

INCLUSIVE ASSESMENT? A POSSIBLE APPROACH. DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE EVALUATION THROUGH UNCONVENTIONAL EVALUATION APPROACHES

UNA VALUTAZIONE INCLUSIVA? UNA SCOMMESSA POSSIBILE. REALIZZARE UNA VALUTAZIONE INCLUSIVA ATTRAVERSO APPROCCI VALUTATIVI NON CONVENZIONALI

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ABSTRACT

In debates on didactics and, more generally, in the world of education, assessment of learning is one of the most important pedagogical topics.

Assessment is the cornerstone of scientific research as it assumes a new centrality in the human and social sciences.

This paper highlights the crucial role of assessment in learning contexts and how the pedagogical actions of the teacher can be seen as central to developing students' cognitive processes.

La valutazione inclusiva deve essere parte integrante della professionalità del docente. Essa si configura come uno strumento imprescindibile di decisioni poiché il docente, mentre osserva e verifica gli apprendimenti, monitora l'efficacia della sua azione didattica e ricalibra la sua progettazione. La valutazione dell'apprendimento va considerata come un'attività il cui scopo è quello di adeguare l'insegnamento ai bisogni formativi di tutti gli studenti.

KEYWORDS

Narrative assessment, formative autobiography, inclusion assessment, primary school

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Introduction

There is more and more discussion about assessment in the school system. Indeed, binomial quality of assessment is high on a hypothetical top ten list of pedagogically correct. Apparently, no educational action, no teaching-learning process is meaningful without proper assessment. In fact, learning in schools has always been assessed.

Over time, the action itself has accompanied and continues to accompany the lives of the younger generations, even if the methods, styles, tools and effects of assessment have changed. From an etymological point of view, assessment does not only mean estimation, but also the attribution of value. It is precisely this second meaning that should guide the evaluative action of the teacher: to estimate implies a static attitude, that of an observer who, as an expert, sums up how much knowledge has been transmitted to the learner.

Assessing, on the other hand, implies a dynamic attitude in which the expert does not only observe and quantify, but first of all knows the learner, his characteristics, his learning style and his strengths and weaknesses.

This enables him to prepare assessment methods and tools that are suitable for determining the quality as well as the quantity of the knowledge that the learner has acquired.

In addition, the evaluation process requires the awareness and active participation of the person being evaluated. In this sense, the act of evaluation is a powerful tool for strengthening the constructs of self-esteem and self-efficacy, which are fundamental to the motivation to learn.

Understood in this way, assessment is inherently inclusive. It responds simultaneously to the need for individualisation and personalisation.

What is inclusive assessment? It means transferring the assessment of learning and behaviour to a bio-psycho-social basis, supporting a model of expanding the potential of all students.

The keywords of education reflect the main coordinates of the model of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (OMS, 2001), which supports a unified conception of human nature, focusing in particular on the state of well-being of a given person and the context in which he/she lives (Rondanini, 2019).

Ensuring inclusive assessment for students with disabilities means taking care to value the person as a whole, in his or her entirety, valuing what is present rather than what is missing. It encourages full participation in a school context that facilitates rather than hinders. It allows all students, each according to their zone of proximal development, to develop metacognition and self-regulation, tools capable of generating authentic forms of self-evaluation.

The latter makes use of formative feedback (William, 2011), which must be timely, explicit and focused on the use of cognitive strategies rather than on the learner's ability or commitment.

The new assessment in primary schools emphasises the use and dissemination of non-traditional approaches to assessment, such as narrative assessment (Demetrio, 1996; Carr, 2001; Cullen, Williamson and Lepper, 2005) and formative autobiography (Crispiani, 2004), which encompass a range of modes and tools based on "narrative assessment" and stories that can make the student's own learning process explicit and clear.

1. A new construct for school assessment

Evaluation represents a pervasive concept today; it dominates the educational scene, orients scientific research, governs all social sectors, from administration to politics and economics. Everywhere it is used, evaluation is a catchword, a synonym for evidence, rigour, transparency and democracy (Damiano, 2011).

Evaluate, in its etymological origin, means 'to give value', so its real function is not so much measurement or selection, but the recognition, interpretation and attribution of value to observed data.

Indeed, in the sense of attributing value, evaluation is now more than ever the premise, basis, support, certification and reporting of teaching/learning processes.

This means that in both school self-evaluation and student evaluation, the act of evaluation cannot ignore the specificities of the context. It is only in this way that it borrows and adopts as criteria the concepts that inspire teaching action, that is to say, as we have said, the principle of individualisation and that of personalisation.

