

METHODOLOGY AND TEACHING FOR THE INTEGRATION OF AUTISTIC CHILD

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Abstract

Leo Kanner in 1943 for the first time described the autistic disorder calling it a clinical syndrome characterized by an inability relational, resistance to change, atypic language (deficit of acquisition, echolalia, mutism, occasional pronoun reversal), repetitive play and stereotype excellent, mechanical memory, excessive emotional reactions and clumsiness. The definition of autism is developed and evolved over the years from this first description, but they are often considered some cases with Autistic Disorders in early childhood difficulties of communication and interaction that are secondary to other diseases. This has a number of implications in terms of prognosis and treatment that are likely to overshadow the main objective which aims primarily to integration into society.

Despite the objective difficulties cognitive, relational and behavioral integration should be pursued in the school of all: living in relationship with non-disabled peers, an opportunity not only to search for functional learning, but also to promote organizational adaptation of the educational institution, a real investment of resources, involvement of all internal and external figures who interact with the child and the adoption of refined methods of facilitating the integration.

The objectives relate to the methodological-didactic "make a special teaching" to respond to the particular needs of the autistic child

Keywords: Autism, teaching, integration, TEACCH program

Introduction

The autism spectrum disorders cause severe disability in the social and persist throughout life. Pupils with autism spectrum disorders have in

common, to a greater or lesser difficulty in the areas of social interaction and communication, repetitive and stereotyped behaviors and peculiar mode of learning. Although united by these characteristics, they represent a very heterogeneous group; in fact, there are some people in which component prevails deficit linked to severe mental retardation, often associated with neurological disorders (first of all epilepsy), and others in which the symptoms assumes the character closest to the personality disorder, with IQ scores in the standard and sometimes even higher; communication skills are also highly variable, with patients without severe language and comprehension deficits, and others with good skills. Syndromes present within the category of autism spectrum disorders (or Pervasive Developmental Disorders, as defined by the main International Classifications) linked by the presence of the symptoms described are divided into Autistic Disorder, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, Rett's Disorder, Asperger's Disorder and Pervasive Developmental Disorder not otherwise specified, a diagnostic category to which the latter is used when you do not meet all the criteria for the previous ones, but it is in the presence of alterations in the areas of social interaction and communication behavior. This heterogeneity makes it essential to a careful assessment of the individual student and design a highly individualized. These two actions, assessment and individualized planning, require the cooperation of at least three actors that the Law 104/92 identifies as fundamental to inclusive education: school, family, health and social services. In general, it is evident that there is no therapy or a method for autism, also in consideration of the variability of the situations that are included within this diagnostic label, but early treatment based on the approach and intensive psycho educational, becomes the preferred means of give again to children with autism the right to a better life.

In this paper we try to examine an organization of educational intervention that can not overlook the proposals that are derived from various specific programs, both in the assessment and intervention, which may help to identify ways of working that meet the needs custom integration. What needs to be pursued, in effect, is the integration at the highest level, to be understood as a path whose primary goal is the maturation of significant experiences in both learning and social. In addition, the knowledge of the different methodological approaches is also important to fill with content appropriate individualized teaching moments "one to one" provided in the personal education plan. Structuring the ability to stay in unpredictable environments, while maintaining a non-disruptive behavior is, in fact, an educational destination of major importance. *Special Teaching* to meet the very special needs of children with autism requires assessment and intervention strategies derived from cognitive-behavioral, the systems of

structured teaching, the facilitation of various forms of communication, the education, the perception of mental states own and others, the adaptation of individualized goals and those of the class, the proper use of the "resources."

