

Towards Inclusive Education: The Evaluation Challenge

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Abstract

School inclusion embodies an educational philosophy aimed at ensuring that each and every student, regardless of individual characteristics, abilities, personal circumstances, or social conditions, is fully engaged and actively involved in the educational experience. This approach emphasizes diversity as a value and promotes the acceptance and appreciation of individual differences within the school environment. Despite the desirability of inclusive education systems being enshrined in many international and national Declarations and regulations, practical approaches still often lean towards school “integration”, understood as a paradigm of “assimilation”, which involves adapting disabled students to a school structure primarily designed for typical students.

This article underscores the essential functions of assessing inclusion policies within individual educational institutions and, more broadly, evaluating mechanisms within the larger educational system to achieve continuous improvement in the real inclusion of all students, dedicating an in-depth analysis to the Italian context. The effective and adequate assessment in this field is challenging and methodological reflection is absolutely indispensable to define shared frameworks for evaluation policies. Building upon the recent OECD framework proposal (Mezzanotte and Calvel, 2023), this work suggests expanding the set of indicators to provide a more comprehensive and in-depth evaluation of school inclusion policies.

Keywords: School, Sociology, Inclusive Education, Methods, Indicators, Assessment.¹

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1. Introduction: An Overview

Inclusive education stands as a fundamental pillar within the broader educational discourse, universally supported by legislative frameworks across European nations, affirming both the right to and the accessibility of education for all children. This paradigm extends beyond the mere assimilation of students categorized with special educational needs into mainstream educational settings, evolving towards a holistic approach aimed at furnishing high-quality education to a diverse spectrum of learners. Indeed, this evolution reflects a shift from integration towards a comprehensive model ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all, especially those vulnerable to marginalization, exclusion, or scholastic underperformance.

The principles of educational inclusion and participation are not only essential components of social justice but also deeply rooted in the realm of human rights².

As highlighted by Tomasevski's notable classification (2001), the *Rights to Education* surpass mere physical ingress to schooling, aspiring instead to ensure equitability and substantive access to high-caliber education for all individuals. This aspiration encompasses not only guaranteeing the physical accessibility of educational facilities but also facilitating access to ample educational resources, inclusive curricula, and tailored learning opportunities. Moreover, it mandates the identification and dismantling of financial, social, and cultural barriers that may obstruct access to education for marginalized or disadvantaged groups. Conversely, the dimension of *Rights in Education* revolves around cultivating a high-quality educational milieu within educational establishments (UNESCO, 2000). This entails assuring that education is not merely relevant and engaging but also culturally attuned to the diverse backgrounds of all students. Additionally, it involves fostering a secure, inclusive, and dignified school atmosphere wherein each student is embraced and esteemed. Furthermore, it necessitates the deployment of innovative and adaptable educational methodologies catering to the distinct needs and aptitudes of students, thereby fostering active engagement and self-directed learning. The *Rights through Education* are predicated on the outcomes and opportunities derived from the educational voyage (United Nations, 2015). In addition to ensuring proficiency in foundational and

² Among the principal conventions that address this aspect are, chronologically: the “*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*” (United Nations, 1948), the “*Convention against Discrimination in Education*” (UNESCO, 1960), the “*International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*” (United Nations, 1966); the “*Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*” (United Nations, 1979); “*Convention on the Rights of the Child*” (United Nations, 1989); the “*Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*” (UNESCO, 1994); the “*Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*” (United Nations, 2006), the “*Sustainable Development Goals*” (United Nations, 2015).

advanced skills, this encompasses access to further educational pathways and meaningful career prospects. Moreover, it entails the recognition and appreciation of the competencies acquired by students through education, ensuring their proper acknowledgment and utilization within society and the workforce.

Hence, the pursuit of Education for All (EFA) transcends mere expansion of educational provisions; it encompasses the augmentation of educational quality and the enrichment of children's educational experiences and accomplishments (UNESCO, 1990). Similarly, advocating for greater inclusion extends beyond mere assimilation of children into mainstream educational environments; it underscores the imperative of enhancing the caliber and profundity of participation that all children undergo within the realm of education.

