

# From the analysis of support teachers training needs to the creation of effective training courses. Reflections from an exploratory survey<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The paper presents a reflection on the training needs of teachers who attend the specialization course for support activities. As adults in training, these teachers need to acquire theoretical and practical competences through teaching methods that cannot be compared to those generally used with university students. Starting from the data extrapolated from research conducted in the University of Genoa (a.y. 2013/2014) and in the University of Macerata (a.y. 2016/2017) the paper provides an overview of emerging needs and teaching methods that can be used in university training practices aimed at professional adults.

Il contributo presenta una riflessione sui bisogni formativi degli insegnanti che frequentano il corso di specializzazione per le attività di sostegno. In quanto adulti in formazione, questi insegnanti necessitano di acquisire competenze teoriche e pratiche attraverso modalità didattiche che non possono essere equiparabili a quelle utilizzate generalmente con gli studenti universitari. A partire dai dati estrapolati da ricerche condotte nell'Università di Genova (a.a. 2013/2014) e nell'Università di Macerata (a.a. 2016/2017) si offre una panoramica dei bisogni emergenti e delle metodologie didattiche utilizzabili nelle pratiche formative universitarie indirizzate ad adulti professionisti.

**Keywords:** training needs; support teachers; University practices; active teaching methodologies

**Parole chiave:** bisogni formativi; insegnanti di sostegno; pratiche universitarie; metodologie didattiche attive

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## 1. Introduction

Specialized support teacher training is currently a topic at the center of numerous reflections (ANED, 2010; Council of the European Union, 2010; WHO, 2011) on the ability of training courses (in the life learning perspective) to ensure the acquisition of professional competences responding to the different needs emerging in the classes.

In fact, the increase in the quality of inclusion is related to the possession of specific competences such as design. Together with a multi-perspective view, it guides the teacher in creating inclusive curricula. These curricula, as reported in previous discussions on the subject (Pennazio, 2017a) are characterized by the presence of “contact points” between class curricular projects and personalized/individualized educational plans (IEP – Individualized Educational Plan) of students with disability and with SEN. In general, the contact between the two design dimensions is obtained through adaptation strategies and technological tools that make materials and learning contents accessible to all. In addition, the curriculum requires teacher to put into practice a collaborative and relational competences necessary to share with colleagues not only the project plan, but also the choice of strategies and methodologies useful for creating inclusion (Kochhar et al., 2000).

In this perspective, the profile of the specialized teacher recalls the idea of a teacher who is present within a class to support it as a whole, not addressing exclusively the student with disabilities. He is a teacher who actively collaborates with the curricular teacher by suggesting all inclusive teaching strategies to be implemented, including the use of any technologies in the theoretical perspective of the UDL (Rose, Meyer & Hitchcock, 2005) to make the educational proposal more responding to the needs of all students. To allow the start of this dialogue, however, it is necessary that curricular and support teachers have internalized the logic of inclusion and they have developed specific competences through specific training courses.

The concept of inclusion coincides with the possibility for all students (regardless of their functioning) to participate and actively engage in their learning path in the classroom context. To achieve full implementation of inclusion, the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE, 2011) considers necessary the acquisition of inclusive competences in all European countries and in all teachers so that, starting from school, inclusive practices can spread.

In this perspective, the teachers training courses, to effectively develop inclusive competences, will have to start from the identification of their training needs (what they think to know, what they know and what they consider necessary to acquire) in order to better calibrate the didactic path and the strategies through which to transfer new knowledge.

Starting from these considerations, the paper presents the results of the training needs analysis shown by the teachers who attended the specialization course for support activities at the University of Genoa (a.y. 2013/2014) and at the University of Macerata (a.y. 2016/2017).

The results obtained highlighted that the main training needs are connected:

- (1) to the acquisition of specific theoretical and practical competences to generate inclusion;
- (2) the need to demonstrate possession of a professional practice;
- (3) the need to perceive this practice valued, because they are adults in training with a consolidated professional experience.

It emerged that these needs are satisfied when the three aspects begin to dialogue with each other. The determining element in the interaction between the different levels of need is attributable to the use of specific teaching methods of adult education, not comparable to those generally used with university students. Starting from this consideration, the paper offers an overview of the emerging formative needs and of the possible didactic methodologies that can be used in university training practices aimed at professional adults.

## 2. Approaches to adult training

Some Italian researches have investigated the effectiveness of training courses for support teachers (Calvani et al., 2017; Fedeli & Pennazio, 2019; Ferrara & Pedone, 2019; Pennazio, 2017b; Pinelli & Fiorucci, 2019), highlighting how approaches centered on the active and reflective participation of teachers in training must lead to positive outcomes in the acquisition of certain competences. This position agrees with the assumptions proper to adult education studies in general (Bochicchio, 2012, 2019; Salerni & Zanazzi, 2019).

As Ferrara and Pedone (2019) claim, training (initial and in-service) designed for teachers should act on two levels:

- (1) on the one hand, to support them in the general ability to redesign educational contexts guided by a greater understanding of the variables of school architecture and didactic mediation (Damiano, 2013);
- (2) on the other, to encourage them to become aware of their implicit representation and ideologies that influence both the way in which the teachers themselves think about disability, and the way in which they translate into practice a certain method of inclusion (Cammedda & Santi, 2016; Pinnelli & Fiorucci, 2019). This last aspect should be considered as one of the starting points, together with the detection of needs, of the training path of each teacher and even more of the support teacher.

