpens collective intelligence and refines common inquiry. The curriculum that emerges remains permeable and responsive, able to sustain complexity while expanding participation.

(35) Schön, D. A. (1983). The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action, Basic Books, New York.

Reimagining Education for Social Inclusion and Human Development
ISBN 979-12-218-2574-9
DOI 10.53136/979122182574910
pp. 225-245 (aprile 2026)

CHAPTER VIII

DESIGNING A SELF-PACED COURSE ON INCLUSION IN (HISTORY) EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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8.1. Introduction: Why this course?

The decision to design a training course on inclusive history education stems from a growing awareness of diversity in our classrooms. Not only because students that were previously absent are now present, thereby increasing diversity, but also because we are now more aware of this diversity and the importance of responding to different student needs. We are cognisant of both the difficulties many teachers face when teaching in diverse classrooms, and the obstacles many of their students encounter when learning history, due to their lack of references and identification with the topics taught or to specific learning difficulties they may experience. This in turn leads to a lack of motivation and to difficulties engaging and progressing in their learning process.

Today, pre-service teachers usually receive training in inclusive strategies and methodologies, but there are many

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in-service teachers who still rely on their own personal experience when it comes to dealing with diversity in the classroom. During the activities organised by the SENSEI project, many of the teachers we met expressed a desire to learn more about inclusive methods and strategies.[1] Moreover, research has demonstrated the effectiveness of teacher training in terms of improving teachers' practice and attitudes towards inclusion.[2] Training offers teachers the opportunity to reflect on their own professional practice and how it relates to inclusive approaches in education; it also contributes new perspectives, valuable knowledge and resources that can be used to make lessons more inclusive.

Given that the successful implementation of inclusive practices depends primarily on teachers, their training is fundamental. However, we know how difficult it is for teachers to find time to continue with their training, which is why an online, self-paced professional development course that teachers can adapt to their own schedule is particularly useful.

(1) Throughout the different events organised within this project, we have heard from teachers that they often feel like they are working on their own and lack support. Teachers often report feeling unprepared and highlight the need for training.

(2) Teacher training is fundamental to promoting and achieving inclusive educational environments: González-Gil, F., Martín-Pastor, E., Flores, N., Jenaro, C., Poy, R. & Gómez-Vela, M. (2013). Teaching, learning, and inclusive education: The challenge of teachers' training for inclusion. «Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences», 93, 783-788. Tristani, L. & Bassett-Gunter, R. (2020). Making the grade: Teacher training for inclusive education: A systematic review. «Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs», 20(3), 246-264. Sokal, L. & Sharma, U. (2014) 'Canadian in-service teachers' concerns, efficacy, and attitudes about inclusive teaching.' «Exceptionality Education International», 23 (1), 59–71.

We also aim to promote culturally responsive and inclusive teaching that enables teachers to move beyond standardised instruction to foster an environment in which diversity is valued as a strength. Through this self-paced course, we intend to promote inclusive history education that embraces and accommodates the diverse backgrounds, abilities and learning needs of all students, ensuring equitable access and a sense of belonging for all, without leaving anyone behind, especially those students from more vulnerable or marginalised groups. Both the SENSEI project and the self-paced course we have designed are framed within the Euroclio principles and commitment to promoting an inclusive approach to the study of the past, which fosters social cohesion and inclusion and contributes to intercultural and interreligious dialogue.[3] Another reference for us was the work carried out by the Council of Europe regarding education for diversity and democracy, which aims to promote intercultural tolerance and appreciation of diversity through history teaching.[4] Although it was initially designed for history teachers, professionals working in other subject areas may also benefit from a course that aims to prompt educators to reflect on the meaning and relevance of more inclusive approaches to education and provides tools designed to help them implement such an approach in their everyday practice.

(3) Euroclio (2014), *Manifesto on High Quality History, Heritage and Citizenship Education. 15 Principles for the recognition of the distinctive contribution of history to the development of young people*.

(4) OHTE (2023). *General report on the state of history teaching in Europe. Council of Europe.*

8.2. Design of the self-paced course

8.2.1. *Our starting point: a broad understanding of inclusion*

Our first challenge was to find a common definition of inclusion that would guide our work. At the beginning of the project, the members of the consortium discussed their views on inclusion and agreed to accept a broad definition.(5) Despite being aware that there are different ways of defining and approaching inclusion in education, we decided to follow Booth and Ainscow's proposal and focus not only on who should be included, but on what characterises a school in which everyone is being included.(6)

Based on the assumption that all children have a right to be in the same educational space, inclusive education is a human rights issue.(7) In accordance with this, on the 30th anniversary of the Salamanca Statement, UNESCO adopted the motto 'Every learner matters, and matters equally'

(5) SENSEI adopts a holistic approach to inclusion, focusing on students with special educational needs, including high-achieving individuals, learners from migrant backgrounds, members of national, cultural or religious minorities, students from varied socioeconomic contexts and individuals identifying as LGBTQI+; it also seeks to ensure an equitable representation of female students as well as equal opportunities for all age groups.

(6) Inclusion is a complex, dynamic and ever-evolving process that aims to promote the presence, participation and learning of all students. Booth, T. & Ainscow, M. (2002). *Index for inclusion: developing learning and participation in schools*. Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE).

(7) UNESCO-IBE (2016). *Reaching out to all learners: A resource pack for supporting inclusive education. Training tools for curriculum development.* http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002432/243279e.pdf. Conclusions of the International Conference 'Inclusive Education: A Way to Promote Social Cohesion', 11–12 March 2010, Madrid. https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/inclusive-education-in-action-flyer_Madrid-Extracts-EN.pdf

to stress that, regardless of their background, ability, gender or status, all students deserve equal access to quality education.[8] Inclusion does not only concern students with disabilities and individuals at risk of marginalisation (who, of course, should be given the support they require); it is an issue that is always present and concerns all learners within a school system that needs to respond effectively to a diversity of educational needs.[9] This involves recognising and valuing the heterogeneity of our classrooms and viewing the diversity of our students as a resource that can be used to enhance their learning.

Moreover, rather than focusing on individuals, attention should be shifted to the environment, striving to remove any barriers that may hamper the participation and learning of all students.[10] When we think of barriers, it is important to note there are material barriers related to teaching materials and resources, which are easily identified, and other less obvious intangible barriers, of which we should be aware in order to improve learners' sense of belonging and participation. Valuing every learner as an active protagonist in a shared educational environment is therefore central to our work.

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(8) Ainscow, M. (2024), *Developing inclusive schools: Pathways to success*. Routledge.

(9) Booth, T. & Ainscow, M. (2002). I*ndex for inclusion: developing learning and participation in schools*. Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE).

(10) Focusing on contextual barriers to enable all students to participate is fundamental in increasingly diverse environments and societies. See Messiou, K., Bui, L. T., Ainscow, M., Gasteiger-Klicpera, B., Bešić, E., Paleczek, L., Hedegaard-Sørensen, L., Ulvseth, H., Vitorino, T., Santos, J., Simon, C., Sandoval, M. & Echeita, G. (2020). Student diversity and student voice conceptualisations in five European countries: Implications for including all students in schools. «European Educational Research Journal», 21(2), 355-376.