The multifaceted nature of inclusivity poses a myriad of challenges, particularly concerning the recognition and navigation of diversity within scholastic environments. Considerations spanning poverty, linguistic diversity, cultural nuances, religious affiliations, gender dynamics, and geographical mobility underscore the complexity inherent in fostering an environment conducive to inclusive education. Yet, despite earnest endeavours to honour diversity and accommodate varying abilities and experiences, the task of engendering active participation and delivering quality education persists as a formidable undertaking.

A pivotal aspect in confronting this challenge lies in acknowledging and dismantling barriers to engagement prevalent within educational institutions. Such barriers, stemming from a plethora of factors including legislative constraints, curricular limitations, educator preparedness, pedagogical methodologies, administrative structures, and attitudinal dispositions towards diversity, significantly impede access to educational opportunities. Additionally, infrastructural inadequacies further exacerbate disparities, preventing the educational pursuits of certain student cohorts.

To address these issues, this article employs a qualitative and document-based approach. This methodology involves an extensive review of the main literature on inclusive education, cited both nationally and internationally. The sources include peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, and reports from relevant educational agencies and organizations. The focus of this review is on contributions explicitly dedicated to evaluative issues and the proposal of frameworks for school inclusion indicators.

The selection of sources was guided by their relevance to the topic of inclusive education evaluation, with particular attention to those that offer comprehensive insights into the development and application of assessment indicators. This approach ensures that the analysis is grounded in a robust

body of existing knowledge and provides a credible basis for the suggestions and conclusions presented.

By analysing these sources, the article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of inclusive education evaluation and attempts to suggest some possible improvements. This includes identifying gaps in existing evaluation frameworks and proposing new indicators that can better capture the multifaceted nature of inclusivity in educational settings. Through this analysis, the article seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on enhancing the effectiveness of inclusive education policies and practices³.

The pursuit of inclusive education necessitates the robust collection and meticulous analysis of data, serving as an indispensable tool in evaluating the efficacy of policy interventions and pedagogical practices. By implementing a comprehensive framework of indicators, educators and policymakers can glean invaluable insights into prevailing challenges and emerging opportunities within the educational landscape.

Each nation aggregates an extensive array of data at local and national echelons, encompassing metrics ranging from enrolment rates and graduation statistics to student demographics and academic achievements. These data, spanning quantitative and qualitative dimensions, offer nuanced perspectives on scholastic dynamics and student experiences, serving as invaluable resources for informed decision-making.

Indicators for inclusive education must be meticulously crafted to encapsulate the multifaceted nature of educational equity, encompassing dimensions such as demographic diversity, infrastructural accessibility, and the academic trajectory of students with special educational needs.

The cultivation of inclusive educational environments necessitates a concerted and collaborative effort, transcending institutional boundaries and fostering a culture of inclusivity. Only through rigorous evaluation, informed policymaking, and unwavering commitment can educational stakeholders effectuate tangible progress towards fostering equitable educational opportunities for all learners.

Obviously, the quality of what happens in the classroom makes a difference, but how do we define quality, by what criteria, and on what variables? Reviewing the research literature reveals clear trends: many studies on teachers' and students' attitudes, many studies on aspects of socialization, social interactions, but very few studies on the effects of Inclusive Education on students (...) On the research front, therefore, to understand and evolve school practices inclusively, we still have many steps to take, also to defend them from inclusion-sceptics

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who persistently pose annoying questions about inclusion such as “Does it really work? For whom? What does it produce? Under what conditions? Is it sustainable?”. We need certain, reliable, generalizable, and definitive data, as much as possible in this area of complex actions (Ianes, 2021, p. 11).

As eloquently articulated by Ianes and Dell’Anna (2020, p.3), inclusive education finds extensive support in the regulations and official documents issued by significant international bodies, and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2009; 2012) provides a robust normative framework for inclusive education. At the Italian national level, Legislative Decrees 96/2019 and 66/2017 strengthened the commitment to inclusion. However, conceptual ambiguities persist due to the lack of a clear agreement on the definition of “inclusive context” which is often erroneously confined solely to the dimension of disability and access to the general education system. Moreover, there continues to be a certain confusion and overlap between the concepts of “integration” and “inclusion”.

