

# Italy's total inclusion: lessons and issues

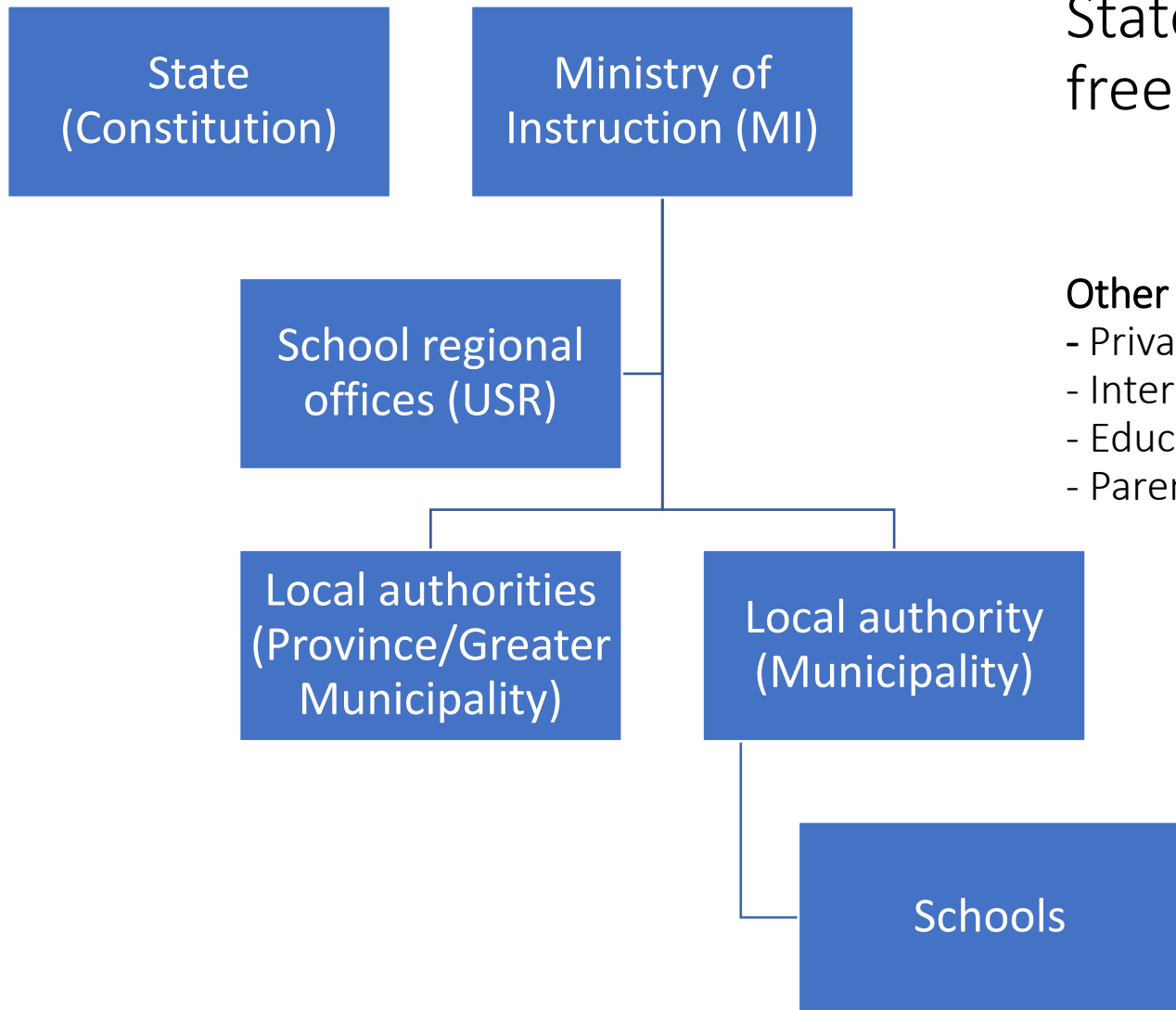
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# Agenda

- Background: Italian Education system
- What's unique about the Italian education system
- How Italy has addressed some general assumptions about inclusion
- Questions



## Italian education system:

State schools – education is free

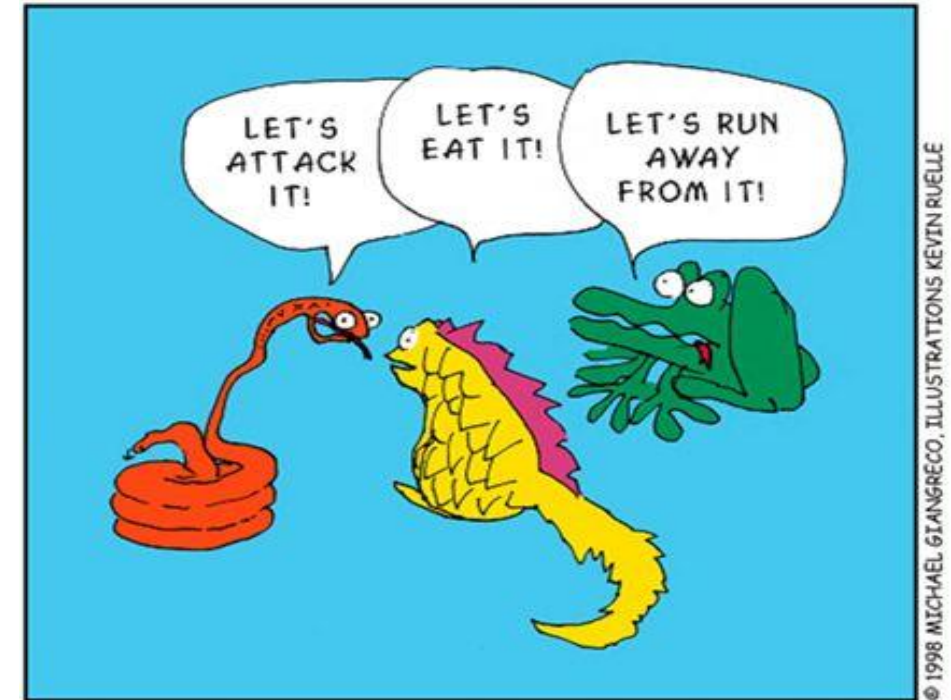
### Other education providers:

- Private schools/religious schools
- International schools
- Education in hospitals
- Parental education/home education

# What's unique about Italy?

In the 70's while the rest of the world was deciding whether to educate children with disabilities in mainstream schools/classrooms, Italy was already educating them in regular classrooms along with their peers without disabilities. This educational policy is known as '**integrazione scolastica**' (school integration).