Adult training requires approaches capable of placing the adult in training at the center of the training process, making him actively participate in all phases of the training process. It is necessary to start with the extrapolation of the need (which also originates from a practice that the teacher in training has acquired and who he feels the need to demonstrate possession) to arrive at his analysis and therefore the proposal for action (Knowles, 1971). It becomes useful, being adults in training with their own experiential background and conceptual positions, to bring to the surface their 'implicit pedagogies' that positively/negatively influence their willingness to learn new knowledge and action strategies and their availability to put them into practice.

In this perspective, it becomes necessary to provide opportunities in which the teachers in training can confront their beliefs, deconstructing the assumptions that hinder: (1) the management of the class as an inclusive setting (Cammedda & Santi, 2016; Ferrara & Pedone, 2019; Pinelli & Fiorucci, 2019); (2) the implementation of inclusive representations and attitudes (Montesano & Straniero, 2019; Pinnelli & Fiorucci, 2019). It is necessary to guide teachers in training to become reflective professionals (Lewis, Perry, Friedkin & Roth, 2012; Mezirow, 1991; Schön, 2006) able (1) to critically rethink their practice and the functional strategic choices to allow each student to increase his potential, and (2) to implement specific design, teaching and relational competences (Albanese & Mercadante, 2010; Chiappetta Cajola & Ciraci, 2013, Ferrara & Pedone, 2019).

Some researchers (Eurydice, 2008, 2009; OECD, 2017; UNESCO, 2009) that focus both on the professional competences of teachers and on the training courses, intended for the acquisition of these competences, highlight gaps in training processes in general.

The use of teaching strategies that are not suitable for adult education could be the cause of this. In fact, before the delivery of learning content, it would be necessary to identify the training needs and implicit ideologies of the participants.

### **2.1 Identify training needs**

In teacher training, therefore, it is necessary to start from the extrapolation of their training need.

The analysis of the concept of *need* refers to Maslow's studies (1954) which, in the context of his theory of human needs, highlights the existence of a direct relationship between need and motivation and between need and action (Bochicchio, 2012, p. 31).

The analysis of the relationship between need and motivation establishes that «people are more willing to learn when they draw motivational stimuli from experience and, therefore, in training processes it is more useful to leverage intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivations» (ivi, p. 32). The analysis of the relationship between need and action establishes that «people act more effectively when their action is oriented towards satisfying a need» (Ibidem).

As highlighted by Baudrillard (1972), training needs cannot be identified only as a deficiency with respect to the present or aspiration with respect to the future but are something more complex, identifiable as a tension that the person feels within himself and that pushes him to action, motivating it. The identification of the training need becomes an important practice, which must be taken into account when designing a training course for professional adults. This practice must involve: (1) the trainer teacher called to interpret the information collected, translate it into objectives for the action (before and during the course) identifying the competences and abilities to be developed (Bochicchio, 2012); (2) the teacher in training that must become aware of why it is important for his profession to learn new competences, abilities and knowledge (Knowles, 1971). In this process, the teacher trainer becomes a facilitator who helps teachers in training in this self-analysis and identification of the resources to be used starting from their previous practice.

Therefore, at the beginning of each training intervention, it is necessary that the trainer teacher does not prepare the delivery of knowledge content as an immediate action but devotes time to gather the needs declared by the teachers in training around that specific discipline, to bring out their expectations and making their professional experiences dialogue with new knowledge.

### **2.2 Eliminate negative representations and attitudes through dialogue and comparison**

The identification of need is not the only practice necessary to prepare effective adult training courses.

As already anticipated in the previous reflections, the adults in training access the training courses with their previous experience made of practices but also of representations and attitudes with which they define an educational situation and they consequently prepare their interventions in certain way.

As Pinelli and Fiorucci argue (2019, p.542), among the variables that influence teachers' attitudes and perceptions, the initial training of teachers is a priority (Chong, Forlin & Au, 2007) that influence didactic effectiveness, the educational relationship and the availability to experiment with innovative paths, such as, for example, those oriented towards school inclusion (Sharma, 2012). In consideration of the complexity of social scenarios and the cultural approach to differences (Pinelli & Fiorucci, 2019) it becomes essential to help teachers in training become aware of their representations and attitudes, bring them to the surface, analyze and modify them.

In literature, social representations are defined like: (1) what is used to interpret, make known, socially shareable, what is perceived and of which there is little knowledge (Moscovici, 1984); (2) interpretation processes and of co-construction connected to it (Pinelli & Fiorucci, 2019). Both are conditioned by ideological systems (Rateau, 2000, Rouquette, 1996). Attitudes are instead individual modulations of a common reference system attributable to an interindividual level. Ideology therefore constitutes the matrix of social representations which in turn are the matrix of attitudes (Pinelli & Fiorucci, 2019; Rouquette, 1996).

Social representations and attitudes acquire even more value in the field of specialized teacher training where attitudes towards disability and inclusion, as demonstrated by research in the sector (Pinelli & Fiorucci, 2019), seem to be the result of the representations that people create and share during social interaction; a sort of individual interpretation of a collective belief (Pinelli & Fiorucci, 2019; Ramel, 2014). The interesting theoretical study on the subject operated by Pinelli and Fiorucci (2019, pp. 539-541) highlights the existence of a very strong connection between the representation of disability and inclusion as reported in other studies (Lamontagne-Müller & Gyax, 2009).

