



Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University Journal.  
Pedagogical Sciences. Vol. 3 (106)

Вісник Житомирського державного  
університету імені Івана Франка.  
Педагогічні науки. Вип. 3 (106)

ISSN (Print): 2663-6387

ISSN (Online): 2664-0155

## METHODOLOGY AND HISTORY OF PEDAGOGY

## МЕТОДОЛОГІЯ ТА ІСТОРІЯ ПЕДАГОГІКИ

UDC 376:37.013.8

DOI 10.35433/pedagogy.3(106).2021.5-19

### THE AUTONOMY AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE HUMAN BEING

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*The article focuses on the autonomy achieved by a person with disabilities in connection with a network that has to make the imaginary project feasible. A multidisciplinary reading on the concept of autonomy that is related to the idea of dependence and independence is essential within this network. Furthermore, possible autonomies are presented, dealing with spheres of the human being that are usually regarded as inaccessible to a person with disabilities, such as the sexual sphere, living alone, social life and work. These aspects of life belong to adulthood, which every human being undertakes at some point in their life. But the latter is not usually recognized to the person with disabilities, locking them up in a dimension of non-growth and "eternal child". The concept of autonomy implies dependence. As the Argentine pedagogist Myrtha Chokler reminds us, "there is no autonomy without dependence". We all depend on everyone, children and adults: in our life, we talk about co-dependence or mutual dependence. On the other hand, autonomy also means self-governance, i.e. not doing things for oneself, but doing for oneself. This represents an important dimension of autonomy: the will. In the educational field, autonomy requires a mutual involvement between educator and student which is characterized by a mutual affective and emotional dependence in which the will always remain the central focus of the student's action, without it slipping into obedience. Autonomy, therefore, is a conquest. A process in which the adult educator, who takes care of the student, works on the educative relationship through trust, freedom of movement, affective security, within a safe space, physical but also emotional, in which there is openness to novelty and change. This requires the creation of an environment that welcomes the pleasure of the student (especially at an early age) to be autonomous, that welcomes his attempts that will be the way to learn not to depend on the adult. And for all this, an indeterminate and personalized amount of time is required.*

**Key words:** disability, autonomy, dependence, independence Inter(in)dependence, growth, adulthood.

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## АВТОНОМІЯ ЯК ФОРМА ВИРАЖЕННЯ ЛЮДИНИ

Д. Аргіропулос

Стаття зосереджується на автономії, досягнутої людиною з обмеженими можливостями у зв'язку з мережею, яка має зробити уявний проект здійсненим. Міждисциплінарне читання концепції автономії, пов'язаної з ідеєю залежності та незалежності, є важливим у цій мережі. Крім того, представлені можливі автономії, що стосуються сфер людської істоти, які зазвичай вважаються недоступними для людини з обмеженими можливостями, таких як сексуальна сфера, самотність, соціальне життя та робота. Ці аспекти життя належать до зрілості, яку кожна людина бере на себе в певний момент свого життя. Але останнє зазвичай не визнається людиною з обмеженими можливостями, замикаючи їх у вимірі незростання та "вічної дитини". Концепція автономії передбачає залежність. Як нагадує нам аргентинський педагог Мірта Чоклер, "автономії немає без залежності". Усі ми залежимо від оточуючих, дітей і дорослих: у нашому житті ми говоримо про співзалежність чи взаємну залежність. З іншого боку, автономія також означає самоврядування. Це являє собою важливий вимір автономії: волю. У освітній сфері автономія вимагає взаємної участі вихователя та учня, яка характеризується взаємною афективною та емоційною залежністю, в якій воля завжди залишається центральним ядром дії учня, без того, щоб вона скочувала до послуху. Отже, автономія є завоюванням, процесом, у якому вихователь, який піклується про учня, працює над виховними стосунками через довіру, свободу пересування, афективну безпеку, що реалізуються у безпечному просторі, як фізичному так і емоційному, в якому є відкритість до новизни та змін. Для цього потрібно створити середовище, яке вітає бажання учня (особливо в ранньому віці) бути автономним, яке вітає його спроби, які будуть способом навчитися не залежати від дорослого. І для всього цього необхідна невизначена і персоналізована кількість часу.

**Ключові слова:** інвалідність, автономність, залежність, незалежність, взаємозалежність, зростання, дорослість.

**Introduction of the issue.** Autonomy springs from the sense that every human being constructs thanks to the subdivision of meanings. The more consistent the undifferentiated background, the greater the degree of vulnerability and dependence. Enabling oneself to see the beauty of a disabled person beyond their disabilities is an attitude that can help to discover new possibilities that will be eventually used to create a new life. In everyday life, human beings use different skills, knowledge and abilities to carry out an activity. All this allows the creation of relationships to live in a society and set goals and achieve them. To complete a work project, make a cooking recipe, play a musical instrument or cross the street, we need specific skills, such as: remembering information to perform a given task, coordinating our movements, implementing reasoning, creativity and knowledge that allow us to find

solutions to a problem. Each person is an individual with their biological composition, personality and specific characteristics that make it a unique being in the world. From this perspective, it could be said that diversity is a positive concept, understood on the same level as the beauty of uniqueness.

