

**‘SENitizing’ Migrant Children in Inclusive settings: Exploring the Impact of the  
Salamanca Statement Thinking in Italy and the United States**

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## **Abstract**

This paper emphasizes the aporetic nature of the Salamanca Statement on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994), adopting a cross-cultural perspective. It draws on an intersectional perspective on inclusion (Connor, Ferri & Annamma, 2016; Artiles & Kozleski, 2016; Erevelles, 2014) to argue that although inclusion has been defined by such an international declaration as a transformative project to ensure access to quality education for all students, national inclusive policies are still focused on a pathological construction of student difference, slowly incorporating children from different linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. The focus on Italy and the United States is a response to examine the discourses and practices of inclusion in two countries that have been impacted by the Salamanca Statement thinking. To substantiate our argument concerned with the limitations embedded in the Salamanca Statement, data from two empirical studies conducted in Rome and in Upstate New York will be presented. The studies show how inclusion leads to overrepresentation of migrant students in Special Educational Needs. We conclude that the Salamanca Statement has been transferred into a tool to strengthen normality against difference, and that it should focus on interrupting micro-exclusions for groups sitting at the intersections of race, ability and other identity markers.

## **Key Words**

Inclusive education, Special Educational Needs, Migrant Children, Policy, Salamanca

## Introduction

With the purpose of re-affirming the universality of the right to education, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, adopted in 1994 by 92 governments and 25 organizations, brings children with disabilities to the fore and offers an outline of inclusive education as the vehicle for strategies outlined in the Education for All (Hodkinson, 2009; O’Hanlon, 1995). The Statement argues that inclusive schools are “the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building inclusive society and achieving education for all” (UNESCO, 1994, iv). It suggests that such schools can provide an effective education for the majority of children and improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the entire educational system (ibid.). However, the Salamanca Statement is not an unproblematic and benevolent policy. It lacks a clarification in relation to the theoretical paradigm underpinning it, and the vision of inclusion supported by the statement still focuses on the construction of difference as it related to within-child deficits (Ferguson et al, 2003). This vision of inclusion situates the need for transformation within the constructed difference(s) of individual children rather than the institutional mechanisms of schooling. The Salamanca Statement, as any human rights legislation (see Migliarini, 2018b), allows national governments to apply strategies to maintain sovereignty over the definition of inclusion and the implementation of principles enshrined in the Statement (Artiles, Kozleski & Waitoller, 2015; Miles & Singal, 2009). As a non-legally binding document, it has largely been considered a guideline for national education policies. These problematic aspects of the Salamanca Statement have concurred to the construction of difference in pathological terms on a global scale, gradually incorporating children from migrant backgrounds and other cultural groups in special education based on dubious labels such as *emotionally disturbed/behaviourally disordered* and *linguistically disabled* (Artiles, 2013; Beratan, 2008; Blanchett, 2010; Erevelles, 2014; Harry & Klingner, 2014; Lindsay, Pather & Strand, 2006; Youdell, 2012). Hence, despite significant international efforts made in the last 25 years to desegregate and deinstitutionalize students with or without disabilities, research shows that levels at which inclusive education is practiced is far from acceptable (Booth & Ainscow, 1998; Connor, 2008, Forlin, 2006; Hunt, 2009; Riddell, 2013).

This paper proposes examples of the gap between promise and performance in the enactment of the Salamanca Statement. This gap reflects normative incongruities between international human rights law and national policies, which have become more evident in recent times of neoliberal reforms in education and society. The hypothesis is substantiated through two qualitative empirical studies exploring how school professionals define inclusion and implement inclusive policies for migrant students in the city of Rome and in a mid-sized urban school district in Upstate New York.

By adopting an intersectional perspective on inclusion—one that accounts for the complex intersections of race and ability— (Connor, Ferri & Annamma, 2016; Artiles, Kozleski & Waitoller, 2015), this paper aims to highlight how the model of inclusion, embraced by the Salamanca Statement, has led to the overrepresentation of migrant and minority students in the category of Special Educational Needs.

The analysis begins with the archaeology of the Salamanca Statement: an in-depth exploration of the document, the socio-cultural and legal conditions that have brought to its framing, and its interpretative evolution in these past 25 years. This supports understanding the motivation for drafting an international model of inclusion, as well as the limits and critical aspects within the document. This is followed by a description of the methodology used to give rise to the data gathered in the empirical studies conducted in Italy and in the U.S. As the analysis shows, these two countries have been considered as case studies due to the similarities in teachers' conceptualization of inclusion and inclusive practices, and because they have been sufficiently impacted by the Salamanca Statement. In the last section, the paper highlights the aporetic nature of the Salamanca Statement, while advancing a re-definition of inclusive education through an intersectional and interdisciplinary lens.