Agreeing on a common, operative definition of inclusion proved fundamental in the initial stages of designing the course and deciding what aspects of inclusion to address. Having a broad definition of inclusion helped us consider its identity dimension and the extent to which students feel they are represented and included in history lessons and teaching materials. This prompted us to focus on the contents being taught and the extent to which they enable all members of the class to feel represented and connected, thereby improving the meaningfulness of the lesson and students' sense of belonging and engagement in the learning process. Our definition of inclusion, however, also refers to accessibility and equal opportunities for participating and learning in the classroom, which involves adapting learning environments and teaching resources to the needs and abilities of different students, from those with specific learning difficulties to their more gifted counterparts.

We were aware that our future self-paced course needed to address both aspects: how we approach the topics we teach and whether we include hitherto overlooked or underrepresented groups and protagonists in our lessons; and what methods and strategies we can use to make sure all students — including those with learning difficulties and those who are struggling to fit in — are able to participate and advance as much as possible in their learning process. Consequently, we finally decided to divide the modules of the course into two main sections: '*What to teach*' refers to the more identity-based and representative side of inclusion, whereas '*How to teach*' focuses on the methods and strategies that promote the active participation and learning of all students.

8.2.2. *The importance of self-reflection for developing an inclusive outlook*

In addition to addressing diversity in a broad sense, we have also tried to consider the needs of teachers themselves and to promote self-reflection and an increased awareness of inclusive teaching. As well as providing information, we have therefore designed activities to encourage teachers to reflect on their own practices and think about how they can apply the knowledge acquired to their specific teaching contexts. Consequently, all modules follow the same structure: an introductory explanation of the contents presented, activities designed to activate previous knowledge, acquisition of new knowledge and activities to apply it, and a final step designed to consolidate and structure information through self-reflection activities and the creation of a portfolio. Each module also includes a list of further resources and a bibliography to enable teachers to learn more about the topic under discussion if they so wish.

The aim is to share the knowledge and best practices gathered by members of the SENSEI project and to present diverse approaches to inclusion that may inspire teachers. Aware of the diversity of topics teachers in different countries may need to include, our examples, strategies and best practices are based on more general issues, which teachers can then adapt to their own contexts. The idea is to encourage teachers to reflect on their own teaching activity and progressively introduce small changes into their everyday practice.

As it is a self-paced course, meaning that teachers engage with it at their own pace and without direct peer interaction, we have prioritised the promotion of reflective

practices, encouraging participants to think about different issues linked to inclusion and providing opportunities for them to consider how other teachers' previous experiences relate to their situation. Zeichner and Liston stress the importance of examining our own values and assumptions as teachers and point out that it is through reflection on our own teaching that we become more capable and better teachers.(11) Since direct observation, discussions, peer-support and group practices are not possible in a self-paced course, the main tools we selected to promote self-reflection were: examining case studies and thinking about how they relate to participants' own practice, suggestions for developing teaching improvement plans based on real practice, checklists and a portfolio in which teachers create their own reflective journal and collect information that may help improve their teaching.(12)

8.2.3. *Involving teachers and educators from different contexts in the design process*

This project brings together professionals from different fields and offers an opportunity for teachers' associations, schools and universities to collaborate. This enables us to approach the topic of inclusion from a variety of different perspectives

(11) Zeichner, K. M. & Liston, D. P. (2013). *Reflective teaching: An introduction*. Routledge.

(12) About the role of self-reflection in teacher training and the need to foster critical reflection and awareness of our perceptions, beliefs and practice, see: Kirpalani, N. (2017). Developing self-reflective practices to improve teaching effectiveness. «Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice», 17(8), 73-80. Sanders, M., Haselden, K. & Moss, R.M. (2014). Teaching Diversity to Preservice Teachers: Encouraging Self-Reflection and Awareness to Develop Successful Teaching Practices, «*Multicultural Learning and Teaching*», 9 (2), 171-185.

and to multiply the angles from which we consider and discuss how to promote inclusive environments. Despite our diverse backgrounds — the group includes secondary school history teachers, teacher trainers, trainers working in non-formal education, university lecturers and members of NGOs, among others — we face similar challenges when it comes to ensuring the inclusion of all our students.

As mentioned earlier, one challenge we encountered at the beginning of the project was that we all had different experiences of inclusion, which initially made it difficult to identify topics that would be relevant for such a diverse group of teachers and educators. Not all countries are in the same situation regarding the process of inclusion, and we did not all have the same student groups in mind. However, the debates and discussions held during the course of the project offered us the opportunity to learn from each other's experiences and question some of our beliefs, which we had previously taken for granted.

The design process was collaborative from the start. In addition to our internal meetings, the webinars organised in the spring of 2024, the conference in Leskovac in November 2024 and the plenary session held at the Euroclio Annual Conference in Bratislava in the spring of 2025 helped us shape the self-paced course itself and its contents. Many people have been involved in this process, including consortium members, experts and teachers from different European countries working in both formal and non-formal environments, all of whom expressed their needs and shared their best practices, offering constant feedback.[13] The combina-

(13) About the role of collaboration, the extant research demonstrates the advantage of having a group of educators sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, collaborative and learning-oriented way.

tion of online and face-to-face meetings and events to present our ideas, gather feedback and listen to teachers' interests, needs and perspectives constituted a fundamental part of the process of designing this self-paced course. It has allowed us to include the experiences, voices and perspectives of teachers and educators from different countries and contexts, both formal and non-formal.

8.3. Contents of the self-paced course: from 'What to teach' to 'How to teach'

As mentioned earlier, based on the definition we adopted in this project, we established two main thematic areas for this self-paced course: '*what to teach*' and '*how to teach*'. These two themes then guided the overall learning objectives established. We also added an introductory module that outlines how we understand inclusion and explains the importance of equitable learning environments and their implications for the didactic proposals contained in the subsequent modules. The first thematic area deals with the contents taught and focuses mainly on the role of history education. Consequently, the second module discusses how the historical construction of self and otherness determines how we understand ourselves and others, and how this affects exclusion and discrimination, and the third module is dedicated to raising awareness and encouraging

See: Stoll, L., Bolam, R., Mcmahon, A. et al. (2006). Professional Learning Communities: A Review of the Literature. «*Journal of Educational Change*», 7, 221–258. See also: Binkhorst, Floor; Poortman, Cindy L.; Van Joolingen, W. R. (2017). A qualitative analysis of teacher design teams: In-depth insights into their process and links with their outcomes. «*Studies in Educational Evaluation*», 55, 135-144.

reflection on how history textbooks and other teaching materials often ignore and silence different groups. The main learning objective of this module is to critically evaluate teaching materials in order to identify and address the exclusion of marginalised groups. The second thematic area focuses on the methods and strategies we can use to promote inclusion and adopts a more general approach to inclusive education. The main learning objectives in this part of the course are linked to using different pedagogical strategies to increase accessibility and encourage the participation of all students, as well as to designing inclusive lesson plans and learning environments that foster more engaging and effective learning. Consequently, the fourth module focuses on the characteristics of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and its contribution to enhancing the accessibility of all students to education, and the fifth presents some active methodologies and strategies designed to make learning processes more effective.

8.3.1. *Becoming aware of the importance of examining who is included in the contents we teach, and how they are included*

As Farida Shaheed, UN special rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, reminds us, 'even without deliberate manipulation, history teaching is not exempt from bias and, too often, the diversity of historical narratives is insufficiently acknowledged. Democratic and liberal societies too must question their existing paradigms from the perspective of ensuring a multi-voice narrative inclusive of, and accessible to, all.'(14) From the perspective of history teaching, we had

(14) Shaheed, F. (2014). *Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights*, A/HRC/25/49, UN Human Rights Council, 23 January 2014, p. 8.

one key question in mind: what can history teaching do to engage, motivate and offer positive references to students so that they feel included and confident enough to participate and learn as much as possible?

