The practice of the network for social inclusion

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Riassunto: Il contributo presenta una riflessione sul concetto di rete per l’inclusione sociale. Dopo una presentazione del concetto di rete l’articolo scende a trattare la dimensione di vita delle persone con disabilità ormai fuori dal percorso scolastico obbligatorio e spesso con famiglie di appartenenza in età senile. L’autrice del contributo mette in luce una pratica della rete come supporto alla realizzazione del progetto di vita delle persone con disabilità in età adulta, orientata ad un preciso assetto pedagogico condiviso esplorato attraverso un approccio integrato di metodologie di ricerca qualitative.

Abstract: This paper proposes a reflection on the concept of social inclusion network. It introduces first the concept of network, which is followed by the outlining of the reality of the lives of disabled people who are out of the compulsory school itinerary and often with aged parents. With this paper, the author sheds light on the use of the network as a support to the realisation of a life project for disabled adult persons. It points towards a precisely shared teaching structure, exploring it through an integrated approach of qualitative research methodologies.

Keywords: disability, network, social inclusion.

Mission inclusion

There is a wide scientific literature about the concept of inclusion with a special emphasis on perspective school, labour and social inclusion (Aleandri, Giaconi, 2012).

Theoretical speculation is equally rich, it underlines that a single person or institution, in a linear logic, cannot achieve the target of inclusion. Instead, educational and planning practices are needed, namely those of the network in their circular and relational logics (Banzato, Mattioli, 2011). In fact, the system of relations is the one that grows around the disabled person. At the same time, it contributes to the co-construction of the network and that involves family, school, leisure structures, neighbours, neigh-
bourhood, country, social and health systems, training communities, labour, associations, voluntary workers, etc.

The implementation of the network practice enabled the change from an only charitable approach to an inclusive one (Giaconi, 2012), based on increasing the value of diversity in social inclusion processes.

The real strength of the network is represented by reciprocally connected knots, able to give a strong support to disabled people and to their families. Along the same lines, Consolini (2013) defines the concept of network as «the whole of the actors “knots” who have a degree of autonomy, make activities and exchanges of information related to a common “mission” through connected forms of “relations” and according to established modalities/instruments» (Ibidem, 80).

This is why the network should be supported with participatory projects by all the parts involved. A synergistic action is necessary on the territory among those who are involved in the inclusion project at different levels: on territorial information and training, at institutional level (from school to social and medical services, to associations and authorities, to the world of labour and leisure), at family level where there are special educational needs.

From the point of view of research in education, observing the networks becomes essential, and, likewise, the links in which they configure their structure: single members and networks functions, the relations amongst network members towards collectivity, autonomy and the passages through time, space and relations.

Here is the example of a disabled person that grows up passing from primary to intermediary school (first and second levels, until the age of 16). Nowadays, after the mandatory school years, the Italian law (L. 79/1999) grants the right to study at the university offering specific orientation and tutorial services. Those who do not follow this route need a network to support them and families that are open to the “After Us” dimension. In other words, families looking for answers and possibilities for their, now adult, children who now have to deal with elderly or fragile parents, or have to face their death. Finally, which network is needed for the disabled who are out of school and cannot live in a family now too old to look after them?

We present a possible answer to this question: a network of training communities and of social-training centres that showed, in the Italian context, one experience of excellence in receiving and taking responsibility for people with disabilities and their families.
The meaning of the network has been explored through a qualitative research methodology that we will see below. We found there the analysis of 200 interviews with people involved at different levels in the network that was built to support disabled adult people.

**An Integrated Methodology**

During the first investigation attempt on the networks that support disabled people, the attention turned to the choice on the research methodology.

Amongst the different choices, the research group opted for the qualitative methodology called Grounded Theory (Glaser, Strauss, 1998; Glaser, 1978; Strauss, Corbin, 1990; Tarozzi, 2008) with the aim to unite the need to “start from the bottom”, from a strong binding with experience and, equally, to convey the sense of training action within the training communities analysed.

Considering the specificity of the context, the methodological structure was integrated with a case study reconstructed with a number of epistemological tools (written material such as personal writings, autobiographies, texts, etc.), this allowed a non-historical reconstruction, based on the founding stages of the network construction (Giaconi, 2012).