### **The Archeology of the Salamanca Statement**

The Salamanca Statement and its Framework for Action on Special Needs Education was a groundbreaking policy, which paved the way to the education of children identified as having disabilities and/or Special Educational Needs in regular classrooms and settings. It was an inspirational policy that led to the dismantling of segregated education in many countries worldwide (Hardy & Woodcock, 2015). It consisted of two main documents: a section on principles, namely the Salamanca Statement, which reaffirmed those identified by the World Declaration of Education for All (UNESCO; 1990), and a section on actions, the Framework for Actions on Special Needs Education, which provided a series of recommendations on how to implement inclusive principles. Nevertheless, both sections were not mandatory legislative measures; their implementation was mostly left to the commitment and good will of policymakers and practitioners who received the Salamanca Statement. Despite its transnational dimension, it was up to each nation to determine the actual endorsement and enactment of the documents (Hunt 2011; Hardy & Woodcock, 2015).

Policymakers were left with much room for navigating implementation of the Salamanca Statement within their own settings and, using an archeological method (Foucault, 1972), it is possible to understand the processes that have led to the existence of dominating discourses about difference in education and the emergence and possible transformations of current approaches to

inclusive education (e.g. the blurring between special and inclusive education). The Salamanca statement, therefore, provides the historical evidence of why, among all possible discourses, only some of them became dominant while others were left to the margins.

In the 90s, two of the most important legacies of the Salamanca Statement were the emphasis on inclusion as an issue of human rights (Rioux & Pinto, 2010) and the shift in the language from integration to inclusion (Vislie, 2003). This new terminology, however, did not correspond to a shift in the paradigm from integration to inclusion (D'Alessio, Donnelly & Watkins, 2010, Rioux & Pinto, 2010). As Vislie (2003) argues, Salamanca was then interpreted as a way of challenging all exclusionary policies and practices in education through ensuring the growth of international consensus of the right of all children to a common education. The Statement, however, did not articulate any explicit theoretical position supporting the advancement of inclusive education as a systemic change. International statements concerning human rights, however, are not neutral or immune from power dynamics within dominant discourses. As such, they require that theoretical premises and rationales in which they are embedded are clearly explained (Medeghini, 2013).

At the time in which Salamanca was enacted, some countries were already welcoming students with disabilities in mainstream schools (see Italy and Canada), while other countries were still questioning whether this possibility was a valuable option (see Belgium and Germany). Devolving decision-making on how to implement inclusive education to individual countries, boards, administrators, and schools resulted in the juxtaposition of different meanings and related practices. While the principles of mainstreaming and 'integrated education' were clearly widely shared, information about how such principles could be translated into practice remained at the level of possibility of practice (Hunt, 2011).

It is undeniable that at the time in which the Statement was issued, the focus was to ensure a process of de-institutionalisation of children with disabilities. The task of the Statement was to bring together as many supporters as it could to achieve such goal. This search for supporters regardless of their epistemological positions, distracted the attention from what was required in terms of systemic changes beyond the technicalities of additional provision and equal access to education. Using the human rights framework, instead, required addressing a series of political, economic, social, and environmental barriers (Rioux & Pinto, 2010), that countries would have had to overcome to make inclusive changes. The implications of the Statement were not unproblematic; rather, they required a series of fundamental changes at the level of pedagogy, assessment, curriculum, organization, and monitoring measures. Whilst, in the Framework for Actions, Salamanca sought to provide a series of recommendations on how education systems were

supposed to change in order to develop inclusion (e.g. see flexible curriculum, resources allocation, management), those fundamental changes were not adequately explained and supported. In this concern, Vlachou (2004) argues that policies are destined to fail when they are not provided with clear indications on how they can be translated into practice and/or with indications about what sanctions are envisaged in case legislative measures are breached.