The same survey highlights how, in teachers in training, the most recurrent social representations of disability are mostly stereotyped and close to common sense (Fiorucci, 2018; Ramel, 2014), often influenced by the fear of disability itself (Disanto, 2015) and capable of acting negatively on didactic and inclusive practices (Jordan, Schwartz & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). A series of correlations emerge where an attitude of inadequacy is accompanied to a more serious deficit (Ryan, 2009); a less serious deficit or specific learning disorders are accompanied by more proactive attitudes (Cassady, 2011). The experience of contact with people with disabilities is also considered in the survey as a variable capable of positively or negatively influencing the attitudes and representations of teachers (Burke & Sutherland, 2004; Falanga, de Caroli & Sagone, 2011; Fiorucci, 2018, Wong, 2008).

On the teachers' attitudes towards inclusion instead, the same survey refers to a series of Italian studies (Ianes, 2016; Ianes, Demo & Zambotti, 2014; Medeghini, 2007, Vianello & Di Nuovo, 2015) in which it is highlighted that the effectiveness of inclusion does not concern a real improvement of the disabled person in the school context but is attributable to a series of social variables. Thanks to these studies, we understand the importance, in a training course, of dedicating time to bring out the social representations and bad attitudes towards disability that teachers often unknowingly have. It is a matter of helping them to respond to their implicit need to know disability, the area of special educational needs to better act in an inclusive perspective.

### 3. Research design

Following a study divided into several phases and years, it was possible:

- (1) to detect the training needs of the support teachers in training in terms of acquiring competences perceived as useful and necessary for their profession;
- (2) to identify the teaching methodologies and strategies to be used in response to the same needs.

The aim of the survey was to understand how to best structure the training courses, starting from the teachers' needs which, on the one hand, are specific needs of adults in training and, on the other, linked to the characteristics of the disciplines. Moreover, the social representations on disability, gained during the professional experience, influence the didactical practice.

#### 3.1 Participants

The study involved in a first phase (a.y. 2013/2014) the teachers in training of the support course of the University of Genoa (n = 145), in a second phase (a. y. 2016/2017) the teachers in training of the support course of the University of Macerata (n = 180). In both cases, attention was paid to teachers in training of kindergartens and primary schools.

#### 3.2 Research objectives

In the first part of the quantitative/qualitative exploratory research (for a detailed description refer to Pennazio, 2017b), conducted with the students of the specialization course of the University of Genoa, the objective was to bring out their personal training needs related to the various disciplines. In particular, we have tried to extrapolate information on these aspects:

- the training needs related to some competences required of the specialized teacher and the conviction of teachers in training to possess them or not (the needs in terms of competences and self-reflective ability) (at the beginning of the course);
- the training needs related to specific and disciplinary knowledge (at the beginning of the course);
- the most suitable type of training to help teachers in training acquire specific competences characterized not only by knowledge and competences but also by proactive and inclusive attitudes (teaching practices in the training of adult-professionals) (at the beginning/end of the course).

In the second phase of the quantitative/qualitative exploratory research (for a detailed description refer to Fedeli & Pennazio, 2019) conducted with the students of the specialization course of the University of Macerata, it was decided to analyze the need connected with the technological competence (e.g., computers, tablets, specific software, the Internet, blogs, social media) considered fundamental for making any adaptations to lessons, responding to the operating needs of each student. The general purpose of the study was to obtain information on:

- the incoming needs connected to digital/technological competences of the teachers in training;
- their ideas about the impact that the use of technology could have on the realization of an inclusive teaching;

- the role that the practical and collaborative approach, promoted during the module, had on their learning and on the reflection process related to the use of digital skills in the classroom (at the beginning/end of the course).

### ***3.3 Methodology and tools***

In the first phase of the research, an online questionnaire was administered, prepared with the Lime Survey application structured in three parts: personal data, perceived needs, didactic setting of the course (detected at the start and at the end of the course).

With regard to perceived needs, the participants were asked to express, through a Likert scale from 1 to 4 (1 lowest level, 4 highest level) their perception of the level of confidence with respect to the main competences/knowledge required of the support specialist teacher and to argue their position. Participants were asked to describe their ideal lesson and if the course met their expectations.

In the second part of the research, an online questionnaire created with the Google Forms application was administered, structured in three parts: personal data, perceived needs, didactic setting of the course (at the beginning and at the end of the course).

As regards the perceived needs, participants were asked to highlight their initial technological/digital competences, their idea about the usefulness of using technologies in the realization of an inclusive practice and the elements necessary for a good use of these.

As regards the didactic approach of the course, in the initial phase, the expectations of the students were investigated, while in the final phase their point of view on the collaborative constructivist approach adopted in the course and experimented by them was investigated.

