



INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

A CASEBOOK FOR GOOD PRACTICES

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Universidade de Évora
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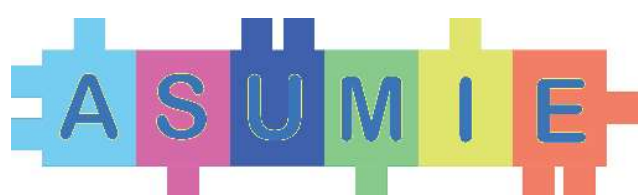
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del Sacro Cuore



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ACCESSIBILITY IN THE UNIVERSITY? HOW TO DO THAT?

Maria Concetta Carruba

Mariateresa Cairo

SUMMARY OF THE CASE

The chapter introduces the matter of accessibility in university context. In the first part the authors point the attention on the idea of accessibility through the presentation of what is accessibility and how is it possible a practical application. It is exposed a life story of Greta. The methodology used for the interview is narrative and biographical. It is underlined the importance of the right of study in the high education as a long – life project for disabled people. As the European indication (Lisbon Declaration, 1997 and Bologna Declaration, 1999) the high education must be an accessible opportunity for all young people who want improve your knowledge, ability and reflection capacity to obtain life and job skills. The educational and career guidance and the supply of a global environment without barriers and with facilitators and tools (friendly and flexibility programmes, specialized and available teachers and accessible technologies, formats and materials) are the condition for inclusive education and the participation of the all students. Teachers and professors must be trained to adapt their teaching to students with different health conditions, learning profiles and socio – cultural backgrounds.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

What's the meaning of Accessibility? Before talking about universal accessibility tools, we need to clarify that “accessibility” is:

1. the quality of being easy to approach, reach, enter, speak with, use, or understand;
2. the quality of being usable, reachable, obtainable, etc;

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3. the quality of being suitable or adapted for use by people with disabilities and with learning difficulties.

Practically, Accessibility is:

- a. Break down of architectural and communicative barriers (architectural, physical and urban, sensory and perceptual, localization, socio – cultural and communicative barriers);
- b. Use of aids, new technologies (assistive technology) (GATE, Global Cooperation on Assistive Technology, in [https://www.who.int/initiatives/global-cooperation-on-assistive-technology-\(gate\)](https://www.who.int/initiatives/global-cooperation-on-assistive-technology-(gate))) and language (Braille, AAC, Sign language...) (CRPD, 2006)
- c. Universal Design for All (UDL framework and Guidelines) (CAST, <https://publishing.cast.org/catalog/books-products/universal-design-for-learning-meyer-rose-gordon>)
- d. Educational Differentiation based on Tomlinson's model.

Accessibility, based on the CAST point of view, is shaped by what we need to do, our interactions with the environment, and our personal preferences. Educational materials and technologies are “accessible” to people with disabilities if they are able to “acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services” (Joint Letter US Department of Justice and US Department of Education, June 29, 2010) as people who do not have disabilities.

CAST is the Centre for Applied Special Technology in USA (<https://www.cast.org/about/about-cast>).

CAST's mission is to transform education design and practice until learning has no limits. Located near Boston, CAST is a no profit education research and development organization that created the Universal Design for Learning framework (<https://www.cast.org/impact/universal-design-for-learning-udl>) and UDL Guidelines (<https://www.cast.org/impact/udl-public-policy>).

The correct way to understand the concept of Accessibility keeps in consideration the contribution of CAST.

The questions are:

- Are tools, environmental settings, processes or approaches accessible? And then:

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- To whom are they accessible?
- Under what conditions?
- For which tasks?

When we talk about accessibility, we need focus on:

- Accessible educational materials;
- Accessible formats;
- Accessible technologies;
- Assistive technology.

Differentiating instruction means that the teacher anticipates the differences in student's readiness, interests, and learning profiles and, as a result, creates different learning paths so that students have the opportunity to learn as much as they can as deeply as they can, without undue anxiety because the assignments are too taxing—or boredom because they are not challenging enough. Differentiation can look very different in various classrooms because teachers use numerous strategies and tools to instruction. Regardless of the specific combination of techniques, however, effectively differentiated classrooms share several key characteristics:

1. Differentiated instruction is proactive.
2. Differentiated instruction is more qualitative than quantitative.
3. Differentiated instruction is rooted in assessment.
4. Differentiated instruction provides multiple approaches to content, process, product, and affect/learning environment.
5. Differentiated instruction is student-centred.
6. Differentiated instruction is a blend of whole-class, group, and individual instruction.
7. Differentiated instruction is “organic.” Teaching constantly evolves through collaboration between students and teachers, which includes setting class and individual goals. (Tomlinson, 1999; Tomlinson, 2008; Tomlinson, 2013; Tomlinson, 2014; D’Alonzo & Sala, 2023)

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

When Educational materials could be accessible?