Thanks to this policy, Italy has been celebrated as one of the most inclusive education systems in the world.



REPTILIAN RESPONSES  
TO DIVERSITY

# A brief historical introduction

The policy of *integrazione scolastica* (or school integration policy):

- is celebrated as an innovative and progressive policy in the literature
- allows all students to be educated in 'mainstream' classrooms and schools (since 1977)
- led to the dismantling of all state special classes and schools (only a few ones remain today along with private ones)

(Booth, 1984; Ferri, 2008; Giangreco and Doyle, 2012)

# Integration: facts and figures

school year	% of students with disabilities
2016-2017	2,9%
2018-2019	3,3%
2019-2020	3,5%

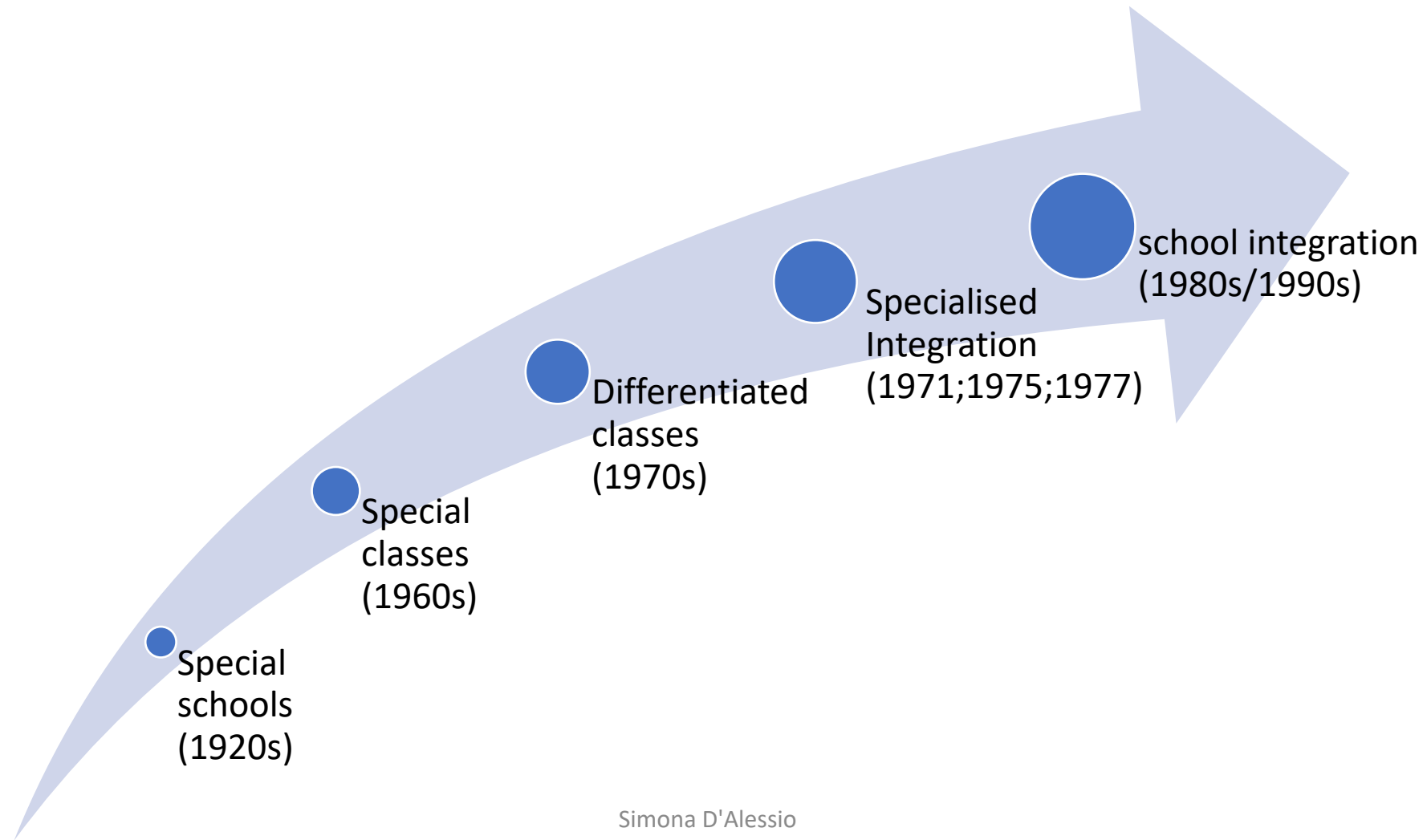
90% of teachers are in favour of integration

75% of teachers disagree with special/differentiated classrooms

*Italy dumped disabled students in unmodified settings without support. It was «wild» integration...'*