**Current state of the issue.** The concept of diversity, which represents the core of the investigation of special education, is the soul of education. It does not mean only the starting point of any educational relationship, but it also indicates an effective tool in the different educational processes, which goes through the life of each individual. In this sense, it is possible to think of education as a path made of different processes, characterized by a particular dynamism; paths that must be designed and redesigned continuously, tending to a future, to a change. Education is

made up of relationships that require an encounter and knowledge with the other from oneself, who is different from us, with whom one can "be in a relationship". This type of research becomes a necessary condition for embarking on the path that progressively structures our identity, which is never static, definitive.

**Outline of unresolved issues brought up in the article.** However, the encounter with otherness is never a linear, predictable path. Indeed, it could be defined more as a clash than an encounter. Otherness can be represented by an unexpected, unplanned, unpleasant situation, which puts us to the test and challenges us, thus activating, unconsciously, a process of change. Here the concept of otherness will be used as a tool and a way to analyse one of the fundamental goals of educational processes: autonomy. The term autonomy derives from the Greek "*autonomy, a compound of *autós* "same" and theme of *némō* "to govern". In a broad sense, autonomy is the ability and faculty to govern and govern itself, with its laws*". On the psychological level, autonomy indicates a "state of integration whereby an individual lives in full harmony with his feelings and behavioural needs or impulses that, to be satisfied, require to be favoured and stimulated. It is the ability to face and master different situations to find solutions to problems related to external reality and to distribute oneself together with one's actual qualities and abilities. This condition is dynamically conquered slowly and progressively, graduated according to age and level of maturity, preserved, dispersed or mortified because of particular circumstances or experiences". Autonomy, therefore, is a conquest. A process in which the adult educator, who takes care of the student, works on the educative relationship through trust, freedom of movement, affective security, within a safe space, physical but also emotional, in which

there is openness to novelty and change. This requires the creation of an environment that welcomes the pleasure of the student (especially at an early age) to be autonomous, that welcomes his attempts that will be the way to learn not to depend on the adult. And for all this, an indeterminate and personalized amount of time is required.

**Results and discussion.** The concept of autonomy implies dependence. As the Argentine pedagogist Myrtha Chokler reminds us, "there is no autonomy without dependence" [11]. We all depend on everyone, children and adults: in our life, we talk about co-dependence or mutual dependence. On the other hand, autonomy also means self-governance, i.e. not doing things for oneself, but doing for oneself. This represents an important dimension of autonomy: the will. In the educational field, autonomy requires a mutual involvement between educator and student which is characterized by a mutual affective and emotional dependence in which the will always remain the central focus of the student's action, without it slipping into obedience.

The mother-child bond is a bond that goes beyond the respective and successive post-birth projections and identifications. The mother, from the beginning of her pregnancy, creates an idea and expectations that she projects onto her child, beginning to develop a bond that will continue and be further nurtured after birth. The child depends on his parents because they offer him everything he needs to live and develop. But he is a subject of the action and not only of reaction: he is a subject who can put all his resources and capacities into motion to achieve the satisfaction of his needs. It is not necessary to be taught to do or to be led to do, but it is necessary to prepare the environmental and relational conditions so that this happens by itself. This is why we talk about positive autonomy and negative autonomy. Becoming autonomous does

not mean becoming completely independent, because autonomy implies dependence; without it, the individual would never experience the feeling of freedom that comes from leaving that "haven" where he has been moored for years, on which he has depended. Achieving autonomy implies a change, of course, entering other seas, not easy to navigate but for which one must take risks. The metaphor of "sailing" is symbolically representative of the passage that each of us undertakes towards adulthood. In the various passages of life, the detachment from what is known and the encounter with the other, with otherness, is fundamental and functional to the construction of a positive autonomy. Autonomy in the positive sense is possible thanks to a process of differentiation that makes the person free from mental and physical states, as well as relational and social ones, to which he should no longer belong. Negative autonomy, on the other hand, is typical of those who exchange the freedom of thought and action for individualism, where there is an inability to recognize the value and existence of relationships. Therefore, each of us is the result of genetic and environmental factors and autonomy represents the most concrete expression of human development. It is identified with the need for independence which, especially in the case of individuals with disabilities, implies a continuous confrontation with one's limits and potential. In the usual reference model, the person with a disability is seen as the most fragile person, in need of continuous support and help. When the concept of autonomy is applied to a person with a disability, this leads to a distorted view of the shared reality of "being normal". In the common belief, being autonomous is equivalent to possessing the greatest possible power, not only over oneself but also over others. This logic, besides being unjust, is autarchic. As Andrea Canevaro