Although Salamanca was credited for being the first international policy agreement leading to inclusion, it officially remained a Framework for Actions for Special Needs Education, as the title itself reads. This is evident when the Statement indicates that the main focus of the report is children “whose needs arise from learning difficulties or disabilities” (UNESCO, 1994, 6). Although inclusive education was meant to cater for all children of a wide range of categories, beyond the category of Special Educational Needs, the Salamanca Statement put the emphasis on one specific category of student difference, i.e. disabled students, while mainstream concerns remained outside the debate. At an embryonic level Miles and Singal (2010) have begun to question Salamanca inability to see disability as part of the human condition and to discuss how such a groundbreaking policy failed to take account of intersectionalities and of the multi-dimensionality of discrimination operating with education systems. In contrast, any form of student difference began to be interpreted as a form of pathology (and inferiority) that required to be compensated through the provision of additional resources (Slee, 2007).

Soon after Salamanca, another important UNESCO document, the International Standard Classification of Education - ISCED (UNESCO, 1997), sought to clarify the language used in the Statement and officially put an end to the notion of ‘Special Education’ in favor of ‘Special *Needs* Education’, thus reinforcing the move from segregation to inclusion. It was then that the notion of Special Needs Education began to incorporate other minorities at risk of school failure, beyond ‘handicapped categories’, but still needing additional support (ISCED Glossary, 1997 no page). Extending the target population in need of additional support in UNESCO documents following Salamanca allowed for the process of mis-identification (Peters, 2004) of students at risk of school failure, such as Roma children and ethnic minorities to begin. It was then that the seeds of the process of ‘SENitization’ (Migliarini, 2018a) of other minorities were planted and are still visible today (Ferri & Connor, 2005).

The following sections present the qualitative research studies conducted in Rome, Italy and in a mid-sized urban school district in Upstate New York. The first section focuses on the research design and methodology adopted in the two studies. The paper continues by analyzing the implementation of the Salamanca Statement in the two countries, where inclusive education policies are influenced by neoliberal ideology and an individualized ‘service delivery’ approach.

The research data presented below are explanatory of some of the limitations that are embedded in the Salamanca Statement and could show why, despite more than 25 years have passed since its implementation, forms of discrimination are still present in our education systems. Examples of evidence will include forms of overrepresentation of migrant students in the category of SEN across two countries, such as Italy and the USA that have been strongly influenced by the Salamanca Statement.

### **The research studies in Italy and in the United States**

This article draws on two qualitative studies conducted in Italy and in a mid-sized urban school district in Upstate New York, U.S. between 2014-2016 and 2017-2018, respectively. Based on nine refugee services in the city of Rome, the Italian study investigated the intersections of ‘race’, disability, and migrant status in relation to the to the educational and social experiences of forced-migrant children. Located within the interpretative paradigm, the methodological approach adopted was constructivist grounded theory. Data collection involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with 27 participants, 17 professionals in the roles of managers, educators, teachers, social workers, psychologists, neuropsychiatrists and cultural mediators, with varying levels of previous work experience in the field of migration, and 10 asylum-seeking and refugee children from West African countries at different stages of their asylum request process.

The U.S. study developed in two phases. Phase one involved critical discourse analysis (CDA) of existing inclusive policies and school reforms at state and local levels, with a specific focus on English Language Learners (ELLs). The documents analyzed included, among others, *Commissioner's Regulations Part 154-2* (NYSED, 2015a). The policy documents were collected using purposive sampling. As such, only information of specific interest has been selected from relevant document sources. Following IRB approval, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 teachers, including general education and English as a New Language (ENL) teachers, and other school professionals in the Upstate New York region.

The process of data collection and analysis was iterative, thus CDA of policy documents and interviews happened simultaneously. The participants were selected through a combination of purposive and snowballing sampling. In order to establish the study’s credibility and conformability (Guba & Lincoln, 2005), member-checking with participants and data triangulation with policy documents was done throughout the data collection process. Other strategies to support trustworthiness and transferability of findings include data collection over a period of prolonged engagement, and interviews with participants (ibid.).

## **Integrating through disablement: neoliberal inclusion and forced migrant children in Italy**

Soon after the conceptualization of the Salamanca Statement, Slee (1996) argued that while schools around the world were establishing procedural arrangements and engaging in discursive guises about inclusion, the educational structures were in reality disabling; with organization, pedagogy, and curriculum placing different groups of students at risk of exclusion within the mainstream. While this issue has been mostly addressed for students with disabilities, concerns over the disenfranchisement of new marginalised groups, such as youth from indigenous groups and migrant and refugee children continue to emerge. This seems to be particularly true for contemporary Italy. Long before the conceptualization of the Statement, the Italian government passed the milestone policy of *Integrazione Scolastica* (1977) that made the education of all students with disabilities in regular classrooms, along with their non-disabled peers, mandatory. Since then, the country has been described as an inclusive education system (Ferri, 2008), where authorities are compelled to provide financial support and specialist staff to guarantee personalised forms of teaching for all students needing additional support (D'Alessio, Grima-Farrell, & Cologon, 2018).