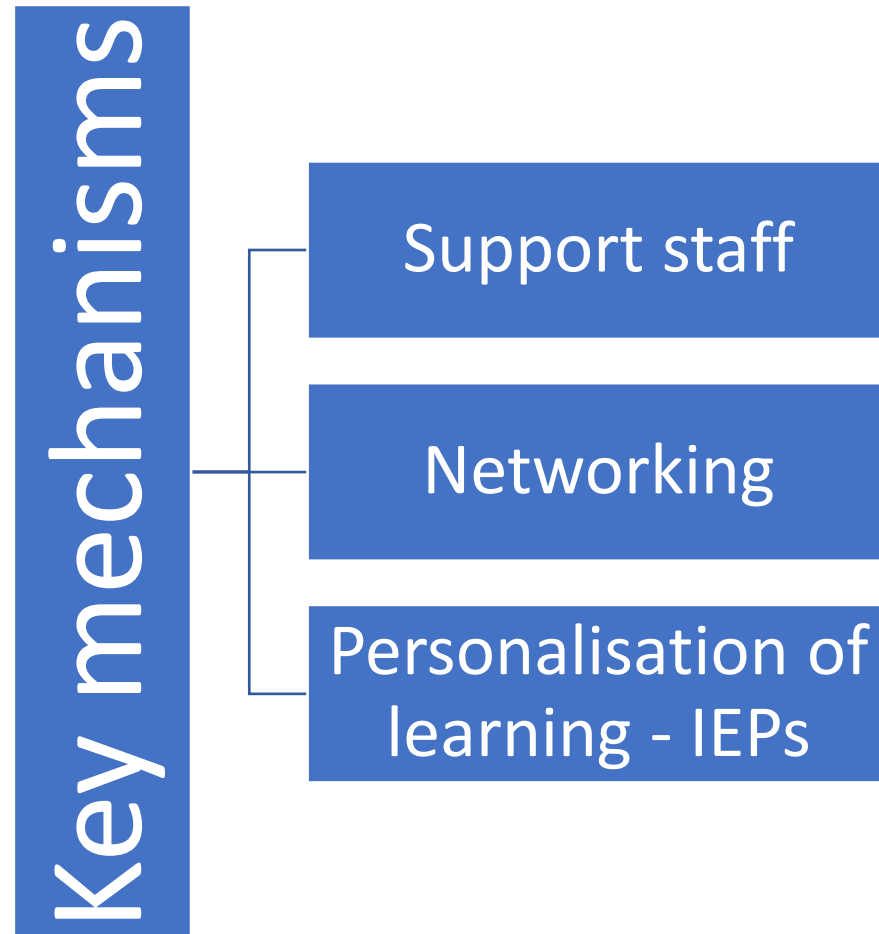
Assumption 1

# The journey towards inclusion

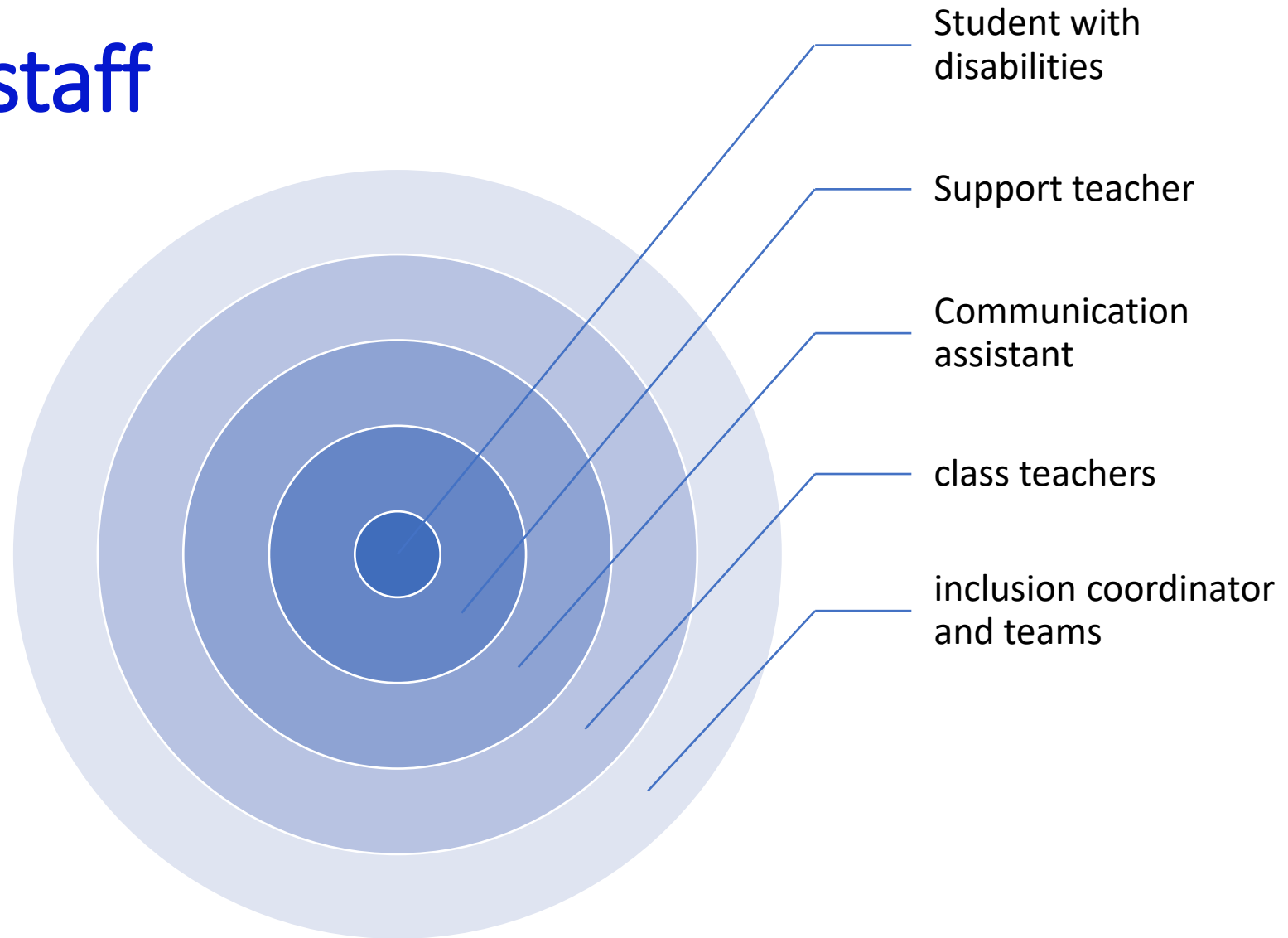




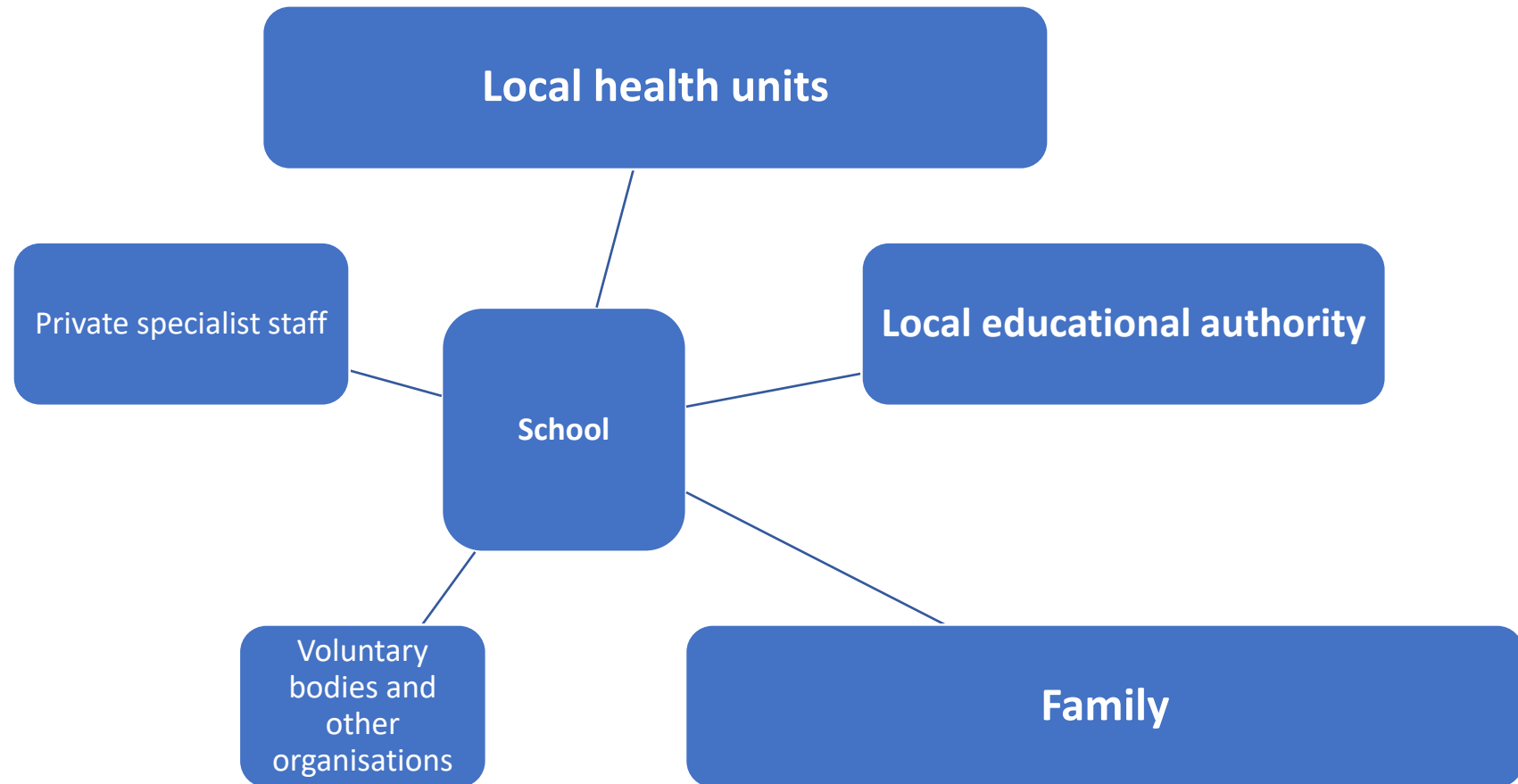
# Key mechanisms of the integration process in Italy and support inclusion



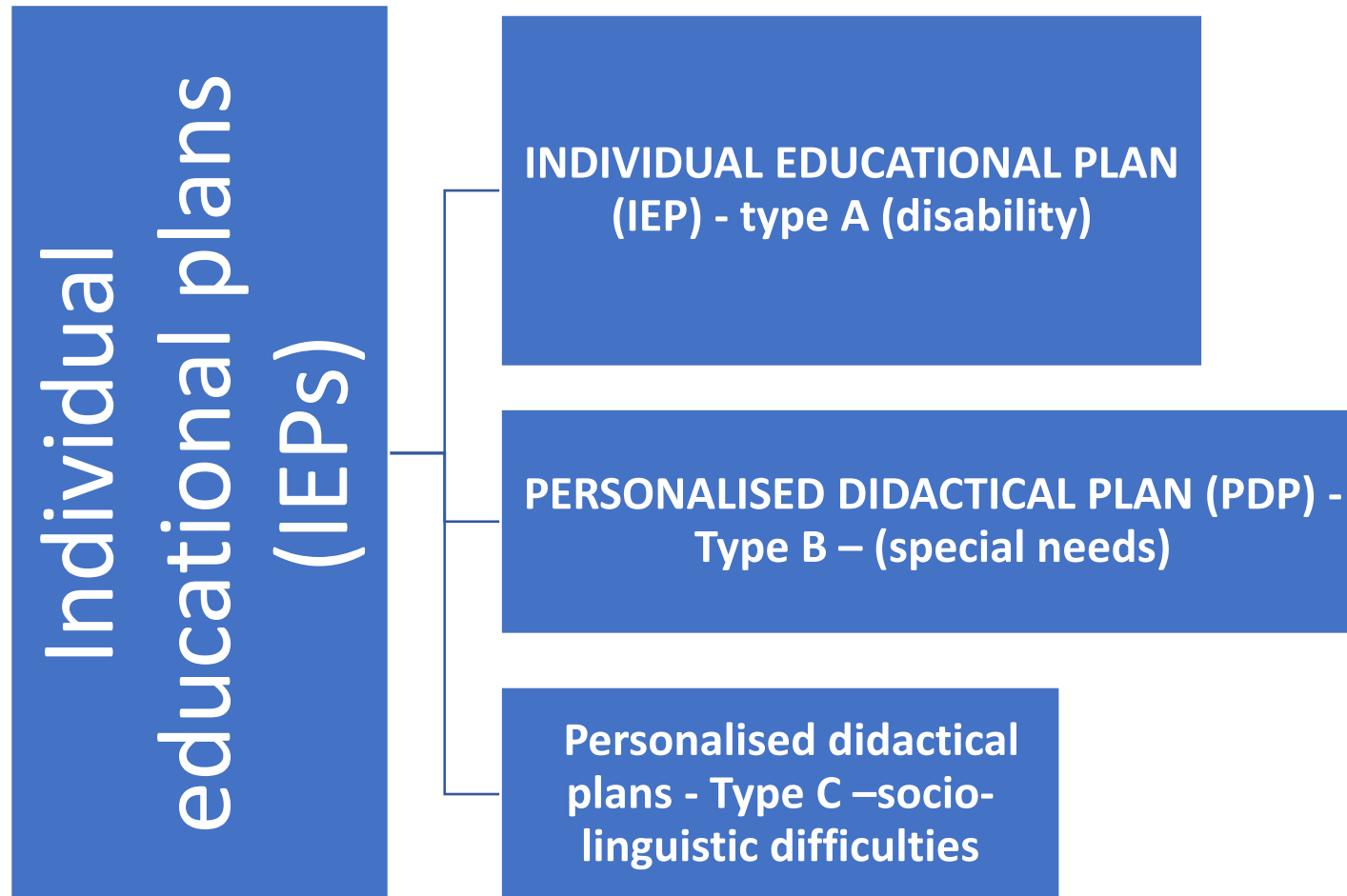
# 1. School staff



## 2. Networking with different actors



# 3. Personalisation of learning





**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:  
DOING IT WRONG DOESN'T MAKE IT WRONG.**

*Inclusion is only about students  
with disabilities...'*

Assumption 2

# Integration and inclusion are not synonyms

**Integration** can be understood when opposed to **segregation**. It deals with disability and focuses on individual deficits and how compensate for them.

**Inclusion** can be understood when opposed to **exclusion**. It deals with social barriers and discrimination and requires interventions on removing those barriers.

Who is excluded? from where? And by whom?

