



Education is a *key instrument* awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. It is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education.

DISABILITY IS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE

Disabled people *are entitled* to the same human rights as all other citizens. The first article of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights *states*: All human beings are free and equal in dignity and rights. In order to achieve this goal, all communities should celebrate the diversity within their communities and seek to ensure that disabled people can enjoy the full range of human rights: civil, political, social, economical and cultural.

DISABLED PEOPLE WANT EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND NOT CHARITY

We have moved a long way during these last decades: from the philosophy of paternalism towards disabled people to one of attempting to empower them to *exert control* over their own lives. The old approaches largely based upon pity and perceived helplessness of disabled people are now considered unacceptable.

The education system is the first step towards an inclusive society. If we think about the strategies to be *carried out* for supporting disabled people, we can find three main ways that can be placed in a sort of pyramid of supporting possibilities and that display three different but *mutually interlaced* levels of action. Each of these levels must be completed for accessing the upper next one; so the three levels are to be understood in *hierarchical* order and in a *top-down* sequence from broad to narrower freedom of action. They are:

1) *Education* 2) *Integration* 3) *Containment*. That is: *Learning* ← *Interacting*, ← *Limiting*.

The three practical paths can configure all possibilities of helping a disabled child, providing the right treatment he or she is able to accept by giving feedback. In other words: from each level *upwards* the care-giver can only proceed if there is an evident chance that the disabled can react at the next level. On the other hand: each level, once reached, *encompasses* the lower one and takes it for granted. Let us *tackle* these levels from bottom up.

Containment: at this lowest level, the care giver, the specialist or the staff in charge, observes that there is no possible development or *enhancement* of the person in care but just not more than the *sheer* almost unconscious existence into an external world made of situations, settings, contexts. There is, in other words, a *scant* perception of the environmental world around: the individual experience his/her behavior in an isolated way. He does not participate to common actions and is not well aware about roles, interaction, rules taken for granted, shared behavioral patterns. All this is confused in his mind: he has to be constantly kept under control by the educator by means of direct observation and close contact within the sphere of manipulation. The specialist must constantly restore what we could call a sort of "*ground zero*" type of cognitive life. Containment remains the only option, although it does absolutely not avoid or ignore emotions and *affection*.

Integration: here the person has the ability to properly interact with the social world around him/her: containment is no longer needed, since only little adjustments of the pupil's behavioral pattern have from time to time to be shifted or brought back to the everyday life common sense as shared by everyone. Little environmental problems can be *effortlessly* overcome; moreover, social interaction with others can even be a good medicine for the disabled pupil and turn out to be safe for him, since he starts to understand and feel the role of the others. He can also play different roles, *grasp* irony, *share* common activities, *give accounts* about his feelings, be involved in actions and group-working with class and *care giver*. Yet he still is not able to reasonably *undertake* an educational *path*: his learning pace is very slow; there is no possibility to build up a solid background knowledge which can lead to a job, or to concrete and usable advancements in his education.

Education: as you can see, this highest level simply covers all the lower ones. The educational action can here truly take place and can provide a *differentiated* educational path. Here integration itself is "*taken for granted*". Education can be provided within a sufficiently wide spread range of knowledge. This range can provide sufficient *social competence* and educational *skills* that can then be used conveniently once the disabled is "sent out" to society. Here many different levels of achievement are possible of course: yet in any case education has been able to set up a background knowledge together with a sufficient competence in different areas. Although this working ability can be performed only at a differentiated level and *somehow* still remains confined within the fixed *landmarks* of the so called "special education", the person can now experience freedom of choice.