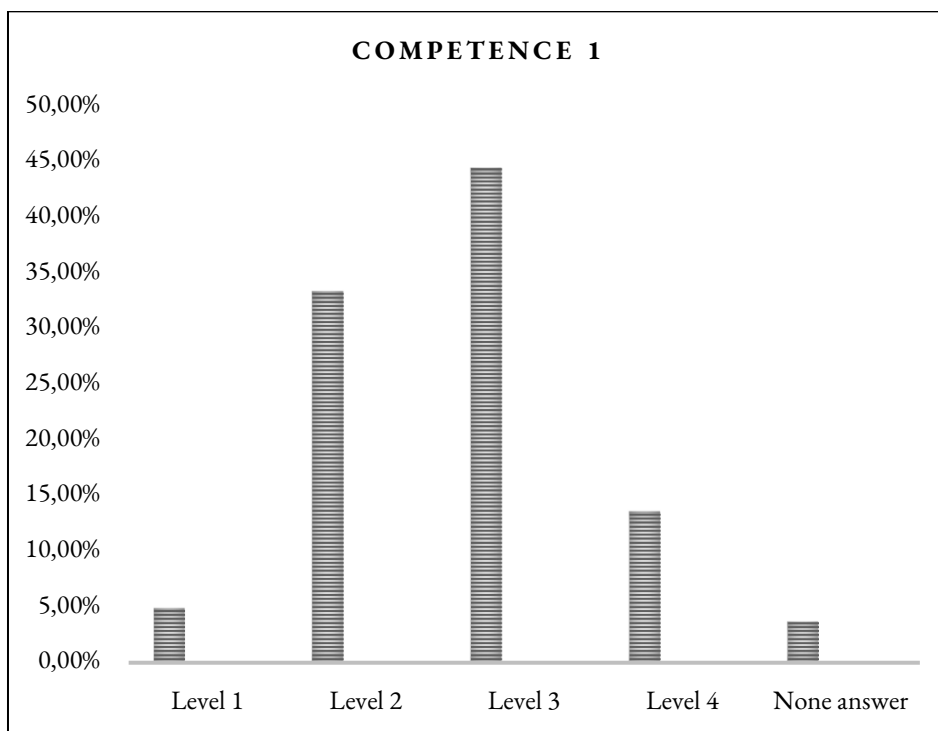
## **4. Data analysis and discussion**

The Qualitative Content Analysis methodology (Schreier, 2012) was adopted for the analysis of qualitative data, while for the quantitative data the percentage data return offered by the Lime Survey application was used.

In discussing the results achieved, we will proceed by correlating the evidence that emerged in the two phases of the investigation.

From the analysis of the extrapolated data in relation to the entry needs and expected teaching practices of the first and second research phases, needs emerged that can be linked to some specific skills required of the support teachers (in terms of knowledge, practical application and connection with the professional experience possessed) to which we tried to connect possible didactic actions to be put in place during the course to help teachers in training to respond to their perceived need.

**4.1 Need related to the possession of competences to manage the interaction and educational relationship with students in the class by promoting pro-social relationships between them and the school community**



Graph 1: Participants' confidence level with Competence 1

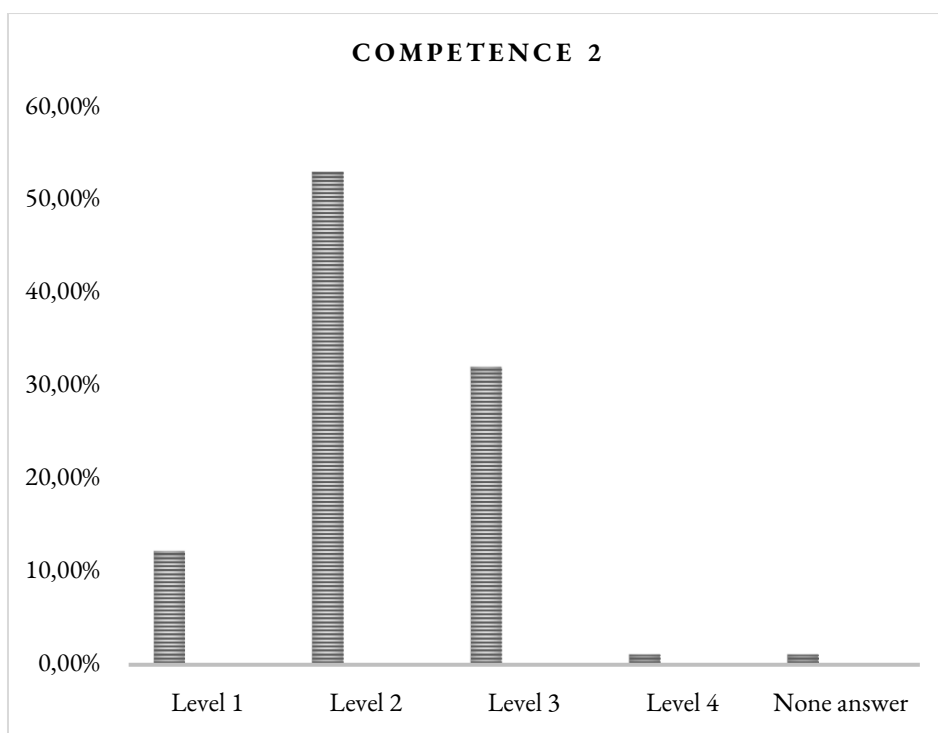
Graph 1 shows that most of the participants (44%) declare a level 3 of confidence with respect to the competence/knowledge considered. 33.3% of the participants are on level 2. Only 13.6% of the participants declare an excellent level of confidence / knowledge while 4.9% declare that they have no confidence. 3.7% of the participants did not answer.

In relation to this need, qualitative data highlight the perception by the teachers in training of the usefulness of this competence but it emerges a certain difficulty in “putting it into practice”. Furthermore, from the analysis of the initial data, it emerged that a structuring of the training courses not fully responsive, in terms of practical suggestions, to the request for training of the participants. As a first consideration, the importance of helping teachers to know and try to put strategies into practice to create an inclusive climate within the classroom emerges, becoming themselves “models of prosocial behaviors”. The work on the social representations possessed by the teachers turns out to be fundamental, then continuing with the practical presentation of cases in which it becomes possible to make them explicit and relate them to one’s professional experience. It is necessary to create situations that lead to reflection on the importance of acquiring the ability to implement inclusive “attitudes” as claimed by the ICF (WHO, 2001).