# What is inclusive education?

- It is **not** about mainstreaming/integrating learners with disabilities into **unmodified** education systems and schools; rather, **it is about transforming regular school settings** (in terms of *pedagogy, assessment, curricula* and *organisation*) to ensure that all learners can benefit from an education of quality (D'Alessio, 2008; 2009; 2012).
- inclusive education is concerned with **strengthening the capacity** of the mainstream settings to respond to the needs of all children
- involves a particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion or underachievement (**Reaching out to all learners (UNESCO 2016)**)



*“Inclusion is not effective as students with disabilities do better when they are educated in separate classrooms and taught by specialists”*

Assumption 3

- **Research evidence** has shown that both academic and social needs of students with disabilities can be adequately met in regular classrooms.
- Longitudinal studies comparing students' cognitive and psychological development in special and mainstream settings have shown that students with disabilities **make more progress in academic performance in mainstream education than in special settings**
- There is also evidence that students educated in mainstream settings develop **better communication and language skills** due to the greater number of stimuli received

Research shows that when learners with disabilities are educated in mainstream settings a series of positive benefits can result:

- (1) Friendships*
- (2) Increased social initiations, relationships and networks*
- (3) Peer role models for academic, social and behavior skills*
- (4) Increased achievement of IEP goals*
- (5) Greater access to general curriculum*
- (6) Enhanced skill acquisition and generalization*
- (7) Increased inclusion in future environments*
- (8) Greater opportunities for interactions*
- (9) Higher expectations*
- (10) Increased school staff collaboration*
- (11) Increased parent participation and*
- (12) Families are more integrated into the community.*

(Hicks-Monroe, 2011 p. 65)

*“Italian students with disabilities can only be accepted in schools if they have a diagnosis or medical report in order to be supported within school”*

Assumption 4

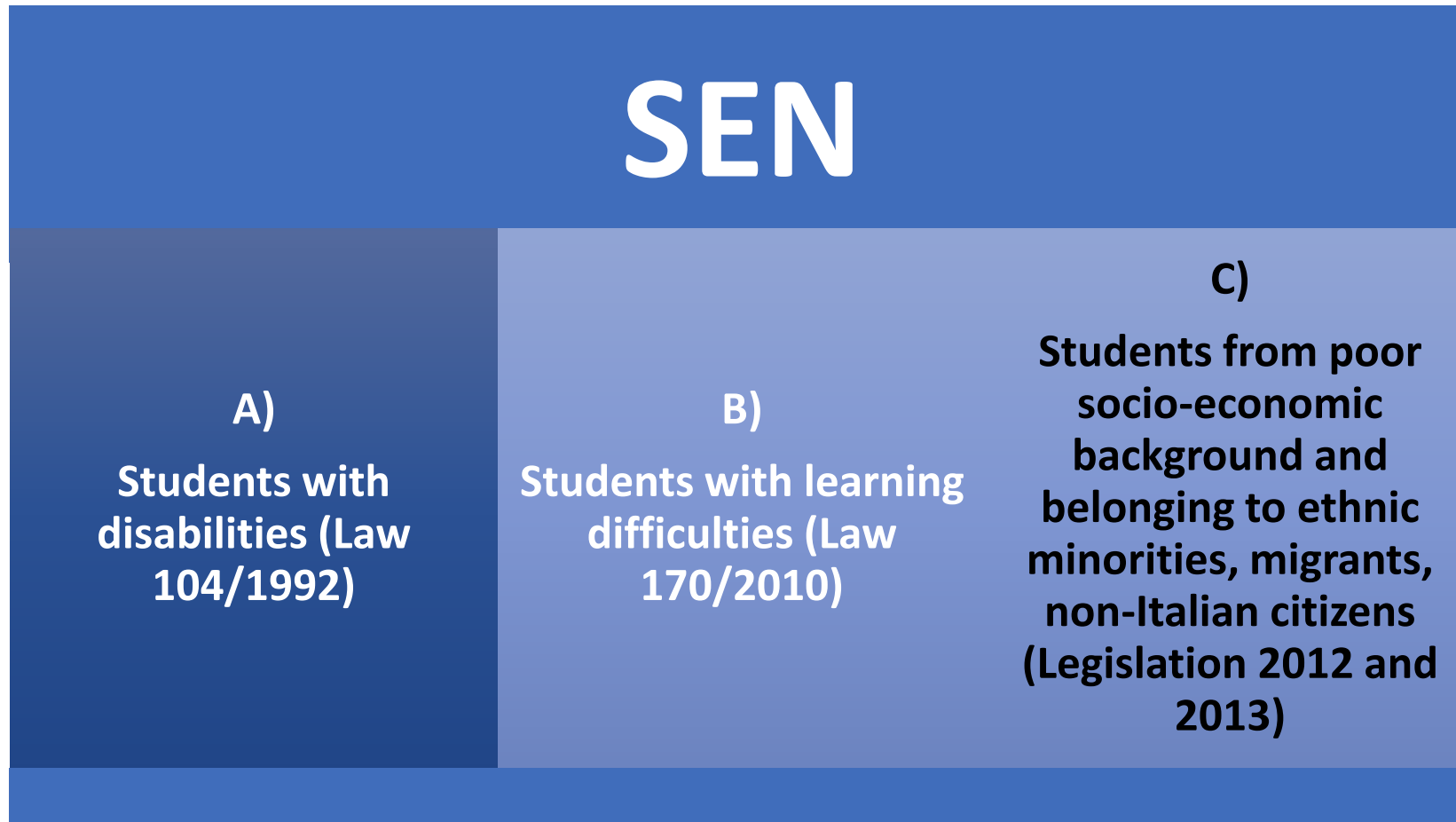
# All students are supported within schools

- Decisions to support students with SEN can be made by teachers council regardless of the submission of a medical diagnosis by parents.... However, medical diagnosis and medical assessment are the gatekeepers to additional resources.
- Participation in regular settings should **not be conditional upon the submission of a medical diagnosis** as this often results in a series of negative consequences for students of determination. For example, a **diagnosis** of dyslexia, blindness, or deafness **can facilitate access to specialist support** and services as well as personalised teaching but it may also lead to **stigmatization, peer rejection, lower self-esteem, teachers' lower expectations, and limited opportunities**

(Van Brakel, 2006; McMahon, 2012)

# SEN macro-category includes 3 sub-categories: A, B, C

(Ministerial Directive 2012)