History lessons often deal with the rather abstract notion of 'people from the past', without taking into account the diversity that existed in past societies. SENSEI aims to raise students' awareness of the fact that people in the past were diverse, to help them recognise the complexity of past societies in order to better understand the diversity of the present. Furthermore, as teachers, we need to draw attention to the close connections that exist between history and identity and the role that history education plays in the process of identity formation, both collectively and as individuals. When we teach history, we need to remember that teachers today work with increasingly heterogeneous groups of students, and if we want to help them understand their world, we need to teach a kind of history that takes the diversity of the past into account.(15) Moreover, in an increasingly globalised world, it is important to look into history beyond national frames.(16)

To address these issues, modules 2 and 3 deal with silenced histories and seek to explain how historical biases and stereotypes are created. They also propose strategies and recommendations for dealing with and including

(15) Historian Maria Grever offers some thought-provoking reflections on this matter in her work: Grever, M. (2012). Dilemmas of common and plural history: reflections on history education and heritage in a globalizing world. In Carretero, M., Asensio, M & Rodríguez-Moneo, M. (Eds.). *History Education and the Construction of National Identities*. IAP, 75-91. See as well: Berger, S. & Lorenz, C. (eds.) (2008). *The contested nation. Ethnicity, class, religion and gender in national histories*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

(16) Grever, M.; Stuurman, S. (2007). *Beyond the canon*. Palgrave Macmillan.

groups that have long been absent from our history lessons.[17] We are aware that the image we currently have of certain social groups has been partly created through education (in this case, history education), and that teaching history using a critical approach can contribute to the deconstruction of previous notions of 'us' and 'them'. This critical approach to history education may also help us understand how we have traditionally ignored certain groups, so that we can include them and give them a voice in our lessons. Rather than teaching a fragmented and disconnected history of diverse social groups, this approach aims to include different hitherto marginalised, forgotten or silenced protagonists, voices and perspectives into the long history we teach.[18]

Thanks to the participation of teachers from different countries and contexts, both in the webinars and in the events organised in Leskovac and Bratislava, we have had thought-provoking conversations in which we have been able to identify different groups that have been excluded or silenced in the past for various reasons. Moreover, several workshops in Leskovac (November 2024) included practical activities designed to foster empathy and counter the

(17) We are grateful to our colleagues from the Portuguese History Teachers' Association for their valuable contributions in these areas.

(18) Suzanne Popp argues for global history as it fits better into the lifeworld of young people today. She suggests approaching national histories from a global perspective in order to offer a more inclusive perspective on national history, give enriched perspectives and empower students with a migratory background. See: 'On teaching global history, an interview with Susanne Popp', https://euroclio.eu/2023/08/29/on-teaching-global-history-an-interview-with-susanne-popp/. For a conceptual clarification, see: Popp, S. (2023). World History, Global History, Big History: Some remarks on terminology and concepts in relation to history curricula and textbooks. «Hungarian Educational Research Journal», 2023, 13 (4), 470-485.

prejudices and discrimination that are at the core of many exclusionary attitudes we currently encounter in our classrooms.[19] Our discussions with teachers have shown us that raising awareness of these exclusions is the first step to including those groups in the bigger picture of the history we teach. This is important not only because we may have students who identify with those groups and we need to offer them positive references with which to build a more positive image, but also because we should all be aware of, recognise and value the diversity that exists in our societies. In this regard, even though not all countries have undergone the same historical evolution or have faced the same challenges, we were nevertheless able to find some common patterns.

In the plenary session held at the Euroclio Annual Conference in Bratislava (April 2025), we discussed and shared our views on how we teach historical processes of exclusion, such as the experiences of former colonial empires and colonised countries, nation-building processes that paid no attention to national minorities and marginalised or expelled religious minorities, authoritarian and dictatorial regimes that imposed specific views about the past, and national identities based on progress and modernisation that excluded groups perceived as unable or unwilling to adapt to modernisation. Although we are all quite used to teaching within our national frameworks (which may vary widely), we should not overlook the broader issues found in all countries, such as colonialism, empires, nation-building processes, wars, revolutions, industrialisation and modernisation.

(19) Lamikiz, A. (2024). I*nclusive Education in Action. Takeaways from the SENSEI Conference*. https://euroclio.eu/2024/12/03/inclusive-education-in-action-takeaways-from-the-sensei-conference/

In all cases we can identify excluded groups and excluding narratives of the past, which we can deconstruct in order to give voice and visibility to those who have hitherto been underrepresented in or absent from our history lessons. Another recurrent idea in those conversations was the importance of focusing on alternative views, dealing with socio-cultural history and bottom-up perspectives rather than limiting our focus to political history and top-down interpretations of the past. It is also important to highlight interconnections, mutual contributions and exchanges that took place between different groups. This means offering new, more plural and inclusive views of history.

Acknowledging this, the next step is to ascertain how to foster such a critical approach in the classroom in order to promote more inclusive history teaching. Providing a variety of sources fosters awareness of the complexity of history and offers a chance to investigate the history of hitherto forgotten communities, rendering them visible. By presenting sources and teaching materials that contain multiple perspectives and including topics and historical figures that represent positive references, we can offer students more opportunities to participate and help them gain confidence and advance in their learning.

8.3.2. *Active methodologies and strategies for including everyone in the classroom*

SENSEI promotes practices that aim to offer every student the opportunity to enhance their learning. This involves teaching the value of inclusive behaviour, encouraging participation from everyone and actively creating

safe and collaborative learning environments so that, regardless of their background or ability, all students feel included.

One of the key ideas in most of the Leskovac workshops was the need to increase the protagonism of learners in the classroom, along with the importance of promoting everyone's motivation and active participation. Many participants emphasised the advantages of using active methodologies to spark students´ interest, help them adapt better to different ways of learning and provide them with the opportunity to take greater control of their learning process. Connected to this, cooperative work provides an opportunity for students who may feel lost in larger groups to actively participate in smaller ones. As such, this method can be used to encourage positive interdependence and the active participation of all. Another important aspect discussed in the project is the need to be aware of students' feelings and pay attention to their emotional well-being. Many of the educators attending the workshops talked about the importance of addressing emotions, taking students' views and experiences into account, not labelling them and being careful not to overlook quieter students who often pass almost unnoticed.

To address these issues, one of the modules focuses on UDL and how to adapt teaching materials, and the other suggests methods for making students feel included and explains how we can organise our classroom spaces for this purpose. Our aim is to make teachers think about how to ensure the participation of all students in the activities they include in their lessons, and how to promote accessibility and eliminate obstacles and barriers that may hamper this participation and learning. When designing these last two

modules, we again relied on the work carried out by some of our partners.[20]

Our starting point is a concept of inclusion that does not focus on the specific difficulties experienced by certain students, but rather on strategies aimed at dealing with the diverse nature of the class as a whole by adapting the teaching materials, classroom dynamics and spaces to the needs of a variety of different individuals. The goal is to ensure equal opportunities and provide equal education for all. It is therefore important to design the different aspects involved in the teaching and learning process in advance, eliminating barriers right from the beginning, so that all students can participate, feel included and learn. Although some individuals may require further differentiated teaching, proactive design helps create accessible and flexible learning environments from the start. In keeping with this, UDL is based on three main principles: there are multiple ways of representing knowledge to make it more accessible to students, who can also demonstrate the knowledge acquired in multiple ways, and the ways in which they engage with the learning process are also multiple.[21] Lessons designed in accordance with the principles of UDL attempt to meet the needs of all learners at the onset of instruction, rather than adjusting it once obstacles for specific students have been identified. Consequently, all students benefit from UDL, not only those who experience barriers to their learning,

(20) We would like to express our gratitude to our colleagues from Ikastolen Elkartea (Spain), Labyrinth in Brno (Czech Republic) and the Danish History Teachers' Association, for their valuable contributions to these modules.