The work documented here belongs, because of its written material and interviews, to the plane of verbal representations of the meanings amongst the networks participants in the training communities and on the territory.

In the history of this investigation route, the question that emerged was defined and made clear to the exploration and analysis of the meanings attributed to the “knots” of the network with the intent of letting an eventual shared theoretical and pedagogical setting emerge from practice for social inclusion.

In total 200 interviews were made in region Marche (Italy). As this is a “system” analysis. The research extended to the “outside” representations, identified in a group of ten persons belonging to the communities network “outside environment”.

The analysis of the material produced, is structured in this order:

- Initial material coding.
- Categorisation of the emerged elements.
• Integration of the categories.
• Theorisation.

The methodological setting of the Grounded Theory, is conceived, despite of different versions and technicisms, as “[…] a research style” (Strauss 1987, 7) that brings up theory in an inductive way, that is to “anchor” an eventual theory starting from concrete experience. Therefore, parallel and recurrent itineraries of collection increase their value, with analysis that lead to progressive and multiple levels of conceptual abstraction. This connects and integrates concepts into increasingly articulated networks, until […] “faithful” (Strauss, Corbin, 1990, 21) and “founded” (Glaser, 1978) theorisation emerges to interpret the phenomenon investigated. As a consequence, Grounded points to the methodology, and also the result of the research (Mortari, 2007, 150).

The scientific literature underlines how this approach, that came from a sociological milieu (the sociologists Glaser and Strauss), with the time «[…] was extended and recognised as having high significance in the pedagogical milieu too» (Strauss, Corbin, 1994, 275; Mortari, 2007, 149).

To make clear what follows, we briefly track the phases that characterise an investigation route that uses the Grounded Theory (for more about the question see Glaser, Strauss, 1998; Italian translation Strati, 2009).
• Finding a research field to explore in its complexity and wholeness.
• Gradual focus on the question that originated the investigation.
• Choice of the research’s tools and procedures (for example semi-structured interviews that during the research, while a theory arises, become increasingly structured).
• Theoretical sampling, which is the choice of participants along the research route that is based on the results of the simultaneous process of collection and analysis. This extends to those areas that are to be explored and ends when the resulting ideas become “saturated”.
• Simultaneous collection and coding of the data characterised by increasing the initial coding of the materials; categorisation of the resulting elements; integration of categories and theorisation.
• Writing of memos by the researcher: whereby observations and reflections are collected in every phase of the research, in sensitive and critical passages such like reflections on extension and choice of the theoretical sampling and on data collection. And also, on the categorisation process (also emerged categories, observations on applying...
nominal labels, on linking categories, on finding the main category, amongst other things).

• Reporting, starting from the researcher’s memos, and retrace the route giving form to the theorisation that emerged emphasising the integration of meanings through the words of the participants and researchers.

• Valuation of the research so that the mode of the Grounded Theory may lead to an area of self-correction (Tarozzi, 2008, 60). This can be reinforced by areas of “external validation” where a researcher expert on the methodology retraces the descriptive and conceptual process started.

Therefore, we share the well-pondered opinion of some authors (Glaser 1978, 1998; Tarozzi, 2008) to avoid excessive technicalities and stiff procedures to ignite the procedure; it is better to leave room to research recurrence and to the emergency of the theory.

This directive makes possible to test the credibility and the value of the analysis. On one hand, it is through the involvement of crosschecked analysis groups made up of a researcher and outside professionals expert on the methodology, responsible to do a crosschecked reading of the material. Also, it is composed by en route follow-ups between the author of the interviews and the researcher, to verify the reliability of the value found inside the analysis. On the other hand, comes the negotiation, the co-structuring and domestic consensus, in other words, the implementation of procedures to enable the community to identify itself and validate the emerging “theorisation”.

Amongst different uses of the Grounded Theory, in this research itinerary we referred to the recent “constructivist” re-elaborations (Chramaz, 2006). Such perspective increased the value of the knowledge as co-construction between researcher and research participants (Charmaz, 2000), and the polarisation of the attention on the interpretation, negotiation processes, as well as sharing the significations.

