

Inclusion/exclusion: an educational challenge

Inclusione/esclusione: una sfida pedagogica

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Abstract

Exclusion/inclusion in education are terms generally referring to situations of hardship in the disabled, individuals with special educational needs or in conditions of marginalization. In the wake of original French sociological research, in-depth reflections have been devoted to this theme. Enriching the pedagogical vocabulary on exclusion is the first step to circumscribe the problem and start positive actions to break down social and educational exclusion barriers. The result is an articulated and linguistically updated picture of the problem if the goal is, as we hope, to use the tools to lower the threshold of indifference in a political and educational line of inclusion and material and cultural redemption.

Keywords: inclusion; exclusion; disaffiliation; disqualification; disconnection.

Sintesi

Esclusione/inclusione in pedagogia sono termini generalmente riferiti a situazioni di disagio in portatori di handicap, oppure soggetti con difficoltà di apprendimento (BES), o in condizioni di emarginazione. Arricchire il lessico pedagogico sull'esclusione rappresenta il primo passo per circoscrivere il problema e di qui avviare azioni positive per abbattere gli steccati dell'esclusione sociale ed educativa. A questo tema e sulla scia di originali ricerche di ambito sociologico francese sono state dedicate approfondite riflessioni. Ne è uscito un quadro articolato e linguisticamente aggiornato del problema se l'obiettivo è, come ci si augura, usare gli strumenti per abbassare la soglia dell'indifferenza in una linea politica ed educativa di inclusione e riscatto materiale e culturale.

Parole chiave: inclusione; esclusione; disaffiliazione; squalifica; disinserimento.

1. Introduction

In 1974 a volume was published in France intended to coagulate a growing interest in sociology. It deals with the essay by René Lenoir, *Les Exclus. Un francaises sur dix* (1974). A few years later, that text broke through at the institutional level and was adopted by the European Union. Its title was promoted as a key concept of the EU's social and educational policy. The bibliographic reference immediately brings us to *medias res*, because around the 1970s/1980s, in the socio-political-cultural debate in France, the dyad of social exclusion/inclusion was imposed. In what follows, we will privilege the French debate due to the resonance of these questions in the Francophone culture. Gradually it insinuates itself into all the interstices of the humanities with unprecedented significance, perhaps also by the role occupied by Lenoir, who had the privilege of being able to speak from a prestigious pulpit, being secretary of state in the Chirac government.

Who are the excluded? Exclusion coincides with a deficit of sociality; it is the inability to carve out a place in our society, to be accepted in the same way as others. This is Lenoir's thesis for which, in this case, categories are to be considered, such as drug addicts, the mentally ill, the suicides, the delinquents, the disabled, the abused children, the single parents, the elderly in difficulties, the unemployed. We stop here, but the list could extend in relation to the degree of social complexity, even if the identity of the excluded person could be summarized in a simplified way with the expression *who is left out* (Cegolon, 2019). At the time of the investigation conducted by Lenoir, the ranks of the excluded were around a percentage of 10%, but on a tendentially incremental inclined plane. As the condition of large numbers of post-Fordist workers suggests, these are the first to have been affected by the tremendous technological revolution taking place in the last decades (Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2018; Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014). For many of them, the possibility of lasting integration appears little more than a mirage.

Compared to what has been described, the final impression may be manipulating final, compact data. This is not the case; the term exclusion is not exhaustive, precise, defined once and for all. In reality, that generic trait contained in the term could break up the linguistic profile of the word. For example, let's consider the category of children or young people: there may be not-employed, young people who seek and cannot find work or give up in front of the walls of social indifference, thus leaving the struggle to find a job (Rosina, 2015); but there are also young people, especially children, particularly in the third world, who are abused (Tagliaventi, 2002). To move from words to deeds, as expected in a pragmatic approach, the first step is to identify the transition from exclusion to inclusion. When and why does it occur?

