

Integrazione Scolastica in Italy:

A Compilation of English-Language Resources

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

Background Information and Context

This English-language resource compilation was initiated as a foundational step in preparing for a three-month sabbatical stay in Italy (September-November 2011) to study the policies and practices of including students w

currently available and to better understand elements of *integrazione scolastica* that might inform our own practices.

We recognize that relying on English-language literature is a significant limitation to understanding *integrazione scolastica*

universities and 16 schools in five regions of Italy (i.e.,

Glossary of Key Terms

Asilo nido

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

Assistente

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

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

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

Bisogni educativi speciali (BES)

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

Certificazione di disabilità

A *certification of disability* is issued by a medical/legal board at the local health authority to establish that a student has an eligible disability under Italian law and regulations based on the

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

Diversamente abile

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

Educatore

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

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

for the preparation of insegnante di sostegno, which currently are not available. During this waiting period

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

national Ministry of Education.

Orientamento scolastico

Vocational counseling in schools (or in private centers) refers to support provided by vocational counselors (consulenti di orientamento) or teachers with specific training, to assist individuals in choosing their subsequent level of schooling. For example, vocational counseling is provided as students are completing middle school (scuola secondaria I) to assist them in choosing the type of high school (secondaria II) they will attend (i.e., liceo, technical, professional). Similarly, as students complete high school (secondaria II), vocational counseling is provided to assist them in making decisions about attending university, other post-secondary

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

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

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

Scuola dell'infanzia

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

Scuola primaria

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

Scuola secondaria I

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

media (middle

Art and science are free and teaching them is free. The Republic lays down general rules for

prevention

Article 5

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

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

By 1996 approximately 98% of students with disabilities

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

In 2007 both Italy and the European Union signed the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. In 2008 it took effect after the 20th country ratified this landmark treaty. In 2009 Italy ratified both the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and the *Optional Protocol*, a side agreement to the Convention that allows its parties to recognize the competence of the *Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* to consider complaints from individuals; the European Union ratified in 2010. In 2010 Law 170/2010, recognized dyslexia, dysorthography, dysgraphia and dyscalculia as a specific learning disorders. While these are still not considered "disabilities" in Italy they are

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lastly, D'Alessio

in Italian schools. D'Alessio examines both the history and modern practices of *integrazione scolastica*. The text highlights educational, structural and cultural constraints that require a student to receive a certification

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

The authors explore the reasons why there is so much turnover in support teacher positions in Italy. *Insegnanti di sostegno* frequently ask for redeployment as general education classroom teachers after only a few years after gaining their qualification to work with students who have disabilities, leaving many children without qualified support while local authorities try to fill vacant positions. Examples of concerns expressed by *insegnante di sostegno* in Italy included: (a) feeling blamed by teachers and parents if students do not progress adequately, (b) questioning their own professional abilities and self-efficacy to meet students' educational needs, (c) challenges collaborating with medical team members outside the school, (d) heavy workloads, (e) unclear roles and unresolved discrepancies in expectations among school personnel and families, (f) administrative discontinuity in annual assignments that interfere with them working with the same children, and (g) collaboration challenges with classroom teachers, especially when some still want the *insegnante di sostegno* to take the student with a disability out of the classroom to receive support. Contrary to the spirit of the law, some support teachers report that they are not perceived as part of a team,

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

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

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

Recent research in inclusion-oriented schools in the United States has begun to document how a variety of demographic and service delivery variables (e.g., percent of students identified

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Following the publication of the earlier article by Vianello & Lanfranchi (2009) about deficit and surplus functioning, the journal editors invited four sets of authors with backgrounds in inclusive education from the US and Malta to write reactions and responses to the article that

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

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

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

Findings confirmed the hypothesis that different beliefs of teachers were distributed across different factors based on experience and attitudes toward inclusion. For example, teachers with both experience and positive attitudes were strongly opposed to special schools, considered the presence of a student with a disability enriching, and felt the support

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

Lesson 1: Position yourself as a learner

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

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

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

Lesson 2: Understanding educational practices requires understanding culture and history

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

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

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

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

Living in a foreign place following local patterns of daily existence offers learning opportunities that cannot be accessed in the cocoon of a rental car and hotel room. As much or more so than any visit to a school, university, or conference, it was during these less formal day-

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

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

Lesson 4: Even accurate information can be misleading

As we embarked on our sabbatical preparatory reading, limited to only English-language resources, temporarily we fell prey to the old adage, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." In retrospect, with the benefit of hindsight, it was

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

During our stay in Italy we collected school demographic data at each of the 16 schools we visited. The data represented a subset of variables similar to those we had collected in US schools (e.g., total school population, class size, number of special educators, number of assistants, number of students with disabilities, number of students with disabilities placed in general education classes at least 80% of the school day). We wanted to share the data and bette

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Appendix B

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

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

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

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

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

29 Salamanca Statement and

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