

## VADEMECUM

In order to promote the use of a common European terminology that is pedagogically correct, the following is a brief excursus on the issues of disability and SLD (Specific Learning Disorders).

On 8 October 2010, Law 170 "New regulations on specific learning disorders in schools" was issued, with the aim of "**guaranteeing the right to study and ensuring equal opportunities for the development of skills in a social and professional context for people with SLD**" (Art. 2).

Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) are neurobiological disorders that affect about 3.5 % of Italian students. These include dyslexia, dysorthographia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia. The various disorders can occur in variable association or, more rarely, in isolation and with varying degrees of severity.

They are defined as **specific** because they occur in the absence of sensory or neurological deficits and specifically concern individual domains of ability: reading correctness and speed in the case of **dyslexia**, graphic realisation (quality and speed) in the case of **dysgraphia**, transcoding linguistic processes in the case of **dysorthographia** and automaticity in calculation (mental and written calculation, retrieval of arithmetical facts and execution times) and number processing (reading, writing, recognition of quantities) in the case of **dyscalculia** (Article 1 of Law 170).

By definition, they are only diagnosed in individuals who have a normal or higher IQ (it should be noted that "IQ" refers to verbal comprehension and visual-perceptual reasoning) and have had adequate educational and social opportunities. They also have a familiarity factor.

In the absence of adequate educational support, they have a negative impact on schooling, despite the good cognitive abilities of those concerned. Many of the difficulties that students with SLD have in studying and taking exams are attributable to reduced working memory efficiency.

It is therefore easy to understand that the strengths of students with SLD are numerous and therefore the commonly used term "disorder" is inappropriate; the individual differences would be more appreciated through the expression "personal characteristic", that would be much more correct but certainly less used.

As far as students with disabilities are concerned, the reference framework law is 104/92, which still uses terminology that medicalises and stigmatises the disabled.

Following the entry into force of the "UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" in 2007 and in the light of the "International Classification of Functioning Disability and Health" (ICF), it is worth remembering that the terms used in European documents to refer to persons with characteristics that differ from those of a normal type are as follows: "persons with disabilities", "disabled persons" or "in a situation of disability". Other terms, widely mentioned in different contexts, including in the media, although known to most people, are in fact to be considered improper. Some pedagogically incorrect terms are certainly the following: "handicapped persons"

or, even worse, “handicapped”. Even the term “differently abled” - sometimes used by media - is not always considered appropriate.

In conclusion, the terms to be used in the academic field, also considering the correct use of gender, are the following:

**“Students with specific learning disorders” and “Students with disabilities”.**

Therefore, in order to underline UNIMORE's sensitivity and its inclusiveness and opposition to any form of marginalisation and stigmatisation of "diversity", we hereby request that this terminology be used in all official documents and institutional communications.

Kind regards,

Claudia Canali and Giacomo Guaraldi