(21) Flood, M. (2026). The emergence of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in Irish curricula as an approach to inclusive education in the Republic of Ireland. «Journal of Inclusive Education in Ireland», 38(2).

since multiple means of engagement, expression and representation enhance learning for all.

Although the effectiveness of such an approach is still under debate, there is evidence to suggest that UDL is an effective teaching methodology for improving the learning process of all students,[22] which is why we decided to include it in the course and present the work carried out by our partners from Ikastolen Elkartea (Spain) in the design of teaching materials. In one of the webinars held in the spring of 2024, attendants were given examples of digital textbooks adapted to the principles of UDL, which aimed to provide learners with multiple means of engagement, representation and action. The webinar hosts insisted that we should start by activating students and offering them opportunities to become engaged in their learning process. As some of the teachers participating in our webinars pointed out, sometimes no adapted textbooks or materials exist, and teachers must adapt them themselves, adding more images, introducing some kind of logical progression through complex activities and avoiding distractors. In such cases, having some knowledge of UDL principles or even some examples of adapted teaching materials at their disposal may be very helpful.

The fifth module deals with cooperative work, the design of inclusive spaces and the importance of relational aspects and listening to students. Regarding cooperative work, research into classroom dynamics highlights the importance of using cooperative strategies and structures to promote

(22) Capp, M. J. (2017). The effectiveness of universal design for learning: a meta-analysis of literature between 2013 and 2016. «International Journal of Inclusive Education», 21(8), 791–807.

the participation of all students.[23] According to the programme 'Cooperating to Learn, Learning to Cooperate', which has been running in Spain since the 1990s, cooperative learning can contribute to the development of cohesion, equity and inclusion.[24]

Spatial organisation also plays a very important role when it comes to eliminating barriers and promoting participation and learning for all. Moreover, designing spaces with different activities in mind — searching for information, reflecting, discussing and debating, giving presentations, etc. — helps enhance learning processes. Our partners from Labyrinth in Brno (Czech Republic) prepared some materials to help participants in the self-paced course become more aware of the importance of having open, flexible spaces adapted to various needs; they stressed the advantages of ensuring that people can move between spaces and of organising classroom settings to promote cooperation and participation, while at the same time improving accessibility. School infrastructure can be a resource that helps enhance learning experiences; experts suggest turning physical spaces at school into more effective learning spaces by identifying elements in those spaces that contribute

(23) Johnson, D. W. & Johnson, R. T. (2005). Training for cooperative group work. The essentials of structures. In Davidson, N. *Pioneering perspectives in cooperative learning*. Routledge. Albalat, S. T., Moliner, O. & Lago, J. R. (2024). Building cooperative learning competence in resistant pupils: strategies for teachers. «Education», 3-13, 1–17.

(24) Riera, G., Segués, T. & Lago, J.R. (2022). Cooperative Learning for Cohesion, Inclusion, and Equity at School and in the Classroom. In: Collet, J., Naranjo, M., Soldevila-Pérez, J. (eds) *Global Inclusive Education. Inclusive Learning and Educational Equity*, vol 8. Springer, Pujolàs, P., Lago, J. R. & Naranjo, M. (2013). Aprendizaje cooperativo y apoyo a la mejora de las prácticas inclusivas. «Revista de Investigación en Educación», 11(3), 207–218.

to improving accessibility and maximising their learning value.[25]

Finally, it should be pointed out that relational approaches aimed at fostering connections between students and the educational community in general also help promote inclusion. Such approaches seek to eliminate social and communication barriers and promote empathy and a sense of belonging among students. Moreover, experts highlight the importance of engaging with the views of students themselves, since this can lead to practices that help foster inclusion by promoting dialogue between students and teachers. As Ainscow and Messiou remind us, students for whom existing arrangements act as barriers to their participation may become hidden voices, whereas listening to their views can often encourage inclusion.[26]

8.4. Concluding Remarks

Dealing with the many different aspects of inclusion in education has been fairly challenging for us, particularly since our aim is to reach educators working in very different environments. Teachers and educators working in different countries and contexts understand inclusion in different

(25) Khurana, A. (2022). Converting physical spaces into learning spaces: Integrating universal design and universal design for learning. «Frontiers in Education». 7. See also: Fisher, K. (2005). Linking pedagogy and space. *Department of Education and Training, Victoria University, Australia*. Benade, L. (2019). Flexible learning spaces: Inclusive by design? «New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies», 54 (1), 53-68.

(26) Ainscow, M. & Messiou, K. (2018). Engaging with the views of students to promote inclusion in education. «Journal of Educational Change», 19, 1–17.

ways; they prioritise different aspects and express different needs. Designing a course that is useful and meaningful for a diversity of teachers, and which will remain useful for a longer period rather than quickly becoming obsolete, was no easy task. To address those challenges, we decided to focus on general topics, including activities that can be adapted to different contexts.

However, even with the efforts outlined above, we were unable to cover all the aspects of inclusion discussed within the SENSEI project. We are aware that one important aspect that is missing is the role of non-formal education in the promotion of inclusion. As our colleagues from CSU in Leskovac reminded us, it is necessary to look beyond the school environment and take the work and experiences of non-formal education into account also. Implementing practices, methods and techniques that have proven successful in non-formal education in schools may help create a more positive climate in the classroom, thereby facilitating the inclusion of all students. Looking ahead, the connections between formal and non-formal education in the field of diversity and inclusion constitute an area that requires further reflection.

In sum, the collaborative way in which this self-paced course was constructed has enabled us to identify common issues, enrich our daily practice with new ideas and become more thoughtful professionals who do not take their practice for granted. We hope that this is transmitted through the self-paced course and may serve as inspiration for further initiatives.

Reimagining Education for Social Inclusion and Human Development
ISBN 979-12-218-2574-9
DOI 10.53136/979122182574911
pp. 247-252 (aprile 2026)

CHAPTER IX

FOSTERING EQUITY IN THE CLASSROOM THROUGH ENGAGING ACTIVITIES. FOLLOWING THE ESD PATH

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Valentina Cătălina Holic*

9.1. Introduction

Participating in the SENSEI project brought multiple challenges as well as accomplishments due to its diverse partners, the educational systems they come from, and their cultural backgrounds. Coordinating communication, aligning expectations, and adapting to diverse working styles has been demanding, yet rewarding, by fostering intercultural competence and broadening professional perspectives.

This article describes four activities of the workshop delivered during the SENSEI Conference held in Leskovac, Serbia, in November 2024. As workshop facilitators, we had the privilege of not only representing our institution but also contributing actively to a dynamic learning community, while tackling a topic we had been deeply researching: education for sustainable development.

