A DisCrit-informed person-centered approach to inclusive education in Italy

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Abstract

In this article, the authors present DisCrit-informed person-centered strategies to reframe inclusive education in Italy through an equity prism. The aim is to provide teachers in mainstream secondary schools with practices that inform the design and implementation of Individualised Education Programs (IEPs) and Personalised Teaching Plans (Piano Didattico Personalizzato [PDP]), through non-deficit, intersectional, and culturally relevant approaches. Drawing on a case study carried out in a school in Rome, the article analyses the challenges that teachers face in including students at the intersections of race, ability, language, and citizenship. In doing so, the authors intend to advance critical thinking about the use of inclusive tools, and the importance of reframing them through the DisCrit framework, rooted in indigenous theory (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). Finally, the article suggests that some of the existing inclusive practices exacerbate the exclusion of migrant students with and without disabilities, in spite of promises of equality for all students.

Keywords: Person-centered planning, strength-based IEPs, DisCrit, inclusive education, Italy

Introduction

I can tell a story of a child I received in my class last year, he is 12 years old. He should have been placed in the first year of secondary school, but because of his language he was placed in year five of primary school. And he was from Cabo Verde, but the problem is that he has no official papers of any kind. He was born in Italy, then he moved to Cabo Verde with his mum after five years, and then he was abandoned in Cabo Verde because the mother got ill. We don't know anything about his mother's illness, but she couldn't take care of the child, so the child was completely free. He attended school but nobody cared about his results. Suddenly, he was sent back to Italy, but the father could not take care of him. So finally, he was sent to Rome, to our school because his grandmother lives here in Rome, but there is nothing official. He has no residence permit. He is now entrusted to his grandmother, but she is really old. She is 70, but we can't do anything because we have no official papers, no official documents. We don't have a residence permit, so we sent him for a cognitive assessment, but he was refused because he has no papers. So, the problem is quite a big one. Now he is in secondary school and we are trying another way. We are trying to send him to social assistance and not cognitive assistance, but we consider him socially at risk, because the grandmother can't take care of him because she is too old, and they are also very poor. The father doesn't want to intervene, so we don't have many actual official tools to use. But for now, we use the social support and see if through that support, even local charity or national associations could take care. Hopefully that could lead the grandmother through the bureaucracy to get official papers and so we can do something for him...The problem that most migrant students face is that families do not want to integrate, and they face social and money problems. Rosa, English Teacher

You know, I am an old-school teacher. I think it is important to distinguish between the PDP for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and the PDP for students with specific learning disabilities. Students with specific learning disabilities have a 'disability,' so we help them by valuing their strengths and finding a strategy to overcome their difficulties. The PDP for SEN students is reductive because initially students are helped and the material is simplified. But this should not last for a long time. Instead, we keep these students with a PDP for more than three years and students do not progress in their learning. We should really make sure that the learning progress is better monitored. Antonia, Italian Teacher

These vignettes offer a perspective into some of the challenges that Italian teachers in public schools face when addressing the educational requirements of students living at the intersections of multiple forms of oppression. In the first vignette, Rosa, the English teacher, reports the story of an undocumented student, and shows how a possible diagnosis of disability is used as a way to gain more social and educational support for the student inside the school. Additionally, this vignette highlights the obstacles within the complex bureaucratic Italian welfare system when a migrant student is undocumented. The entire description is focused on the perceived dysfunctions of the boy's family, reinforced by the comment on how immigrant families are not willing to integrate. In the second vignette, an experienced Italian teacher differentiates between two different types of personalised didactic plans (PDPs henceforward): the first type is intended for students identified as having SEN and a second one is intended for students identified according to a disability category. Importantly, she points out how implementation and monitoring of learning progress of students is not accurately in place. Thus, teachers' expectations of students from migrant backgrounds with disabilities to progress in their learning and academic achievement is limited.