Objectives

For an educational institution that wants to "become special", in order to meet as effectively as possible the special needs of individuals with autism, it is essential: in the class to promote the knowledge of related disability, use of new information technologies, the methodologies used educational and teaching developed specifically for children with autism. For people with autism, simply being in the classroom itself may represent an important relationship, even if they employ much of their time in individual activities and repetitive. Far develop the ability to stay in unpredictable environments, while maintaining a non-aversive behavior is an educational destination of considerable importance, since it is necessary to take into account the significantly different way to use the systems perceptual, motor, mnemonic, intellectual, communicative, affective-emotional and relational. It is therefore necessary to check the "strengths and weaknesses" of the autistic child, so you can plan and systematically adjust plans customized and integrated intervention. Moreover, even if the activities that take place in the classroom are not suitable to the level of the student, it may be useful for certain periods to try to get his attention to "participate in the culture of the task" (Moretti, 1982; Rollero, 1997 Tortello, 1999), that is, to put it in a position to grasp at least some elements of a lesson to appreciate the topic you are dealing with. Hence the importance of providing some of the objectives of the utmost importance for the possibility of *teaching one to one*, to be done even outside of the class when the type of work to be done is not compatible with the common organization of the environment (for example, the presence of too many distracting motivations). Such moments out of the class, however, should be time-limited (usually no higher than 10-12 hours per week) and programmed so that they can be reduced with the progress of the educational and adaptation of the child. The space for the individual activity should be organized according to the principles of structured education, typical of the approach TEACCH, (*Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication-Handicapped Children*) whose characteristics have to be taken up by the network and institutional health care that is created on the territory. It is carried out, as well, a total care of patients with autism through a single answer that involves the various services.

For the purposes of inclusion of children with autism, will be useful to promote *knowledge of deficits and disability* in the classroom. The moment

is imparted appropriate knowledge and an appreciation of the companions with disabilities is easier to stimulate actions to help and support. Specially with the autistic this aspect is of paramount importance, since it is necessary that schoolfellows understand that some behavioral characteristics, such as poor social relationships or any aggressive behavior, are not due to "wickedness" or desire to offend, but they represent the consequences of a deficit. You can use different approaches, from simple explanations of the main aspects of the syndrome, to watching television shows or movies on the subject who presented admirably stories related to autistic people, to read and comment biographies of autistic high level until the scientific study of the knowledge currently available autism. The same testimonies of parents of children with autism gathered verbally or through writing books, can efficiently raise the level of knowledge of everyone.

Essential then is the *use of new information technologies* in education that are taking considerable importance in the Italian school, though not always to the proliferation of hardware associated software tailored to specific needs. The prospects opened to facilitate the learning of the child with a disability are significant and relate to aspects of the curriculum (tutorials on instrumental skills of reading, writing and arithmetic), that the ability to manage in a controlled recovery projects and programs purely rehabilitative.

Even for the autistic student computing can be an exciting opportunity, able to bring it closer to the activities of the rest of the class. You notice very often that students are motivated to interact with the computer, which allows you to focus for long periods of time on certain tasks easier to manage exercises independently.

It 's definitely need to refer to techniques and special software in relation to the objectives that are being pursued, taking into account that the most important priority is to foster the development of the cognitive dimension, as a fundamental condition for increasing communication skills and imaginative. The recent evolution of multimedia tools, which use different codes (oral and written language, iconic music), can create, at least initially, a confusion in the decoding process of the child, so it may be useful to refer to the software less exercise sessions processed by the computer point of view.

With the passage of time, then, in relation to the motivation level shown by the school-boy, it can decide to opt for programs with a multimedia structure, in which the contents are not presented only in sequential and static.

In the experience of inclusive education a significant part of the child's time should be devoted to exercises similar to those carried out by his companions. The didactic action, therefore, should build on the objectives

adapted to those of the class, with exercises incorporating the use of similar materials. In this way even if the student with autism may insist to carry out their activities independently and apparently not integrated with the rest of the class, however, tend to structure a sense of belonging to the community. Classmates in turn, can trigger sequences of interactions can greatly facilitate social growth of the student with autism. This will require their active involvement, through raising awareness of issues, due to their complexity, must be addressed with appropriate methods and tools if you want to "understand" the problems of those who behave differently from the rest of the class. The behavioral and cognitive of autistic subject make it very complex interactive relationships of the onset of significant thickness. In general, it can, however, identify a number of measures that will facilitate forms of help and support from peers: to encourage the development of relationships help teach skills and pro - social skills facilitating indicate the relationship; situations tutoring program; work on creating a non-competitive climate to enable shared learning experiences.