Secondly, it is important to guide teachers in training to acquire the ability to observe their own way of being and to act in the relationship by indicating adequate self-observation methods to be transferred to students. Knowing how to trigger this self-analysis process, in an educational intervention aimed at acquiring prosocial skills, allows to detect and evaluate the skills to be modified, reconstructing or improving them. The observation and analysis of one’s own modes of action in the interpersonal relationship (e.g., through video analysis) leads to the progressive maturation of awareness of one’s own weak points and positive aspects with the consequent ability to reflect before acting. Even the acquisition by the teachers in training of the habit of verbalizing feelings is fundamental because it facilitates the evaluation on what actions, words, gestures are most appropriate to the situation or context. In relation to prosocial behaviors, it is then necessary to provide theoretical and practical indications, with moments of simulation, which help specialized teachers to work in the classroom on three variables: sharing, help and cooperation.

**4.2 Need related to the competence of co-design, co-monitoring and co-conduction of innovative projects aimed at promoting the inclusion process within the classroom**



Graph 2: Participants’ confidence level with Competence 2

The Graph 2 shows that over half of the participants (53.1%) present a “level 2” of “confidence” with respect to the competences / knowledge indicated, while 12.3% present a “level 1” of “confidence”. By combining the two percentages we obtain a result equal to 65.4%, that highlight a low level of “confidence” in the half of the sample. Only one third of the participants declares a “confidence” level “greater than or equal to 3”, while 1.2% do not

respond. In relation to this need, teachers in training declare the lack of knowledge/strategies necessary to create an open dialogue between specialized and curricular teachers essential for co-design and co-conducting inclusive interventions in practice.

If at the theoretical level there is understanding about the usefulness of this way of acting, teachers practical experience leads them to consider it not easy to apply with the tendency to choose simpler strategies such as adapting to what is proposed by the curricular teacher or work separately.

Many European education systems currently support the importance of promoting a collaborative approach between curricular teachers and support teachers who play a proactive role in improving the capacity of schools to overcome the barriers to learning and participation (Ghedin et al., 2013). It is therefore necessary to support the teachers in training so that they understand the three dimensions for which inclusive education should be carried out: didactic co-planning, shared teaching, co-evaluation, linked by the collaboration between curricular and class teachers. During the training course it becomes useful to let the teachers in training learn (also through simulation approaches) that the educational activities are connected with other actions (Ghedin et al., 2013) and that inclusion and participation in the education system involve a change in culture, practices and social policies (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

In this perspective, teachers in training should be helped to perceive themselves as agents of change within the school context. They should be provided them with adequate communication and relational methods to propose and share co-teaching practices with curricular teachers, in which two or more teachers, one curricular and one supporting, co-plan (co-planning), co-teach (co-instructing) and co-evaluate (co-assessing) for a diverse group of students within the same class, in the same class school reality, with different approaches (Friend & Cook, 2007; Ghedin, 2013).

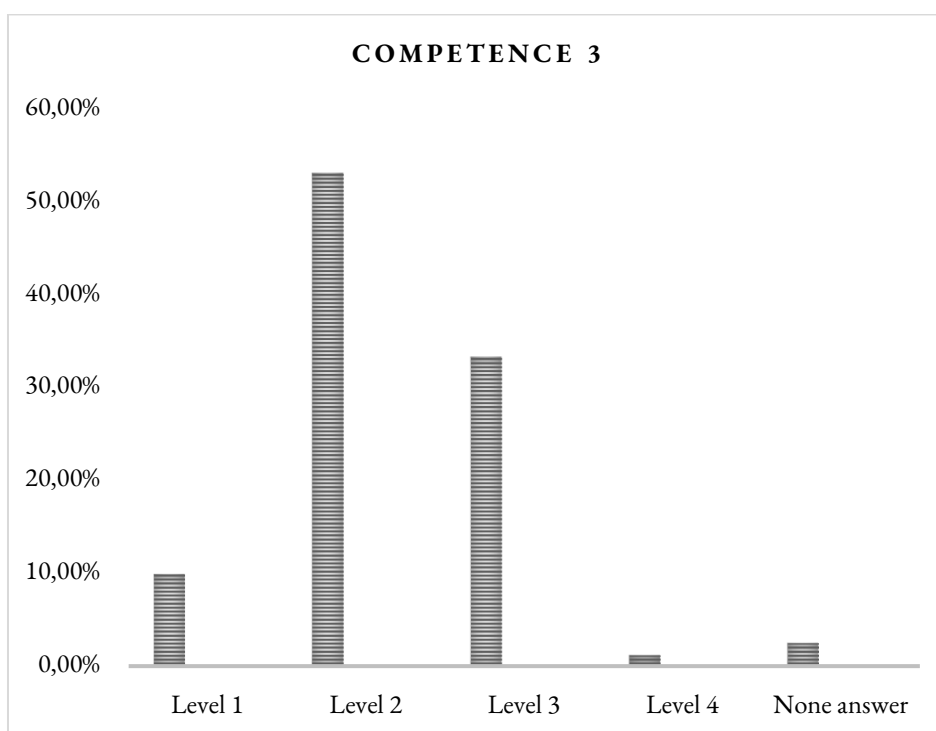
#### ***4.3 Need related to skills to monitor and evaluate educational and training interventions***

Graph 3 shows that 53.1% of participants declare a “level 2” of “confidence” with respect to the competences / knowledge considered, 33.3% of participants declare a “level 3”, while 9.9% indicate a level 1 of “confidence”. Almost all of the participants, despite the years of professional experience, indirectly declares that they have to improve their level of “confidence” with respect to the competences / knowledge considered. Only 1.2% declare a “level 4”, while 2.5% of the participants do not answer.