2. Integration vs. Inclusion

In general, school integration focuses on adapting students with disabilities to the existing educational system, often through special classes or additional support within regular classes. In contrast, inclusive education fosters an educational environment that embraces diversity in all its forms by integrating students with Special Needs into regular classes and providing personalized support to ensure their success. While integration may tend to create separation and differentiation, inclusion aims to cultivate a learning environment that is fair, collaborative, and respectful of individual differences, thereby promoting the well-being and success of all students.

As lucidly argued by Bruschi and Milazzo (2018):

The concept of integration indeed postulates the establishment of a ‘normal’ standard that the individual is called to approximate. The purpose of active policies and the aim of educational intervention is, precisely, to proceed as far as possible with the ‘normalization’ of diversity. In essence, the paradigm implicitly referred to by the idea of integration is that of ‘assimilation’, based on the adaptation of the disabled student to a school organization that is fundamentally structured for normal students... within this paradigm, integration becomes a process primarily based on strategies to make the disabled student as similar as possible to other. On the contrary, inclusion reverses the very paradigm of normality, presupposing the equal dignity among all individuals and seeking to construct a learning environment suitable for all individuals and adequate to valorise each person’s peculiarities” (Bruschi and Milazzo, 2018, pp. 2-3).

In the Italian regulatory framework, the concept of integration has recently been definitively replaced by that of inclusion, as established by Law 107 of July 13, 2015 (known as the “*Good School Law*”) and Legislative Decree

66/2017. According to these documents, inclusive education addresses all students and responds to their different educational needs through educational strategies aimed at developing their potential, respecting the right to self-determination and reasonable accommodation, and with the goal of improving quality of life. This principle is reflected in the cultural, educational, and organizational identity of school institutions and in the sharing of individual projects among schools, families, and other stakeholders, involving all components of the school community, contributing to the educational success of all students.

Despite the broad scope of the concept of inclusion, which encompasses all forms of discrimination based on difference, the international literature sometimes still tends to associate it primarily with aspects related to disability. While in real situations, in recent years, other segments of the student population at risk of exclusion have significantly expanded, such as foreign students with language learning difficulties, which represent by now a “structural” phenomenon in many European countries (Freddano *et al.*, 2019, p. 61).

As argued by Dell’Anna (2021, p. 50), inclusive education is often linked to conceptual categories based on presumed standards of ability and intelligence, which can reproduce inequalities and stigmatize differences; this also raises doubts about the economic interests involved, as the “inclusion industry” continues to expand with new categories and increasing revenues. It cannot be denied that this is objectively a complex discourse, often suspended between the need to categorize, in order to implement targeted and specific interventions, and the inherent risk of “labelling” action, with the need to necessarily find a balance between these two dimensions. There is no doubt, however, that:

Access to the general education system alone, without adequate resources and accommodations being made available, also constitutes a form of discrimination. Monitoring and evaluation must therefore concern the quality levels of the various services, in relation to the outcomes achieved (Dell’Anna, 2021, p. 64).

In Italian strategies and practices aimed at implementing inclusion, there is a predominance, which sometimes becomes exclusivity, of interventions targeted at students with Special Needs, referring to three categories: disability (individuals certified under Law 104/92); the area of specific developmental disorders⁴ and the area of economic, linguistic, and cultural disadvantage. Therefore, there is a significant risk *fragmentation of inclusivity*, potentially leading to the segregation of user groups, not only towards certain private schools considered excellent but also within the state system itself (Bruschi and Milazzo, 2018, 7-8). It is noteworthy that even

⁴ Which includes, in addition to specific learning disorders (Law 170/2010), deficits in language, non-verbal abilities, motor coordination, attention, and hyperactivity.

esteemed scholars in this field emphasize (e.g. Ainscow *et al.*, 2006) how the concept of Special Needs can represent a barrier to inclusion, insofar as the idea that educational difficulties can be addressed by selecting and classifying students with Special Educational Needs is indeed inherently problematic, as it is based on labelling that can lead to lower expectations for such students and paradoxically tends to reinforce the forms of discrimination it seeks to combat. At the same time, this perspective detracts attention from the difficulties faced by ‘normal’ students and the problems that can arise from relationships, cultures, curricula... that is, from the organization of school as an inclusive system. This results in “the concrete risk of a taxonomy of individuals and a bureaucratization of interventions”, leading to a “diversion from inclusive education” (Bruschi and Milazzo, 2018, 8).