Help comes from the sociologist Castel, who moves precisely from the need to update heuristic tools. In time they have proved to be unequal with respect to the classificatory objective and, as such, responsible for terminology that is not infrequently vague and approximate. The problem was interpreting and expressing the exclusion from work specifically, both the lexicon and semantics. The French sociologist's goal was to dispel the fog that has always thickened on the term exclusion from which the new subjects of discomfort are generally excluded (Castel, 1995). In this way, young jobless, for example, are equated with the disabled – the classic recipients of social action, while standard rules are inapplicable. In fact, the inactive or unemployed are not invalidated from the inside, like the disabled. Their condition does not depend on them but on the outside. They are the sacrificial victims of the economic situation; they are the inauspicious result of the society of risk and uncertainty (Bauman, 1999; Beck, 2000; Chicchi, 2001).

2. Excluded from work

Mention was made of the tendential enlargement of the audience of excluded, in unimaginable dimensions, given a dramatic change of paradigm: the legacy of the so-called *short century* with lasting and virulent effects in the third millennium. The whole employment society is little more than a memory, put in crisis by breaking the compromise between capital and guaranteed work (De Masi, 2018). In this *economic* perspective, the excluded, who are non-recipients of income, join the ranks of the new forms of poverty. This is the dramatic context explaining the emergence, between the end of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s, of research in the social sciences on the topics we are discussing. The goal, as mentioned, was to clarify a subject of objective complexity, refining above all the linguistic-defining aspect and, thanks to this, to offer a more accurate picture of an increasingly frayed reality.

For example, the most striking case is the condition of inactive or unemployed young people. They can be defined as *normal useless* (Donzelot, 1996), but also *supernumeraries* (Castel, 2003): young people knocking on the doors of the world of work. The condition is dramatic because they rightly demand reintegration, but they have to deal with a hostile context where demand exceeds supply. Those who should facilitate the entry of young people – i.e., the companies – are pursuing the opposite objective because they are mainly going through a restructuring phase. Translated: more technology and less workforce. We owe Castel an ingenious linguistic classification proposal: *disaffiliation* (Castel, 1991; Gajac, 2015). Disaffiliation, by whom? One could hastily be led to dismiss the question with the formula: whoever is the cause of his sore weep for himself. However, there is something deeper, a non-chosen choice of the *I give up because I feel rejected by society*. Every job, albeit in its different shades, always incorporates an added value; it is the place par excellence to oppose the grim condition of loneliness. As the privileged space for relationships – before in the family and gradually after of it – it allows us to reset our lives with new plans: self-independence and the creation of a family of their own.

Another French sociologist is more pessimistically inclined, this substituting the term disaffiliation with *disqualification* (Paugam, 1991): a *disqualification* without appeal, the loss of the two pillars on which the individual finds his existence, protection and social recognition (Paugam, 2001). To fully appreciate the traits characterizing social disqualification, it is enough to focus on the constituents that shape the condition of inclusion and the nature of social ties.

In the first place, there is natural kinship, which is an objective source of socialization and identity. Outside and beyond the family, elective socialization succeeds over time. It takes place outside the family, in the neighbourhood, in groups of friends, in local communities, etc. The next step is represented by the school and then by work, where a specific function is learned and performed. The point of arrival is the conquest of active citizenship, the distribution of rights and duties to all the nation's members. Therefore, this is the pre-existing social scheme of individuals. They must measure themselves with all the variations determined by the values systems binding in different contexts. For example, though strong in the family, the principle of solidarity in relationships is nevertheless conditioned by their importance. The same happens in school and work, the privileged place for elective ties and organic participation, which, however, is not separated from the organization and the importance that school and work play in a specific environmental, historical and social context.

Let's consider the other side of the problem, that is, when the individual has to face the hostility of a world from which, consequently, he wants to stand back, isolating himself.