These vignettes are just two examples of the general attitude of white monolingual Italian teachers to construct poverty, migration, and language learning phenomena as signs of disability (Author 1). Particularly, teachers often use students' proximity to the white Italian norm and nondisabled status as a metric for ascertaining their ability or belonging in certain learning contexts. Such attitudes seem to constitute a reaction to the significant increase of migrant children in Italian classrooms (Italian Ministry of Education [MIUR], 2014). They also mirror the historical color-evasive approach of the Italian society towards issues of race relations and racism in education (Author 1).

The article intends to provide teachers with supporting strategies that can be used in reframing inclusive education practices through an intersectional and culturally relevant lens (Annamma et al., 2016; Annamma & Morrison, 2018). The use of strength-based approaches for the Individual Educational Programs (IEP henceforward) and PDPs is not necessarily new, even in the Italian context, yet it is still guided by medical and deficit models of disability and diversity (Author 3; Author 1 & 3). The authors have chosen to focus on the Italian context, as they want to explore how the IEP and the PDP are designed and implemented in an educational context that has been defined as exemplary in terms of inclusive policies and practices (Ferri,

2019). In Italy, the state is compelled to provide financial support and specialist staff to guarantee personalised forms of teaching for all students needing additional support (Author 3). Inclusive support has changed in the aftermath of the implementation of special education policies in 2012 and 2013 and following an increase in the number of migrant and forced migrant students. Thus, this article serves as a model to shed light on how even in inclusive systems the strength-based model has been overlooked. Despite their growing application, inclusive pedagogical approaches are largely absent in the development of strength-based IEPs for students with disabilities (Author 2a). Thus, IEPs and other tools such as the PDP, devote only surface level attention to documenting students' strengths and abilities. Academic performance statements and goals are written in a deficit-oriented manner (Taylor, 2006). Teachers miss the opportunities to see beyond the limitations and challenges that their students may face, and instead, they overly focus on the shortcomings of the students.

The Global Impact of COVID-19, Racism, and Anti-Blackness

The authors would be remiss if they did not acknowledge the current state of the world as it relates to COVID-19 and how this pandemic situation has determined an increase in the growth of racist and anti-Blackness attitudes. At the early stages of the pandemic, Italy was particularly hard hit as cases rose sharply in late February 2020 which led to the country placing its some 60 million residents on lockdown in early March. Italy's numbers peaked in mid-March at roughly 6,000 new cases a day placing significant strain on the medical system and causing up to 627 deaths in a single day at the peak. The realities in Italy unfolded in other countries around the world with countries like the United States, Brazil, Russia, and the United Kingdom scrambling to control the outbreak. As the teachers interviewed in the case study affirmed, the lockdown has had a significant impact on the learning and socio-emotional status of multiply-marginalised students and communities. Thus, the urgency to reframing inclusive tools that acknowledge the multiple forms of oppressions that certain students live, to avoid reproducing inequalities, and helping them to thrive and not just survive.

In the height of the first wave of the pandemic in June 2020 in the United States, racialised violence against Black Americans led to the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless others, sparked anti-racist protests across the United States and around the world. People across the globe took to the streets to resist racialised violence in all of its forms in solidarity with Black Americans. Sadly, statistics confirmed what COVID/anti-racist protesters knew from the start, that Black communities and other communities who have been forced to live on the margins of society have been disproportionately impacted by the intersections of COVID-19, race, ethnicity, nation, gender, class, and disability (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 2020). This is of particular importance when taking a global perspective on COVID-19 as the pandemic is expected to force 49 million people into extreme poverty (World Bank, 2020). While unknown at the time of writing, the authors presume that such extreme living conditions could force many people to leave their country of origin to find hope in the borders of other countries, like Italy. Such has been the case with Italy, a country that saw

181,436 immigrant sea arrivals in 2016, 119,369 in 2017, 23,370 in 2018, and 11,471 in 2019 (United Nations High Commission for Refugees [UNHCR], 2020).

The article begins by presenting the DisCrit framework and its affordance to reframe the design and implementation of IEPs and PDPs in the Italian context. This is followed by a description of the methodology used to collect the data and the presentation of the history of IEPs and PDPs in the Italian context. Lastly, the paper presents practical strategies to reconceptualise IEPs and PDPs in the Italian school contexts through an equity lens.