3. Enhancing Inclusion Assessment Through New Indicators

In the pursuit of fostering inclusive social environments, evaluation assumes a pivotal role in guiding improvement processes. Evaluative practices serve as compasses, directing educational systems towards enhanced inclusivity and equitable outcomes. Through systematic assessment, educators and policymakers garner invaluable insights into the efficacy of interventions, identification of areas necessitating attention, and formulation of evidence-based strategies. Thus, evaluation emerges as a cornerstone for driving continuous improvement in nurturing inclusive educational environments⁵.

However, it is widely recognized in educational research that the indicators used for evaluating inclusive education are not universally valid across all educational contexts and systems (Booth and Ainscow, 2002; Levin, 2008; Florian and Spratt, 2013; Cerna *et al.*, 2021). They must be adapted to the cultures, characteristics, and specific needs of each context (Mitchell, 2015; European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2011). Careful consideration should be given to what to measure and evaluate, and which data collections are sustainable in terms of cost-effectiveness when developing a new framework of indicators.

Educational institutions should aim to select a set of indicators by balancing the cost of data collection and the utility of the measures. Furthermore, when opting to disaggregate data for monitoring the needs and challenges of distinct, diverse student groups, it is imperative to weigh the potential pitfalls of categorizing students. Additionally, it is noteworthy that certain individuals exhibit overlapping characteristics, resulting in

⁵ In this regard, see also Giampietro and Poliandri (2020).

intersectional identities characterized by intricate needs that pose challenges in both measurement and analysis.

In the context of school inclusion, indicators serve several key functions (non-exhaustive list):

- **Intervention Progress Monitoring:** Indicators allow for monitoring the effectiveness of interventions aimed at promoting school inclusion, providing data on changes and the impact of policies implemented over time.
- **Identification of Inequalities and Disparities:** Indicators enable the identification of inequalities and disparities in access to education and academic outcomes among different groups of students, providing data to identify and address critical issues.
- **Evaluation of Equity in Education:** Indicators enable the assessment of the degree of equity in education, ensuring that all students have equal opportunities for learning and academic success, providing data to promote inclusive policies.
- **Monitoring of Inclusive Policies and Programs:** Indicators are used to monitor the implementation of inclusive policies and programs at national, regional, and school levels, providing data to evaluate the effectiveness of adopted measures.
- **Guidance for Policy Decisions:** Indicators provide valuable data and evidence to guide policy decisions in the field of inclusive education, offering insights for resource allocation and the development of targeted policies.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Indicators facilitate the involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making process, including students, families, teachers, and industry professionals, providing data to promote collaboration and awareness.
- **Impact Assessment of Actions:** Indicators enable the assessment of the impact of actions and interventions aimed at promoting school inclusion, providing data to evaluate the effectiveness of implemented policies.
- **Identification of Best Practices:** Indicators enable the identification and dissemination of best practices in the field of school inclusion, providing data to promote the adoption of effective approaches and innovative strategies.
- **Monitoring of Physical and Technological Accessibility:** Indicators facilitate the assessment of the physical and technological accessibility of schools for students with disabilities, offering data to identify and address architectural or technological barriers.
- **Evaluation of Welcoming Atmosphere and School Climate:** Indicators allow for the evaluation of the welcoming atmosphere and school

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climate for students from diverse backgrounds, offering data to foster an inclusive and hospitable school environment.