The first sign of the precariousness of social relations coincides with a deficit of protection and recognition, which can be identified in key tests for each area: in the family, in elective relationships, in work, in civic life. Consider these examples: the parents' death, their inability to be up to the standards of normal parenthood, the separation or divorce of the spouses, the end of a long friendship, temporary or permanent unemployment or underemployment, the loss of rights.

As has been reiterated, the picture outlined is the translation of the thesis of disqualification. From the disaffiliation proposed by Castel intended as subtraction of recognition and social protection, the concept put forward by Paugam has little to do with the public aspect. It clearly emphasizes the personal dimension, identifying its consequences in the personality process. Taken as a whole, the two sociological stances outlined – Castel and Paugam – have many common and shareable elements, but, perhaps, from a historicist point of view, Paugam is, as it were, more a child of our time.

This persistent condition of marginalisation and disorientation affecting affluent societies is, to a greater extent, a real challenge for pedagogy which cannot escape this crucial question: how to concretely respond to people's need of freeing themselves from the smothering economic, psychological and social submission? Further food for thought comes from another sociologist, close to Paugam, Bourdieu, who brings up the concept of *misery* (Bourdieu, 1993). Misery is opposed not so much, as we would be led to think, to opulence but lack of agency. "The matrix of all misery is, in essence, the misery of the possible, the impotence of the act or, better, the unavailability of power, the possibility of not acting" (Paugam, 2001, p. 13). Moreover, in the same line of thought, we find a pupil of Bourdieu, to whom we owe this considerable thought: the impotence to act leads to the awareness of ineffectiveness, uselessness, misery and, consequent, drift towards depression, one of the great evils of our time, time *Des perdents*, as de Gaulejac defines it. Time as "désinsertion [...] social descension [...] déclassement" (de Gaulejac & Leonetti, 1994, p. 13).

Starting from these analyses, some questions await answers and solutions: why is the number of victims of downgrading and marginalisation growing? Through what process of social exclusion? Operationally, the critical question is: is there any instrument to tackle the problem of integration and social inclusion?

Precisely the complexity of the problems and the plurality of subjects crushed by the cogs of disinsertion have convinced de Gaulejac that the question cannot be addressed in its wholeness, in an abstract approach, in a handy and generic conceptualisation. As a matter of fact, too many and various are the cases whose comprehension is only by way of storytelling. Only individual stories can offer enough food for thought to define a credible long-term strategy.

De Gaulejac admits a link between the pedagogy personalising approach and Castel's attempt to identify, in any case, the general stages of the process of exclusion, in any case, tortuous and oscillating. We start from a phase of *integration*, characterised by planning and stability, which, however, is doomed to crumble, degenerating into a desire for revenge and aggression when the work becomes precarious. According to Castel's terminology, the phase of the need for assistance from the institution then succeeds and often leads to the resignation and isolation characterising the fourth phase, that of the disaffiliation mentioned above. However, the dramatic point lies in the second phase, vulnerability, which marks the point of no return, marginality: all our social ties shatter (Castel, 1994). As for the actions to promote social inclusion, they seem destined to produce modest outcomes. Generally, they show to be ineffective palliatives, attempts at integration but

ineffective, with inadequate impact on the subject to be reintegrated into the social fabric. Starting from the assumption that an ideal work integration is based on the material and symbolic recognition of work and the social protection that derives from it, Paugam identifies different inclusion levels, all of which are unsatisfactory. They range from an uncertain integration based on precarious work; then comes a laborious integration, where the work is stable but unsatisfactory; finally, the most unwanted condition, when the individual does not reach an acceptable level of job stability and job satisfaction (ibidem).

A French studio is credited with having been able to concretely photograph the social unease following the progressive and unstoppable marginalisation in work and relationships. It is the aforementioned de Gaulejac and Leonetti (1994) who has retraced the path of various *excluded* or *disconnected* ones. The constants of these bankruptcy biographies have been summarised in Figure 1.