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The material presented in the workshop directly addressed target 4.7 of SDG 4- Quality Education:

> *by 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development).*(1)

The workshop had a two-fold purpose: on one hand, it aimed at making the participants familiar with Education for Sustainable Development, and on the other hand, it introduced them to activities that could be used with their preferred content, to make the lessons more inclusive in terms of ensuring equal opportunities for students to participate. Moreover, the workshop was targeted at acquainting participants with interactive teaching methods employed from the perspective of inclusive education using approaches characteristic to education for sustainable development. Nevertheless, we do not suggest that we were introducing something entirely new, but rather building on existing practices. This *stanza* written by our Romanian national poet, Mihai Eminescu, mirrors the idea behind the workshop:

> Time is passing, time comes yet,
> All is old, and all is new;
> What for good or ill is set

(1) In: https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4#targets_and_indicators

You can ponder and construe;
Do not hope and do not worry,
What's a wave, will wave away;
Though enticing with a flurry,
Cold remains to all, they say.

At the end of the workshop, participants could identify the sustainable development goals, their potential in inclusive teaching, apply teaching and learning strategies/methods to their context and subject-specific content.

According to UNESCO, Education for Sustainable Development (EDS) aims at providing every girl and boy, woman and man with the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary to shape a sustainable future.(2)

ESD means integrating key sustainable development issues into teaching and learning; for example, wellbeing, gender inequality, climate change, biodiversity, sustainable consumption. It also requires participatory teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower learners to change their behavior and take action for sustainable development. ESD consequently promotes competencies like critical thinking, imagining future scenarios, and making decisions in a collaborative way, and requires far-reaching changes to the way education is often practiced today. We employed methods belonging to cooperative learning, visual thinking strategies, as well as the use of digital tools, and highlighted the potential for inclusion of each activity. Each participant received a brochure containing the description of the activities with links to materials, ready to be used in the classroom.

(2) In: https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/education

The first activity consisted of introducing the Sustainable Development Goals through an interactive quiz in teams, which gave participants an insight into the content. We chose Baamboozle,[3] which is an interactive online platform designed to enhance learning through games and quizzes, making lessons more engaging and enjoyable for students. It also works with students who do not have devices in the classroom.

We believe that one efficient way of bringing EDS closer to pupils is using images. As a consequence, we organised a visual thinking activity, following the steps provided by The Visual Thinking Strategies Institute.[4] Students have to observe a picture for a given time and then engage in discussions by answering three questions: *What's going on in this picture/image? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find?* The teacher acts a facilitator and there are no wrong answers. When applying this strategy, educators will observe every child striving to identify details and build upon classmates' answers. This strategy promotes collaboration and supports classes to become more inclusive, accessible, and responsive, encourages an equitable society of thoughtful, respectful students that value diverse perspectives, reflective practice around issues of race, class, gender, and ability, in order to increase awareness of and respond to the inequities that exist in education.

Teachers can find inspirational resources for using this strategy with their pupils on the website of the Institute, as well as on two other respected websites, Once Upon

(3) In: https://www.baamboozle.com/
(4) In: https://vtshome.org/

a Picture[5] and The New York Times[6]. Exploiting video material brings positive engagement among students, so another type of resource we used during the workshop was an advert. We choose a specific one, released by John Lewis Department Store due to its powerful, inclusive message (beyond its commercial one)- the 2023 Christmas advert.[7] This was the start of introducing hexagonal thinking, which promotes collaboration and shared understanding, as students either guess or share important words or concepts and where everyone's voice is valued, and diverse viewpoints enhance learning outcomes.

Giving a twist to well-known games can bring different levels of engagement in the classroom. Jenga, i.e., can foster decision-making skills and improve hand-to-eye coordination. It was created by Leslie Scott, the co-founder of Oxford Games Ltd, based on a game that evolved within her family in the early 1970s, using children's wooden building blocks the family purchased from a sawmill in Takoradi, Ghana. The name Jenga is derived from kujenga, a Swahili word which means "to build". What we did was to write numbers on the blocks and provide participants with a set of questions. In groups, pupils stack up the tower following the normal set up. A student removes a block (using only one hand) from anywhere below the highest completed layer and reads the number on that block. The player looks for the corresponding question in the handout and answers it.

After the question is answered, the player puts the block back on the top of the tower. If the tower falls anytime

(5) In: https://www.onceuponapicture.co.uk/

(6) In: https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/27/learning/how-to-teach-with-whats-going-on-in-this-picture.html .

(7) Cf. In: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cyuqy4Eb_I4

during their turn, they lose. If the student does not know the answer, he/she can be helped by the other members of the group. Winner? The last player to stack a block without causing the tower to fall! These four activities had been tested in our classroom, and they had proven to offer each pupil the possibility to participate according to their level. They also support our belief that any classroom activity must involve all the learners simultaneously, so that active learning and social interaction are obtained.

Delivering a workshop to educators from different countries required thoughtful preparation and commitment to meaningful dialogue. It has been an experience that blended professional development with personal growth, reinforcing the power of education as a bridge between cultures. It involved careful planning, clarity of objectives, and sensitivity to participants' varied experiences and roles. The challenge lay in making the content relevant and engaging for everyone, but the accomplishment came from witnessing active participation and impactful learning outcomes.

Reimagining Education for Social Inclusion and Human Development
ISBN 979-12-218-2574-9
DOI 10.53136/979122182574912
pp. 253-264 (aprile 2026)

CHAPTER X

BEYOND HISTORY: PILOTING ERASMUS+ TEACHER ACADEMY SENSEI MODULE FOR 360° SUSTAINABLE AND EQUAL INCLUSION

Jana Chocholatá*

> "I believe that education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform."
>
> John Dewey

10.1. Introduction

Labyrinth, a laboratory school in Brno, had a unique opportunity to be a partner in the Erasmus+ Teacher Academy SENSEI, and pilot a teacher training module to raise awareness of the concept of '360° inclusion' and of how it can be translated into everyday school life.

Labyrinth, the first laboratory school in the Czech Republic, is an open, highly inclusive, and innovative school where teacher trainees and in-service teachers come to observe research-informed practices. Many of the research-based innovations are piloted by the school thanks

* Labyrinth.

to the close cooperation with teacher training faculties and the Czech Ministry of Education. The School Education Programme is called *I will find my path in the world*, which captures the school's mission to educate children in line with principles of democratic education and bring them up as active citizens prepared to have agency in the society and communities they will be part of. Founded in 2016, Labyrinth took inspiration from the educational model introduced by John Dewey and his Laboratory School at the University of Chicago (1896)[1]. This and other laboratory schools in the world were inspired by Dewey's idea of a university-run or affiliated school to do research, educational experimentation, curriculum development, professional development, and teacher training.

Labyrinth, in collaboration with an expert from the Faculty of Education, Masaryk University in Brno, adapted and taught an optional teacher training course using the materials designed as part of the initial teacher training module by the University of Wrocław and the University of Florence. The course aimed to pilot the module and possibly adapt the materials to suit a slightly different teacher training environment.

The course was designed as an optional course for students in both Bachelor's and Master's study programmes and was offered to all students at the Masaryk University's Faculty of Education. Taught in English, the minimum required language level of participants was B2. The course was named *Education for Sustainable and Equal Inclusion* and took place in the autumn semester of the 2025/2026

(1) Cf. Cucchiara, M. (2010). *New Goals, Familiar Challenges?: A Brief History of University-Run Schools*. «Perspectives on Urban Education», 7 (1), 96–108.

academic year from early September to early December. The course was also advertised on the faculty's website and social media.