It is essential to point out that this approach calls in action a series of highly sensitive questions, which were taken into the structure of the research. They go from the integration of the researcher into the context, to the importance of a trustworthy relationship between researcher and participants aiming to a “New Alliance” (Damiano, 2008), to the intersubjective co-construction in the collection of data and in interpretation of analysis, to the attention to the negotiation of “meanings”, and more
(Tarozzi, 2008, 34-37). All the aspects of this experience, were documented in the memos, and were the object of reflection in the research diaries (Mortari, 2007).

**Route of the analysis of the inclusive networks**

The research on the field started from three actions, that we split in this descriptive phase, although they were performed simultaneously: the study case reconstruction with the founders of the inclusive network, and also with the people recognised as “historical” and significative in the building up of the network, the beginning of the theoretical sampling, the early interviews and interviews text analysis.

The persons interviewed, were chosen in connection with the analysis process, the categories emergence and the theory. Theoretical sampling widening occurred until the emerged categories became saturated.

Therefore, the research initially moved from a theoretical sample that was done by the founders and directors of the local network. Later, after the emergence of the categories, it extended to families, neighbours, community members, community trainers, social and health workers and leisure services workers.

After the transcription, analysis and return of the interview made in line with the first theoretical sampling, the scope of the theoretical sampling was widened on the basis of the early significative units that emerged. Also for these interviews were made transcriptions, the analysis that follows and the returns.

It is important to underline that the collection of material and that the early analysis of the texts were made at the same time. After transcription, each text was analysed in various phases, involving researcher and the group of methodology experts. All was coordinated by the researcher, to enable a debate and a crosschecked and shared reading of the material. The first phase in Grounded Theory terminates the “open coding”.

Specifically, this early coding phase started with the repeated listening of the interviews by the researcher to appreciate their overall value. Next, came interviews’ transcription, they too were read several times, proceeding then to a more detailed text coding “piece-by-piece”. In our case, the Grounded Theory procedure options found (word-by-word, period-by-period, “incident-by-incident”) were oriented on the analysis of sentences rather than single words.
Therefore, on periods that the interviewed considered relevant and significant on the subject that was treated, that is the pedagogical setting of Capodarco’s Community.

Such a choice is based on the sharing of the assumption, made by many authors, that «[…] the meaning is established by the context, therefore, a word-by-word analysis becomes limited […]» (Mortari, 2007, 154).

The recurring analysis of the sentences allowed the finding of the basic and provisional unities of meaning, inserting them within an organised list (Tab. 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaningful units, basic and provisional (text Responsabile centro socio-educativo 1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[...] It is not single person, or one institution, that implements inclusion, it is rather a network to be woven.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[...] Let us think to many interwoven threads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[...] I am not satisfied with the image of the disabled in the Centre; it makes me think to a spider web of negative points. The disabled weaves the network with family, school, territory and us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[...] Let us work for the inclusion to be the centre of shared and co-responsible planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[...] The framework is the relationship. In other words, the Centre is a structure open to the context, in relation with the families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[...] the workers are able to relate all educational activities through the relation with people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[...] These are articulated themes, I am sure that they belong to our network, even with some differences.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tab. 1. Samples from the Analysis of Interviews: meaningful interviews

Every meaningful unit was attributed a short caption, taking care to maintain the language of the speaker (Tab. 2) then a conceptual label was applied to identify the key marker. This aimed to catch the essential trait of the text selected earlier, without altering it with personalised language or vision.

The process of nomination (Tarozzi, 2008, 95) was received with the experts’ suggestion who encouraged the use of a verb in the infinitive form. This would allow «[…]» to express the movement dynamically, the course
of the meaning that should be highlighted […]» (Ibidem, 96). Then, a substantive that allows focusing «[…] on object, content and meaning referred to the text» (Ibidem).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaningful Textual Units (text Responsabile centro socio-educativo 2)</th>
<th>Short caption.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Let us help people to establish ties, to become increasingly autonomous starting from their situation that is to make them feel good. All this is part of daily activities planned within a structured physical space, that is simple, orderly, because for them this is a mental space too, a mental order. This makes sense if inserted in a network that privileges inclusion over exclusion.</td>
<td>Promote the relationship, the well being and an inclusion network.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tab. 2

The selection choices for meaningful textual units and conceptual labels were recorded in the researcher memos.