argues Autonomy as autarky, as an individual ability to do without the help of others, leads to great dependencies. Being autonomous implies knowing how to express oneself and make oneself understood by others. But it also means to become part of that system of codes that regulate the interaction between individuals within one or more specific situations. The need to belong is one of the most human needs there is. Feeling part of something, we do not feel out of place, and we know how to find a balance in our lives and the world. We find belonging in our daily activities, in the bonds that we gradually build.

Belonging is a practice. If we all need to belong to reality, to a context in which we can recognize ourselves, how do people with disabilities perceive this need? In a person with disabilities, the need to belong manifests itself more strongly, first within the family, then in the subsequent contexts of life. Belonging can cover several areas and requires the search for new stimuli. Belonging can be transformed.

Anna Contardi reminds us that to belong to a context we must carry out actions autonomously. In a person with disabilities, the concept of autonomy cannot be taken for granted and cannot be understood statically. There is no single taxonomic dynamics of autonomy. This aspect is what we need to work on. First of all, we help the person to become aware of their limits. Then, we organize and build connections with their particular autonomies, to work on their existing obstacles. And this requires social organization; building from the perspective of the life project. "Project of life is first of all 'thinking' in a future perspective, or better a double thinking, in the sense of imagining, fantasizing, desiring, aspiring, wanting" and simultaneously in the "to prepare the necessary actions, to foresee the various steps, to manage the timing, to evaluate the pros and cons, to understand the feasibility". In the pathways to

autonomy, the type of relationship that is established with the other is important, "between controlling and being controlled" [2: 14]: Controlling the information we are given, identifying the right information, necessary for our objective, knowing how to discriminate between the various pieces of information. This means having the ability to control, and the educator has the task of helping the student to know how to control, and "not control" him; that he is able to receive the right information, putting it together to reach his objective. "The fundamental characteristic of man is to be in the world and with the world [...]. But the condition of extraneousness and dependence creates in the disabled subject a sense of incapacity that can end up neutralizing all his vital energies; he ends up adapting himself passively, that is, living the condition of not being".

The concept of autonomy is often associated with the concept of self-sufficiency. The two terms are understood as synonyms but are hardly ever imagined as belonging to a person with a disability. Making a distinction between the two concepts, we can say that self-sufficiency consists of skills that enable the person to be sufficient for himself, regardless of the deficit. On the other hand, autonomy must be the objective towards which to strive, considering the abilities and resources of the person. For this reason, autonomy cannot be conceived equally for everyone. "To educate to autonomy means to offer the person with disabilities the opportunity to grow and realize his own project, thanks to the acquisition of new and more and more complex skills useful in everyday life".

Bandura defines self-efficacy as the set of beliefs an individual holds about their abilities to increase motivation levels, activate cognitive resources, and perform the actions necessary to control the demands of a given task. Self-efficacy consists of the expectation that

the person has of successfully mastering the trials of life, of living up to some events. Therefore, self-efficacy implies a subjective evaluation of one's abilities that is seen as determining factor of the motivation to act and influences learning. According to the concept of efficacy, which each of us has, the goals we set ourselves and thus, the efforts we are willing to make to achieve the change. The concept of self-efficacy for people with disabilities is also an aspect to be cultivated and cared for daily. People with disabilities must be aware of what they can do and how to overcome a physical, mental or relational obstacle according to their abilities and know-how to ask for help when necessary. Knowing how to ask for support must be one of the skills to be supported. Often, people with disabilities do not ask for help because in their lives they have never had the opportunity to ask for it since there has always been an adult ready to take their place in any situation. To promote the development of autonomy, it is necessary that the educators do not dominate their students, that they do not replace them by giving them, for example, help before they ask for it. It is necessary to know how to find the right connections between abilities and possibilities, mediating between them and the social context. Therefore, the subject must become part of a context and be responsible. They must have their own space for progressive participation and find obstacles to measure themselves according to their abilities.