However, in 2012 the Italian Ministry of Public Education introduced the macro-category of Special Educational Needs (SEN) through a three-tiered categorisation system that focuses on different types of provisions for learners. While the first sub-category (i.e. children with severe physical or intellectual impairments diagnosed by local health units in line with Framework Law 104/1992) is entitled to additional provisions and funding, the second and third sub-categories (i.e. children with learning difficulties certified by public or private clinical diagnosis – Law 70/2010, and students with cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic disadvantage without certified medical diagnosis but still requiring support) are only entitled to receive personalised support, including compensatory and dispensatory measures put in place by classroom teachers (D'Alessio, 2014). The consequence of the introduction of this new macro-category has been the increase in the number of students, especially those from migrant backgrounds, identified with 'SEN' (MIUR, 2014). Interestingly, both the Ministry guidelines and recommendations of 2014 and 2015 on the integration of migrant children in Italian public schools present data on the increasing disproportionality of migrant students in the category of SEN, but do not offer operational indications for teachers to tackle this issue (MIUR, 2014; 2015). Indeed, such disproportionality in the identification of migrants as students with SEN shows schools' strategy to obtain additional resources for children not entitled to support under previous legislation on inclusion. Importantly, it also highlights how Italian national policy—in line with the Salamanca thinking—constructs

cultural and linguistic diversity as forms of deviance and pathology, when compared to the white Italian/European norm (Bocci, 2016; Migliarini, D'Alessio & Bocci, 2018).

The paradox at the heart of the Statement's implementation—the potential double-role of national government as protector and violator of inclusion—is well reflected in the manufacturing of refugee children's cultural and linguistic difference as a 'deficit' by Italian professionals:

“There was a forced migrant girl in the first year of middle school that had socialization and behavioural issues and learning difficulties. In the beginning she was sent here by the school because of her learning difficulties [...] so I met the teachers, the social worker, because her family is poor, they live in a occupied building, and after these meetings I met the family with the cultural mediator. During the first meeting with the family only the dad wanted to be present, but then thanks to the work of the cultural mediator we managed to engage her mum too, and we started working on family roles, and at school we encouraged the girl to play with groups of Italian children, and we managed to offer her homework support [...]. In the end I confirmed the initial diagnosis of learning disability.”

(Participant N, Prof\_Serv5)

Participant N is a neuropsychiatrist, in charge of SEN and disability certification of migrant children. In the passage above, she describes the roles and power dynamics of the subjects involved in the certification process. As a neuropsychiatrist, she has been accorded the greatest status in placement deliberation. The *poor, migrant, patriarchal family, living in a squat* in central Rome is the last to be involved in the process, since it is explicitly perceived as less compliant, socially dangerous, and in need to be fixed (Erevelles, 2000). Interestingly, Participant N focuses attention directly to the girl's family, perceived as less valuable and causing the girls' troubled behaviour in school, without mentioning the specific issues the girl may have encountered in school nor the way teachers have engaged with her. In the impossibility of physically pushing the girl into a segregated classroom, due to Italian inclusive policy and adherence to the Statement, Participant N disables the girl by assigning her a learning disability label based on a dubious judgement influenced by teachers' implicit bias about the girl and her family, thereby enacting a micro-exclusion. She intentionally forces the girl to adopt the manners and morality that the dominant culture deems “respectable” (Harris, 2012, in Adams & Erevelles, 2016), *as if* respectability resides within individual bodies *and not* within normative institutions and systems supporting ableist ideologies that serve to control the oppressed rather than challenge the violent practices of the oppressor (Campbell, 2009).