- Engagement of Families and Communities: Indicators facilitate the assessment of family and community engagement in the educational process, providing data to foster effective and collaborative partnerships.
- Assessment of Teacher Training: Indicators enable the evaluation of the effectiveness of teacher training in promoting school inclusion, providing data to enhance pedagogical practices and promote inclusive teaching.
- Monitoring of Bullying and Discrimination Prevention Policies: Indicators facilitate the monitoring of the effectiveness of policies aimed at preventing bullying and discrimination in schools, providing data to implement targeted interventions and cultivate a safe and respectful school environment.
- Evaluation of Access to Support Services: Indicators enable the assessment of students' access to support services, such as psychological or therapeutic assistance, providing data to ensure adequate support for students with Special Needs.
- Assessment of Transition Strategies: Indicators allow for the evaluation of the effectiveness of transition strategies for students with disabilities or from disadvantaged backgrounds, providing data to facilitate a positive and inclusive transition.
- Evaluation of Accessibility of Teaching Materials: Indicators enable the evaluation of the accessibility of teaching materials for students with disabilities or specific needs, providing data to ensure an inclusive learning experience.
- Monitoring of Participation in Extracurricular Activities: Indicators facilitate the monitoring of students' participation in extracurricular events, providing data to promote opportunities for social and personal development.
- Evaluation of Mentoring and Tutoring Programs: Indicators allow for the evaluation of the effectiveness of mentoring and tutoring programs in the context of school inclusion, providing data to offer personalized support and promote academic and social success.
- Monitoring of Adequacy of Sports and Leisure Facilities: Indicators enable the monitoring of the adequacy of school facilities for sports and leisure activities, providing data to promote inclusive physical activity and the development of motor and social skills.
- Assessment of Effectiveness of Linguistic Integration Policies: Indicators enable the evaluation of the effectiveness of policies for linguistic integration for immigrant students or those with a mother-

tongue different from the language of instruction, providing data to promote a multicultural and inclusive school environment.

It is important to emphasize that indicators are not universally valid across all contexts and educational systems. They must be adapted to the cultures, characteristics, and specific needs of each context. It is crucial to carefully select what to measure and evaluate which data collections are sustainable in terms of cost-effectiveness when developing a new framework of indicators. Educational institutions should aim to choose a set of indicators by balancing the cost of data collection with the utility of the measures. Furthermore, when deciding to disaggregate data to monitor the needs and challenges of specific diverse groups of students, it is important to consider the risks of labelling students. However, disaggregating some indicators to account for the barriers and needs of specific populations is essential. This particularly concerns individuals whose characteristics overlap, creating intersectional identities that involve more complex needs.

In crafting an evaluation framework, alignment with assessment objectives and contextual nuances within the educational landscape is imperative. Moreover, emphasizing the iterative nature of evaluation underscores the necessity of field-testing and refining the framework to ensure its relevance and effectiveness in real-world settings. This iterative process of refinement ultimately culminates with the establishment of a robust and sustainable framework for continuous evaluation and improvement.

Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge that the reflective exercise on an evaluation framework and indicators remains preliminary and general in comparison to specific contexts and evaluative operations conducted in the field. Contextual factors, including cultural diversity, socioeconomic backgrounds, and institutional structures, significantly influence the implementation and interpretation of evaluation frameworks. Therefore, while laying down a framework provides a foundational structure, its adaptability and refinement in response to on-the-ground realities are paramount for meaningful and effective evaluation practices.

One of the most successful models of the last decade, progressively gaining prominence, is Loreman's (2013, 2014) *Input-Process-Outcomes* model. This model offers a structured approach to understanding the dynamics of inclusive education by delineating inputs, processes, and outcomes. Particularly noteworthy is the integration of this model by OECD⁶ into its framework proposal, underscoring its value in informing comprehensive evaluation strategies and promoting inclusive practices within educational systems.

⁶ The study, published in OECD Education Working Papers, No. 300, was conducted by Mezzanotte and Calvel (2023).

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Input	Everything provided to the system at any level to achieve inclusive education, including financial resources, policy, central and local staffing, training curriculum, required infrastructure, interdisciplinary support, centralised resources, consultants, etc.	• Policy • Material and financial resources • Curriculum • Teacher education and continuous professional development • Leadership
Process	Practices in school jurisdictions, schools and classrooms that translated inputs into ways of working with students, ultimately producing outcomes. This includes instructional and assessment practices, pragmatics at the school level, funding and use, etc.	• School climate • Teaching and pedagogical practices • Collaboration • Support to individuals
Outcome	Results stemming from inputs and processes including stakeholder group satisfaction, academic achievement rates, school attendance, cost effectiveness, post-school employment or study activities, etc.	• Educational outcomes • Well-being outcomes • Economic and labour market outcomes

Table 1 – *Input-process-outcome* model for indicators of inclusion in education. *Source:* Our minor revision from Mezzanotte and Calvel (2023, pp. 22-23)⁷.