Talking about evaluation means dealing with a subject that is closely linked to the design of the educational, didactic and training process. The complexity of this subject is not easy to grasp.

With the ministerial decree no. 172 of December 2020, the concept of assessment in primary schools undergoes a profound transformation, with the abolition of grades expressed in tenths and the reintroduction of descriptive judgements linked to the achievement of specific educational objectives assessed by levels of competence.

The legislator's attempt is to construct a sort of complete overhaul of the assessment system in the knowledge that the numerical grade reveals little about the learning-teaching process that has been achieved.

The construct of assessment for learning aims to promote and enhance the potential of each child. It has a formative character, oriented towards new and different learning. It describes the evidence observed in order to make families and students aware of the state of preparation in a particular discipline. This new ministerial model of assessment in primary education is linked to the idea of a school that goes beyond the transmissive logic and the distinction between curricular and extracurricular to establish itself as an integral and systematic educational environment.

Indeed, the guidance states that "the perspective is that of assessment for learning, which takes on a formative character, since the information gathered is also used to adapt teaching to the concrete educational needs of all students and their learning styles, modifying activities according to what has been observed, starting from what can be improved" (Miur, 2020b, p. 1). (Miur, 2020b, p.1).

The purpose of descriptive assessment is to provide families and students with accurate information about how they are learning according to established criteria and to indicate how to continue their learning.

The guidelines for primary schools also emphasise: "The perspective of assessment for learning is present in the text of the national guidelines, where it is stated that assessment is a regulatory process that precedes, accompanies and follows each curricular process and must make it possible to improve students' learning progress. (Miur, 2020b, p.2)

Descriptive assessment is not the mere summation of the results of different tests, but takes into account the observations that a teacher makes on a daily basis, during school routine, play, teaching moments or during complex problem situations.

For the teacher, it is not simply a question of adapting or applying the new model by integrating it into traditional didactic schemes, but of fundamentally modifying what goes on in the classroom, directing it towards stabilising learning processes in which every student learns to learn according to his or her own cognitive characteristics, which, thanks to didactic experiences, he or she learns to recognise and improve.

Assessment by judgement offers a description that encourages the learner, does not select, does not label, acts as a true documentation and allows continuous self-assessment by the student.

According to the new regulations, formative and summative assessment are complementary. The former aims to intervene in the learning process and aims to improve the learning process, while the latter consists in reporting the results.

With the introduction of descriptive assessment, summative assessment has also become formative, providing rich and reliable information about what has been achieved and what remains to be done for learning.

2. For an inclusive assessment.

It is therefore clear how, from this point of view, the act of evaluation represents a delicate moment, since it is articulated in a plurality of facets, without being "flat-lined" in the monodimensionality of a mere quantitative control, useful in itself, but certainly not sufficient and exhaustive.

Evaluation should be able to guarantee the effectiveness of the processes and the integral development of each one, while respecting all diversity.

This should be done in a logic that we could define as spiral, in that it allows for constant monitoring and therefore continuous adaptation of the pedagogical-didactic design.

Only when this logic permeates the entire educational system will we have a truly inclusive school. Then assessment will be functional for the life project and the well-being of each learner and not just an obligatory act or, worse, an inappropriate weapon to keep students at bay.

In the last fifty years, the Italian debate on educational needs has revolved around three key words: to include, to integrate and to contain.

These terms describe not only the national path from a pedagogical-didactic point of view.

They also describe a normative path: the transition from inclusion to integration, and then from integration to inclusion, does not imply a simple semantic change, but is configured as a formative journey, a process that the entire school community must undertake in a transversal way, based in particular on the values that the concept of inclusion implies: freedom, dignity, solidarity, equality, justice, participation, sustainability, respect for diversity, community, non-violence, trust, honesty (Booth & Ainscow, 2014).

The perspective of full inclusion is based on indispensable aspects such as organisational procedures and their functioning, coordination and cooperation actions, and methodological and didactic actions (Cottini et al., 2016). It requires constant participation and reflection on the content acquired.

The inclusive school is everyone's right and the participation in it is an expression of the dignity, the autonomy and the freedom of the individual. In the future, the inclusive teacher can become the "hub" of the most important issues of the autonomy school and contribute to the design of a school that can become a "laboratory of democracy" for the new educational paradigm that could be outlined as a valuable opportunity for a fairer and more equitable school. (Mulè, 2002)

The main responsibility of schools is to take proactive measures to achieve their goals, which include the promotion of independence, self-awareness, identity development and life planning among students: This process represents the ethical aspect of "inclusion". As such, educational institutions are obliged to modify and meet the needs of all students (Medeghini, 2006).