One of the main keys to the success of the process of inclusive education is to foster friendship and help from friends (Stainback and Stainback, 1990; Salisbury, Gallucci, Diver and Peck, 1995; Janney and Snell, 1996).

Of course, the relations of friendship and support are highly individual, fluid and dynamic, different depending on the age and mostly based on free choice resulting from all personal preferences. However, this does not mean that they can not be facilitated and supported by actions taken by teachers and parents, and a favorable climate in the classroom where even the able-bodied fellows will derive considerable benefits both cognitive and social (Peck et al., 1990).

Methods

Regarding the strategies of educational intervention and the contents to be favored to promote learning autistic student, comes the need for a customized approach that combines the information coming from the most refined methods of intervention, with the methodological-didactic and organizational measures necessary for the promotion of a real integration (Cottini, 2002a).

The intervention strategies proposed by *behavioral approach* inspired much of the teaching, which is related both to non-disabled children and with disabilities. And it is necessary to provide special situations of help, provide forms of imitative learning, reward behaviors satisfactory when learning is made difficult by the presence of deficits also implement techniques such as the help and aid reduction, modeling, chaining, reinforcement, the use of non-subversive strategies to contain problematic

behaviors. Autistic children with low functionality, in fact, prove to benefit in a significant way of teaching a precise and predictable, with goals organized in a taxonomy and controlled management of contingencies of reinforcement.

Knowledge of educational and teaching methodologies validated by the international research is essential for the development and implementation of an individualized education program. In particular, it is desirable that all teachers who know children with autism: educational and teaching methods used within the program TEACCH; strategies applied to Augmentative and Alternative Communication 'autism; techniques of assessment and intervention for the management of behavior problems.

The principles of *structured education* provided by the TEACCH program constitutes a methodological contribution of great importance provided by Schopler and his collaborators (Schopler & alt., 1990), who suitable to be generalized, with some adjustment, even at school level. The adaptation of the environment and activities to the needs of autistic allows you to build a highly structured environment in which the reference points become visible, tangible, predictable and affordable. The *organization of the physical environment* proposed by TEACCH is clearly not replicable in a comprehensive school-wide policy. Some devices may still allow a presence and better adapted within their own class.

It could, for example, be determined by using adhesive tape is placed in an area where the student school, with close to a cabinet or shelves where you can find the necessary materials to teaching. The same space can be expanded to include other banks when a task is scheduled for small groups. The spaces used for special activities - such as the gym, the music classroom, laboratory, etc.. - should be clearly indicated, so that the child can become familiar with a provision that takes contours less chaotic and, consequently, more reassuring. With the passage of time and the progress of the adaptation of the child, these devices may be no longer needed, for which they will be progressively eliminated to give the organization a conformation as normal possible.

The *visual diagrams* indicate the student activities to be performed and the sequence of the same, helping to anticipate and predict the various tasks. Are generalized to the school level, to help you understand the course of the day and the alternation of moments of work (individual or group) to moments of the game. Choosing the most appropriate visual aid (concrete objects, photographs, drawings, pictograms, written words) should be based on the assessment of the child's ability to understand.

Work systems and the precise organization of labor, and materials provide students with autistic information on the type of task to be accomplished and the implementing rules. In the experience of inclusive

education a significant part of the subject's time should be devoted to exercises similar to those carried out by his companions. In this way, even if the student with autism may insist to carry out their activities independently and apparently not integrated with the rest of the class, however, tend to structure a sense of belonging to the community.