Strategies	Psychological Dimension	Social Dimension
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circumvention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distancing • Sense inversion • References to a different value system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Derision • Integration • Disengagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledgement of the situation • Revaluation of personal identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggressiveness • Desire for revenge • Search for social and individual recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary change in power relations • Mobility inside the system • Indictment of the system
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defence • Interiorisation of one's negative image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoidance • Differentiation • Denial • Roleplay • Resignation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insulation • Loss of collective identity • Escape from reality • Alcohol or drugs • Manipulation • Social passiveness • Self-destruction

Figure 1. Summary table of unemployment response strategies (de Gaulejac & Leonetti, 1994, p. 77).

In summary, exclusion is “the end of a double process of stalemate: in relation to work and relational insertion” (Castel, 1994, p. 13). Two factors contribute to it, one external, society; the other internal is the subject. Abandoned, disaffiliated and disconnected from the society into which he was born, the excluded perceives himself as a failure, exposed to public mockery, the object of social indifference or disdain. Reversing the reasoning and thinking of a subject in harmony with himself and the world, we understand the profound meaning of the double dyad (work-not work, relationship-isolation) within which social integration is built. Outside of social protection and recognition, the individual risks getting lost.

3. Pedagogical exclusion as disaffection

Compared to advanced sociological analyses, the opposing pair *exclusion/inclusion* in connection with the pedagogical debate leave the impression of unfinishedness. The almost exclusive reference is, in fact, to situations of hardship in people with disabilities or with special educational needs (d'Alonzo, 2018) or a more generic problem of marginalization of the individual (Giosi, 2019). This happens when an all-encompassing term, suitable for every need, is used indistinctly as *exclusion* or *inclusion*. However, this linguistic vagueness, the use of a kind of, we would say, *passpartout*, shows the chord when urgent and decisive analysis needs are pressing.

Let's remain in the field of our hypothesis, the precarious economic and social contexts and the connected risk of continuous changes. Then, the occurrence of exclusion is chiefly an economic question. It is less the result of personal deficiencies, more the break in the balance between supply and demand for work. Prevailing is the tendency to use the term *exclusion* to a physical and psychological disability, thus undervaluing the objective change that exclusion can have in every social position and every moment of life. In this sense, pedagogy can respond to the problem by implementing long-life education's essential and exclusive instrument.

Enriching the pedagogical lexicon regarding exclusion can be necessary because it forces a more analytical observation and a specific identification of the phenomenon. Moreover, it offers a reliable basis for undertaking inclusive actions. It may be helpful to start from the term's transversal meaning that is obtained in contrast to its opposite: inclusion. Suppose the latter alludes to a *stable and functional integration* situation. In that case, exclusion follows the interruption of the fundamental relationships between us and the world and coincides with the "process by which individuals or groups are completely or partially excluded from participating in the society in which they live" (Deakin, Davis, & Thomas, 1995, p. 5). The best explanation for this passage is due to a sociologist who insisted on the weight of the relational factor: "The notion of social exclusion is centred in the first place on relational issues, in other words, on inadequate social participation, on a weak social integration and the lack of power" (Room, 1995 – cited in O'Brien & Penna, 2008, p. 3).

Time has come for putting together the position of all the sociologists, repeatedly cited, who have analysed the problem with original nuances and sensitivities. Castel has proposed a more targeted term, *disaffiliation*, to underline the interruption of the exchange with the social reality of belonging from which the individual feels rejected as an *excess*. de Gaulejac, wishing to reduce the social weight of the phenomenon, proposes the term *désinsertion* (disconnection) to underline the role played by the subject. Paugam, more than de Gaulejac, further accentuates the individual aspect of suffering, speaking of *disqualification*.

Similarly, in order to remain within its competence, even pedagogy could advance its interpretation of the phenomenon of exclusion. It should concentrate on the type of relationship connoting the educational problem. This is the relationship that the educator maintains with the pupil, favouring the latter's autonomy through gradual growth as a function of self-education and self-training (Pellerey, 2006).