The analysis of the qualitative data reveals an evident need of the teachers in training to acquire competences related to the systematic observation capacity (as regards methodologies and tools) related to the types of evaluation to be implemented in inclusive educational and training interventions. The need is not only to know the most suitable tools and strategies for observing and evaluating but also to try to implement and apply them. The importance of collaboration between the curricular teacher and the specialized teacher again emerges in order to share choices and responsibilities, actively discuss the practices and, therefore, the opportunities that are intended to be provided to students in terms of evaluation procedures (Ghedin et al., 2013).

The specialization course should offer teachers in training opportunities in which they can practice evaluating/discussing together starting from clarifying their conception of assessment (again attention to the internal representations possessed) that guides decisions in the assessment field, the what and how to observe, and who

for them it is necessary to involve in the evaluation process. This exercise of collaboration is closely linked to the reflective dimension (Schön, 2006) inherent in the co-evaluation process that leads to becoming aware of the implicit theories that guide one's actions.



Graph 3: Participants' confidence level with Competence 3

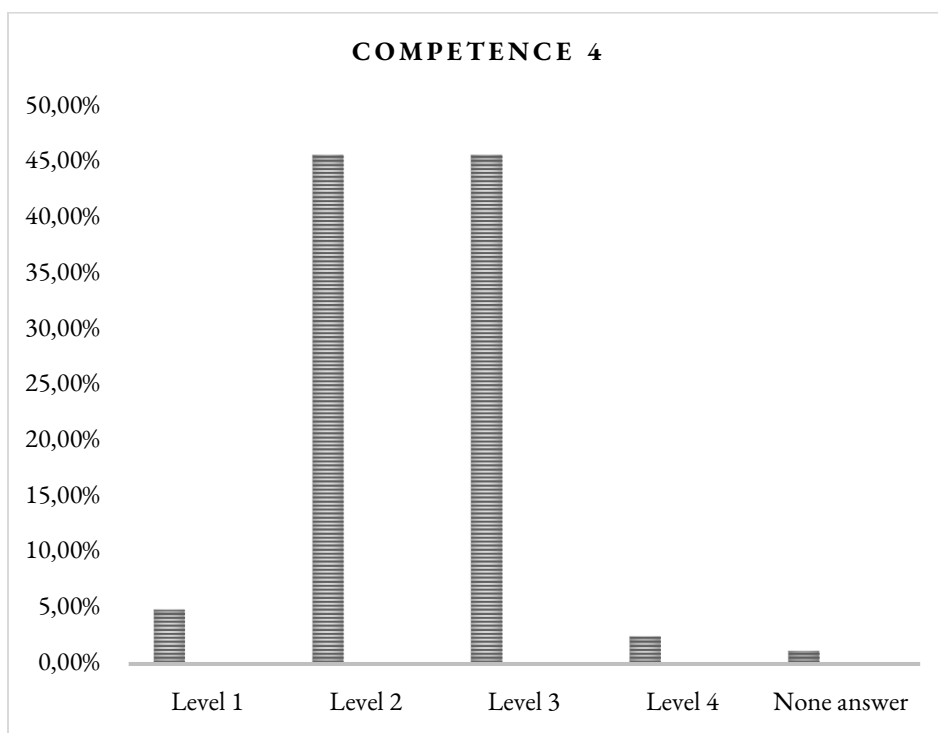
#### ***4.4 Need related to pedagogical-didactic competences for the integrated management of the class group***

Graph 4 shows how the percentages of the “confidence” levels, with respect to the knowledge / competences considered, are equally distributed (45.7%) between a “level 2” and a “level 3”. 4.9% of participants declare a “confidence” level 1, 2.5% an “excellent” level, while 1.2% do not respond.

The analysis of the qualitative data shows the perception in teachers in training of the importance of carrying out shared work in the classroom through strategies such as tutoring and collaborative work.

These ways of working seem to be little known in practice and therefore difficult to implement in the daily routine of teaching. The teachers in training in fact demonstrate a general knowledge of the collaborative forms of teaching / learning that go beyond the frontal lesson but they are unable to organize them effectively in the classroom. It is therefore important to make the teachers in training aware, also with practical and not only theoretical explanations, of the different types of teaching mediated by peers that respond positively to the needs of all students, not only those with special educational needs. The teachers in training must therefore get to know these strategies in detail to promote inclusive management of the class group. If a strategy is not known

to perfection it cannot then be applied effectively in practice (for example, you will work in pairs thinking of using tutoring but in reality it is a simple work in pairs).



Graph 4: Participants' confidence level with the Competence 4

#### ***4.5 Need related to pedagogical-didactic competences to realize the most effective and efficient forms of individualization and personalization of training courses***

Graph 5 shows that the percentage of participants (43.2%) who declare a “level 2” of “confidence” in the competences / knowledge considered is slightly higher than the percentage of participants (40.7) who declare a “level 3”.