Building upon this conceptual framework, the OECD presents a set of indicators aimed at providing supportive examples for real interventions in assessing inclusion. In turn, drawing from the framework proposed by the OECD, we have developed a reflection aimed at integrating the proposed set of indicators (see Table 2), while consistently remaining within the realm of potential examples supporting evaluation practices⁸. In turn, drawing from the

⁷ Itself based, with adaptations, on Loreman *et al.* (2014), based on Kyriazopoulou and Weber (2009), and complemented by Cerna *et al.* (2021).

⁸ This work has been conducted based on a thorough literature analysis on the topic, within which some contributions must be highlighted as particularly relevant: Booth and Ainscow (2002); Kyriazopoulou and Weber (2009); Armstrong *et al.* (2010); European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2011); Florian and Spratt (2013); Booth and Ainscow (2014); Forlin and Loreman (2014); Mitchell, (2015); Cottini *et al.* (2016); Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2018); Amor *et al.* (2019); Brussino (2020); Ianes and Dell’Anna (2020); Gouédard, (2021). This selection is based on the significant contributions of these works to the field, their frequent citations, focus on evaluative issues, and methodological rigor. These sources provide valuable insights into policy, practice, and evaluation, and represent both international and/or national perspectives, ensuring a well-rounded understanding of inclusive education.

framework proposed by the OECD, we have developed a reflection aimed at integrating the proposed set of indicators (see Table 2)⁹. Naturally, we remain within the realm of potential examples supporting evaluation practices.

Before delving into the proposed set of indicators, it's essential to preface with some necessary considerations. The intended purpose of this indicator kit is evidently to serve as a foundational support for the development of evaluative inquiry tools within the domain of social inclusion. However, it's imperative to acknowledge that the process of operationalizing these indicators into actionable variables requires careful consideration and refinement.

While some indicators may seamlessly translate into measurable variables, others might necessitate a more nuanced approach, perhaps through the application of Likert-type response scales. Furthermore, constructing question paths to effectively capture the essence of these indicators is crucial for obtaining meaningful insights. Additionally, it's worth noting that the versatility of these indicators allows for the inclusion of specific probing questions tailored to the unique research objectives at hand.

It's important to emphasize that the proposed set of indicators does not function as a standalone data collection tool but rather serves as a preliminary framework. This framework encourages thoughtful reflection and serves as a guide for researchers and practitioners in the development of comprehensive evaluative instruments. Through thoughtful consideration and iterative refinement, these indicators can ultimately contribute to the creation of robust tools for assessing social inclusion initiatives.

Moreover, it's essential to recognize that these indicators are primarily designed for self-assessment by policy responsible for fostering inclusion within educational institutions. While they may also serve as a reference point for external evaluations, conducting such assessments entails significant complexities. External evaluators would require a profound understanding of the internal mechanisms addressing inclusion dynamics, adding layers of complexity to the evaluation process.

<i>INPUTS</i>	
<i>Areas</i>	<i>Indicators</i>
Policy	Existence of a school-level policy for inclusive education.
	Is information about the school made accessible to all, irrespective of home language or impairment (e.g., in Braille, in languages different from the instruction one, etc.)?
	<i>Regular review and update of existing policies to ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities and linguistic or cultural minorities.</i>

⁹ In the Table new indicators proposed in addition to the original ones are indicated in *Italic*.

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	<i>Existence of a school policy for accessibility and adaptation of instructional materials.</i>
	<i>Existence of recruitment and training policies specific to support staff for students with disabilities or special educational needs.</i>
Material and financial resources	<i>Distribution of funding between more and less advantaged schools/student groups.</i>
	<i>Percentage of education budget spent on implementation of disability-inclusive education plan at the local level.</i>
	<i>Provision of targeted resources (e.g., school meals, books, transportation) to vulnerable student groups.</i>
	<i>Proportion of funds allocated to accessibility and adaptation of school environments for students with disabilities.</i>
	<i>Availability of specific resources, such as technical support or aids, for students with disabilities within the individual school.</i>
	<i>Implementation of support measures for vulnerable students during transitions between schools or educational stages.</i>
Curriculum	<i>Does the program reflect the varied backgrounds of the students?</i>
	<i>Which groups (e.g., students with SEN, Indigenous students, etc.) receive special provisions within the curriculum?</i>
	<i>Percentage of less advantaged students participating in inclusive extracurricular programs.</i>
	<i>Integration of diverse cultural knowledge and perspectives in instructional materials and textbooks.</i>
Teacher education and CPL	<i>Availability and quality of initial education and continuous professional learning received by teachers in the field of inclusive education.</i>
	<i>Alignment between staff professional development activities and students' diverse needs.</i>
	<i>Teachers' self-reported efficacy in teaching students with SEN, teaching in a multicultural or multilingual setting, communicating with people from different cultures or countries, and approaches to individualized learning.</i>
	<i>Monitoring the feelings of self-efficacy with respect to inclusive teaching methods. Teachers' beliefs and questions on their ability to teach in a multicultural setting.</i>
	<i>Frequency and quality of ongoing training courses offered to teachers on inclusion and diversity.</i>
	<i>Involvement of teachers in mentoring or coaching activities to improve their inclusive practices.</i>
	<i>Assessment of teachers' cultural competence through self-assessments or external evaluations.</i>
	<i>Existence of protocols for measurement of the effectiveness of individualized learning strategies implemented by teachers for students with special educational needs.</i>

