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Paolina Mulè
[edited by]

Inclusion, Citizenship and Intercultural Dialogue

Some International Perspectives



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Chi fotocopiasse un libro, chi mette a disposizione i mezzi per fotocopiare, chi comunque favorisce questa pratica commette un furto ed opera ai danni della cultura.

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The Methodological Considerations about the Concept of Culture: significance for Inclusion Research in Italy and Russia

by Alexey Shemanov

Abstract: In this paper, different understandings of culture are discussed because they influence professionals' attitudes to the inclusion and thus determine the implementation of inclusion policy. The social model of disability is considered as a theoretical framework which pretends to be a basis for the inclusion policy, and the argumentation against social model is analyzed. Vygotskian theory interpreted as the theory of development of individual as correlated with the history of culture is discussed as a possible framework of integration policy. The study also endeavors considering some cases in the field of inclusion research in Russia and Italy to demonstrate the dependence between the understanding of culture and the possible ways of implementation of inclusion policy, and to show that the way of including of learners with special educational needs (with disabilities, from migrants' families, etc.) depends on understanding of culture and on structuring perspective of care reflecting image of human being. This image of human being and view on culture together determine understanding of human rights and their hierarchy and consequently they also determine the way of implementation of inclusion in different countries.

Keywords: inclusion, integration, culture understanding, social model, image of human being, Vygotskian theory

Introduction

The culture is one of the key concepts in inclusion researches because this notion is widely used in discussions within the framework of social-constructionist model of social and cultural differences (of disability, for example), i.e. so-called social model. This model aims to deconstruct socially constructed oppositions produced in the culture (such as normal – deviant, ability – disability, etc.) and is suggested as a ground of inclusion policy and practice. As Tanya Titchkoski states, '[e]very image of disability is an image of culture' (Titchkoski, 2009, p. 77).

The social model as a framework of critical cultural studies in the field of disability research plays an important role in challenging the defectiveness-based medical model which is the basis of special education of people with disabilities. Therefore, Roger Slee proposes that 'inclusive education, according to this conception, becomes a field of cultural politics with the objective of social reconstruction' (Slee, 2008, p. 106). Though the dominance of the social model of disability was interrogated using post-structural and feminist approaches, this interrogation was made within the framework of disability studies (Slee, 2008, p. 105), i.e. again from point of view of critical cultural studies methodology. Also when the inclusion as idea was under the criticism, this criticism was often fulfilled from the cultural theory's point of view, e.g., as it was made by Anna Hickey-Moody (Hickey-Moody, 2003, p. 11ff), who uses such notion as 'cultures of intellectual disability', and others like that. Chris Abbott underlines the importance of constructivist and socio-cultural theories for debating of e-inclusion, i.e. using of digital technologies to minimize learning difficulties (Abbott, 2007).

Another important topic in the field of inclusive education is a question if school culture corresponds or does not correspond to the aims of inclusion or, in other words, an issue of inclusive culture, i.e. whether the culture does or does not promote inclusion in school. The ways of discussions of that topic depend on how the inclusion is interpreted by its promoters (Corbett, 1999, Zollers et al., 1999, Carrington & Elkins, 2003, Nind et al., 2004, Ainscow & Sandill, 2010, Moliner Miravet & Moliner García, 2013).

In this paper, different understandings of culture are discussed

because they influence professionals' attitudes to inclusion and thus determine the implementation of inclusion policy.

1. Culture: Different uUnderstandings

The project of inclusion could be considered as an implementation of the intention to change the theoretical framework of understanding the processes of social integration, and it also could be considered as continuing the integration policy. According to Parsons' sociology, for example, social integration could be taken as a permanent function of the social system. In that case, this function is performed by culture as a subsystem fulfilling the integration by means of cultural common values which are shared by social actors (Turner, 1991, pp. xviii-xxi). However, within the framework of the social model which is often accepted as underlying the inclusion project, consideration of inclusion as a kind of social integration is usually seen as inconsistent with the inclusion principles. For example, in the paper written by J. Corbett, integration is contrasted with inclusion because the concept of integration emphasizes the individuals' efforts to integrate themselves into the mainstream culture, but the concept of inclusion underlines the society's efforts to accept all persons with their peculiar properties. Or, as J. Corbett writes, the inclusion "creates a climate of receptivity, flexibility and sensitivity" [Corbett, 1999, p. 59]. To create such climate, the deconstruction of stigmatizing and discriminating categorizations of people and barriers of culture for them is usually suggested in a framework of the social model.