The text of the interview was entirely re-read and completed with a meaningful title. This was the first “conceptualisation” of the main passages, it can be described as «[…] an operation with which one element of the data collected (observation, phrase, paragraph), can be elaborated in relation with a concept that states its specificity» (Mortari, 2007, 153).

The procedure was repeated again, at the end of the first analysis. The researcher did it alone, while the staff codified it by crosschecking it, to establish and make clear the conceptualisation process. In other words, this was done to establish that the number of conceptual labels to be applied and that they suited properly the text of the speaker.

Furthermore, these three actions of analysis that initially were done in sequence (reading and words and frequent units highlighting, meaningful units description with special attention to the language used by the interviewed and allocation of the conceptual label), in a second phase the analyses were read both vertically and horizontally to establish the coherence between the units and the words of the interviewed.

Therefore, this early open coding operation was realised with a dynamic movement that from the “whole” (the text) came down to the parts (phrase analysis and meaningful units identification), to come back later to the overall vision from the single units (text re-reading), in a circular
and recurring logic. It is noteworthy, that all texts were always subject to
the researcher individual analysis, and analysed by crosschecked groups of
Grounded Theory experts.

This procedure was repeated in each interview, a document was made at
the end of this phase divided in three columns: text, captions on meaningful units and the corresponding conceptual labels.

The text, marked with different colours for each meaningful unit found, was inserted in the first column (same colour identify the same concept throughout the text). The conceptual labels, corresponding to the textual part of the speaker, were inserted in the middle column; they were described with attention to the language of the speakers rather than the symbolic language of the researcher. Finally, the conceptual labels that contained, with a substantive and a verb, the main and unique meaning of the unit that they related to were inserted in the last column.

Overall, it is noteworthy that this research is characterised by two extremely sensitive moments that were fundamental in its realisation. The first one has to do with the interview’s construction, therefore focused on the “researcher position” with all the guiding tips on what could have conditioned the interviewed and the content of the interview.

The second is about the analysis of the materials, which required the participation of a researching team made of Grounded Theory methodology experts. This was done to avoid falling into personal readings and coding to favour a shared and inter-personal vision.

With reference to this last aspect, it is necessary to point out that choosing the speaker’s language enabled the sharing, by the coding staff, of the delicate phase of selection of the interviews’ meaningful units with their nomination processes.

Early reflections and notes of the processes were registered in the relative diaries of research and memos by the researcher.

To sum up the first analysis done by the researcher individually, and crosschecked by the coding staff, was realised through these phases:
  • Repeated listening of the interviews.
  • Transcription and repeated reading of the whole text.
  • Location and analysis of the parts of the text (phrases, paragraphs).
  • Transcription of the captions referred to the meaningful text units found, with care to maintain the language of the speaker.
  • Building an orderly and shared list of the meaningful units.
  • Allocation of a conceptual label to every meaningful unit.
• Re-examination of the process and vertical and horizontal re-reading of all the material.
• Analysis of key words frequency in the texts.

The first phase condensed documents coming from the analysis of all interviews in line with the theoretical sampling, after re-examination and sharing by the staff, the parts were sent first, then discussed in a further meeting with the interviewed persons. This was to implement text return, negotiation, sharing and possible further extensions and analyses.

It has been demonstrated that this phase is essential to share, underline and analyse further the meaningful units coming from the early interviews. It is thanks to the return that the person interviewed could re-run his experience. To be able to see it again in a different light and to take on a further level of complexity in comparison with the first interview.

Therefore, beginning from the document of return and synthesis, the essential and core elements emerged focusing on the co-sharing of the language used in relation to the concepts expresses by the interviewed. We then moved to request eventual analysis and supplements on the document to stimulate new scenarios in the interviewed thinking. This was in relation to the pedagogical setting, which stands at the basis of the network of support existing in the various training communities.

Initially, the new interviews were written and analysed, both individually, by the researcher, and in a crosschecked mode. In a second moment, they were sent and returned to the interviewed to obtain further consensus.

During this phase, after the comparison of all interview texts, was attempted a collection of the various “conceptual labels” to be put in wider and more abstract categories. To find a particular dimension of the phenomenon that was studied. As second passage, was started a process of grouping into categories and macro-categories. In other words «wider concepts, important themes that are able to interpret more extensively wide portion of data» (Tarozzi, 2008, 94).