Macro-category of SEN			
Type of need	Disability (A)	Learning Disorders (B)	Other difficulties (including language minorities) – C)
<b>Legislation</b>	Framework Law 104/1992 (physical; sensory; cognitive impairments) <a href="#">Decree 182/2020</a>	Law 170/2010 (dyslexia, discalculia)	Directive 2012 and ministerial circulars 2013 (socio-cultural and linguistic difficulties)
<b>Individualisation and classification procedures / assessment of needs</b>	<b>Functioning Profile</b> - issued by the local health unit (based on the ICF manual) – <b>External referral procedure</b>	Clinical diagnosis (by the local health unit or/and a private doctor) – <b>External referral procedure</b>	Teachers - class council (no clinical diagnosis is required) in agreement with parents. ICF manual is sometimes used. <b>Internal Referral procedure</b>
<b>Pedagogical plans</b>	Individualised Educational Plan (IEP) – may not lead to a school certificate/diploma	Personalised Didactical Plan (PDP) – leading to a legal school certificate/diploma	Personalised Didactical Plan (PDP) – leading to a legal school certificate/diploma
<b>Provision</b>	Support teachers, extra aids/tools and additional economic resources to the school	Dispensatory and compensatory measures – no additional resources	Dispensatory and compensatory measures - no additional resources

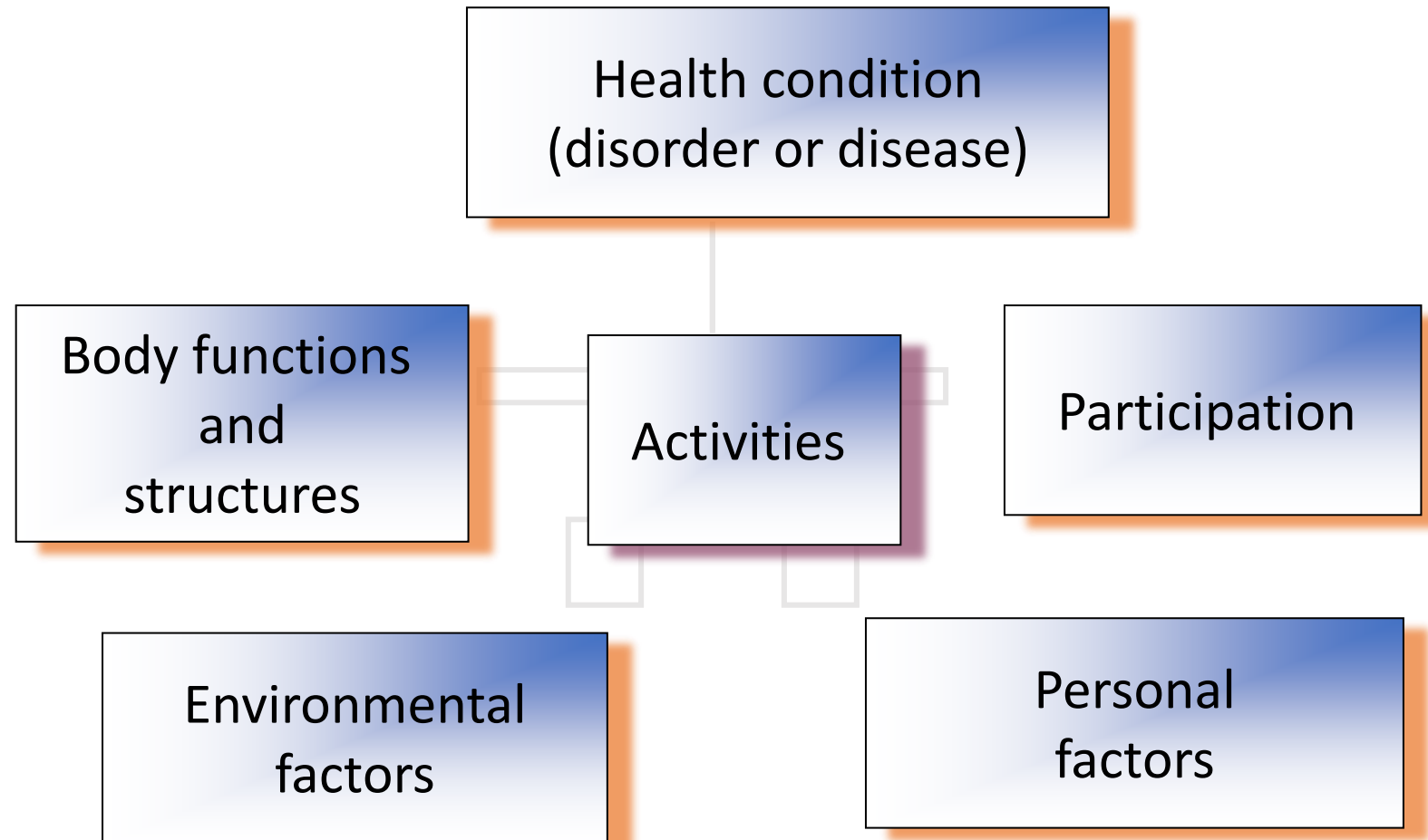
# International Classification of Functioning (ICF -WHO 2001)