Honestly, the world's situation is especially critical regarding the youth world, particularly concerning the transition from school to work. The process moves in a tortuous way; the path is studded with difficulties, between impulses and withdrawals, enthusiasm followed by resignation, pushes forward and renunciations, with an escape from reality and refuge

in marginal groups, such as dropouts and young not in education, employment or training (NEET). Especially dramatic is the problem of NEET, the refuge of passivity, people who back from fighting for their future. Moreover, the pandemic we are experiencing has increased the difficulty of finding a stable occupation and has also contributed to lower educational performance, which is largely undermined by distance learning. Linked to these difficulties, the process of socialising is slowing down; social media tend to replace the human warmth of presence, etc. This weakening of relationships in the vital context of a young in formation inevitably affects the dynamics of self-esteem and recognition.

The obstacles that have taken place in the growth process are an implicit admission of failure towards oneself, a condition that could fall into a specific pedagogical category we would call *disaffection*. Disaffection from oneself includes the anguish of an *empty classroom* but also of *emptying of the individual*, the lack of self-love or the instinct for self-preservation: the other side of a social detachment, linked to unemployment or, to remain in our field, school dropout. It occurs when the social distancing becomes followed by a kind of distancing of the individual from himself when he decides to give up the primary impulse addressed to his own fulfilment.

4. Pedagogical strategies of inclusion

The vicious circle existing between self-disaffection and disaffiliation confirms the assumption underlying the so-called personal pedagogy according to which education, aimed at the good growth of the subject, can only be achieved through human relationships. What happens in a personal life is just in the relationship; everything positive that grows, progresses and stabilizes in human behaviour comes from the relationship and the related reflection. What consolidates in us rests on a form of reinforcement, that is when we have the confirmation of the identity of the other (Boffo, 2011; Mari, 2019). This point of view is particularly effective as concerns inclusion. Anybody experiencing the plight of losing his job or, still worse, the failure to getting a job, faces an existential drama. This has to do with a serious vulnerability due to a sense of abandonment and isolation. The interruption of working relationships seriously hinder to process of recovering balance and psychological well-being. Contrary to popular belief, helplessness and personal mistrust are seldom affected by personal incapacitations. Generally they come from the very lack of those relational conditions which are part of people's lives, essential requirements in view of personal development and fulfilment. All in all, only through enhancing and confirming relationships people can only get out of the crisis due to abandonment and solitude.

Another psychological effective resource is provided by storytelling. Life stories are concrete examples, they easily stimulate reflection, confrontation, dialogue. This kind of approach – biographical and autobiographical – is largely applied in pedagogy, with growing interest in recent studies (Demetrio, 1996; Formenti, 1998). Given the plurality and complexity of the factors involved, personal crises are never attributable to a single element, in the specific case the loss or separation from work. In his researches, carried out with the biographical method, de Gaulejac comes to the conclusion that the phenomenon of exclusion, although attributable to macroeconomic factors, just depends very often on the history of the subject. The personal stories analyzed by the French scholar have highlighted that, upstream, work exclusion is often preceded by a previous crisis, an emotional or relational fragility that worsens when the subject finds himself in front of the *onset of a new tear* (de Gaulejac & Leonetti, 1994).

In this sense, the most immediate form of reconciliation with ourselves may be narration. An biographical story, based on one's own experience, is not an ordinate sequel of temporal order of events. It is the emergence of relevant events marking the course of our life. Their significance helps us to speak about ourselves in an authentic, truthful way. We are really what we have shown ourselves to be through our choices, our actions, our behaviour, our experience in one word. To which we owe the scaffolding of our personal identity, what we are and not what we can appear (Formenti, 1998; Smorti, 2018).

These are the tools at our disposal to successfully counter the stigmatizing social representations branding people with a false identity, such as to mistakenly induce others to attribute disaffection entirely on the subject. Different said: for how they are, stressed people must complain only themselves.