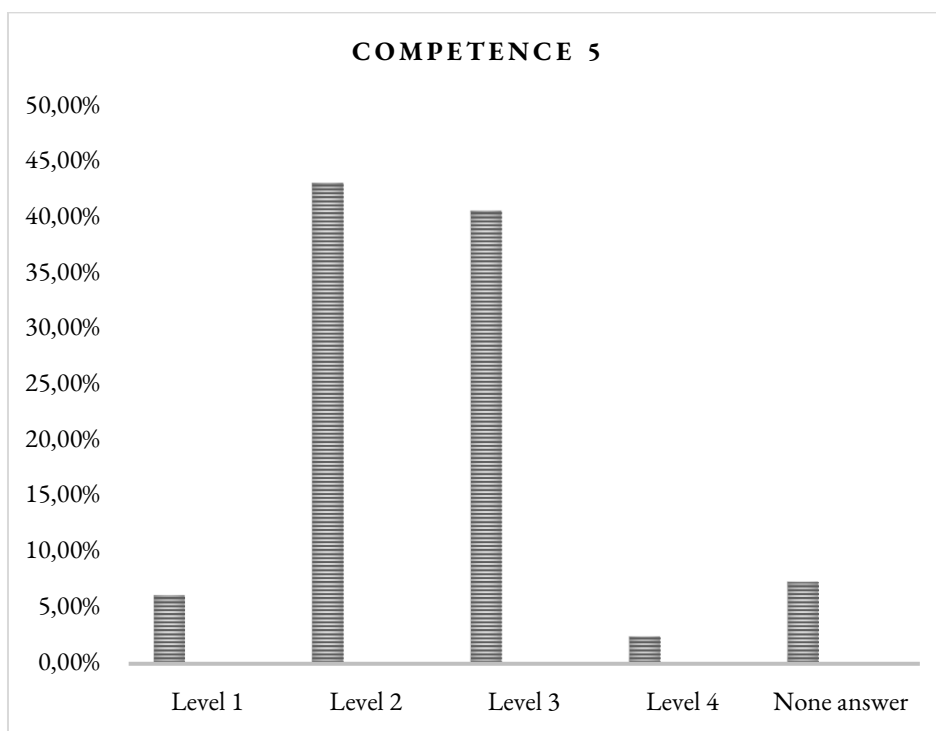
This group of participants highlights again the need to improve their training regarding these specific competences/knowledge. 6.2% declare a “level 1” while 2.5% a “level 4”. 7.4% do not respond.

The analysis of the qualitative data shows a low knowledge on the part of the teachers in training of the ways to implement real individualized and personalized paths. Often the difficulty in the implementation of these paths is due to a terminological confusion that generates the inability of the teachers in training to grasp the substantial differences between the two processes. It follows that the terms are used interchangeably without grasping their specificities.

The course will therefore have to clarify the meaning of the two processes, provide examples of methodologies to create individualized or personalized paths and require teachers in training to apply them in practice starting from proposed cases and problem situations.

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Graph 5: Participants' confidence level with Competence 5

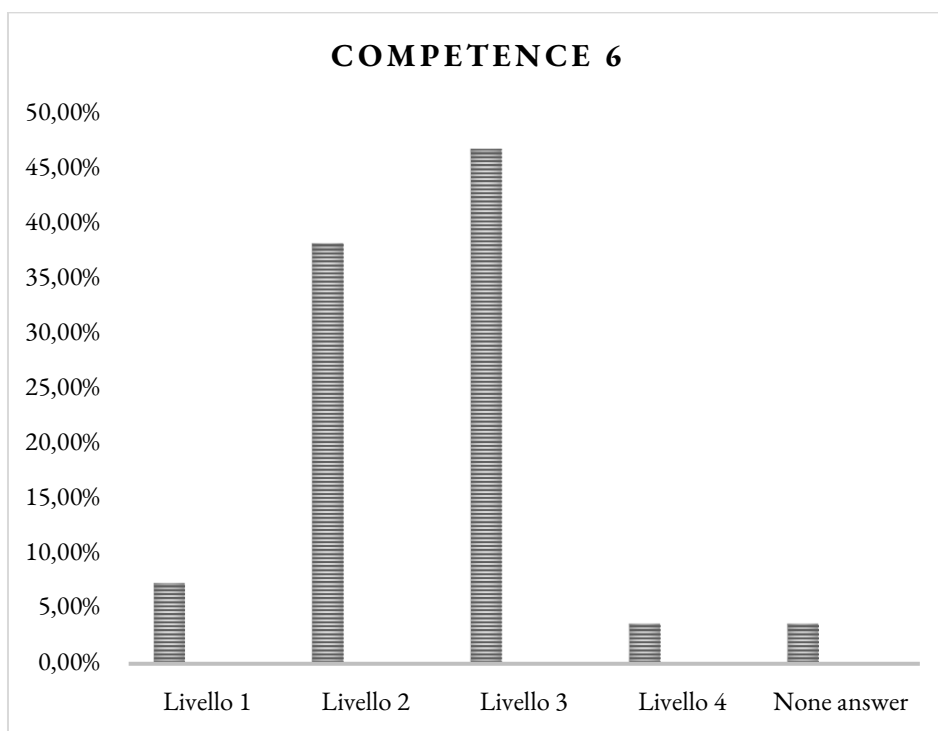
#### ***4.6 Need related to pedagogical competence in the development of the IEP - Life Project on an ICF basis***

Graph 6 shows that 46.9% of the participants declare a “level 3” of “confidence” with respect to the competence considered, 38.3% “a level 2”, while 7.4% “a level 1”. 3.7% declares a “level 4”, 3.7% does not respond. By combining the percentages of the answers “level 1” and “level 2” on the one hand, and the answers “level 3” and “level 4” on the other, we obtain, respectively, 45.7% and 50.6%. This means that almost half of the participants approach this competence with low “confidence” levels, while the other half approach it with higher “confidence” levels. Probably, in half of the cases, previous professional experience contributed to the consolidation of this competence, while in the other half of the cases, the work experience was not particularly significant in this regard.