The precise organization of the tasks provided for in the TEACCH program can also be useful for provide opportunity for the student to practice autonomous and repetitive, which, even when not determine important key evolutionary learning, may be useful for increasing time spent in the classroom.

For students with autism who have good cognitive function is certainly useful to include in IEP(individual education plan) goals related to the perception of the mental states of self and others.

Learning to recognize emotions, to understand and predict the behavior of a person. On the basis of the thoughts or actions that performs, in fact, can facilitate the understanding of everyday situations and improve the soft skills of children. Apart from this, these skills are also extremely deficient in individuals with autism to "high functionality".

The program offered by Howlin et al. (1999), inspired by the principles of *theory of mind*, is aimed precisely in this direction, providing for the progressive teaching of mental states in three areas: *emotions*, the *system of beliefs and false beliefs* and *symbolic play*, with particular reference to *pretend play*. It is proposed practices through teaching cards easily generalized in the school context, in part, during the work of the individual child and partly as an asset for the entire class especially at the level of kindergarten.

The *Facilitated Communication* (Cottini, 2002b) resulted in both an increase in communication skills that the level of social integration. Thus, for children who are unable to express themselves verbally and with a deficit of motor control, which, however, demonstrate an awareness of the written language (or at least to be able to learn), can certainly be also offered at the school level the use of communication facilities through various instruments (keyboards on paper drawings with letters or words, typewriters or computer media). Teachers, once learned the practice of facilitation, can toggle the various figures of *facilitator* who consider themselves the main measures for the achievement of autonomy on the part of the student.

And necessary to recommend, however, an approach that is at the same time open and critical, leading educators to identify Facilitated Communication in an additional teaching tool can be used with some student and certainly not an elective therapy applicable to everyone.

It may be right to use AAC (*Augmentative Alternative Communication*) when a child fails to develop verbal language or when it is

not sufficient to enable him to communicate with others, either because of poor vocabulary, either because it is incomprehensible to those who do not attend regularly . The word alternative is to indicate the use of modes of communication other than oral language. The adjective Augmentative is to indicate how the methods of communication used are aimed not to replace but to enhance the natural communication.

Currently you prefer to use the term Augmentative Communication, as it allows you to think about the strategies, techniques and aids such as ability to provide something additional to communication skills which the person is already in possession (gestures, vocalizations , gaze , etc.). The purpose of this type of communication is to compensate for the shortcomings of communication in order to provide the means of expression suitable for expressions adequately their needs. It 'obvious that there are no ready-made solutions, but these will be different, and then customized according to the age of the individual, relational and cognitive development, their motivation to learning a new way of communicating, the environment in which he lives and so on. The tools provided must be not only appropriate but also flexible, in that they must adapt to the changing abilities of the person with autism. It is especially important to help the student with autism to develop and strengthen their skills residual teaching strategies appropriate, to allow it to be used as independently as possible of the various symbols and aids available. In fact, one of the main instruments of Augmentative Communication systems are just symbolic graphics that give the opportunity to express themselves through graphic signs to people who are unable to produce symbols, but they are able to select.

The strategies of most CAA validated by research are those that involve the use of manual signs and images such as photos, drawings and pictograms: in particular, have been used in many experiments symbols PCS (*Picture Communication Symbols of Meyer-Johnson*) through the methodology of the PECS (Picture Communication Symbols Exchange Bondy & Frost). A validated methodology to cope with the problems of behavior is known as functional communication (FCT, *Functional Communication Training*) (Arduino, 2005). For integration of the tables of communication may also use communication aids denominated VOCAs (*Vocal Output Communication Aids*), which can be constituted by one or more buttons. Their pressure causes listening to a pre-recorded messages, which can be programmed, but they are defined number, and then limit the communication. The software programs which reproduce the tables of communication, however, have no numerical limit of messages and the access can take place with the keyboard, pointing devices, sensors. Techniques for Augmentative Alternative Communication certainly can not replace the convenience, speed, accuracy of oral language but offer the

opportunity to autistic individuals with disabilities minutes of finally being able to communicate.