Building an inclusive school can only happen through teachers as "strategic agents of educational and social inclusion processes, i.e. capable of fully embracing the challenges posed by diversity and the lifelong learning perspective" (Chiappetta Cajola & Cirani, 2013, p. 9).

Both the educational systems and the teaching practices aimed at promoting inclusion need monitoring and evaluation forms that make it possible to review the situation, the strengths and weaknesses, as well as the progress made. This requires structured tools for evaluation and self-evaluation. On the one hand, these tools can enable teachers to "reflect in action" (Damiano, 2007) on the inclusive quality of the context in which they work and on their own inclusive actions, and on the other hand, they can contribute to the regulation and planning of inclusive educational processes.

Teachers' awareness of the formative and emotional impact that assessment can have on learners is paramount. For this reason, it is necessary that the objectives to be assessed are clearly explained to the learners and that they are supported by the consistency of the process actions to be implemented by the teachers. These actions must be included in the Individualised Educational Plan (IEP) at the beginning of the school year.

They must have as a goal the achievement of the learning objectives. Once again, the need to maintain the link between assessment and educational planning emerges: Within the interclass councils, objectives for the development of competences must be identified, modulated and calibrated to the needs of the student with disability.

3. Developing inclusive evaluation through non-traditional evaluation approaches

An assessment is truly inclusive when it succeeds in generating self-assessment. No learning is possible without a real contribution from the learner. Narrative assessment and narrative autobiography are among the various narrative tools that can facilitate self-assessment and the development of learning processes.

The new assessment in primary schools, which includes descriptive judgements, promotes and valorises the use and dissemination of non-traditional approaches to assessment, such as narrative assessment.

Narrative assessment is a set of practices and tools based on narrative and stories that can make the student's learning process explicit and visible. Storytelling is a pedagogical activity par excellence: it is functional for personal growth and for relating to others, and provides the best conditions for expressing one's potential and becoming the author of one's own life.

In the field of education, it is well known that the power of narrative is maintained above all in relation to the construction of the self: according to the argument of Jerome Bruner, a famous American psychologist, narrative, even before being a mode of transmission, is a way (alternative to logical-scientific thinking) by which human beings organise and manage their knowledge of the world, thus structuring their experience (Bruner 1956).

It is a cognitive mode par excellence because it is not only an a posteriori reconstruction of experience, but also provides it with its fabric, i.e. the formats and patterns of experience itself.

Storytelling has a nature that fulfils an essential function in structuring individual and cultural cohesion (Bruner 1990).

It has an important formative potential: it preserves and transmits practical knowledge, it is a significant representation of the teaching-learning pathway, it captures the subject in the narrative, evoking his or her subjective cognitive, but also affective and practical abilities with a more engaging text.

The narrative assessment can help to recover, in the school context, the dimension of sense and meaning that knowledge has for the formation of personal identity, since education is not something separate from the cultural and social context, but exists and is structured within it.

With regard to narrative assessment, Bruner identifies two fundamental points from which to start. The first is the knowledge that every child should have of fairy tales, and the second is the knowledge of the tales typical of one's own cultural tradition and the conviction that storytelling can develop the capacity for imagination.

He developed the idea of the spiral curriculum as an effective way of approaching a subject, inspired by the research of educational psychologists Ann Brown and Joseph Campione.

Starting with an intuitive idea that is understandable and familiar to the student, one gradually moves to more formal explanations in an increasing circular motion until complete understanding is achieved. In this way, any content can be taught to any child.

As long as it is not divorced from a practical understanding of the context in which the reasoning develops. The spiral of knowledge is better developed in the narrative mode.

The narrative form also has its place in science. It is a more intuitive way of understanding and explaining the subjects studied.

The use, for example, of mathematical language offers a double aspect: on the one hand, logical rigour and, on the other, clarity, but even in this case, the use of the narrative mode proves to be useful in order to better highlight the series of connections, the coherent and contradictory aspects that make it possible to understand whether a theory works or has certain aspects that need to be verified. T

The narrative form is so intrinsic and ingrained in our lives that it is sometimes difficult to break free from the automaticity with which we use it. We need to look at the mechanisms and plots of our stories with a critical and conscious eye, and thus be able to act on them in order to improve them. Bruner identifies contrast, confrontation and metacognition as the tools for doing this. The first consists in giving two opposing but plausible interpretations of the same fact; the second comes when we discover that our narrative truth is at odds with what happens next, when our expectations are not met; the third opens up the possibility of building the epistemological foundations on which to base our knowledge of reality, using the necessary tools to orient ourselves in the complex world of narratives.

