

## **Introduction: Education for all and Quality of life**

*Di Catia Giaconi, Maria Beatriz Rodrigues, Aldo Caldarelli, Noemi Del Bianco*

The theme of this book is the “Quality of life”, it is inherently important in the present society, where people live longer. Health care and long term welfare are essential in the prospect of a longer life expectancy, trying to avoid a substantial impact on the cost of public healthcare and for the families. The theme becomes very relevant if we take in account the life of people with disabilities, with different levels of physical and psychic dependence.

World Health Organization data show that approximately 15% of the world’s population lives with some form of disability. It has been estimated that globally about one billion people have disabilities. These numbers grow as they are associated with the ageing of the world’s population, along with the increasing sophistication of the tools that diagnose the disabilities (WHO, 2011). On one side, longer life expectancy can be considered a social improvement. On the other side, adapting to it brings important challenges for governments, care-giving institutions, families and the general population. The question involves everybody, notwithstanding the prejudices and misinformation that still concern it.

Actions to increase awareness and sensibilization toward older and disabled people have been proposed and implemented. We could mention many local examples, however, at global level we find the proposals by the World Health Organization: World Report on Disability (2011), Global Age-Friendly Cities (2007), Active Ageing (2005). These document’s main contribution aims to promote the discussion on the themes and the responsibilities of all the agents involved and concerned by by the new demographic reality.

Bauman, who put the faults into theoretical perspective, draws our attention to the implacable times we live in. Our competitive times despise the weakest, where few are interested in concepts like community, collectivity and cohabitation. Excessive individualism weakens human ties and strains the capacity of being empathic and supportive, in a increasingly global world (Bauman, 2003; 2007).

Paradoxically, the most diverse news, from far away countries, arrive instantaneously just with a click online, while we became incapable to deal with the nearest problems next to us. The rhythm of change tends to be far too fast, and

equally the speed with which new phenomena appear and disappear in the public awareness is very fast. These are times where each individual is left abandoned, without any consideration from those living in the same community (Bauman, 2009).

However, this indifference should be fought with new ideas of inclusion for people with disabilities. The authors of this book believe in this: another society is possible, it can grow taking in account the characteristics of groups and individuals with special needs and planning ways to help on these needs. Dealing with diversity does not mean overlooking or hiding it, but to give it a meaning and contribute to overcome it.

The book is organised in four chapters. The first chapter brings different perspectives on the necessity to have sustainable proposals to initiate new forms of inclusive planning for disabled adults. Adult age disability creates new educational challenges, it asks to the services provided for people with disability within the scope of the Quality of Life.

As authors and researchers of special pedagogy, we consider our focus to be the creation of the concept of *Quality of Life* (QOL), which will be explored in this chapter and will demonstrate its conceptual and professional potentials; including the field of special education and perhaps more relevantly, the scenario of the pedagogy of inclusion.

The philosophical, medical and economic considerations of this subject will be examined with a multi-disciplinary analysis only within the scope of conceptualisation and appreciation of the quality of life for disabled persons. Remarkable reflections and pedagogical implications arise from taking care of adult disabled persons. They range from organising daytime and residential services, to *parental training* courses for families and training professionals who act in this sector.

Chapter two intends to reflect on the paradigm of the quality of life referred to adult disability and the services referred to the caretaking of the persons with disabilities. To have a shared scientific setting of reference, we would like to start a first training proposal, which aims to acknowledge the *needs* connected with adult disability, especially in cases of autism and multiple disabilities, with an educational approach akin to the quality of life of persons with disabilities during their lives. Ultimately, the perspective is one of a long-term project. The common thread that links both training paths is the attention toward the person's singularity, to his/her

needs and the changes that he/she expects to happen over the time and therefore, the ability to plan and realise professional interventions for a full realisation of the quality of life. As we will indeed see later, despite what we said in chapter one on the great diffusion of the concept of quality of life in the field of vocational guidance, we need a careful professional training to pick the specificity of the educational practices in taking charge of persons with disabilities.

Although the discussion will focus on adult disability, we deem opportune to specify that this perspective should be thought and planned in a *continuum* during the course of life. Therefore, we will introduce some thoughts related to the quality of life of the adult person with disabilities. After the analysis of some essential *needs* of the person, we will address some important reflections concerning the educational practices of planning and caregiving of adult persons with disabilities.

Chapter three proposes a brief reflection on the possible directions in the life of a person with disabilities. It is based on the acknowledgment that the future of the disabled children, especially after the death of the parents, is a huge concern. The disabled person has to be prepared for what is called the “After Us”. The chapter defends the idea that the person with disabilities and the family to the concrete possibility of autonomous life, even in a structure suited to the needs of the family member. To work within the paradigm of the Quality of Life, we need to find the life path of the person with disabilities taking into account occupation, training opportunities also at university level, internship, working insertion and protected workplaces, as well as residence and integrated networks in the community.

Finally, chapter four highlights the historical relationship between needs and assistance, especially since the post war Europe that built the welfare state model. This discussion opens the way to examine practical experiences from Italy and Brazil on educational and labour inclusion. The examples, which show big differences between the two countries are used to discuss the central place that work occupies in the people’s lives. This becomes even truer in the case of disabled people, for whom work is a possibility, or an instrument, of emancipation. An effective path of working inclusion leads to improve the Quality of Life of the person.

We hope you will enjoy reading this book and that it may bring fresh insights to help your work or to concern your world, in accordance with reason that brought you to read it. The Quality of Life is important to everyone and we hope that this book may help in building bridges between educators and disabled people, as well as other health professionals and people who have interest in this important subject.