Children with autism may exhibit different behavior problems: opposition to the proposed work, temper tantrums, aggression, self-harm non-compliance with the rules of the class, disruptive behavior, rituals that disrupt the work of other students, and others. Most behavior problems are caused by: problems of sensory tolerance to certain environmental stimuli (noise, confusion, light, heat); educational proposals not adapted to the characteristics of the child (too complex or, in a minority of cases, too simple), communication problems, both in the sense of a lack of understanding of what others say, both in the sense of difficulty for the child to express themselves.

Usually it is difficult to intervene after the problem has manifested itself, while it is more effective to prevent these problems by structuring the environment and assessing precisely the occasions when involved. A structure that, starting from the skills, give visually certainty, predictability, safety, gives an answer "educational" to problem behaviors (Micheli, 2003). The behavior problems require an assessment which allows to make a hypothesis about what it has determined. For this purpose it is useful to refer to the technique of 'functional analysis developed in the field of behavioral. In addition, a specific assessment of the level of understanding of the language is action essential for the prevention of problem behaviors and, more in general, for all the intervention.

Results

The educational success that it is possible through the development of simple goals, limited, gradual, progressive, through trial and continuous adjustments of learning, it is now urgent to switch to a more enlarged than has hitherto, in the knowledge that the common goal is achieved with the effort of all.

Becomes fundamental step to replace the special education teacher with the "supports", understood as a set of tools, operators, energy, and resources that must be coordinated, linked to specific contextual situations, to various actors protagonists in that moment, in that specific educational and social reality in which you intend to achieve the integration of these students.

They are supports not only the community, social group and school, the group class, tutoring but also to the documentation, the organization of space and training courses, meetings between the operators involved, including physicians with parents, assessments periodic group. In short, the backups require the joint and synergic contribution of different contributions, by both the central and peripheral structures of the Administration, which by representative bodies, institutional levels (Ministry of Health, Ministry of

Labour, Ministry of Technology), government local groups involved in the integration of people with disabilities.

Some serious deficiencies were in the system and heavily seen : there can be no true integration of the pupil disabled when it becomes a sterile conflict between teachers for the percentage breakdown of the hours related to own presence, and when the cooperation between operators is limited to bureaucratic compilation (PDF Profile dynamic functional) when the "Group H" of the school is only because it has been approved by the school Committee, and when the projects are done by using the economic resources and not on the contrary.

Should be highlighted the lack of specialization of almost 40% of support teachers but also the non-scheduled training of teachers and generalized curriculum, which promotes the delegation only to the almost total support teacher. The presence of the latter is characterized, then, by insecurity and constant turn-over, resulting in continual need of recruitment, temporariness, discontinuity and teaching difficulties in the growth of professional skills. It should be also redefine the professional role of the teacher support and think about its use more functional through at least 200 hours of specialized training, commensurate with the type of disability, to be added to the current 400 hours of basic training activities needed to achieve the specialization in support; enter into initial teacher education curriculum a number of credits in the field of special pedagogy and didactics. This leads to a better understanding that every disabled person has a history with the causes and specific constraints and therefore the integration can never be undifferentiated or generic, since the conditions are not undifferentiated. They have the right to education and vocational training, as well as stated in art . 38 of the Italian Constitution, 'cause these guys are equal citizens , who by law must be guaranteed equal opportunities, we must also provide for a systematic and continuous updating of all teachers on issues of special education, refresher courses required to achieve managers and technical inspectors.

One of the objectives of the Project coordinated network, which is based on a course of individualized care and a psychoeducational program shared between family, school and services, is to promote the generalization of skills and competencies identified in the initial Functional Assessment.