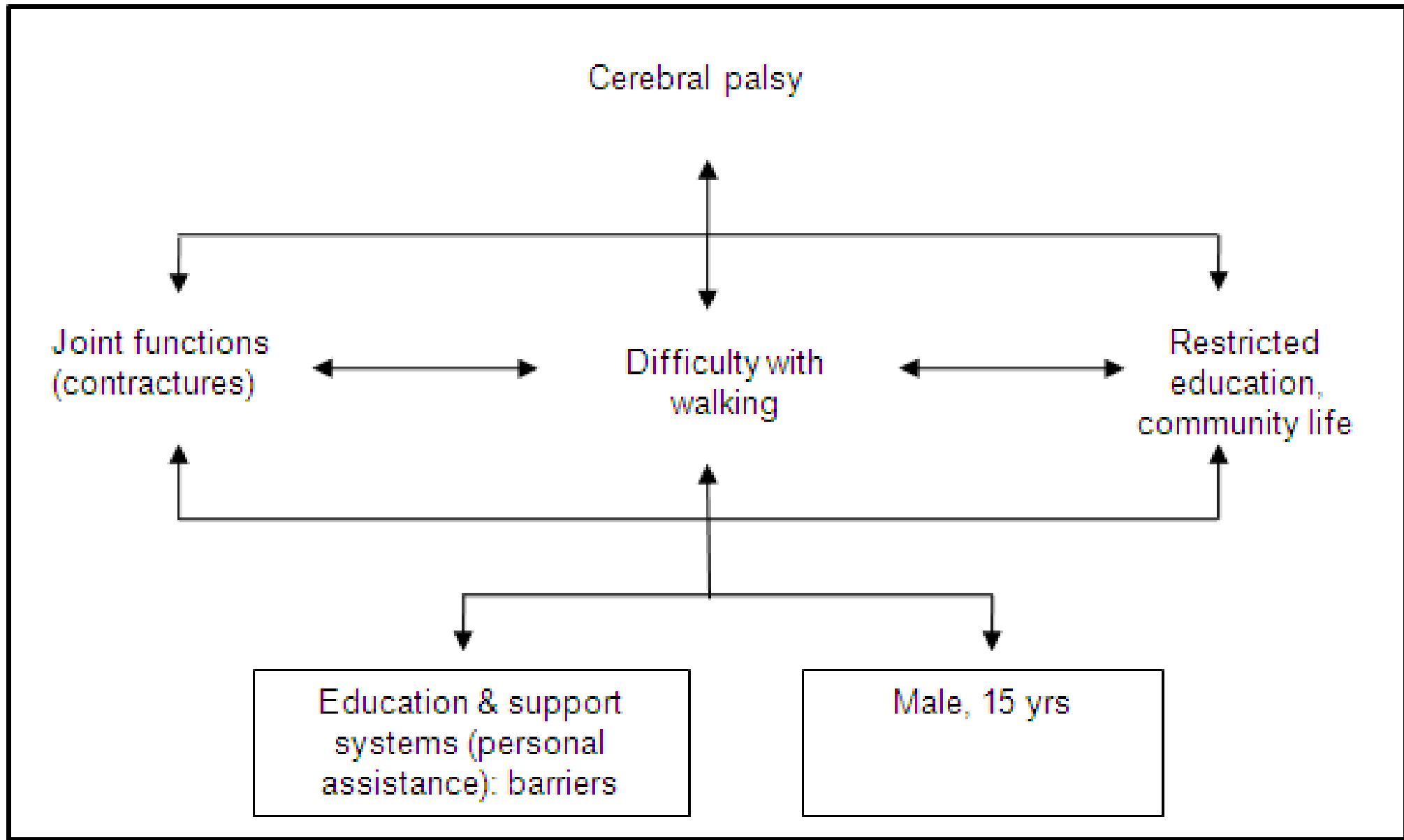
Italy has recently adopted the ICF as a new tool to identify and classify students with disabilities and to allocate resources to schools

- Disability results from the **interaction** between health and personal conditions and environmental factors in which individuals with disabilities live



# Interactions between the components of ICF (2001)





# ICF: Descriptors for activity and participation

*Performance*: what a person can do without obstacles and/or with the support of facilitator

*Capacity*: what a person can do *without* the support or assistance of facilitators

- Activity is personal
- Participation is social

What the student can or cannot do as a result of his/her impairment but what he or she can do IF provided with the right facilitators and IF barriers to participation are removed

*Children with severe impairments  
are better educated in segregated  
settings*

Assumption 5

- Italy has been mainstreaming children with severe impairments since 1970s. Our state schools were not yet ready to meet those complex needs but we did not have any other alternative site to educate them.
- Research has shown that these students can benefit from mainstream settings, if appropriate interventions are made available on a long-term basis.
- There are some criticalities but all children are educated in their district school

*The inclusion of students with disabilities has a negative impact on the other students in the school*

Assumption 6

Research findings have shown that the education of students with disabilities in regular classroom **is not detrimental to the education of students without disabilities**

Italian **students without disabilities** benefit from interacting with their peers as they are provided with opportunities to further develop their social skills and to experience values such respect and acceptance towards human diversity a sense of personal responsibility and an ethic of caring and commitment to others, better self-esteem, personal development, social skills, comfort level with people who are different, patience, kindness, consideration and empathy, which can all contribute to the making of a better society

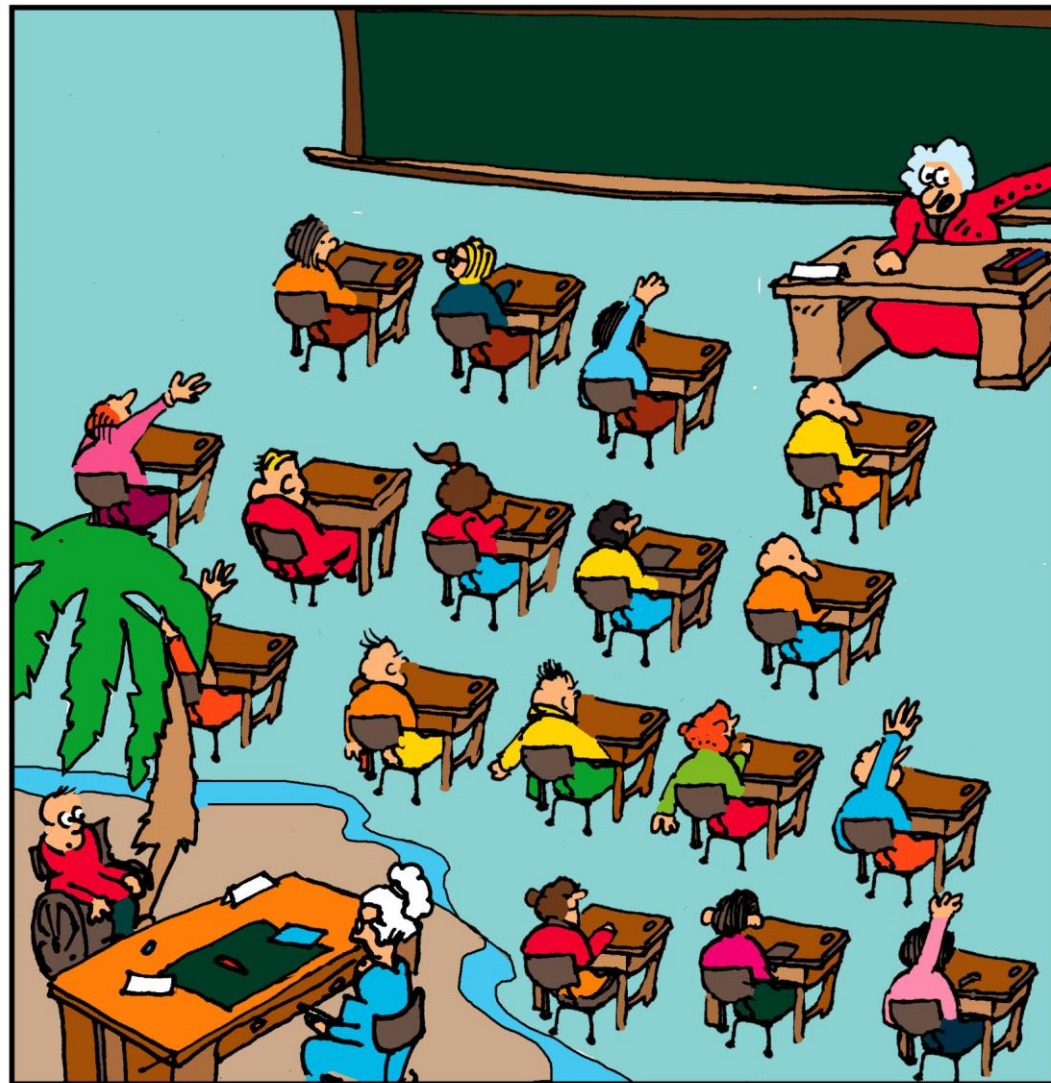
(Kalambouka et al, 2007; Cologon, 2013; Ruijs, 2017; Ruijs et al. 2017; WHO/World Bank, 2011; Helmstetter et al. 1994; Giangreco, 1994; Staub and Peck, 1994; Staub, 1999; McDonnel et al. 2003; Stahmer and Ingersoll, 2004; Stahmer, Carter, Baker, and Miwa, 2003; Kalambouka et al. 2005; Baker-Ericzén, Muggenborg and Shea, 2009; Finke et al., 2009; Hanline & Correa-Torres, 2012; Odom, Buysse and Soukakou, 2011; Stahmer, Akshoomoff and Cunningham, 2011)