	<i>Availability of continuous cooperation and communication between teachers and parents and whether all members of the school community are kept informed about school practices.</i>
Leadership	Leaders' knowledge on inclusive education.
	Values/beliefs of leaders on the inclusion of diverse students.
	<i>Active involvement of school leaders in promoting an inclusive culture through policies and practices.</i>
	<i>Assessment of transparency and fairness in leadership decisions regarding inclusion and accessibility.</i>
	<i>Monitoring the implementation of inclusion policies at the institutional level, guided by school leaders.</i>
	<i>Active engagement of school leaders in collaboration with local communities to support differently abled students and their families.</i>
PROCESS	
School climate	Implementation of a whole school anti-bullying policy.
	Input from ethnically or culturally diverse students on bullying prevention and anti-prejudice materials, activities, and goals are included in your school.
	Active involvement of different school actors (e.g., school leaders, teachers, parents, students, etc.) in the creation of an inclusive school climate.
	Students feel "unsafe in school because of personal characteristics, such as sexual orientation, gender expression, or race/ethnicity".
	<i>Percentage of students who report feeling respected and valued by their peers and teachers.</i>
	<i>Existence of a peer mediation program to resolve conflicts peacefully within the school community.</i>
	<i>Student participation in decision-making processes related to school policies and practices.</i>
Teaching and pedagogical practices	Percentage of lower secondary principals reporting that in their schools they are teaching students to be inclusive of different socio-economic backgrounds, provide them additional support and implement explicit policies against gender or socio-economic discrimination.
	Is cooperative learning used in the classroom? Is peer tutoring implemented? Are students with diverse needs actively engaged in classroom instructional, social, and assessment activities with the rest of their class?
	Individualized learning supports as an alternative to grade repetition is available in your school.
	Alternatives to suspension/expulsion are provided in your school.
	<i>Availability of differentiated instruction to meet the diverse learning needs of students in the classroom.</i>
	<i>Integration of real-world, authentic learning experiences into the curriculum to enhance student engagement and relevance.</i>

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	<i>Use of formative assessment strategies to provide timely feedback and support student learning progress.</i>
Collaboration	Index of student cooperation, based on: “Students seem to value cooperation”; “It seems that students are cooperating with each other”; “Students seem to share the feeling that cooperating with each other is important”; “Students feel that they are encouraged to cooperate with others”.
	Is support for vulnerable students viewed as the responsibility of all the school staff and whether special teachers or teaching assistants have opportunities to consult with other staff about strategies to help them work with all students in their classroom? Do teaching assistants have opportunities to consult with other staff about strategies to help them work with all students in their classroom?
	Is there continuous cooperation and communication between teachers and parents and if all members of the school community are kept informed about school practices?
	<i>Existence of formalized mechanisms for collaboration and information sharing among teachers, such as professional learning communities or collaborative planning time.</i>
	<i>Engagement of external stakeholders, such as community organizations or businesses, in collaborative projects or initiatives to support student learning and well-being.</i>
	<i>Implementation of peer observation and feedback protocols to promote professional growth and sharing of best practices among teachers.</i>
	<i>Regular opportunities for students to collaborate on projects or assignments that require teamwork and problem-solving skills.</i>
Support to individuals	There is availability and effective use of assistive technologies for students that necessitate them.
	Teachers know how to use assistive technology for individual students who need it, including communication systems and software.
	Opportunities for enrichment and to stretch learning are provided for students of all abilities.
	Teachers plan and present information in multiple ways, taking cultural, socio-economic status, and other types of diversity into account; Provide students with opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills in a variety of ways.
	<i>Availability of counseling services for students to address academic, social, and emotional needs.</i>
	<i>Existence of mentorship programs where older students mentor younger peers to support academic and personal growth.</i>
	<i>Provision of flexible scheduling options or alternative learning pathways to accommodate diverse student needs and interests.</i>
	<i>Existence of a protocol for measurement of student satisfaction and perceived supportiveness of school services and resources through regular surveys or feedback mechanisms.</i>