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Educational materials created by UDL approach, allow to create material, in different format (print, digital, graphics, audio), that are designed or enhanced in a way that makes them usable across the widest range of learner's need, including learners with disabilities.

What about the formats?

There are several different formats to provide the same information in another way to address the barriers traditional materials can present for some learners. Examples of accessible formats include audio, Braille, large print, tactile graphics, and digital text conforming to accessibility standards.

When technology solutions could be defined as accessible?

When technologies such as hardware or software are universally designed, have a common setting which permits accessibility. Nowadays more technologies are created by this approach and in the setting area, the disabled people can manage the views option, add accessible fonts, manage the audio input, and reduce the motor skills necessary in using the tools. They are technologies for all but customized based on the customer's needs.

What about Assistive Technology?

When technologies are designed to address specific barriers for learners with disabilities, they represent an assistive technology. Examples of assistive technology are the text-to-speech tool, screen readers for visual impairments, and speech recognition. Assistive technology is created to reply to a specific need. These tools are for a specific customer. Nowadays the debate around this topic focuses on the possibility to create digital tools designed for everybody.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND ACCESSIBILITY IN UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE AND THE NETWORK OF CNUDD (ITALY)

“The Catholic University is an academic community that contributes to the development of studies, scientific research, and the preparation of young people for research, teaching, public and private offices, and free professions. The Catholic University fulfils these tasks through adequate higher education and education informed by the principles of Christianity,

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respecting the autonomy proper to every form of knowledge, and according to a conception of science at the service of the human person and of civil coexistence [...]" (Art. 1 paragraph 2 Bylaws of the Catholic University).

This is the incipit of the first article of the Statute. The academic community is engaged in the task of formation. Welcoming the student to the Catholic University means initiating with him and for him a project to promote himself and his personal fulfilment. This focus applies to everyone, no one excluded: the University is first and foremost a context in which and on which to work to ensure an inclusive experience, as the WHO indicates in the ICF, International Classification of Functioning and Health. Also in the Vygotskian vision, learning is a socio-educational process that requires the co-presence of several figures and is established within a precise context that may be more or less functional to the process itself. The athenaeum accepts these directions and makes them its own.

The presence of the Inclusion Service, from 1999, is renewed in the choice of proposing a well-structured pedagogical approach oriented toward an inclusive horizon. The activities promoted by the Integration Service, in full compliance with the Statute of the University, aim to prepare the necessary measures to guarantee the right of students with disabilities and with DSA to actively participate in cultural, educational, and research activities as well as to benefit from the University Integration Service by identifying effective facilitators and eliminating barriers to learning or reducing their negative impact.

In Italy, THE CNUDD (Conferenza Nazionale Universitaria dei Delegati per la Disabilità) has been working since 2001 as an instrument capable of representing the policies and activities of Italian Universities towards disabled students and issues related to disability. The Legge 17 of 28 January 1999 (Integration and amendment of the Legge-quadro of 5 February 1992, n. 104, for assistance, social integration and the rights of disabled people, published in the Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 26 of 2 February 1999) has issued specific directives to Italian universities creating the figure of the Delegate for disabilities, mandatory in each university, providing specific directives regarding the activities to be carried out in favour of disabled university students and providing for the disbursement of funding in a specific chapter of the FFO (Fondo di Finanziamento Ordinario).

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Each University is required to provide services for the integration of disabled students, among which the Law provides for the use of technical and teaching aids, the establishment of specialized tutoring services, as well as individualized treatment for passing exams. In each university, the Rector's Delegated Professor for Disabilities carries out the functions of coordination, monitoring and support for all the initiatives necessary for the integration of disabled students within their own university.

The main purpose of the CNUDD is to allow the exchange of information and experiences between the various universities and to share some guidelines for the activities of all the universities by activating the services necessary to implement the regulations envisaged by the Legge 17/99 and trying to respond in the most appropriate way to the needs of disabled students in their university education.