Theoretical Frameworks

DisCrit

The urgency to intentionally include discussions of race, racism, ableism, and white supremacy in the creation and implementation of IEPs within Italian schools stems from the intellectual tradition of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Bell, 1987), and Disability Studies (DS) (Bell, 2006; 2011; Blanchett, 2006; Connor, 2008). In this paper, the authors draw from DisCrit, a combination of CRT and DS, to argue for an epistemological shift to the writing and implementation of IEPs and PDPs within Italian classrooms. Following the significant increase in the number of migrant students with SEN (MIUR, 2014), and the color-evasive attitudes of Italian teachers when discussing race and racism in schools (Author 1), it is important to recognise how ability and race are interconnected and influence what constitutes the "norm" (Annamma, et al, 2013). That is, people are compared to a desired standard (e.g., white, male, nondisabled, straight, middle class). Those who do not meet these requirements are labeled as abnormal and often constructed as "disabled students" (Author 1 & 3). Families from multiply-marginalised backgrounds are most at risk of suffering discrimination or being pathologised, and exoticised during the drafting and the implementation of the IEP. In addition, they tend to be considered as disposable and their narratives of oppression and marginalisation are often seen as unrealistic (Author 1).

This paper highlights the importance of centering multiply-marginalised students, families, and community members in the IEP process, to promote equity in mainstream school settings in Italy. While the authors rely on all seven tenets of DisCrit,[1] for the purpose of this article the authors highlight *Tenet Three*, which offers that the construct of race and ability are built in the social consciousness and that these productions have material consequences; *Tenet Four*, which privileges voices of marginalised populations traditionally not acknowledge in research; and *Tenet Five*, which considers legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race and how they have been used separately and together to deny the rights of some citizens. In this article, the authors seek to examine DisCrit affordances to person-centered planning and strength-based practices that would situate multiply-marginalised students, especially disabled

[1] The seven tenets of DisCrit are: 1. DisCrit focuses on ways that racism and ableism circulate interdependently; 2. DisCrit values multidimensional identities; 3. DisCrit emphasises social constructions of race and ability; 4. DisCrit privileges the voices of marginalised populations; 5. DisCrit considers legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race; 6. DisCrit recognises whiteness and ability as property; DisCrit requires activism (Annamma et al., 2016).

migrant students, as valuable members of the school community and having decision-making power in the making and implementation of IEPs.

DisCrit is at the center of the framing and analysis of this article, creating a necessary conceptual framework to address entrenched inequities in education (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). The article focuses on how the IEPs can be a tool that fails to support disabled and multiply-marginalised students in the Italian context. Although, IEPs and PDPs are resulting from different legislative measures (i.e., Law 104/92 and Law 170/2010) supporting respectively students with impairments and students with learning difficulties or socio-cultural problems, both educational plans seem to be entrenched within the same deficit-oriented thinking, leading, eventually, to compensatory measures and additional supports. In the following sections, the article presents the research study, and provide a critical analysis of the Italian laws and policies that paved the way for the creation of the IEP and PDP.

The Research Study

The data used in this article are part of a qualitative pilot case-study conducted with teachers and administrators in a comprehensive school in Rome, Italy, in the fall of 2020. The authors conducted the pilot case study as part of a larger transnational project aiming at expanding the person-centered strength-based approach for IEPs through the intersectional framework of DisCrit. The transnational study intends to transform the design and implementation of IEPs into more equitable inclusive and culturally responsive tools centering multiply-marginalised students, their families and communities, and monitoring more systematically their learning.

Located within the interpretive paradigm, the methodological approach that the authors adopted is a qualitative case study (Yin, 2014). Data collection for the pilot case-study, involved focus groups with four school professionals, including one English teacher, one Italian teacher, one support teacher and the head teacher. The study sample was limited due accessibility issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Originally, the authors intended to interview ten school professionals from two different secondary schools in Rome. But the restrictions due to the lockdown measures in Italy, and the challenges teachers were facing with virtual learning, have pushed the authors to reduce the sample to only the available teachers. The authors chose school professionals because of their roles, for their engagement with inclusion and diversity in the school, and their number of years in service.