The educational proposals must focus both on learning objectives and everyday objectives, defined as recursive care': the need to care for one's person, materials, time, space, to do so for all the days of the year, for all the years of our lives. However, it is difficult, especially for a child with disabilities along with their family, educator, teachers, friends to think immediately from this point of view and prepare

interventions in this direction. In the beginning, the instinct is partially or completely to adapt to the disabled person and their will. But it also induces to become much more permissive for the discomfort, due to the deficit. By doing so, the person could become estranged from themselves due to the control of their lives by others. And this mechanism could also persist in the phase of the person's adulthood, producing estrangement towards oneself and the surrounding world. Many conquests, in this way, are difficult to achieve in the family environment, especially when dealing with adolescents who show the need for detachment and independence. The theme of autonomy takes on particular prominence in the period of adolescence. If it is already difficult for the family of a "normal" adolescent, who manifests the need and desire for detachment from the family, to recognize this need and accept it, just imagine how complicated it can be to live this situation in a context with disabilities, especially if the deficit occurred after birth, in childhood, and the person finds himself having to ask for help and to return, at least initially, to depend, for most of the functions, on someone and/or something. In this sense, the educational work must turn towards the construction of identity, on knowing how to be an adult person or a person who is becoming one. Thus, "to face the problem of autonomy means to set ourselves, as operators and as parents, not only the objective of reaching certain competences, but to recognize and favour the change from the condition of child to that of adolescent and adult".

The family is the main element that allows the autonomy of the child. Firstly, the child must be seen as an adult to relate to him in a way that is appropriate to their age. The family's ability to change the way it relates to their child, to allow the detachment and therefore the child's growing up, is

fundamental for the pathway to autonomy. In a "normal" situation, one tends to consider one's child as a little one to be protected when adolescence arrives. The first conflicts arise between parents and children, which show the reality of change, the arrival of new needs of the adolescent, such as having more space for oneself and not wanting parents to interfere in one's world. If, however, the child has a disability, physical or intellectual, or both, the situation is different because the natural rebellion does not manifest itself. Therefore, both parent and child maintain the need to hold hands. Adolescence for a person with disabilities is often not experienced as a golden age of discovery, risk and asking existential questions about one's future. Instead, it is often a phase of the eternal child, a vision that people project on the disabled person and that the person stores, wearing a false self. In this way, the growth and evolution towards adulthood tend to stop in childhood. Parents often consider their parental role as something indispensable, which must last forever. They are worried too much, and their excessive attention creates an image of the child as an eternal child, with educational styles that are prolonged over time and prove to be inadequate. Accepting the fact that one's child is becoming an adult presupposes confrontation and acceptance of the limits that every process of adulting proposes: process towards "adulthood" or process towards the adulthood.

The family wants to protect their child from limits and obstacles because they think their child has already faced enough difficulties. It is also an act of self-protection, of avoidance of further worries and sufferings. While the child grows up, the parents struggle to implement an adequate educational detachment from the child.

The parent, in this case, should learn to "let go, gradually, of the child's hand". It is necessary to stop making decisions

for their child and let them become free to experience and express themselves. They should allow their child to take the risk of making mistakes. Furthermore, the parents should gradually detach, which does not mean abandonment, but putting a certain distance, even physical. It is necessary for the child to feel that they can do it alone, that the parent is not abandoning them, but that they will be there for anything. But first, the child must get involved, try to be the protagonist of their own life, taking responsibility for their actions. However, the family needs to be accompanied and helped to face such a path with serenity. Therefore, putting the child at the centre of their life is significant to make them become the protagonist of their life project.

The contexts the disabled person lives in will determine their autonomy and social inclusion. To realise it, the procedure has to follow a holistic approach. Within this method, it is much easier to detect and enhance people's skills and abilities in harmony with the community in which they live.

Reaching autonomy and emancipation for persons with disabilities is complex and painful. It requires careful planning that often takes a lifetime, and it is possible only if there is a social network and if it is functioning. It is necessary to respect the right to participation of every person, to guarantee that they can express their opinion and above all that this opinion is taken into consideration when it comes to decision-making processes. Only in this way can self-determination be achieved. This aspect is related to the principles of uniqueness and globality of the person, which are essential values in the Italian Constitution.

It is necessary to rethink the person with disabilities with their needs for normality. These needs as affective, educational and experiential that characterize the psychological and social life of every person. In other

words, they are needs common to all people.

Focusing exclusively on the specific needs of a condition, one runs the risk of considering the person only as of the sum of a series of problematic aspects. The person must live within a system of meanings and stimulating contexts. Within these environments, the person's actions lead to a meaningful goal. And it is necessary that these actions, to be authentic and acquire more value, are recognized by the other members of the context in which the person is. One of the most common needs for an adolescent or young adult is to "get away" from the family environment and begin to live experiences independently. One of these is to go out and live alone.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities emphasises, in Article 19, the importance for persons with disabilities to be able to choose, like others, "their place of residence and where and with whom they live and [that] they are not obliged to live in a particular living arrangement. It is recognised that inclusion also involves the possibility of detaching oneself from the family of origin, interrupting the relationship of dependence and establishing new interpersonal relationships and building one's own family. Independent living is one of the areas in which self-determination is called into question. The prerequisite for independent living is the development of the self-adult, having adult relationships and perceiving and being perceived as an adult.