The CRUI (Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università Italiane) has expressed its full willingness to collaborate with the CNUDD as the coordination instrument of university actions in favour of disabled students (<https://www.cruai.it/cnudd.html>).

CASEWORK: THE STORY OF GRETA

This section will report one story, an interview of a student with disabilities, and mediation actions for breaking down cultural and learning barriers experienced. The story is taken from the text: D'Alonzo (2021) "Vite reali: la disabilità tra destino e destinazione" ("Real lives: disability between destiny and destination"). In this book it is possible to read some interviews to young people with disability, their life experience and their careers in the Italian school and in university.

Greta is a 28-year-old visually impaired young woman. She was born in Milan where she lives with her parents, two older sisters and her grandmother. As a child she fell ill with a hereditary autoimmune disease which forced her to frequent operations (especially on the eyes) and long periods in the hospital. In addition to eye problems, there are other physical pathologies, which in some periods make her life very difficult and painful. These frequent hospitalizations and the surgical operations to which she is subjected are a strong and intense memory. The frequent absences from school are compensated for by the presence of two attentive and

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very present parents who support her and by the possibility of attending the typhlo pedagogical consultancy centre of the Instituto dei ciechi in Milan, where she is helped with specific educational aspects, books of text transcribed into Braille and other didactic material.

Despite the many sufferings, she presents herself to the interviewer full of confidence and joy, positive and a lover of nature, reading, music and figurative art (fashion in particular). She likes to study:

Q: *Make an introduction of yourself, liberally.*

G: *My name is Greta, [...] I have two older sisters, so I am the runt. I love the element of water in general; I love reading so much; I love to learn about anything - I'm an extremely curious person about the world around me, but most of all, I'm curious about people. I would say that I also really like art and music, even the more aesthetic part [...] as a result of my personal story. I can perceive, according to my possibilities, figurative art, especially the dimension of fashion, which is a more modern part of figurative art. I enjoy the world of fragrances, which, I must say, by olfactory election, is one of the senses I have most developed. As a child, I had a hereditary disease that led me to have many surgeries, to be hospitalized a lot, and to almost completely lose my sight. I can't see almost totally anymore: something is left, but very little. Health is something I care a lot [...]*

Greta recalls her first eye operations:

Q: *Is it a feeling [the consciousness of diversity], then, that has always accompanied you? Did you feel it within yourself?*

G: *In fourth grade [into primary school], I had very heavy eye surgeries because of a haemorrhage of the choroid, the part in front of the retina - a very delicate area to operate on. They had to operate on me so many times and I was also absent from school for several months. That time, for a while, I was really in the dark; I had to be very careful and only put myself in certain positions. When the choroid came off, which was also a very painful event, for several weeks I experienced darkness [...]*

Q: You can say "I was in the dark" because you were seeing it before. Is it, at that point, that you became aware of it?

G: I can say that because at that point I became aware of the darkness, a darkness that, it may seem a paradox, I had never seen. Not seeing the light for me was the thing that made me most aware. I always told myself that what I wanted to be able to see was the sunlight and the setting sun. The first words I said to the doctor before my surgery at Monza Hospital was that I hoped to be able to see the sunset again. "I hope I can please you. I'm not telling you that I can get you back the way you were, because you had a bad haemorrhage," he told me. The promise of the setting sun was fulfilled, and I was delighted. When I then went back to school and also had to start using different tools, typhoon-technical and typhloinformatics (I used to read enlarged, but at that time I switched to computers) there was perhaps a determined transition to the world of disability. It was there before as well, but that moment represented a radical change [...]

Q: Going back to the use of typhlo technical tools, it is very interesting to point out your achievement of greater awareness. What memories do you have?

G: Thinking back to primary school, for example, it was immediately obvious how different I was from the others: I was the only one in the class who used a computer, the only one, above all, who had to learn Braille, [...] all that instrumental apparatus cost me a lot of effort. "My goodness! I have to!" I used to say. Braille was hard, but at the same time it intrigued me. Instead, being able to write on the computer, being able to use speech synthesis, and being able to read things back, was a relief both in terms of time and effort. I used to struggle so much for reading, partly because of the amount of clinical eye surgeries I had undergone. In the beginning, reading for me was exhausting.

Greta attended a private primary school.

Q: What was your experience like in primary school?

G: I was a very happy child going to school. I liked it. I must say I was also very interested in learning. However, there was something about that school, which called itself inclusive, that was jarring, and some attitudes or situations hurt me.