The authors used pseudonyms for all the participants, as part of the authors' commitment to protect their confidentiality, and the interview excerpts presented in this article have been translated from Italian by Author 1. The authors' analysis of the data gathered in the pilot study is in line with the constructivist grounded theory methods, and thus consists of different coding strategies (Charmaz, 2011), memo writing, comparison of codes and categories, and of categories with extant literature to be able to define variation. Throughout the research process, the authors used the tenets of DisCrit to guide the research questions which have been subjected to a rigorous analysis expressed in early and advanced memo writing.

Inclusive Tools in Italian Public Schools

As the vignettes in the introduction to this paper show, in the Italian public schools the IEP and the PDP are used within public schools to support three different categories of students: (a) students with medically-certified disabilities according to Law 104/92; (b) students with learning disorders such as dyslexia according to Law 170/2010; (c) students struggling to comply with academic standards, mostly identified as students with socio-cultural difficulties, and (d) students from a marginalised background but without a medically-certified diagnosis of impairment, as established by the Ministerial Circular of March 2013. Although the IEP and PDP have been introduced as progressive tools for the inclusion of marginalised students, they are the by-products of a longstanding history of disability laws rooted within the medical model of disability.[2] Policies published between 1977 and 1992 depict a notion of inclusion embedded within ableism as the criterion for functioning. As a consequence, school practices focus on rehabilitation and compensation for disabled students (Author 3). The 1994 Presidential Decree published on February 24th introduces the Dynamic Functional Profile for the diagnosis and evaluation of disabled students in inclusive classrooms. It delineates the purposes and implementation mechanisms of the IEP, specifically focusing on learning interventions, social relations, and autonomy of students. Following the publication of the International Classification of Functioning Disability and Health (ICF) by the World Health Organization (2010), the Italian Ministry of Education adopted the ICF to elaborate guidelines for IEP writing and implementation. The ICF is used to boost the medical perspective of disability in the writing and implementation of the IEPs, and reinforces the scientific validity of "functioning," as a way to establish what students can or cannot do in the classroom (MIUR, 2009).

In response to the significant increase in the number of migrant students, with and without disabilities, in Italian classrooms, the Italian government has introduced the macro-category of SEN, through the Ministerial Decree of December 2012, and the following Circular of March 2013. The macro-category of SEN, introduced in 2013, is organized through a three-tiered categorization system that focuses on different types of provisions for learners. As explained in the two vignettes, and in light of such categorization systems, the process of certifying disabilities is rather complex for students of migrant backgrounds. Each sub-category within the macro-category of SEN has been provided with a specific working tool. More specifically, the Ministry of Education has introduced the PDP as a supportive tool for all students classified as having a learning disorder (Law 170/2020) or for those with a transitory difficulty, such as linguistic, socio-cultural difficulties, whilst the IEP remained specifically designed only for students with medically certified diagnosis. Similarly, as Antonia, the Italian teacher argues, the PDP presents some slight differences whether it is designed for students identified as having learning difficulties (hence with linguistic or socio-cultural difficulties) or for those with learning disorders. As expressed in the 2012 Ministerial Directive and 2013 Circular, the PDP focuses on:

[2] The medical model of disability is driven by the imperative to "healthy normalcy," whose defining characteristic is the location of disability within the individual with biological impairments, ignoring macro-sociopolitical contexts of racism, ableism and other intersecting systems of oppression (Author 1).