Independent living is a concept within a much broader context, that of Independent Living and After Us. At the end of the school career, for the person with disabilities, it becomes necessary to think about a career, employment, university studies. When parents begin to feel older and know that one day they will no longer be able to take care of their child completely and that their child will have to start taking care of

themselves, hoping that they can count on other people. When parents think about After Us, they know that they have to face a series of juridical, educational, welfare and economic problems of their children, that have to be "settled" before their death. Adulthood is a social status because it is defined by a set of interactions of different kinds: social, familial, political, cultural, environmental, economic.

Development does not stop at adulthood but continues through daily experience, so the human being always finds himself in a situation of incompleteness. Being an adult means being aware of this characteristic of incompleteness and at the same time trying to enrich it as much as possible with meaning and significance. Therefore, the adult is open to the future, tending towards change and the re-designing of himself: "Becoming an adult is strictly connected to the fact that someone has imagined us as adults and, through the imaginary, has gone through the process of growth for us and with us. We don't become "grown up" if nobody thinks us really able to become so (Lepri 1995, p. 249)". This imagery is intrinsic to the family of the person with disabilities, who, especially as the end of their school career approaches, feels an increasing fear of what will happen "after us". The lack of an imaginary world is linked to the consideration of one's child as an eternal child to be protected. It would be necessary to create an image as close as possible to the real plan of the person's abilities, competencies and limits. This plan should take into account the person's passions. It is necessary to *plan daily to build the future*, with continuity between past, present and future by becoming protagonists of their time, which is often negated. The project dimension has the task of balancing and transforming the imaginary. When this does not happen, the disabled person does not develop the ability to gradually become more and

more the protagonist of their life project. The daily dimension risks to be lived in a multi-directed way and marked by the filling the time as an end in itself. This can lead the disabled person to lose the understanding of the sense and meaning of what they are doing. If one does not recognise oneself in what one is doing, it is natural that one's sense of identity and the possibility of self-determination gradually falter.

In order for the imaginary project to become a project, it is necessary to meet and respond to the needs through a pathway co-constructed by the services and the person. Within this context, the answers to the needs emerge from daily experience oriented towards the future. The social dimension of a person is decisive for the construction of personal identity, and this occurs from childhood and continues throughout life, through the construction of various roles. The attitude of overprotection and assistance refrains the people with disabilities from the roles, above all, in the passage from those acted in the micro-social to those more complex connected with the entrance in the adolescent age. This <<protection>> from the roles seems to be connected to the need not to make the disabled person meet the tiring and painful parts however present within the role as well as present within any growth path (Lepri 1995, p. 251).

In the world of "able-bodied", "normal" people, sexual activity is now free from censorship: it is a topic of discussion without filters, which no longer provokes that sense of shame that this issue had until some time ago. If for everyone else the issue is now outdated, for people with disabilities, however, this issue is almost never addressed and is not part of the person's life project. The fact that it is one of the indicators of a person's quality of life and that everyone has the right to their recognition and exercise, just like work, family, etc., is often overlooked. The issue becomes more



difficult when the disability includes both a physical and an intellectual deficit, compromising various norms concerning the sexual sphere, thus going into sharp contrast with the prevailing aesthetic norms. This has important consequences on the relational-behavioural level.

Sexuality, on the other hand, is one of the factors that characterise the stages of individual and social development, so it also involves the relationship that a person has with himself, how he perceives himself, and how this affects interpersonal relationships. The first step is to work on breaking down the prejudices that overwhelm the subject of sexuality in people with disabilities, which lead to disregard and hide the needs, desires and expectations of the person involving the sphere of intimacy and affective relations. Moreover, the sexual manifestations of persons with disabilities are often immediately associated with perversion, and thus with a problem that must be eliminated or avoided. Not as a need common to all individuals. The sexual character is an intrinsic component of man that goes beyond the reproductive organs. It is part of every dimension of life and it is necessary for the construction of the self and the encounter with the other from oneself. It is not only a biological phenomenon, but it is also a psychic and sensory experience that activates the mind-body connection, defining itself as a central experience for the construction of personal identity. It is a widespread idea to consider sexuality as a problem for disability. Commonly, people try to ignore the existence of this sphere in a person with disabilities, as if it were a missing part or not expressible and experienceable in a "normal" way.

It is believed that ignoring this dimension in some way makes it disappear; it is considered something linked only to genitality and the act of masturbation, without making, therefore, mentalization of the sexual

sphere, a sphere that concerns not only the body dimension but also the mind. The profound significance of sexual development in the process of identity construction is erroneously ignored, through a logic based on the belief that the subject expresses his sexual need only when he engages in genital behaviours, such as masturbation, attempts at sexual approach, etc... If, on the other hand, this does not occur, it means that the person with a disability does not have a sexual dimension. When the sexual need is not revealed, or at least apparently so, it happens that, in some cases, it suddenly manifests itself, sometimes in violent and aggressive or self-aggressive forms.