Thus, according to Bruner, the dimension through which subjective identity is constructed and at the same time openness to the other is "The Narrative Creation of Self" (2002). Narrative is seen as the most biological way of representing reality to oneself and to others. It is therefore of paramount importance that storytelling regains its communicative value by working with the school and its various activities, including assessment. Through narrative it is possible to draw attention to the subjective, hermeneutic and contextual nature of educational action. (Crispiani, 2004).

Narrative assessment is not a solitary act: the primary interlocutor is the person who tells the story, but at the same time the story is also communicated to the person who listens to it. It is intersubjective, it is addressed to the listeners in order to enter their hearts and minds, in order to create relationships of trust and to be an instrument of acceptance.

4. Formative Autobiography

The method used is based on the production of written autobiographies by the participants or on interviews conducted by the researchers, a method that originates in the sociological disciplines. Its first applications in the context of urban sociology have generated a climate of enthusiasm favourable to the

development of new action research programmes based on the sharing of semi-structured interviews and written productions of the participants.

These are oriented towards the centrality of the subject in their own self-learning paths (Bruner, 1988; Demetrio, 1996;).

As early as the 1970s, in the American school context, the educational and training potential of the autobiographical approach was highlighted in relation to the entire life cycle of its users. Its valorisation was stimulated in particular by Bruner's contributions, characterised in particular by the constructivist perspective centred on the active role of the subject in relation to the environmental context and his or her evolutionary history.

Formative autobiography allows the individual to reconstruct his or her own life story, given the reflexive processes that autobiographical writing can trigger. The formative autobiographical approach should be considered not only as a set of reflexive strategies capable of affecting self-learning, but rather as a pedagogical perspective capable of providing elements for the personal maturation of the individual (Cambi, 2002; 2003; Demetrio, 1996; 2008).

The renewed interest in the narrative approach, stimulated by Bruner's contributions in the United States, favoured the spread of the autobiographical approach as a chosen strategy for self-training in our country as well. In particular, the contributions of Demetrio (1996; 1998; 1999; 2008), Cambi (2002, 2003) and Smorti (2006) have been extremely relevant for the understanding of the training possibilities of the approach.

The need for a re-reading of one's own existence from an alternative perspective is in fact one of the fundamental needs of contemporary society, and this is supported by the possibilities for self-understanding that the approach offers (Cambi, 2002; Demetrio, 1999, 2008).

Formative autobiography is an opportunity for learners to play an active role in the organisation of their own experience and in the development of their sense of self-determination.

It has the task of bringing out the learner's point of view, through a personal, informal and free reworking, which can be expressed both orally and in writing.

Through this mode of expression, the student can bring out the following

- The experiences considered most important, such as meeting, researching, discussing, laboratory activities;
- The main moments of learning;
- One's own emotional-relational experience while learning;
- One's self-evaluations regarding one's cognitive growth;
- One's own responsiveness, expectations and general impressions.

Concerning this last point, formative autobiography can help to strengthen personal identity and self-esteem through continuous interpretive practice. It is a place for the meaning that the student gives to his work, the intentions that guided him in the performance of the activities, the emotions that were felt.

Through its use, the student can explain the aspects that interested him, giving reasons. He can also communicate the difficulties he encountered and how he overcame them.

Using the formative autobiography also allows the student to describe the sequence of the operations carried out, highlighting the most frequent errors and possible improvements, expressing his evaluation not only of the final result obtained but also of the learning process followed.

Conclusion

It is necessary to rethink the concept of inclusion, redesigning it according to the principles of inclusive pedagogy (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011), with the aim of promoting, in the mainstream teacher, the adoption of attitudes of shared and widespread responsibility in an ecological perspective.

The pedagogical and didactic features of the tools, which can be traced back to the narrative-assessment approach, insist in particular on the subjective uniqueness of the person. This uniqueness is manifested in the emotional-affective, intellectual and social spheres and guides individual behaviour, self-esteem and self-evaluation.

The student, the protagonist of the narrative, becomes the subject protagonist of his own training: from being a subject in training, he discovers himself to be the subject of training. On the basis of the metacognitive processes activated, he can actively contribute to the realisation of his life project.

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