- Italian and international studies have also shown that students who do not experience special educational needs or disability do not receive less attention from their teachers or less instructional time due to the presence of their peers who have special educational needs or disabilities. By contrast, they showed that typically developing students attending inclusive class had higher academic performances than students attending normal class because they are often exposed to a **variety of teaching and learning methods** and **more trained teachers** that results in better academic achievements for all students in the classroom

(Kalambouka et al., 2005; Vianello and Lanfranchi, 2011; Cole, Waldron and Majd, 2004; Helmstetter, E., Peck, C. A. and Giangreco, M. F. 1994; Staub, 1999; Staub and Peck, 1994)



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ISLAND IN THE MAINSTREAM  
MRS. JONES AND MRS. COOPER ARE  
STILL TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHY FRED  
DOESN'T FEEL LIKE PART OF THE CLASS.

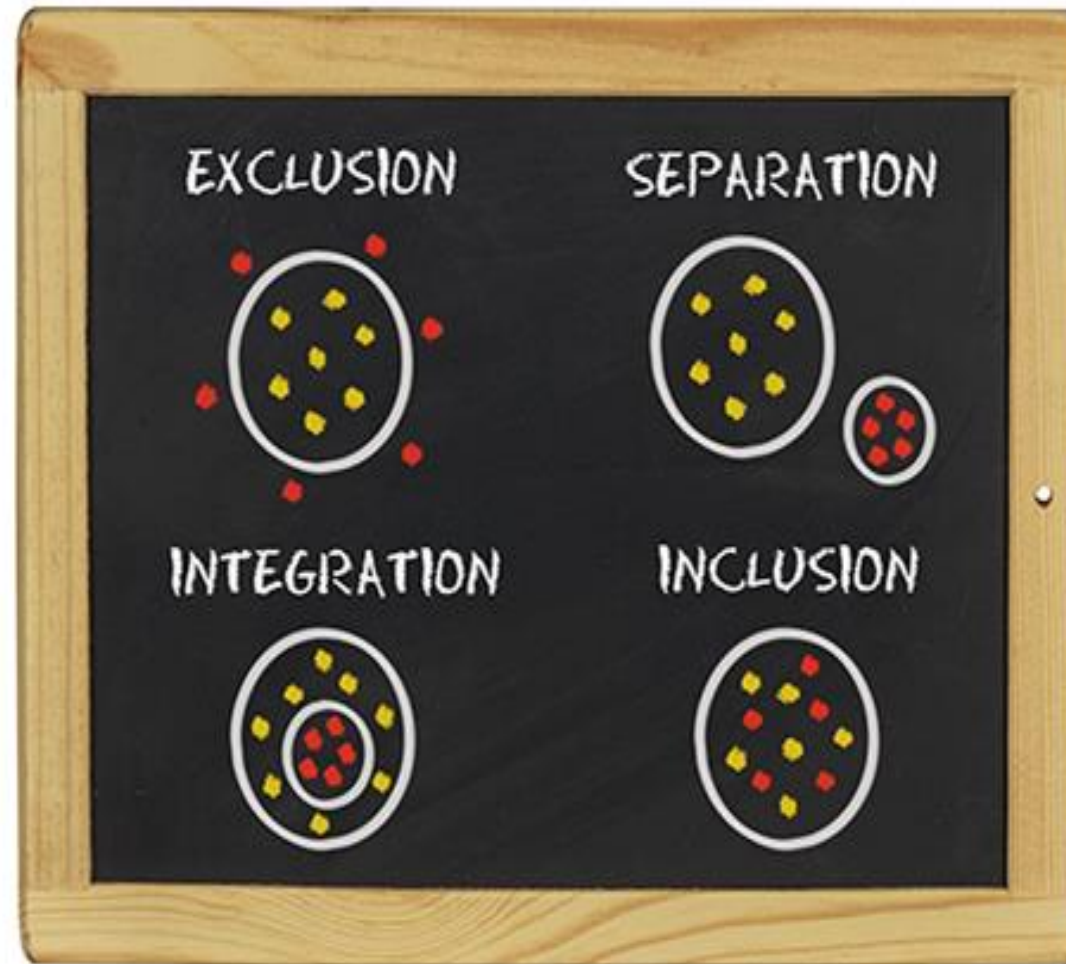
*Inclusion is too expensive...*

Assumption 7

The allocation of resources is key to the education of students of disabilities in regular classrooms. School integration requires that additional resources are allocated whenever students with disabilities are registered in regular classrooms (extra staff, supplementary aids). *Rejection of students with disabilities from state schools because of the lack of additional resources is not an option in Italy.*

From an inclusive perspective, the problem remains when resources **are not allocated to the school for the normal functioning but only because of the presence of students with disabilities.**

Inclusion requires disentangling resources from classification procedures as this would reduce the risk of labelling children with disabilities



# Final reflections: from integration to inclusion

For inclusion to achieve a more than a hollow endeavor it must involve a process of radical transformation of existing education systems at the level of curriculum, assessment, organization of support and pedagogy.

To move from integration to inclusion it is necessary to make sure that integration key mechanisms (support staff, IEPs, additional resources) are disentangled from individual impairments and become tools to strengthen the capacity of the mainstream setting

The classroom context is something that can be modified, whereas a student's learning difficulties will not likely be so easily changed. Moreover, teachers often find that changes that one makes with students with learning difficulties in mind end up benefiting a wider range of learners in the classroom—a key principle of universal design for learning (UDL).



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