Anna Hickey-Moody believes the 'cultures of disability' is one of the main concepts both in artwork performed with disabled people and in the disability studies. Analyzing in her paper the principles of Australian dance theatre's artwork (Restless Dance Company), she agrees with a statement of the theatre director that belonging to a culture of intellectual disability offers possible means of 'forging individual identity' for actors with disability in this theatre company [Hickey-Moody, 2003, p.11].

Hickey-Moody tries to substantiate that worth of culture of intellectual disability is no less than worth of culture of people with-

out disability, and she does it in two ways. First, with the help of philosophical considerations based on Deleuze and Guattari's approach, she theoretically argues worth of thought and body are incomparable because they belong to different planes and therefore there are no grounds to ascribe a privileged status to thought and make it the measure of body and cultures based on it [Hickey-Moody, 2003, p.8-9]. She suggests: "Drawing upon the work of Benedict Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari argue that matter, or substance, has an intrinsic worth that cannot be judged in relation to thought. Thought is 'imagination', a product of matter, and has an intrinsic value of its own. Yet the value of thought is qualitatively different to the value of matter; the two entities 'operate on different planes'" [Hickey-Moody, 2003, p.8]. Not discussing the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, or Spinoza, we can note that matter (or substance) and thought are contraposed as source and product within this argument. But the main claim here is that each of them has its own intrinsic value because both entities 'operate on different planes'. Second, Hickey-Moody points out theatre artwork of Restless Dance Company was built on the principle that the disability has a creative primacy in this theatre, and actors without disability perform logistical functions in theatre machine [Hickey-Moody, p.10-14].

Hickey-Moody shares the constructionist framework accepted in critical cultural studies and mainly in disability studies. It means that cultural meanings are considered as fluid and becoming products of social constructing, which does not represent the real world, but are stabilized and fixed only with power interests or other factors (like, e.g., relations between fragmented body experience, imaginative level and symbolic order in the process of self-becoming, according to J. Lacan). Hickey-Moody's reasoning seems to combine a constructionist explanation of the cultural meaning's permanent becoming and constructing, and a *sui generis* essentialism, i.e. assertion of essential differences among people which have different bodies, essentialism based on Deleuze and Guattari philosophy. The variety of human body differences turns out multiple cultures of disability. As Hickey-Moody proposes, "there is no singular and containable 'culture of disability'. Rather, we can but speak of 'cultures' of disability". Thus, the diversity of cultures rep-

resents the variety of essential body differences among people. Hickey-Moody claims the inclusion idea presupposes the acceptance of singular and containable 'culture of disability' and therefore ignores essential body differences among people and diversity of cultures of disability. In the framework of inclusion, she believes, the value of cultures of people with intellectual disability and their worth are diminished. She sets the Restless Dance Company as a good example of artwork including people with intellectual disability which regards the intellectual disability as a power and a benefit of actors in this theatre where their bodily peculiarities are accepted and used in creative way.

Anastasiou and Kauffmann consider the whole social-constructionist approach (social model) as a kind of cultural determinism which excludes other views on notions deconstructed with its help, e.g. disability [Anastasiou & Kauffmann, 2011, p.376]. According to the postmodern version of social constructionism, the notion of disability is an arbitrary narrative, similar to a fairy tale, constructed from cultural beliefs and used by different institutions for their needs [Anastasiou & Kauffmann, 2011, p.373]. Scientific content of disability is also regarded by social constructionists only as a way professionals implement their interests (in science, medicine, etc.). From the point of view of these authors, the cultural analysis of disability does not question scientifically established knowledge of its different forms and special education practices based on it, because this knowledge is culturally irrelevant and expresses scientific truth, though in approximate way, which is possible to correct in further investigations.