> (a) Certified diagnosis for students with learning disorders; (b) Analysis of students' needs and social contexts through observations; (c) Planning of educational interventions based on personalisation and individualisation; (d) Compensatory tools in case of severe difficulties; (e) Assessment tailored on students' needs and pathways; and (f) Families and students' commitment in order to establish a collaboration. (p. 4)

Despite recent policy attempts to transform IEPs and PDPs into tools framed with the active participation of students' families and communities (MIUR, 2020), the vignettes show how teachers' perceptions of migrant families are mostly based on deficit thinking. They prefer to focus on how families struggle to integrate and participate in meetings for the elaboration of IEPs and PDPs, rather than on the lack of supportive tools that schools, and policies should be able to provide to migrant families to facilitate their understanding. In addition, implementation, monitoring, and changes of these tools are even more complex, and leave families, community and students out of any decisions. In fact, even class teachers often refuse to make amendments, as stated by Antonia in the second vignette. Documents and procedures are the results of teacher council's decisions and/or derived from ministerial guidelines that do not provide individual teachers with much space for manoeuvring. When looking at PDPs and IEPs, the key sections to provide the child with support are respectively the medical diagnosis and the types of resources resulting from such diagnosis. The most severe diagnosis often guarantees more resources such as hours of supported teaching and/or additional teaching/learning tools, notwithstanding the type of impact that even less severe types of impairments may have on school routines.

As evidenced by Antonia in the introductory vignette, and by other participants in the case study, IEPs and PDPs are not reviewed easily over time. What seems to emerge from the interviews with teachers is that students who have been provided with PDPs tend to remain encapsulated within this "needy" condition over the years. PDPs for students who have been identified as having SEN resulting from their linguistic and socio-cultural difficulties (i.e., migrant students), should be used as temporary supportive tools only. Migrant students should learn new skills, while teachers (and the school) should develop new organisational and teaching methodologies to meet students' requirements. In contrast, PDPs remain the main supportive tools used over the years, while class methodologies and curriculum remain basically unchanged. Students' requirements are constantly understood as "needs" rather than seen as school inadequate response to difference. Although migrant students are generally expected to progress, their learning progress is not constantly monitored, and students are not provided with all curricular and assessment changes they require to fully succeed as their peers.

Following the new Decree Law n. 66 of 13 April 2017, a series of legislative measures were passed in 2020 which established that IEPs would be designed based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (WHO, 2001). The IEP based on the ICF model has become a unique tool at the national level to manage disability in schools, and the centrality of families' and disabled students' participation in the structuring and drafting of the

IEP (and consequently in PDPs) has been recognised. In the new ICF model, support teachers are not the only professionals with a decision-making power during the functional diagnosis and planning of interventions. Power and decision-making are also bestowed to parents via the School Working Group on Inclusion (*Gruppo di Lavoro Operativo per l'Inclusione* [GLO]), the school body in charge of elaborating the IEP (Tramontano, 2020). Nevertheless, medical experts, such as neuropsychiatrists and psychologists, are identified as key decision makers in the planning and designing of IEPs.

Despite medical expertise being crucial to understanding students' functioning, school contexts cannot be compared to therapeutic settings, with inevitable consequences in terms of teaching and learning strategies. Teachers and school practitioners cannot play a secondary role. Thus, with the last reforms, the IEP and PDP models remain anchored in the "functional" and "deficit" medical model of disability. Lastly, these reforms have said very little about the practical ways in which schools and teachers are going to engage families, community members and students, and how to monitor students' progress at the end of each year, especially during transitions onto different grades of schooling. To address this gap, in the next section, the article provides practical strategies to reframe school inclusion through an equity lens.

Reframing Inclusive Education Through Person-Centered Planning

"We tend to use these tools [IEPs, PDPs] because we don't see any progress in students' learning. We are forced to use them because we don't see any improvement...I'm not sure, but I think we simplify too much and the students just get used to this and they don't challenge themselves, and we don't challenge students. Even when we tried to move the students out of the IEPs or PDPs we realised that they were lost." Antonia, Italian Teacher

Antonia's quote highlights how tools designed to be inclusive can become means by which schools justify why some students do not progress and/or do not progress according to grade/age standards. PDPs and IEPs are used during assessment meetings to control students' learning and achievement, while teaching strategies remain unquestioned. The article provides strength-based supports, in line with DisCrit tenets, that can be implemented as a series of "field tasks." These field tasks can be useful to both pre-service and in-service teachers and should be completed under the supervision of a more experienced colleague. The authors introduce two field tasks in the subsequent sections. When taken together, these field tasks can increase transparency and accountability when implementing inclusive supports, as well as promote DisCrit-informed strength-based inclusive education practices. In the subsequent sections, the authors describe each component of DisCrit-informed strength-based inclusive practices and their implications for teaching.