The analysis of the qualitative data shows that while the Individualized Educational Plan seems to be known within the world of school (although with some basic ambiguity as emerges from the statements of teachers in training), the Life Plan appears less obvious. Therefore the teachers in training would be able to outline the characteristics of the IEP but not connect them to those of the Life Project. It is therefore necessary to provide teachers in training with a knowledge not only theoretical but above all practical of the two “tools” in order to lead them to the acquisition of the realization practices involved. It is a competence that refers to an educational planning capacity aimed at drafting the IEP-Life Project for the children with disabilities, in perspective of adult life.

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Graph 6: Participants' confidence level with Competence 6

Furthermore, it is useful to create simulative didactic situations again in which the teachers in training can collaborate with each other in the compilation of the IEP-Life Project, this is useful to convey to them the importance of educational co-responsibility and networking. In addition, it is necessary to provide adequate knowledge of the ICF model not only in its articulation of parts and codes but also in the method of application, in the observation procedures and in the preparation of the IEP as required by current legislation (Legislative Decree n. 66/2017, amended by Legislative Decree n. 96/2019).

As Ianes and colleagues (2013) points out, a good Individualized Educational Plan should result in a Life Project, allowing the children to be thought of as belonging to contexts different from school, contexts that go beyond the family. In this perspective, we look at the children as a growing person who, in his specific functioning mode, will become an adult (Ianes et. al., 2013). In this sense, the project must not only be the place of knowledge and planning of activities or training opportunities but a place of possibility, which does not concern only the school, but all the contexts in which that children lives. It is therefore necessary to illustrate to teachers in training the way to build those alliances between contexts and subjects that are part, in different way, of the life of the children with disabilities.

#### ***4.7 Need related to digital competences to improve educational actions from an inclusive point of view***

From the point of view of digital literacy, most teachers said they have a competence in the field of ICT mainly attributable to a personal rather than didactic use of the same. The interesting fact is that the same teachers in training have declared that they have followed training courses on the subject (at the University, the school) and also have a certification (EDL) but that they have not understood how to “plan an inclusive use of the same technologies” in the didactic practice addressed to all, not only addressed to students with special educational needs. This data was useful for reflecting on the emerging need attributable both to a design plan (knowing how to plan), both to a practical plan (knowing how to act) and to an inclusive plan (knowing how to act in a perspective for all). While initially the teachers in training focused mainly on their lack of technical competence (relating to the choice and use of technology), at the end of the course they started to pose the problem in pedagogical terms and to see the same technological tools as pedagogical tools, to be integrated into inclusive educational planning as they are capable of determining the necessary “adaptations” to the proposed activities, making them accessible to all (Fedeli & Pennazio, 2019). The change of perspective can be guaranteed by providing teachers in training not only with the presentation of different technological supports to be used but by placing them in front of real cases, problem solving where it is necessary to carefully plan a didactic intervention mediated by technology.

### **5. Conclusions**

The analysis of the quantitative/qualitative data has highlighted how it is not possible to structure an effective training course for adults without considering:

- (1) the careful identification and analysis of their training needs;
- (2) the clarification of their internal representations consolidated by a previous professional practice.

The focus on these two dimensions allows to make appropriate methodological choices in the preparation of training courses for professional adults.

The responses provided by the participants highlighted that in the structuring of training courses for professional adults it is necessary to use experiential learning and active teaching methodologies.

Experiential learning provides that alongside more communicative teaching strategies, learning situations are proposed that recover experiences lived in real contexts (Hickson, 2011). In this type of learning, the trainer teacher should become a “facilitator” of learning by providing stimuli to the group of participants and making them active in building knowledge. The experiential learning model was proposed in 1984 by Kolb who, taking up Dewey’s thought, highlights the existence of a circular relationship between action and reflection, between concrete and abstract, believing that effective learning requires the presence of four components: concrete experience, observation reflective, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation (Kolb & Kolb, 2009; Salerni & Zanazzi, 2019). Baker and Kolb identify important elements of experiential learning in dialogue and discussion as they are correlated with the possibility of attributing meaning to experience, triggering reflection

and sharing perspectives by actively and participatively promoting individual and group learning (Baker, Jensen & Kolb, 2005). As well observed by Salerni and Zanazzi:

reflection on experience as meta-reflection is fundamental because it favors the connection between the action plan and that of the conceptualization, allows us to understand the meaning of the experiences lived and to compare them with previous experiences and knowledge favoring the adoption of a new perspective and a restructuring of reference frameworks [...]. Reflection on the action or on the experience lived is therefore an integral part of the practice and requires time and exercise by professionals working in the field of education to learn to consider the expected and unexpected results of their action (Salerni & Zanazzi, 2019, pp. 55-56).

Active teaching methodologies become the “tool” to promote experiential learning as they are based on practice and follow the idea that knowledge, skills are born from doing. The methodologies that can be used in this perspective include: problem-based learning, flipped classroom, simulations, role play, cooperative learning, cases, life stories. The application of these methodologies alongside more frontal lessons useful to offer conceptual frameworks and specific knowledge, are fundamental in structuring a specialization course called to respond to the training needs of teachers in training.

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