Following the logic of these authors, it is possible to say that although science is a product of history it does not mean that scientific knowledge has no objective significance, and it also concerns the knowledge of person features. However, concerning disability and ways of supporting people with disability, the question is different. The evaluation of human abilities or disabilities is always related not only to exact knowledge of person features, but also to what is considered normal and unnatural in society and could turn out stigmatizing and discriminative effects. The professional belongs to the society and thus often shares its beliefs and prejudices in a nonreflexive way. What professionals would call normal devel-

opment or state and what is deviation depends on how s/he understands what it means to be human being as such. And scientific tools do not give an answer to the question. This answer is rather determined by implicit normative anthropology of professional, i.e. an image of human being which structures professional practices [Meininger, 2001, p.14-15]. As an example of such structuring perspective (normative anthropology), Meininger suggests the now dominating modern conception of autonomous individual which also determines objectives of care concerning people with intellectual disability. He notes that the image of human being as autonomous individual and objectives of care which are followed with such image do not correspond neither the developmental needs of a person with severe intellectual disability, nor her/his vision of the world and her/himself. Meininger suggests changing a structuring perspective of care and accepting authenticity in the community as its ground.

The social model as a framework of inclusion of people with disabilities was initially suggested by activists advocating for the rights of people with physical disabilities, beginning in the 1970s (see for references: Anastasiou & Kauffmann, 2011, p.367). The position of advocating for the rights of people with disabilities could also be used in arguing against inclusion. For example, Hall argues that people with disabilities could easier fight for their rights and support their common values, attitudes and their common culture if they had a possibility to learn and communicate with each other, but not in inclusion settings [Hall, 2002]. It is worth mentioning that the position originating from the idea of fighting for rights seems to belong implicit normative anthropology of autonomous individual in Meininger's words and therefore one could hardly expect people with severe intellectual disability to maintain it. If their rights to live in consistence with their own mode of existence were recognized by the community they belong to, this recognition itself would not contribute anything neither to their development, nor to the acquisition of skills to communicate with other people. Thus, to supporters of special education, on the one hand, and of integration model beginning in the 1970s, on the other, this discrepancy gives a basis for their argumentation against social model as a framework of inclusion.

Next understanding of culture which should be considered is Vygotsky's cultural-historical conception. According to the Hickey-Moody's view mentioned above, the variety of body experiences turns out multiplicity of disability cultures. Concerning the artwork of the dance theatre, Hickey-Moody describes different functions of actors with and without intellectual disability. She states equal cultural worth of people with intellectual disability and their creative function in the theatre basing on Deleuze and Guattari's thesis of incomparability of body and thought and of corresponding cultures because they exist in different planes. But she recognizes that actors without disability have logistic functions in theatre's artwork. In other words, they correlate different cultures one with another and thus the possibility of such correlation questions their incomparability declared by Hickey-Moody. She does not suggest any mechanism of this correlation, and moreover such mechanism seems to be impossible following Deleuze and Guattari interpretation of cultures originating from body and thought, respectively.

Vygotskian theory of culturally mediated ontogenesis seems to offer some conceptual tools for interpreting the mechanism of correlation between different cultures. The attractiveness of Vygotskian theory is that the development of an individual correlates with the history of culture. But these conceptual tools seem to use the framework of lower or higher stages of development and thus inevitably consider higher stage as measure for lower one. In Charles Taylor's words, Vygotskian theory could be probably attributed rather to noncultural conceptions which consider the development in categories not related to cultural specificity though this topic needs more thorough consideration [Taylor, 1995, p.24]. But if one applies culturally specific categories, again the problem of comparability of cultures emerges. Taylor suggests speaking about the dialog of different cultures in a framework of their authenticity, but discussing his conception is beyond the purposes of this paper [Taylor, 1991, p.32-33].

2. Some Cases of Inclusion Research in Italy and Russia

The study does not pretend to embrace the broad area of inclusion research in Russia and Italy, but it endeavors considering only some cases in this field to demonstrate the dependence between the understanding of culture and possible ways to implement an inclusion policy.

It is worth noting term ‘culture’ as itself is not used in the N.M. Nazarova’s paper ‘On Education in Russian Federation’ (2012), dedicated to theoretical and methodological outlines of integrated education, (which was) written before the enactment of the new law. It is included only in such Russian compounds that correspond ‘socio-cultural’ or ‘cultural-historical’ when speaking about socio-cultural conditions of learning children with disabilities, or about Vygotskian theory of their development. The (term) integrated education is used as synonymous with inclusive education and this term embraces mainly people with disabilities [Nazarova, 2011]. This standpoint agrees with the one proposed by Anastasiou & Kauffmann. As mentioned above, integration is criticized in the framework of social model that describes integration as an individual model. But Anastasiou & Kauffmann do not agree with such description of integration.