10.2. Participants

The students who took part in the course had both professional and personal interest in the content offered in the course syllabus. All of them were Czech with a very good command of English. Most of the materials used throughout the course were in English, even though some were also in Czech, as we analysed history textbooks and some official documents and materials which so far have been available to schools and the general public only in the national language. Moreover, the class discussions were to a great extent related to Czech contexts, current educational policies, and support students and pupils are entitled to as part of the inclusive measures. Comparison was drawn to the situation in the neighbouring countries, especially Slovakia, Poland, and Germany, and to other European contexts, e.g., Great Britain or Finland.

It was a heterogeneous group of students in the sense that it was a mixed group of Bachelor's and Master's students in different fields of teacher training. Some of them were students of a single-subject English language programme, while others were studying in a double-subject programme combining English with History and Civics. Even students who study only English and are preparing for a career as teachers of English as a foreign language in secondary schools must take university courses

in the history and culture of English-speaking countries. For them, too, the course was therefore of high relevance.

Heterogeneity was also reflected in other aspects of the students' experience, including their learning history, family background, as some of them came from socially disadvantaged families, some were diagnosed with specific learning differences, namely dyslexia, one was extraordinarily gifted, and one was transgender.

10.3. The course content: using and adapting the Matrix for designing an inclusive education class

The course planning phase started with the teacher familiarizing herself with the *Matrix for designing an inclusive education class*, a comprehensive material designed by experts from the University of Wrocław and the University of Florence. The Matrix structures the potential teacher training course into six larger units corresponding to six major inclusion-related topics, each intended for one or two 90-minute classes. This matched the university elective course well, because the average length of the semester is twelve weeks.

Part of the first session in the semester was devoted to finding about students' needs and expectations from the course, and quite understandably the teacher was interested in the reasons why students opted for this particular course. Amongst the most frequent reasons they stated was that the course advertised a 360° perspective on inclusion in teaching history, which made them curious about its focus. They explained that traditional university courses on inclusion usually featured students with

special education needs and/or specific learning differences rarely aiming beyond this level and that this was the first course to take a broader perspective on inclusion. Some of them reported seeking reassurance, a simple confirmation that they view and perceive inclusive issues correctly. Some claimed they were interested in the latest developments, both on the legislative and practical level. And some, sadly, were motivated by their negative past experience, whether it directly concerned them, their family members or their peers. It can be said that every single student in the group entered the course with curiosity, open-mindedness, increased sensitivity to the issue of equal inclusion and with a hope to learn that things are moving forward.

The first session was meant to introduce the dichotomy between inclusion and exclusion in education as two mutually exclusive concepts in its broadest sense. Based on their own experience and observations of school practices, the participants were easily able to come up with a number of examples of exclusion they witnessed or were subject to at earlier stages of their schooling. These examples ranged from being ridiculed because of slower work pace, difficulties in reading – decoding a written text – typical for dyslexic learners, to being debased for eastern accent, unbranded clothes or different ethnicity. The convergence of these examples of exclusion was striking and easily lead to naming general patterns. Fortunately, the students had many ideas for improvements, some of them drawing on good practices, but also drawing on the content of social media which more frequently than not address these issues. The common denominators of these improvements were continuing teacher education as part of teachers' growth

in the profession, and whole-heartedness, responsibility and open-mindedness as three iconic qualities of reflective teachers formulated by Dewey.(2) With the newly raised awareness we proceeded to teaching materials, namely history textbooks which, whether inclusive or exclusive, shape students' beliefs and attitudes and considerably contribute to their worldview.

10.4. Textbooks as tools of inclusion and exclusion

For the class on role of teaching materials students were asked to bring a textbook focused on teaching anything in history. Some of the coursebooks were published recently, whereas some were the participants' textbooks from their high school studies with some dated features. The aim was to analyse the teaching materials to see whose story they tell and whether they hide, ignore or silence some groups of people who might be marginalised and forgotten. History is told by the winners in which the losers are deprived of their importance, value and identity. History as an incomplete narrative in which the profiles of historical events and figures contain a strong bias. Students were able to think of many different events and personalities from Czech, British, European or world history. To mention at least some notorious, groundbreaking events students immediately thought of was the discovery of America and what it meant for the Native American populations; personalities such as Winston Churchill who was voted the Greatest Briton ever and who managed to lead the nation in its fight

(2) Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education*. New York: Collier Books, Macmillan.

against the Nazi Germany, but had a rather controversial start of his career; or the holocaust in the Czech territory in which thousands of Roma ethnic minority died without anybody acknowledging it until very recently. Taking the students' strong sense of justice into consideration, the concept of hidden history was for them easy to grasp. The participants also emphasised the indispensability of critical thinking skills and evaluation of all the information one is presented with. They suggested multimodal amendments to the content of the textbooks to add multiple perspectives to the narrative. Some of them pointed out that the subject-matter might almost uncontrollably grow in size and that at times probing questions, rather than further, more extensive input, can help students realize that there might be a second voice of history.[3] Value, or rather self-esteem and self-image, together with identity were once again to emerge as key concepts when discussing immigrant groups and marginalised ethnic, national or religious minority groups who tend to be perceived as problematic, feel stigmatised and have demonstrably poorer access to education, housing or jobs.

"Opening-up-the-textbook" approach applied in the following session allowed the students to develop a mental framework for textbook analysis with the aim to deconstruct the textbook narrative, to investigate the didactic transformation of the subject matter, especially into the content representations (Co-Re)[4]. The process of didactic transformation performed by the creators of textbooks,

(3) Wineburg, S. (2007). *Opening Up the Textbook and Offering Students a Second Voice*. Education week 26(39).

(4) Shulman, L.S. (1987). *Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform*. Harvard Educational Review, 57(1), 1-22.

and ideally also by teachers while using them in their classes, is a complex process that raises teaching to the level of a meta-science.(5) Analysing teaching materials and putting under scrutiny how inclusively or exclusively a topic is represented means to undergo the process from the other end. Not surprisingly, this session was assessed by the participants as the most useful for planning their future teaching, for stating appropriate aims, and for understanding the processes of choosing inclusive content representations. Also, they appreciated this approach of analysing, deconstructing, and amending a textbook as the most innovative and the most practical aspect of the whole course.

10.5. Accommodating students with S.E.N.

Two subsequent classes were dedicated to the inclusion of learners with special educational needs. The course participants reported a feeling of confidence in recognizing, diagnosing, and addressing the needs of students with SEN. All teacher trainees at the Faculty of Education at Masaryk University must attend a course in Pedagogical diagnostics, choosing among several optional courses which address issues such as dyslexia and other specific learning differences, ADD/ADHD, ASD, or behavioural disorders. In addition, many of the methodology courses introduce the principles and practices of differentiated instruction. What was absolutely new for all the participants was the concept of Universal Design for Learning, introduced as a sustainable approach that enables teachers to reach all their

(5) Slavík, J. & T. Janík. (2005). *Významová struktura faktu v oborových didaktikách*. Pedagogika, 55(4), 336-353.

learners without the need to design several sets of tiered activities for almost every class. They are, too, well-informed regarding what other experts in the field they can consult, such as special education teachers or school psychologists. Because several of the participants were dyslexic themselves, they had a clear understanding of the condition, its accommodation, and realistic ideas for compensation. They also observed that UDL is an approach that suits everyone, whereas with differentiated tasks, their peers considered them unfair and made them feel embarrassed. They emphasised multimodal teaching materials, experiential learning methods, drama-based teaching techniques, and a multisensory approach as the most effective. On the other side of the spectrum, i.e., as the least effective, they listed lengthy lecture-like input, extensive reading, or poor use of board work.