Also, this itinerary of categorisation, meaning «[...] a more abstract level than the attribution of conceptual labels» (Strauss, Corbin, 1990, 66), demanded to the researcher and coding staff to allocate a name to the category found. In this occasion too, the basis were the words of the speakers, as it is possible to affirm that they were “in vivo codes” (Glaser, 1978, 70; Strauss, 1987, 33; Mortari, 2007, 155). It was also possible to re-run the same itinerary several times.

Eventually, from categorisation, we moved to the finding of the proper-
ties of the categories, «[...] to put in dimension these phenomena, that is to find with which intensity and frequency the properties that were found in the context that was studied did show up» (Mortari, 2007, 156).

For this phase, that is to examine frequency and intensity within the texts of the categories found, we used also programs of automatic or semi-automatic analysis of the textual data (like: N-vivo7).

In brief, categories and macro-categories were found related to their meaningful units and conceptual labels. They were linked to their respective properties (frequency, extension, intensity, length), and then they were “put in dimension”. These actions were fundamental to connect the different categories, to question and compare them and then find the core categories. In every community, once the interview texts of all participants from all structures were compared in cross section, was produced a shared document of synthesis. It was composed of four columns: meaningful units, conceptual labels, categories, macro-categories.

This phase too was marked by an individual analysis, one methodology experts collective analysis, and by a crosscheck, this time with the presence of all the interviewed persons of every community.

The last step concerned the finding of the core categories and of a shared map. During this phase the categories that were interconnected were integrated on the way to the finding of the shared core categories.

The scientific literature introduces the core category (Strauss, Corbin, 1998, 146; Tarozzi, 2008, 97). This is a term that points to «[...] the central, nuclear, essential category that organises all the categories» (Tarozzi, 2008, 97).

The core categories found are the most inclusive, those that can integrate the other categories. These categories were found as saturated, but with a great explicative power, they were the ones that recurred more frequently with more intensity in the texts of the interviewed.

The analyses of the texts were started again in cross section, especially the synthesis cards of every community were the meaningful units, categories and macro-categories had been found. The main and specific, essential and more inclusive and frequent tracts were tracked, with special attention to their frequency and intensity.

In this direction, it was possible to reach a second shared document, issued by the comparison of all the Communities synthesis cards. This comparison was graphically represented with four columns were meaningful units, conceptual labels, categories and macro-categories were inserted.
Partial meaning were collected and shared too.

Before the last return there was a new listening of the interviews, all material was re-read (from early coding to the next integrations), and the different levels of categorisation. As a consequence, the process was discussed again, rerunning it and focusing also on the less relevant traits.

Finally, the categories were lined hierarchically, this issued a shared map that starting from the bottom (peripheral and secondary traits) brought up the more inclusive key traits, and the core categories.

This phase was equally marked by an individual analysis of the texts, by a collective analysis by methodology experts and by a crosscheck with the interviewed that allowed reaching a document shared on multiple levels.

The core categories that were found, emerged, as remarked above, with more frequency and weight in the interviewed texts.

In brief, we show below a portion of the shared document on the core categories that emerged in the research (Tab. 3).
There is a wide scientific literature about the concept of inclusion with a special reference to perspective school, labour and social inclusion. Theoretical speculation is equally rich, underlining how the target and process of “theory emergency” has been sustained and accompanied by the writing of the researcher’s memo that enabled the finding of links and the development of theoretical abstraction. This memo contains notes on the turning point, critical passages, questions posed to identified categories, answers and more about the research carried out.

In agreement with the statement made by many authors, that “A good qualitative research is structured in a circular and recurring form” (Addison, 1999, p. 147), memos and research diaries were read again, on them were written throughout the investigation, the case study, and the description of the shared road map.

In relation to the research evaluation, four evaluation criteria were taken in account corresponding to the main outlines of the Grounded Theory: fit and relevance, workability, modifiability (Tarozzi, 2008, 115). These criteria were used by the researcher who did the investigation as self evaluation about the meaningfulness of the results obtained mode, as well as, base for a comparison with some experts on the methodology. They also had the duty to appreciate the transparency (or lack of it) of the research process that was proposed.

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References


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