Analyzing the inclusive education in Italy, a scholar from USA Beth A. Ferry gives an example, which she considers a violation of principles of inclusion, but this example reflects well approach of integrative education in Italy (*Integrazione scolastica*). In school where deaf children were taught in regular classes, she met a support teacher (*sostegno*) for deaf children who did not know sign language. She was astonished and asked a reason of that attitude to using sign language. The answer was that it was banned in Italian regular schools. Moreover, she heard the phrase “gesture kills the word” [Ferry, 2006, p.48]. It is worth noting that Ferry considers Italian education being a good example of inclusion’s implementation. She explains this discrepancy by saying that teachers and learners perceive ‘classroom as a family where everyone is valued and belongs’ [Ferry, 2006, p.49]. She underlines the value of belonging to family in Italian culture, whereas USA culture tends to focus on civil rights.

However, it is possible to assume there is no discrepancy between the implementation of inclusive education in Italy and the attitude to gesture language in schools because Italian policy of including people with disability was built as the integration. And that is why teaching is directed on fulfillment of good integration of all the learners in common culture and heritage, i.e. mainly in verbally expressed culture. This model assumes higher evaluation of integration rights for each person in common culture than the right of using own language and the guarantee of communication right. The basis of such attitude seems to be another understanding of culture which belongs to the framework of social integration. Thus, the issue of civil rights is not the privilege of the social model and the conception of inclusion based on it. The interpretation of this issue depends on understanding of culture and purposes of including people with disabilities. It is no accident that the Italian model of inclusive education is called *integrazione scolastica*. Nowadays, this model is currently under pressure both of special education in conditions of reduced funding and of understanding of inclusion based on social model. The latter highlights the fight against discrimination and considers the notion of common culture as social construction directed on oppression of minorities rights [Ferry, 2006, see also, e.g., D'Alessio, 2011].

In Russia, after enacting of new law on education (2012), the concept of inclusive culture is considered in many papers dedicated to issues of inclusive education. They enumerate the principles of inclusive culture such as acceptance and support of diversity in schools, tolerance to others, orientation on high achievements for each learners, and so on. The teachers' skills concerning mastering methods of teaching in conditions of diversity of learners are mentioned as a part of inclusive culture too [Starovoit, 2016]. But in Russian schools, the education law does not provide all the conditions which are implemented in Italian integrative school education, namely reduced maximum size of the class, a support teacher in each classroom and limited number of learners with disabilities per class (no more than two). The main difference is the presence of two teachers in each classroom in Italian schools, when learners group includes learners with disabilities. The support teacher pays attention to the needs of all the students in the group, and his/her

competences embrace special and general education skills. In Russia, teachers of general education often do not have sufficient skills to teach in diverse learners' groups, so they see their task rather in translating knowledge and skills to whole group. However, teaching has recently been changing in the direction of more constructivist methods, inspiring learners to interact actively in the process of learning. However, in Russia, teachers remain under strong bureaucracy pressure and control, and they do not often perceive their work as a creative one [Kulagina, 2014].

That is why recommendations concerning the creating of inclusive culture in schools mainly embrace advice to teachers on creating the climate of receptivity, tolerance in learners groups, and so on. Thus, the task of implementation of inclusion is reduced to issues of acceptance of diversity in the learners group and it is isolated from the task of providing high educational outcomes for all the learners. This prevalence of one task in relation to another mission of inclusive education could probably be explained by the dominance of social-constructionist model and the corresponding vision of culture.

Conclusion

Thus, the way of including learners with special educational needs (with disabilities, from migrants' families, etc.) depends on understanding of culture and on structuring perspective of care that reflects the image of human being (normative anthropology in Meiner's words) which often corresponds to this understanding. This image of human being and the view on culture together determine the understanding of human rights and their hierarchy. Consequently, they also determine the way of implementation of inclusion in different countries. For the realization of policy in this area, it is important to choose priorities concerning these values and the image of the desired future.

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