10.6. Multiperspectivity and learning centres for heterogeneous classes

To provide the course participants with hands-on examples of experiential learning and drama-based techniques as one way of understanding people with a migrant background, who in the past as well as at present could feel marginalised, literally voiceless and vulnerable because of a language barrier, the class was set up in three learning centres.[6] To divide students into three groups, each person got a card with greetings in different languages (e.g. Buona

(6) Collins, Rita Chalmers & Naděžda Vojtková. (2010). *Using Learning Centres in the English Language Classroom*. Voices. Cantebury (United Kingdom): IATEFL University of Kent, 2010 (212), p. 4-5. ISSN 1814-3830.

sera, Dobrý večer, Good evening). They were supposed to identify the language on their card and make monolingual groups. This was to implicitly introduce the idea of language being the means of communication, but also a barrier.

Drawing on students' suggestions from the previous lesson, the first centre was a discussion centre where they brainstormed and analysed a migrant experience from different perspectives. The second centre was literature-based, and students were asked to read the plot of *My Ántonia*,(7) an American award-winning novel by Willa Cather, which tells a story of a Czech immigrant family in the US during the Great Depression. The third centre used role-playing, a drama-based technique, which puts students in other people's shoes in order to help them identify with them.

In the first centre, students immediately mentioned "language barrier, loss of social status, different religion, lack of knowledge of available resources, difficulties in finding a job, differences in appearance, being judged based on stereotypes, bias, lack of trust, vulnerability," etc. Moving to the second centre, students read the plot and an extract from the book, and were supposed to identify whether any of the previously discussed issues were present. And indeed, they were. Even though the book is fiction, the plasticity of the characters and situations is historically accurate and provides students with more perspectives than a school textbook can offer. In the third centre, students were given role-cards with some information about the book characters and instructions for a speaking task. They were supposed to act in the role and imagine how the characters felt, for example, when

(7) Cather, Willa Sibert. (2023). *My Ántonia*. Signature classics. New York: Union square & co. ISBN 978-1-4351-7296-8.

the migrant family found out that they had paid for their dilapidated house five times the usual price.

Students positively evaluated the learning centres as a universal classroom management tool to help accommodate any heterogeneity teachers might encounter in their classes. As for history, students suggested centres set up around an event, but focusing on different perspectives: perspectives of different agents or a multidisciplinary approach considering social, political, economic, and cultural history.

10.7. Course completion and evaluation

The main requirement for the course completion was a complex, creative task in which the participants were asked to amend a double page from a history textbook and design a lesson plan to teach to lower-secondary school learners. They were supposed to analyse a teaching material, identify elements of exclusion and add relevant information, task, questions, or a document to make it more inclusive. In the final session, the small-scale projects were presented, and changes were justified.

The students' feedback on the course was exceptionally positive for having opened a new door in their professional journeys. The participants valued the themes as relevant and practical, noting how the course actively engaged and strengthened their critical thinking. Through sustained questioning of both historical content and the ways it is taught, they cultivated deeper critical reflection skills and a heightened awareness of how history education shapes students' understandings of the present—either reinforcing

existing biases or challenging and dismantling them. The trainees further suggested that each topic could be expanded into a dedicated methodology booklet for self-study, benefiting both pre-service and in-service teachers. Above all, they recognized the agency of the teacher as a catalyst for social change, affirming that inclusive history education is not merely a pedagogical practice, but a commitment to fostering a more just and naturally inclusive society.

Reimagining Education for Social Inclusion and Human Development
ISBN 979-12-218-2574-9
DOI 10.53136/979122182574913
pp. 265-275 (aprile 2026)

CHAPTER XI

NON-FORMAL (HISTORY) EDUCATION – CAN IT WORK IN A FORMAL CLASSROOM?

Andjela Kostic, Olivera Ivanovic

Introduction

This article examines non-formal education as a flexible educational approach that contributes to inclusive learning environments. Drawing on foundational definitions (Coombs, 1973; Coombs & Ahmed, 1974; UNESCO, 1987; UNESCO, 1997) and contemporary research, the article analyses the conceptual development, characteristics, and pedagogical benefits of non-formal education.

Within contemporary educational discourse, non-formal education is increasingly recognized as a response to social inequality, marginalisation, and changing societal needs. Its learner-centred orientation and adaptable structure allow educational activities to reach diverse populations and support inclusive learning environments.

The aim of this article is therefore to explore the theoretical foundations of non-formal education and its potential contribution to inclusive educational practice. Particular

attention is given to its role in fostering motivation, adaptability, holistic development, and social participation among learners.

Theoretical Perspectives on Learning Preferences

Individual differences in learning approaches have been widely explored in educational theory. Kolb's experiential learning theory distinguishes between learners who prefer concrete experiences and those who favour abstract conceptualisation (Kolb, 1984).

Another influential framework is the VARK model developed by Fleming, which categorizes learning preferences into four modalities: visual, aural, reading and writing, and kinesthetic (Leite, Svinicki, & Shi, 2009).

Understanding these variations allows educators to design more inclusive and flexible learning environments and supports learner-centred educational practice.

Formal, Non-formal and Informal Learning in the Context of Lifelong Learning

Since the 1990s, international organisations such as the OECD have promoted lifelong learning as a framework for understanding knowledge acquisition across the entire lifespan (OECD, n.d.; Werquin, 2007).

Formal learning occurs within recognised institutions and follows defined curricula, learning objectives, and assessment procedures. Non-formal learning is organised but takes place outside traditional institutional structures and

usually does not lead to formal certification. Informal learning occurs through everyday experiences and social interactions and represents the most flexible form of learning.

Conceptualising Non-Formal Education

Coombs (1973) defined non-formal education as organised educational activity conducted outside the formal system in order to provide learning opportunities for particular groups within society.

Coombs and Ahmed (1974) similarly describe it as organised and systematic educational activity carried out outside formal schooling to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups of the population.

UNESCO (1997) further explains that non-formal education includes organised educational activities that do not correspond exactly to formal education systems and may take place both within and outside educational institutions.

Objectives and Inclusive Orientation of Non-Formal Education

According to UNESCO (1987), non-formal education programmes promote literacy, develop practical skills, and provide equal educational opportunities.

Because of their flexibility and accessibility, these programmes are particularly important for learners who face barriers within formal education systems, including disadvantaged groups and individuals living in underserved communities.

Structural Characteristics of Non-Formal Learning

Research indicates that non-formal learning activities are usually planned and structured around learning objectives even though they occur outside compulsory educational provision (Allaste et al., 2021; Mok, 2011).

Flexible schedules, adaptable curricula, practical orientation, and the absence of strict age limitations allow non-formal education to respond effectively to community needs.

Pedagogical and Developmental Benefits

Learning in authentic environments enhances student engagement and motivation (Affeldt et al., 2018; Ben Zvi Assaraf, 2011). Experiential learning enables learners to connect theoretical knowledge with real-life contexts, making abstract concepts more understandable (Badger, 2021).

Non-formal learning environments also support the development of communication skills, leadership abilities, intercultural competence, persistence, and resilience (Läänemets et al., 2018; Souto-Otero, 2016). Participation contributes positively to learners' confidence and wellbeing (Simac et al., 2021).