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[...] I understood that being in school was a certain fact but I had to be a little bit on the sidelines. As if I, compared to the others, was a minor character, an extra, or in any case a little bit different and that I, therefore, had to try in every way to be as unpleasant as possible. [...] there were any discriminatory incidents, but overall, I perceived a climate that probably even the adults were not able to understand. It was like an air that one breathed, a trend that was not oppositional but certainly not welcoming. [...] I was experiencing inadequacy and blaming myself a lot. [...]

The experience of some more attentive teachers and a support teacher who trusts her and believes in her potential give Greta the strength to continue studying.

Q: *Was that the whole primary cycle? Or did something happen that changed the situation?*

G: *There was a support teacher who came in fourth grade who was with me for two years. Very good educationally and very creative. She was the first teacher who really believed in my potential [...] She gave me the strength to keep learning, and to keep going in school; even though in middle school I did not have professors who valued me as much as I had hoped, I continued with that tenacity and passion to keep going that she had passed on to me. Even if I always found a hostile environment in school at home, I had parents who always conveyed enthusiasm to me ... [...]*

In middle school Greta attends a public school, but she is discriminated by some teachers. Her parents decide to return to private school, even if this requires a heavy financial commitment.

Q: *How was the "re-entry," if we can call it that, into the more familiar environment?*

G: *A very good re-entry educationally, in the sense that I had very good professors [...] I met many classmates again but found them changed. They were already teenagers. I, probably, in emotional terms was more mature but on others, I was not. I did not understand certain attitudes toward female rivalry, conflict, or small groups. Also, I noticed that if in primary school my visual difficulty for my classmates was acquired, now it was noticed more. A silly example: I used to do tests on the computer and teachers would give me the paper on a USB, just as classmates were given printed sheets, I would hear jokes like "On your paper, there are*

already answers." A silly thing, but it was still a behaviour that hurt me because, on grades, I never felt favoured in any way. [...]

Q: *Certainly, these are burdens that have remained anchored in your memory. How was the other important transition, to secondary School?*

G: *The start at secondary School was also not easy. The path to full inclusion and equal opportunity is still the result of bumpy travails, constant tenacity, and positive belief about the future. The transition was a tiny bit troubling at first, as I had not been able to continue, like many of my classmates, at the same institution. In this case, however, there was no longer any gesture of generosity but outright discrimination. The school openly refused to enrol me in high school; there was also pressure from other families against my enrolment. I developed the conviction that, in those parents, there was an unlovely afterthought: the inability to admit that one (one, in this case) disabled person could turn out to be better than their non-disabled children. [...] There had been no chance to enrol me in any of the classical high schools which I had tried, and in the end, I enrolled in a language high school. We already knew the principal of that school, and we knew that they were very attentive people there, not so much to disability in particular, but to valuing differences in all their forms. The school I was coming from said, "We look at excellence," they, on the other hand, were guided by the San Vincentian charism, thus inspired by helping others, caring for illness, and valuing all human characteristics. The first year was hard because it was a different environment. People who came from other schools with difficult family backgrounds, new subjects. Nevertheless, this reality then became an infinite grace and richness; both from the point of view of classmates, subjects, and professors. I became so passionate about languages - yet in middle school I did not like English - that I almost thought I would continue studying them in college. [...]*

GRETA PROGRESS AND EVENTS

A turning point in Greta's story is the transition from high school to university.

Q: *What direction did your educational path take? Was it an easy choice? Did you have any doubts?*

G: *Economics appeared! It was a bit like everything in my life, with some stages and an epiphany. I always liked history in its economic aspects, and during the last two years of high*

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school, I followed the economic-political debate a lot. In the institute, we were also hosting the Technical Commercial Institute, and one day, senior year, the economics professor of the technician gave a plenary lecture to all of us fifth graders on the economic crisis. He dwelt on the behavioural aspects related to economics, explaining how it is man's behaviours that move the economy, such as the fall of the stock market after the attack on the Twin Towers. I had become passionate and interested, even though the topic was far from linguistic. I had heard one of my classmates talking about taking the test at Bocconi for the Economics course in English.

Q: The question, as you continue your story, is about teachers: who were the ones who played a crucial role, the ones who allowed you to take a step forward?

G: The crucial teachers, for me, were encountered in college. [...] In high school overall, I felt welcomed as I was. I never perceived from my professors that my disability was a problem. [...] It is important how those who are in the educational position look at you. And, in those professors, the gaze was right: I was a person to them.