Overview of Person-Centered Planning (PCP)

"We should try to engage with families, especially those from migrant backgrounds, in a different way. We should try to be more inclusive; we should establish a different relationship with them, which will help them see the school not just as a place where to leave their children, but also a place where they can develop significant relationships." Antonia, Italian Teacher

As Antonia states above, it is imperative that teachers actively develop relationships with multiply-marginalised families. Previously, the article described many of the barriers (including teachers' implicit and explicit biases) that inhibit family participation in the IEP process. In this section, the authors offer a specific practice that, if used proactively and routinely, has the potential to lay the foundation for teachers to develop authentic relationships with families and promote the cultural competence of teachers. This practice, Field Task #1 is person-centered planning (PCP). Consider the following quote from a headteacher, Stefania.

> So, the kind of biases are many and these increase with the conditions of families, discrimination in terms of language, poverty and social conditions of course. As a school we still tend to say they have difficulties in speaking, they have difficulties in integrating because of the few hours we give them for meetings at school.

Here, Stefania discusses that schools often do not provide families of multiply-marginalised students enough time to authentically engage in a collaborative process that pushes back against factors that contribute to the formation of negative biases related to such families. Regularly engaging families in the PCP process is one approach to encourage proactive parent participation in IEP meetings. This also promotes in-depth knowledge of students and their families and encourages teachers to develop strength-based IEPs (Author 2a). It is important to note that there are many approaches to PCP including: McGill Action Planning System (MAPS) (Vandercook, York, & Forest, 1989), Personal Futures Planning (Mount, 2000), Essential Lifestyle Planning (Smull & Harrison, 1992), and Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (Pearpoint, O'Brien, & Forest, 1991). Whatever the approach, it is imperative that the location of the meeting be in a location that is comfortable for the disabled student, their family, and their support network.

While there are many approaches to PCP, in this section the article discusses the implications implementing MAPs (Vandercook, York, & Forest, 1989) in the Italian context. When conducting MAPs, the teacher co-facilitates the meeting with another person scribing, and the following questions guide the discussion: (a) What is a MAP? (b) What is the story? (c) What is the dream? (d) What is the nightmare? (e) Who is the person? (f) What are their gifts, strengths, talents? (g) What are their needs? (h) What is the plan of action? The important implication of conducting MAPs is that it is proactive, and helps forge authentic relationships with multiply-marginalised disabled students and their families. This approach has been shown to increase the family's participation and satisfaction with the IEP process and increases teamwork and collaboration from the start (Weishaar, 2010). Additionally, the MAPs process can help teachers

learn about the cultural complexities of families as well as establish a powerful, strength-based foundation for an IEP.

Although a non-school location would be best to increase parents' participation, in Italy meetings cannot be held outside the school settings, and IEP documents are not allowed to circulate for privacy reasons. Consequently, although, in the school, IEPs are constantly shared with parents and medical experts, their design is usually the result of the work of a single teacher and sometimes, class teachers, rather than a collaboration between parents and teachers. As deemed appropriate by the family, any stakeholders in the disabled student's life should be invited to the meeting including but are not limited to: parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, neighbours, social workers, therapists, and teachers. In the age of COVID-19, setting up virtual options is the safest option, and as long as families have access to technology, this allows wide access to participation in virtual meetings. However, for those parents with migrant backgrounds, the lack of technological devices or internet connection have represented significant additional barriers to collaborate with the school. The school used in our research has provided opportunities and devices for migrant families to come to school to share IEPs and PDPs, but such meetings were not always attended by the family for lack of appropriate means of communication in pandemic times. Implementing a PCP can help to reconstruct the multiply-marginalised student in a holistic fashion and provide information from which to create other strength-based documents that can help disseminate this information to members of the IEP, receiving teachers, special area teachers, and paraprofessionals. Ultimately, a PCP can help teachers to resist the marginalisation that is often associated with the intersections of race and immigration status in Italy.