OUTCOMES	
Participation in ECEC	Participation rates for students from a lower socio-economic background.
	Preschool enrolment and preschool attendance for Indigenous children (or other diverse groups).
	<i>Access to quality ECEC programs for children with disabilities or Special Needs.</i>
	<i>Rate of parental involvement in ECEC activities and events.</i>
Active participation	Percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in inclusive settings, based on the enrolled school population.
	Parents are encouraged to participate in decision-making and advocacy activities in the district.
	Everybody is made to feel welcome.
	Concentration of students from diverse groups (e.g., low socio-economic status, minorities, Roma, etc.).
	<i>Rate of participation in extracurricular activities among students from diverse backgrounds.</i>
	<i>Number of community service hours completed by students within the school year.</i>
	<i>Student engagement in school governance structures, such as student councils or advisory boards.</i>
Dropout and repetition rates	Dropout rates from school for different groups of students (e.g., gender, Roma).
	Repetition rates for different groups of students.
	<i>Rate of reintegration of dropouts into education or training programs within a specified timeframe.</i>
	<i>Implementation of early warning systems to identify students at risk of dropping out and interventions taken.</i>
	<i>Rate of successful completion of catch-up programs for students who have repeated a grade.</i>
Achievement	Graduation rates for different groups of students (e.g., by gender, immigrant background).
	University enrolment and completion rates for different groups of students (e.g., by gender, immigrant background).
	Truancy rates for different groups of students (e.g., by gender, immigrant background).
	<i>Rate of students obtaining recognized certifications or vocational qualifications upon completion of secondary education, for different groups of students (e.g., by gender, immigrant background).</i>
	<i>Rate of attainment of academic benchmarks or standards, such as proficiency in literacy and numeracy, for different groups of students (e.g., by gender, immigrant background).</i>

Table 2 – Example of potential indicators of processes in inclusive education within the model *Input-Process-Outcome*. Source: our adaption based on Mezzanotte and Calvel (2023, p. 24-36).

4. Conclusions

If an effective educational system cannot perform without efficient evaluation mechanisms, these are even more indispensable in the case of an “inclusive” educational system or, at least, which aspires to be. Indeed, precisely because many educational systems – including the Italian one – still oscillate between the full (and challenging) implementation of inclusive values and the resistance of old “integrationist” and “assimilationist” impulses, it is all the more essential for the efficacy of inclusion policies, both at the level of single institutions and of entire system, that these become increasingly transparent, accountable, and measurable, especially in terms of concrete results on contexts and individuals.

It is not simple at all. As Dell’Anna (2021, p. 126) aptly points out, the evaluation of an inclusive school system preliminarily requires a precise *vision* of how the system should function and what its real goals are, beyond the ongoing rhetoric. These goals must then be translated into models of description and interpretation; thus, into indicators, variables, tools, indices, quality levels, research designs, dissemination methods... With the belief in the possibility of activating a virtuous circle between evaluative research and generative processes of real inclusion.

Evaluation practices in a field like this must necessarily be flexible and constantly evolving. The attempt to provide, in the third paragraph of the text, *exempla* of indicators in addition to the valuable work conducted by Mezzanotte and Calvel (2023) for the OECD does not claim definitiveness but should be interpreted, with all the limitations and warnings specified in the text, as a reflection and contribution to an essential debate for the affirmation of an education that is just, equitable, and inclusive for all. With the hope that the proposed set of indicators can be tested as soon as possible on concrete operational realities and further refined.

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