In college, I was amazed by meeting the professor of Business Administration and Management. I had shown up in Bocconi intimidated to ask if he thought I could take the test, and take the course, and he replied that he did not understand what the problem was. He, who is blind, said to me, "Miss, as you see I'm here, I'm perfectly fine with it and I don't understand why you shouldn't be here too." [...] that point, I tried the test and was admitted. I studied business administration and management in a bachelor's degree program.

The three-year degree was very good and very intense. There were important professors here, who leave their mark, like the professor I mentioned earlier, who followed me the whole time and also played an effective role in some respects. [...] the economics professor was an effective figure. He asked a lot of the students but was a point of reference. The other figure I encountered was on the second-year budget exam. It was a complex, very difficult exam, the terror of all students. In class I was so focused on not missing a single word from the professor, I would come out of those lectures devastated but I was so passionate about it. This lecturer had a strong feeling for the discipline, to the point where she could make you love accounting, a subject that seems so dry. I took the written exam not with her but with the course leader: he had the paper in front of him and I dictated what to write. [...]

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Q: *What is your present like and what destination are you heading toward?*

G: *At present, I am doing my doctorate in Management and Innovation at the Catholic University. In life, I always felt that I had several plans B, C, and D because, in my opinion, we all have to have them but with a disability even more. When I finished university, I felt the doctorate was a "calling." Meeting these teaching figures gave me the impetus, without presumption, to take up the doctoral program with conviction because, having experienced my skin, in my school years, the meaning of partial or lack of acceptance, of not feeling recognized by teachers, I strongly desire, in addition to the commitment of research, to be of help to those students as shy as I was, as uncertain and unsure as I was, in my future profession as a university teacher. So, after graduation, I rolled up my sleeves and set out to try to write a research project. [...] I took the oral for admission. It was a very nice exam because there were three strict but welcoming commissioners, they asked questions more on a personal level to test whether we were motivated. Knowing how difficult and articulate an academic career is, the commissioners went to check the motivation thoroughly. The next day the email came with a positive outcome and I was overjoyed. This was one of the milestones of my life [...] I am living a present that makes me active.*

Q: *In your future, after all the steps taken, the stumbles but also the achievements, what do you see?*

G: *I have learned to live day by day. [...] However, as a dream, I see a very simple future. Full of good things: certainly, to be able to stay in college and one day become a professor. To have a family, a home, to be a mom.*

Greta is open to life, full of hope. Her awareness grew through many painful experiences. However, in June 2023 Greta completed her PhD in Management and Innovation. She closes the interview talking about equal opportunities, the recognition of human diversity and the fight against prejudices. She started travelling in Europe and participates in international conferences. She publishes her works in national and international magazines.

THE LABORATORY: “PUT YOURSELF IN MY SHOES “

This is an outreach event held annually at Sacred Heart Catholic University with the intent of having participants experience visual, motor, and hearing disabilities to raise awareness of the entire academic community concerning special educational needs.

Students with disabilities will mentor participants and guide them to put on their shoes to understand the way they experience the university and raise awareness about inclusion.

1.VIDEO:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48hWv5h_IUg&pp=ygUbTWV0dGl0aSBuZWkgbWllaSBwYW5uaSB1Y3Nj

2.VIDEO:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWNFvfhxID8&pp=ygUbTWV0dGl0aSBuZWkgbWllaSBwYW5uaSB1Y3Nj>

CONCLUSION AND THOUGHTS FOR THE FUTURE

The history of Inclusive Education at school and social equity in Italy boasts fifty years of experience and production also from a legislative point of view (Accessibility Italian Law “Legge Stanca”, 9 January 2004, n. 4 - G.U. n. 13 del 17 January 2004-, based on "Provisions to promote the access of disabled people to information technology tools").

In Italy, there are specific Laws on Inclusion and also about Accessibility to regulate criteria and procedures for the construction of web spaces accessible to all, no one excluded.

Certainly, the interest in this issue is transversal and global, and there are numerous scientific references to support the necessary work for the removal of barriers of all kinds: from architectural barriers to cultural and digital ones.

Including and promoting accessibility is a constantly open project at Catholic University. Welcoming students to the University means contributing to their education and, more importantly, allowing them opportunities for personal and social growth. Living university life also means learning how to move in society: Nobody excluded.

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