The process of forced migrant children pathologisation continues through the strategy of labelling to access quality inclusive education:

“[...] I work in a vocational training school that prepares young people to become factory workers. We have a lot of foreign students, both migrants and asylum-seekers. [...] Thanks to the learning disabilities we manage to provide them with appropriate education [...]”  
(Participant Z, Prof.\_Serv8.2)

“[...] Teachers say they [asylum seeking children] have dyslexia when they are simply illiterate, so instead of solving the illiteracy issue, teachers’ attribute labels to have resources but these labels have a certain influence on forced migrants’ lives.”  
(Participant O, Prof\_Serv 6.2)

These quotes, by a teacher and a doctor respectively, speak about SEN labelling as a way of ‘saving’ young asylum-seeking children and of guaranteeing their access to quality education. Such process masks the real scope of labelling, which is merely economical: obtaining more resources from the state and local organizations to support these students as articulated in the Salamanca Statement. What is also not shown here is the intent of homogenizing mainstream inclusive settings by rendering migrant children disabled within the educational endeavour.

Interestingly, only one Italian professional who participated in the study seemed to be aware of the disablement of migrant children. And, her quote shows awareness of the tensions in the implementation of the policy of *Integrazione Scolastica* and of the principles established by the Salamanca Statement:

“I’m very upset about it [constructing illiteracy as learning disability]. I find it very superficial, incoherent, and not honest at all. They do it, I mean even psychologists do it. I mean the fact that we have the school inclusion (i.e. *integrazione scolastica*), the de-segregating law ehm this is just on paper. I’m also very shocked that the normal classes still go on with only the teacher speaking and the pupils are obliged to listen, there is no discussion. Frankly, I believe that the Italian teachers cannot make it I mean they have to get more tools to deal with these issues [...]”  
(Participant L, Prof\_Serv7)

As an educator with several years of experience working with refugee children in Rome, Participant L offers a critical view on the construction of learning disability by the majority of Italian teachers in public schools and emphasizes how the policy of *Integrazione Scolastica* fails asylum-seeking and refugee children, actively contributing to forms of micro-exclusions and pathologisation in mainstream educational settings (D’Alessio, 2011).

These accounts reveal how, in constructing asylum-seeking and refugee children learning disability, teachers and other Italian professionals miss the structural features of the situation in which both teachers and refugee students operate. There seems to be no intention of Italian

professionals to understand the ways students are systemically oppressed, how those oppressions are (re)produced in classrooms, and what they can do to resist those oppressions in terms of pedagogy, curriculum, and relationship to reposition students and families as valuable members (Migliarini & Annamma, forthcoming).

### **Including through individualizing: reactive forces of “inclusion” in the United States**

In the U.S., calls for education reform initiatives tend to echo in reaction to episodic internal political movement and social trends, especially at the state and local level (Hunt, 2011). However, in alignment with the Salamanca Statement, U.S. education reforms in the past 25 years place students with special education needs at the center of state and federal policy which change as new categories of “pupils” are defined (ibid.). This *ad hoc* approach to education initiatives has produced reform efforts focused on education standards, standardized assessment, and compliance, all of which emphasize a rhetoric of accountability and student performance. This, along with established systems of power and control, works to justify exclusionary practices under the guise of “service delivery” and individual rights to education (Ferri & Ashby, 2017), as well as the articulation and emphasis on states’ rights. Because of the autonomy afforded to systems at the state and local level, this subtly supports a gradual approach to equity for multiply-marginalised student groups in schools, despite dramatic changes in the broader social and political landscape of the U.S. (Ferri & Connor, 2005).

As a primary example, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA, 2015) turns federal and state education systems’ attention toward schools deemed “lowest-performing” by requiring schools to disaggregate and report demographic and achievement data for minoritized student groups, including migrant children. Compliance with these accountability measures are directly tied to schools’ access to federal funding. As a result, state and federal education systems relentlessly deliberate over student classification and reclassification with specific education labels, such as “English Language Learner” (ELL) (U.S. Department of Education 2016; NYSED, 2015a). This deep concern for student categories is pervasive, often framing the way schools and educators conceptualize inclusive policy and practice in the classroom.

In New York State, education policies for students with disabilities and migrant children—many of whom are classified as ELL students through a state-regulated identification process during school enrolment—are generally conceptualized as separate, individualized “services.” This is clear in interviews with general education and specialized teachers in a mid-sized urban school district in Upstate New York, where nearly all participants articulated the micro-exclusion of

students based on their education labels. Andrea, a white special education teacher who worked in a third-grade inclusive classroom, explained,

“[I]f you’re the special ed teacher in the room, the special ed (*sic*) kids are your kids, and, like, the gen ed (*sic*) kids are the gen ed teacher’s kid. [...] I feel like even administration like even forgets about the kids or students with disabilities...and it’s just like okay well [...] that’s their plan. They have a label. Like when we even go through and look at data, they’ll immediately go, like, ‘Oh, are they ENL? Oh, do they have an IEP?’ and [...] it’s like, ‘Nevermind interventions for them—they have ENL or they have an IEP...’ and it’s like, okay, they are getting something, but does that mean they should be forgotten about?”