The onset of sexuality in these forms leaves one dismayed and worries parents and educators. It is a situation that becomes difficult to manage and requires careful monitoring to avoid creating dangerous situations for the subject and for others. In cases of intellectual disability, it is common practice for parents and educators to consider the expression of sexuality linked only to the genital area because this is usually the way in which the person with intellectual disability expresses and experiences his or her sexuality. In some cases, the path is channelled in such a way as to concentrate in the act of masturbation the tensions generated by sexual drives. In itself, masturbation is not a problem, but it becomes one when the disabled person is unable to identify the ways and places in which to perform it and when he repeats it compulsively. Implementing an efficient educational intervention can help to understand the situation and to implement specific actions to contextualize and adapt it. To do this, we must first understand that sexuality relegated to the genital experience is a limited and limiting vision, completely wrong. Sometimes, in fact, the dogged masturbatory act of a subject with intellectual disabilities is caused by sexuality disconnected from

all the dimensions that characterize it and derives from not having understood that taking care of one's own person, communicating and sharing with others one's thoughts and experiences related to the sexual sphere, and experimentation are also expressions of one's sexuality. The lack of mentalization of sexuality is an experience that can happen to anyone, but for a person with intellectual disabilities, it is riskier because of the difficulty of mental reworking of experiences. Sexuality is mentalized when it becomes an integral part of one's personality, assuming meanings that go beyond the level of sensations experienced through the satisfaction of drives. Mentalized sexuality needs the person's thought and language in order for it to become a way of thinking of oneself as male or female.

Sexual education is, first and foremost, education in affectivity. People with disabilities must be helped to understand that sexuality is made up of different languages, that genital intimacy belongs to emotional ties between people that are very different from the emotional ties between friends, brothers, sisters, children and parents. It is important to help the person with intellectual disability to understand the distinction between a more intimate affective bond and another type of bond, to know his/her sexual organs, to communicate his/her experiences and to know his/her body, to take care of him/herself and of his/her hygiene, of his/her image, etc. In order to make a mentality change, the person with an intellectual disability should be helped to understand the difference between a more intimate affective bond and another type of bond. In order to ensure that mentalization of the sexual sphere takes place, links should be activated that lead to the perception of adulthood of the child with disabilities, who in turn will perceive himself as an adult. Activating links means.

In conclusion, quoting Claudio Imprudente, it is possible to state that when we talk about sexuality in reference to disability, the need for proper communication becomes necessary. Let's start by debunking a common preconception: there is no such thing as the sexuality of people with disabilities and the sexuality of people without disabilities. There is sexuality. A wide word, often misunderstood and limited to the pure sexual act. Sexuality is much more than that. It is communication, empathy, relationship and self-care.

The lack of a job is one of the biggest causes of social exclusion. No job also implies no freedom because, without economic support, no one can lead an independent and dignified life. Furthermore, in the absence of a job, a significant sphere of human relations is lost. In Italy, Law n. 68 of 1999 anticipated a fundamental part of the UN Convention on non-discrimination and the right to equal opportunities in the field of work. This law introduced the institute of targeted employment, which supersedes and replaces the mandatory job-centre, which provided compensations for people with serious health problems. Through the targeted placement, the person with disabilities gets a job to allow self-fulfilment and social inclusion. The aim is to connect labour supply and demand and promote the enhancement of people's skills. It is also the identification of tools for employment in the workplace.

This law, moreover, assigns a significant role to social cooperatives for the employment of people with disabilities: this is how social cooperatives of type B are born, whose function is to train and include or re-include people with physical, psychic or sensory disabilities into the world of work. Despite this, the labour market disadvantage of people with disabilities remains high: "In fact, considering the population between 15 and 64 years old, only 31.3 % of those who suffer from

serious limitations are employed (26.7 % among women, 36.3 % among men), against 57.8 % of people without limitations" [6: 61].

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD) recognises the right of persons with disabilities to work, including the opportunity to support themselves through employment and freedom of choice within an inclusive and accessible work environment. The work environment, therefore, becomes a crucial place for integration. From this point of view, work contributes to the development of the process of autonomy: the right to work must be made effective by guaranteeing to the person with disabilities the respect of the right to an autonomous life (art.19), autonomy in movement (art.20) and full inclusion and participation in all areas of life (art.26). The therapeutic and rehabilitative effect that the work has in some contexts has been widely recognised, especially to reintegrate and integrate people. Feeling useful gives the individual a great sense of satisfaction, just as obtaining positive results increases self-esteem. Positive relationships and collaboration with colleagues can be established within a work environment, surrounded by a climate of cooperation that can diminish the sense of loneliness and distrust that the person might feel. "Work represents a condition that gives meaning to one's life because it allows one to present oneself with dignity in social life and to present oneself as a holder of rights [...] it favours the passage from a weak identity to a more solid and proactive vision of oneself" (Mentasti, Parolini, Re, 2000).