Field Task #1: Conducting a PCP. For Field Task #1, the teacher would identify a multiply-marginalised disabled student and connect to the family. The teacher would introduce the concept of PCP to the family and collaborate with them to set up a time and location for the meeting. The teacher would encourage the family to invite stakeholders to the meeting. During the meeting, the teacher would facilitate the meeting and work together to document the information shared during the meeting. Following the PCP, the teacher would write up a report that synthesises the information and share it with the family and stakeholders. See Appendix A for an example of what directions for conducting a PCP could look like.

Implications for teaching: Field Task #1. Conducting PCPs is a proactive communication structure that establishes collaborative relationships with families. This approach lets families know that while the process does take more time and energy to coordinate, that the teacher is committed to making that time in order to genuinely focus on learning the strengths and needs of the student and their family. Rather than checking necessary boxes as required by legal documents, a PCP centers the family's narrative and lays the foundation for a more collaborative and strength-based IEP/PDP moving forward. Within the Italian context, conducting PCPs is part of the routine procedure to design PDPs. However, the language barriers

remain an issue, especially when teachers have to connect with migrant parents. Having cultural mediators and interpreters alongside teachers would represent a great opportunity to realize this task.

Connections to DisCrit: Field Task #1. Person-centered planning aligns well with DisCrit as it is a strategy centering the lived experiences of historically marginalised youth in schools. It is a tool that does not pretend to speak for marginalised students but aims at working together with families to dismantle structured inequities in the education system. This strategy acknowledges the legitimacy of different cultural heritages, constantly attempts to build significant connections between home and school, based on authentic solidarity, and integrate non-dominant cultural materials into the curriculum (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). By using this strategy, teachers are offered an opportunity to know the interconnected forms of oppressions that students experience inside and outside the school.

Overview of Ecological Assessments.

"We can get organised as a school, but for some students if they don't fall into certain specific categories, we cannot provide them with any sort of assistance. But just teachers and the class council organise themselves to provide support." Stefania, Headteacher

Promoting the use of ecological assessments is one way, as Stefania describes above, that schools can get organised and support multiply-marginalised students who arrive at their school. An ecological assessment is an observation-based assessment meant to be used in different school-related settings over a period of time to get a more-accurate picture of what the student is good at and what they need to be successful in an inclusive setting (Downing, Hanreddy, & Peckham-Hardin, 2015; Author 2b). The assessment presumes an inclusive classroom and is meant to provide a holistic view of students and can be used in any environment (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013). Ecological assessments help teachers to examine naturally occurring routines, what students without disabilities are doing, and whether and how students with disabilities are performing the same sorts of activities and actions. These assessments encourage teachers to fill the gaps with existing school resources (e.g., support from peers without disabilities, small group instruction). It is important to use ecological assessments over a period of time with multiple team members who regularly interact with the student. Conducting ecological assessments can be a great asset for the design and implementation of PDPs. It can allow for a better observation of how multiply-marginalised students engage in lessons, something which is currently missing from the PDP process.

Field Task #2: Conduct an Ecological Assessment. While conducting a PCP is a critical skill for teachers to learn, they also need to know how to analyse an inclusive environment and be able to identify existing supports that can be leveraged for disabled students. They need to determine the gaps in the environment which would pose barriers to supporting disabled

students. To do this, the article suggests assigning teachers Field Task #2, which is an ecological assessment. The article suggests providing teachers the following steps to completing the field task: (a) Identify between 10-15 (more if needed) steps of the activity (e.g., How students without disabilities would engage with the lesson); (b) Identify the natural cues present in the environment (e.g., students line up when they hear the bell); (c) Identify the skills needed to perform the task; (d) Assess the student with a disability's performance of the task; (e) Identify the discrepancy analysis (e.g., Why the student did or did not complete the task, "The student may not have performed the task because they do not understand that the bell means to line up"); and (f) Suggest an intervention (e.g., what skills you need to teach/supports you need to provide, teach a peer to remind the student with a disability that the bell has rung and they need to line up). See Appendix B for a sample filled-out ecological assessment and template.