The Functional Assessment, which will be periodically updated, aims to: "differentiate", highlighting areas of potential, some subjects who are included in the organizationn diagnostisc of Pervasive Developmental Disorders; "orient" the individualized intervention; "Suggest" specific methods and techniques of intervention; "evaluate" the results of interventions. The therapeutic work focused on the development and acquisition of new skills in structured settings at the service requires,

therefore, a guarantee of quality and continuity over time, the operational coordination with the family and the school, the fundamental natural environments for growth, education and development of the boy/girl, and must be based on targets 'functional' (communication, interpersonal skills and social autonomy) shared, verified and updated over time, which would enable a proper adaptation to the environment as possible of the subject, according to parameters health and individual well-being (ICF - International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health). Such activities, however, must maintain operational coordination steadily over time its reference to the original concept of "evaluation", based on precise indicators on which to "measure" the quality on which to make a good scientific research in the context of a systematic collection of documentation on experiences and good practices (Ianes, 1999). The recognition of the appropriateness, efficiency and above all of the ' effectiveness of interventions you will have to increasingly be based on comparisons of the results achieved in terms of social adjustment and quality of life of people with autism, giving more space to the judgments of households (Cottini, 2005c). The educational intervention in the school should encourage, in particular: the acquisition of a language (in whatever form possible, focusing on the verbal , non-verbal , bodily , written etc.). development of perceptual skills and exploration of the environment; the promotion of basic instrumental skills, active participation in the life of the class, start socializing in the group and outside the school.

Success of this intervention is certainly facilitated by an early educational inclusion to schooling by the autistic child, as well as the expertise of all those involved, which must be prepared and motivated people in terms of relationships, knowledge of the disease and strategies pedagogical and educational applicable to it. This allows to also support cases more "severe", characterized by the presence of disturbing behavior such as, for example, aggression and self-injury. In this way, the school, teachers and classmates, they will be able to receive with greater serenity, and proactively, "special friend".

Preconditions to achieving the goal of full inclusion school are: emotional availability and communication of teachers, which need to take personal responsibility, confidence in achieving the goals that must be as concrete as possible, the involvement of parents and family members, that must achieve a continuity of goals and strategies at home. E ' need to attend, as parents, to the drafting of the educational teaching of children, an individualized project realistic and shared. The teaching will be shared (even formulated together with their parents), explicit, flexible, useful in the method and timing. Finally, the networking, coordination and integration of measures. The optics is essential that the synergies between clinical

dimension, family and internal organization of the school. Necessary to define a close relationship and synergy between the knowledge in the scientific field, medical and psycho pedagogical and what is experienced on a daily basis within the classroom, in order to overcome possible separations.

Conclusion

Our contribution has wanted to consider the autistic child in his school experience, trying to identify the routes to facilitate the integration process, highlighting how the situation is to determine when a class is added to a student affection autism need specialized training continues. There is still the need that achievements are continually moved forward, they open themselves to new challenges, using all the resources and involving integrated with the school, including those of organizations and institutions in the private and social with many years of experience and expertise in the field. Reflecting today on autism is not only investigate the disability, but understand to be in front of a person, so that the sum of all disability can not be considered "loss of personality". If we stop to consider the "missing", we use a quantitative criterion, which belongs to the calculation of objects, but that is absolutely unacceptable when referring to human beings. Only through qualitative criteria, however, it is possible to distinguish between health and disease. Get used to seeing the suffering without reacting, watching the misery without action to defeat it is no less autistic behavior of a child with this disability (Basso & Lucioni, 2000).

Starting from this assumption, we have identified some methodological paths (the ability to adapt the objectives of the class and individualized ones to make them, at least in some parts, compatible, the organization of activities in cooperative groups; proper utilization of the resource companions and the study of the deficit in the classroom, the opportunity to refer to the new information technologies), taking into account on the one hand the existence of various approaches to the treatment of autism, experienced at international level, which have proven their effectiveness, although in a different context from that school, and secondly the need to combine the technical information with a focus on key methods for the delineation of a special teaching for the integration of the autistic child.

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