Guaranteeing work to a person with disabilities allows the public system to save on welfare since the person with disabilities can become an active subject and emancipate themselves from the risk of a chronic condition of assistance and an economic and self-supporting point of view. Within a welfare system that guarantees the rights of human beings, it is fundamental to provide and give the

possibility of decent work to everyone, even to those who are not competitive but possess skills to valorise.

Job placement is a complex process, which involves and intersects different institutions and figures. A result, an objective, a process allow the meeting between the productive system and the world of disability. The starting point for this synergic work is the Life Project of the person with disabilities. Job placement must be an integral and central part of it, which requires reflection, method, some knowledge and skills of the professional figures involved. When working with people with frailty, it is necessary to keep in mind that adopting a "trial and error" method does not provide any benefit, neither for the disabled person nor for the professional figure or figures who create and lead the project.

For example, when a person with a disability cannot be allocated in a workplace, they become negative and see this as a failure. This perception can also the operator influences negatively and see it as a failure. Furthermore, a person with disabilities is a person who often has a negative perception of themselves to bear one or more failures and disappointments. These feelings can generate a negative boomerang effect on the person, their identity and their emotional sphere. And they help to increase the idea of oneself as an incapable person. It is a feeling that each of us, disabled or not, feels in our lives when we fail in one or more goals when our attempts to reach the desired goal go up in smoke and then we believe we are incompetent people who will never achieve. Proposing to a person with disabilities the possibility of job placement requires a deep consideration of the real capacities and opportunities, reasoning in terms of individual life projects, opportunities for growth and personal achievements. Work can be an enormous possibility of growth for a person with disabilities. But for the job to be profitable and satisfactory, it must

be compatible with the physical and psychological conditions of the subject and the characteristics and needs of the productive system. When the process of job placement is in action (between the two parties: the educational services and the business system), one should take into account the autonomy possessed by the person such as their communication, social skills, their knowledge and skills acquired through previous work experience, the motivations underlying and the interests and needs of the person.

On the company side, a careful assessment should be carried out to evaluate the complexity and the structure of the task itself: the time-space factors, the execution rhythms, the possible errors and the precision required; the possibility of having technological supports, of making adaptations and making the various work paths more accessible, as well as the spaces hindered by architectural barriers. It should also be taken into account the risks of the job, the teamwork with colleagues, the company's policies and procedures, and the accessibility of the workplace. In particular, job placement influences psychological components, self-perception and identity, either positively or negatively depending on success or failure. For this reason, it is fundamental to foresee the job placement within the life project of the person, combining method and practice dynamically and effectively, promoting cooperation and integration of the person with disabilities; otherwise, we risk creating enormous damage to the person.

One of the issues that should be addressed, first, is the question of subjectivity: "In productive organizations, as a rule, an excess of subjectivity determines annoyance, defensive response, if not even expulsive". Subjective needs are often significantly important for a person with a disability. There are specific needs and

evolutionary history that are difficult to adapt to the rigidity of the organization present within the productive system. The productive system sees the disabled person, and in general the fragile subject, as someone who creates havoc within the system, a possible threat to the integrity of the compromises that regulate the organization. It would be necessary, therefore, to make the subjectivity of the person compatible with the structured and objective elements of the production system; to make the two universes, so intrinsically different, compatible. Belonging to the category of persons with disabilities creates problems in the planning of a path to work insertion because, as stated above, a clash is created between the subjectivity of the person and the objectivity of the system. Belonging to a category generates a widespread prejudice that labels the person, creates a collective image of identification that transcends the person, his identity.

In this way, the social role of the person is predetermined based on the application of stereotypes, such as that of the impossibility for a disabled person to play roles such as being an adult, autonomous, working person with sexual life. This creates a lowering, or even worse, the non-existence of expectations of these people. This generalised and stereotyped idea creates prejudices that influence and determine important aspects of the life of a disabled person, such as that of work. The productive system perceives the disabled person as a threat to its equilibrium and therefore tends to defend itself from everything that is not in line with its objectives; it is a system that requires high levels of autonomy from its workers, set in the perspective of a crescendo, of hyper-specialization, precariousness, aspects that often, as mentioned before, are not considered possible for a disabled person. It is not understood what is the productive advantage, in economic and financial terms, of a person with disabilities, as

well as the fundamental aspect of human dignity which is not limited to the productive capacity of the person. Between these two seemingly incompatible systems, a fundamental role is played by the educator who manages the work placement of the disabled person. The educator is the mediator figure between the two complex and distant worlds. He is a specialized figure, equipped with mediation tools, who acts for projects, who have institutional recognition and strong visibility within the social system. Therefore, a professional, who will have to develop and lead a network work to meet the needs of these two worlds and to make them connect. The professional must dedicate adequate time to researching opportunities, institutional and non-institutional connections, planning the pathway and the tools, to be able to design a work placement in which the objectives, responsibilities, times and resources are clear. In planning this pathway, it must be clear that the disabled person faces some difficulties, the greatest of which is learning to work, i.e.