Is there a way out? Essential should be an empathic attitude from neighbours – familiars, friends, colleagues – as well as setting up a path of self-knowledge in the subject living a crisis. It is useful to remind him of his previous failures, but still more important is to reinforce him by emphasising his own positive achievements. In such a way he can get full awareness of his own weaknesses and vulnerabilities but also of his own resources (Biasin, 2009; Loro, 2006) to be exploited to mobilize the personal commitment addressed to himself (Rossi, 2012, Piccinino 2006).

Different are the forms of facilitation in an autobiographical story that can be considered preparatory to the initiation of this experience in the subject (Kaneklin & Scaratti, 1998). The first approach could be autobiography, based on the presentation of stories told by others, both in written form and through images and videos. The next phase could be the involvement of the subject in the analysis of the stories he is dealing with. The action should be facilitated through a form of play. He should be presented with semi-structured cards which, with apt questions, could guide the subject to identify the events around which the story was structured. The objectives pursued with this activity are double side: firstly, self-mirroring arouses empathy and promotes the understanding of the stories told; secondly, the comparison of stories usefully resize relativizing in the subject his own situation while discovering a world of suffering of which he was previously unaware.

5. Conclusion

News has taken it upon itself to make us touch the suffering spreading through society, spreading among the less well-off classes. The chronicles have confronted us with surprising news of suicides both of entrepreneurs due to the bankruptcy of their company and young people without defects, not psychopaths, but without work, therefore deprived of the dream of life, that of returning to the category of normality.

Disaffection as detachment from oneself; disaffiliation as a rejection of the company. The two terms are linked in a double way. They are the basis of a fundamental current of pedagogical thought, the personalistic pedagogy which in a nutshell reminds us that education, aimed at the good growth of the individual, can only be achieved through human relationships. Everything happens and is completed in the relationship; everything positive that grows, progresses and stabilizes in human behaviour is the result of the reflection exercised by the relationship; everything that is consolidated rests on the reinforcement that comes from the recognition that confirms the identity of the other (Mari, 2019).

It is time to draw some conclusions. Sociological analyses helped us discover the pedagogical implications of *exclusion*, the pre-condition for promoting inclusive dynamics within educational-training contexts. Exclusion is the failure of the flow of relationships towards ourselves and others, a kind of expulsion from the social fabric we have created. However, the sense of isolation we attribute to others is only part of the phenomenon we have analysed. The other part, the most important one, attests that the decisive factor in the interruption of social relations is not outside but in ourselves. By isolating ourselves, we end up self-absolving, attributing a relational deficit externally that, instead, is deep within us. From a pedagogical point of view, we have shown how exclusion should be interpreted mainly as disaffection, as the lack of the natural impulse for self-love, essential to revive our instinct for self-preservation.

Once the diagnosis has been made, the following aim is to promote inclusion will include. The first and decisive step will be to restore the minimum conditions of self-esteem and recognition in the unmotivated subject through actions addressed in two ways. The first is the context where to intervene. Internal practices and communication determine a climate in which people feel more or less welcomed and therefore more or less supported in facing their difficulties. Secondly comes learning which, in the words of Mezirow (2016), is always *situated*. Ordinary dynamics in work or school are potential spaces open to alternative perspectives, where the subjects can lose resilience and get destabilised. Concretely we are referring to lobbying practices by leadership within a work organisation or the violence at the hands of bullies in the classroom.

Nevertheless, granted all this, the conviction remains that the social wounds above emphasised denounced go together or are preceded by the subject's attitude towards himself. So this is the final point recommendation for pedagogy: mobilise the sense of responsibility in terms of self-education and self-training, the two necessary ingredients to be both in harmony with oneself and with the world: inserted, affiliated and retrained, to stick, though in positive, to the way the French sociologists have labelled the exclusion discussed in these pages. To achieve this decisive step, as stressed before, relationships are narrative methods; in particular, the biographical and autobiographical approaches are adequate choices.

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