Implications for teaching: Field Task #2. Conducting ecological assessments allow teachers to understand student strengths and the areas in which students need more support. Since ecological assessments take place in inclusive school settings that the student frequents, this approach to assessment can provide useful instructional techniques and recommendations for student support that moves away from merely placing labels on students and towards addressing their in-class academic supports (Author 2b). Ecological assessments can also help to reduce the stigma of labeling students, and they eliminate the challenges of misdiagnosis as the focus of assessment is not identification, but rather identifying what the *teacher* can do to support the student. Put simply, the goal of ecological assessments is to keep students *in* the general education class rather than justify the removal of the student *out* of that setting.

Connections to DisCrit: Field Task #2. Ecological assessment of classroom environment and of students aligns with the principles of DisCrit classroom ecology. DisCrit classroom ecology recognises classrooms as spaces that center multiply-marginalised students as valuable resources whose lived experiences and everyday knowledge must be built upon (Annamma & Morrison, 2017; Spratt & Florian, 2015). In light of a DisCrit classroom ecology, this task helps teachers to refuse deficit-oriented master-narratives about learning, ability and behaviour of multiply-marginalised students that animate dysfunctional classroom ecologies. The ecological assessment allows for the creation of trust relationships based in solidarity between students and teachers. Additionally, students' actions are perceived as strategies of resistance, often in response to interpersonal and state violence (Annamma & Morrison, 2017). Through ecological approaches and assessment teachers can teach students self-determination and self-knowledge (Annamma & Morrison, 2017).

Conclusion

This article showed the value of applying DisCrit informed person-centred strategies to reconceptualise inclusive education in Italy through an equity lens. Drawing on a case study carried out in a secondary school in Rome, the paper provided teachers with intersectional and culturally relevant strategies to (re)design IEP and PDP. The introduction of person-centred planning and ecological assessment responded to some of the challenges that Italian teachers face when including disabled migrant students in mainstream settings. The thematic analysis of teachers' narratives suggested that existing inclusive practices in mainstream schools increase the exclusion of migrant students and their families. The article started with two vignettes offering a perspective into some of the issues that Italian teachers in public schools face when addressing the educational requirements of students living at the intersections of race, language, citizenship and ability. It presented the affordance of DisCrit to reframe the design and implementation of IEPs and PDPs in the Italian context. After illustrating the study and the history of IEPs and PDPs in Italy, the paper introduced DisCrit oriented and strength-based strategies for in-service teachers.

While the article focused on in-service teachers, this is not to say the field tasks could not be embedded within teacher education programs, provided that professors and pre-service teacher supervisors were versed in the tenets of DisCrit. The authors chose to focus on in-service teachers as this project was designed to directly support and benefit the teachers and students the authors are currently working with in Rome. The field tasks presented in this article are not meant to be absolute or prescriptive in their presentation and application in schools. Rather, they are examples of starting points where teachers can use the templates in the appendices and modify them to make them relevant in their respective school settings. The authors consider this the start of an ongoing conversation with the teachers working within the project in Rome and beyond. The strategies presented in this article are not exhaustive and certainly not presented in any order of efficacy. However, they constitute a starting point to reframe inclusion through an equity paradigm. The authors feel it is their responsibility as academics and practitioners to publish research that can actually be used in inclusive classrooms to benefit all learners.

It is hoped that the field tasks presented in this article are not only used by partner teachers in Rome, but that they are also critiqued and modified by others, in other contexts, who actually apply them. The implications of person-centred planning and conducting ecological assessment for inclusive policy and practices in Italy, and elsewhere, are vast. These strategies can help in promoting critical reflection and action for all teachers, while encouraging them to empower and love multiply-marginalised students, their families, and their communities. For this reason, the authors conceptualised this article as an invitation for teachers, families, and researchers to reach out and share what they have tried, what has been successful and challenging.

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