Learning to work is a process that is strongly conditioned by the organizational climate of the company within which the process of socialization to work develops, which is part of the more general process of maturation and development that allows an individual to be a person. In assessing the context in which to place the person with disabilities, the specialist must take into account and carefully evaluate the defence mechanisms of that person, whether they are compatible and adaptable with the characteristics of that work system and whether, within that system, there is a harmonious, relaxed and welcoming climate. Another important point is to make people feel an integral part of the project, to make them feel welcomed and reassured. And these are needs both of the person with a disability and of the productive organization.

To meditate means to create a bridge between two extremes, which in this case are the disabled person and the world of work; to create a connection between them that takes into account, at the same time, the characteristics and needs of both. Even the relationship between the educator and the student requires a certain calibration, an acceptance of the needs and requirements of the other (on the part of the educator), in order to establish an educational relationship in which the educator does not replace the other, but in which he is a figure of support and help so that the person acquires autonomy and is able to manage on his own. This presupposes that, at a certain point, there is a gradual distancing between the two protagonists of the relationship, so that the person with disabilities is more emancipated and can really grow. Work placement, therefore, is the point of arrival of a process of construction and restitution of social and behavioural autonomy, and the ability to act and cover the various social roles and functions. In spite of the excellent premises, the analysis of the occupational conduction carried out by ISTAT shows the strong disadvantage of the population with disabilities on the job market.

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One of the discriminating factors in job placement is the level of education, both for people without disabilities and those with disabilities. From the survey carried out by ISTAT, it results that, besides there is a strong differentiation between the northern and southern areas of the country, persons with severe limitations employed in central Italy, corresponding to a percentage of 42.2 %, 37.3 % in the North, and just 19 % employed in the South. Moreover, work strongly conditions the possibility of achieving family autonomy, since work is the fundamental and necessary element for self-supporting oneself, producing income and an element of recognition of being an adult. The presence of limitations reduces the possibility of achieving family autonomy,

and this is a further form of social exclusion.

Social exclusion, on the other hand, means the stigmatization and marginalization of certain groups due to social, economic, race, gender, political affiliation, or disability status.

In Italy, 21.7 % of people with severe disabilities (just under 662,000 individuals) are in a condition of isolation. These people state that they have no network of social relations, i.e. they do not belong either to a network of friends or to a support network of relatives, friends or neighbours on whom they can rely in case of need (5 % of the rest of the population). The fragility due to the coexistence of serious limits and the absence of social networks is even more serious for the 204,000 individuals (...) who live completely alone.

**Conclusions and research perspectives.** Participation in cultural life encompasses several aspects: the practice of art and culture itself, which, in addition to giving quality to people's leisure time, brings some benefits, such as enrichment of knowledge, skills, self-esteem, creative and reflective thinking, and a sense of perception of oneself and one's surroundings. Participating in cultural life has a very significant positive effect, even in people with severe limitations. Those who frequently go out, go to the cinema, to the theatre, to concerts, are very satisfied with their lives. The activities one can engage in during one's free time are very varied: from the more "passive" ones, such as watching a film or attending a theatre show, there are others that require a more active role and the use of knowledge and skills, such as playing a musical instrument, singing, painting, taking photographs, writing music lyrics, making videos or taking professional photos. The beneficial effects of sport, both physically and mentally, have been widely recognised for both able-bodied and disabled people. The beneficial effects concern

the cardiovascular, respiratory, muscular and osteoarticular systems and the individual's psychic sphere and relationships. The environment in which the sport-activity is practised can become a context in which gratifying social relationships are built. In the past, for people with disabilities, there was no possibility of practising physical activity or sports, especially at a competitive level. From the 20th century onwards, the first international sporting events began to be promoted within one of the individual disability categories. Despite the wide recognition of the benefits of sport, there are still many people with disabilities who are inactive in physical activity or sport: "Out of 10 people with severe limitations, about 8 declare to be totally inactive, that is sedentary, and not to play any sport or physical activity, against 34.1 % recorded among the population without limitations".

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Received: September 03, 2021

Accepted: October 08, 2021