About the Leskovac Science club

The Leskovac Science Club, operating within the Center for Professional Development in Education (CSU Leskovac), was established in 2016 at the initiative of the Center for

the Promotion of Science, with the support of the City of Leskovac. The Club is part of the national Network of Science Clubs in Serbia, which aims to strengthen science communication and foster the popularization of science at the local and national levels.

The primary mission of the Leskovac Science Club is to enhance public engagement with science by making scientific knowledge accessible, relevant, and inclusive, particularly for populations residing in rural and underserved areas. Through structured program and community-oriented initiatives, the Club seeks to reduce disparities in access to scientific content and to contribute to the development of scientific literacy.

The Club operates through a collaborative model that brings together a multidisciplinary network of experts and practitioners, including researchers, university professors, students, school teachers, and artists. This cross-sectoral cooperation enables the integration of diverse perspectives and methodologies in the design and implementation of activities.

Although the Club's programs are open to the general public, its activities have increasingly focused on children and young people as a primary target group. This strategic orientation reflects the recognition of early and sustained engagement as a key factor in fostering long-term interest in science, supporting talent development, and encouraging future participation in STEM-related education and careers.

The activities organized in the Leskovac Science Club are part of non-formal education in Serbian education system. The associates of our club try to include new contents in a way that interests and attracts a wider range of citizens.

During these 10 years, we have prepared and conducted a lot of events - projects, workshops, lectures, debates, etc.

Innovative Models of Inclusivity in History Education

Since its establishment, the CSU Leskovac Science Club has brought together distinguished individuals, associations, and institutions committed to the promotion and popularization of science. Over the years, numerous examples of good practice have emerged, particularly within the field of history. Among the most notable initiatives are the Escape Room, the Program for Gifted and Talented Students, and the scientific walk titled "Through the Streets of Old Leskovac."

The Escape Room format, implemented for secondary school students, has proven to be a highly effective model of non-formal education. Its adaptable structure allows for seamless integration into formal educational settings, particularly in inclusive classrooms that include students with special educational needs or those from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Through engaging and thoughtfully designed tasks, students worked collaboratively in teams, assuming the role of "detectives." In a relaxed and supportive environment, they simultaneously developed historical knowledge, critical thinking skills, and interpersonal competencies. This approach demonstrates how experiential learning can foster both academic achievement and social inclusion.

The Program for Gifted and Talented Students, organized for the fourth consecutive year, gathered students with special educational needs who have demonstrated

outstanding achievements in history. The program enabled participants to explore historical topics from alternative perspectives under the mentorship of experts in the field. Research activities were conducted using diverse primary and secondary sources, including materials from the Historical Archive, the Local Heritage Department of the National Library, and on-site visits to significant historical landmarks such as Caričin Grad and Skobaljić Grad. The program culminated in a dramatic performance through which students publicly presented their research outcomes. This final presentation not only showcased their academic progress but also strengthened their public speaking skills, which had been systematically developed throughout the program.

An additional objective of the program is to foster long-term networking and collaboration among young participants. Many students remain active within the Club after completing the program, engaging as scientific demonstrators and volunteers. In these roles, they continue to develop their competencies while mentoring and supporting younger participants. In this way, the program ensures sustainability, continuity, and the cultivation of a dynamic intergenerational learning community.

The Scientific Walk represents another innovative and adaptable format for science communication. This activity has attracted considerable public interest, particularly among younger audiences. Guided by a curator and supported by volunteers, participants—including school students, children with special educational needs, members of the Roma community, and passersby—embarked on a historical route through Leskovac. By exploring monuments and locations significant to the city's development,

participants experienced history in situ, transforming the urban landscape into an open-air classroom. Importantly, students acquired new knowledge during these walks, which they later presented in their history classes at school.

These activities are of particular importance to the Club because they actively promote peer learning, a crucial component of both formal education and lifelong personal development. By encouraging students to share knowledge with their classmates and younger peers, the initiatives strengthen communication skills, confidence, and collaborative responsibility — competencies that extend beyond the classroom and into everyday life.

Through these initiatives, the CSU Leskovac Science Club exemplifies how creative educational models can enhance historical awareness, encourage inclusivity, and strengthen the connection between scientific knowledge and the broader community.

Implications for International Educational Projects

Within the broader European educational landscape, non-formal education represents not merely a complementary learning modality, but a strategic instrument for fostering inclusive, resilient, and future-oriented learning ecosystems. Its structural flexibility, responsiveness to local needs, and emphasis on experiential and participatory learning methodologies position it as a powerful driver of social cohesion and educational equity.

In international project frameworks — particularly those aligned with EU priorities such as lifelong learning, inclusion, social innovation, and community engagement — non-formal

education offers a transferable and scalable model. By decentralizing authority, promoting learner agency, and adapting to diverse socio-cultural contexts, it reduces systemic barriers that often hinder participation of vulnerable and underrepresented groups.

The practices implemented within the Leskovac Science Club demonstrate how non-formal approaches can be embedded within local communities while maintaining alignment with broader European educational objectives. The adaptability of formats such as Escape Rooms, research-based gifted programs, and scientific walks confirms that non-formal methodologies can be successfully transferred across institutional and national boundaries.

Importantly, these models do not seek to replace formal education systems. Rather, they enrich them — introducing flexibility, interdisciplinarity, and learner-centered dynamics that formal institutions may struggle to sustain within rigid curricular and administrative frameworks.

Conclusion

Non-formal education represents a pedagogically grounded and socially responsive educational approach capable of addressing many contemporary educational challenges.

By encouraging experiential learning, collaboration, and flexibility, non-formal education strengthens both cognitive and socio-emotional competencies. For this reason, future educational reforms should recognise non-formal education as an essential component of modern educational systems.

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Reimagining Education for Social Inclusion and Human Development
ISBN 979-12-218-2574-9
DOI 10.53136/979122182574914
pp. 277-281 (aprile 2026)

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ISBN 979-12-218-2574-9, formato 14 × 21 cm, 288 pagine, 20 euro

Finito di stampare nel mese di aprile 2026
presso la tipografia «The Factory S.r.l.»
via Tiburtina, 912 – 00156 Roma

IN-CON-TRA / 26
COLLANA DI DIDATTICA E PEDAGOGIA DELL'INCLUSIONE
DIRETTA DA ANDREA MANNUCCI E SILVIA GUETTA

REIMAGINING EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

THE SENSEI PROJECT: A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE ON TEACHER TRAINING AND CULTURAL COEXISTENCE

In a Europe marked by new inequalities, polarisation, and democratic fragilities, rethinking schooling also means rethinking how we live together. *Reimagining Education for Social Inclusion and Human Development* emerges from the experience of the European SENSEI project and offers a broad, rigorous reflection on how teacher and educator education can become a concrete lever for building learning environments that embrace plurality, prevent exclusion, and transform conflicts into opportunities for growth. Bringing together contributions from scholars, teachers, and teacher educators working in different contexts, the volume interweaves theoretical perspectives and pedagogical practices, with particular attention to history education as a crucial space where identities, senses of belonging, and narratives of "us" and "the other" are constructed. Inclusion is understood as a systemic and relational process, involving school cultures, educational policies, and everyday practices. Addressed to teachers, educators, school leaders, university students, and researchers, the book offers practical tools, examples, and models of hybrid professional development and self-paced learning, designed to support educators and learning communities in their everyday work.

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ISBN 979-12-218-2574-9

20,00 EURO