(Teacher\_SY\_Andrea\_02.09.18)

Andrea highlights how students’ classifications—both disability and ELL status—are primary signifiers of who will teach them and what instructional supports are available to them. Further, these students are relegated to interactions only with teachers who offer them individual services, with a rare possibility for interactions with (or acknowledgement from) other teachers, administrators, or students. Consequently, their educational and social experiences at school are compromised by the reification of the labels assigned to them. Teachers similarly experience individualization as they have few opportunities to interact with all the students and teachers in an inclusive classroom.

Special education teachers are not the only professionals whose imagination of inclusive education is limited by the culture of including through individualizing enacted through *ad hoc* policy and implementation. In an interview with Raquel, a white English as a New Language<sup>1</sup> (ENL) teacher, she describes the inclusive mechanisms of the elementary school where she works. She explains,

“So, we have special education inclusion classrooms. Every grade level has, um, one special education inclusive classroom, and we also have ENL students who are in regular education classrooms, and so they get seen by their ENL teacher they get services outside of their classroom and inside of their classroom. So, um, I think that that’s very inclusive because, even though they’re being pulled out for 36 minutes a day, I think that it’s really nice to let them get supported in their classroom with their peers [...].”

(Teacher\_SY\_Raquel\_12.11.17)

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<sup>1</sup> English as a New Language is the term for English language instruction mandated for students who are identified as having limited English proficiency per New York State ELL-identification processes. Many migrant children in New York State are entitled to ENL instruction in accordance with CR Part 154 (NYSED, 2015a).

To Raquel, inclusion is essentially special education, wherein students are treated with individualized interventions in specific physical spaces. This clinical perspective of inclusion is advanced by her reference to ELL students “being pulled out for 36 minutes a day.” This is in reference to the New York State Commissioner’s Regulations (CR) Part 154 Units of Study, wherein ELL students are required to receive segregated ENL instruction for varying amounts of minutes per week depending on their assessment-based proficiency level (NYSED, 2015b). In Raquel’s example, she is providing this specialized instruction for a seemingly arbitrary number of minutes—36—to remain in compliance with state regulations and reduce the amount of time ELL students spend outside their mainstream classrooms. Raquel tries to minimize the stigma of removal by reflecting on how “nice” it is that ELL students are allowed to receive language support in the mainstream setting, but it is clear that students with different abilities should be helped by the appropriate professional, whether it is the ENL, special education, or general education teacher. Although her conceptualization of equity and inclusion for ELL students is framed by her knowledge of CR Part 154, she appears to grapple with the realities of inequity and segregation in her own practice.

### **Discussion: Inclusion through disabling and individualizing**

Italy and the U.S. are characterized by different processes of policy making, implementation, and educational reforms. Nonetheless, data presented in this paper offer a glimpse of the similarities in the conceptualization of inclusion for migrant children by professionals in contemporary neoliberal economies. Italy is experiencing the disablement of subject perceived as ‘risky’ (Giuliani, 2015), the same phenomenon that has been happening in the U.S. during the last three decades (Sleeter, 2010). At present, the U.S. is characterized by an individualized service delivery approach driven by neoliberal principles such as standardized assessment, compliance, and student performance. Despite several attempts to transform education in inclusive terms, in both countries the system is unchanged—indeed, both countries attempt to ‘fit’ diverse children in education via exclusionary practices. Findings from this comparison attests to the problematic aspects of the Salamanca thinking, particularly residing in the national governments’ freedom of enacting Statement and of what discourse around diversity must circulate.

### **Conclusion: Expanding the Salamanca thinking towards intersectional inclusive education**

This paper examined the logical disjunctions within the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Actions on Special Needs Education, adopting an intersectional perspective on inclusion (Connor, Ferri & Annamma, 2016; Artiles, et al, 2011), which more authentically centres the voices

of multiply-marginalised children. It presented data from two qualitative studies on the inclusion process of migrant children in Italian and U.S. public schools. By highlighting the consistent pattern of over-representation of migrant children in Special Education across the Atlantic, this paper emphasizes how in the last 25 years the Salamanca Statement has increasingly become a tool to reproduce the 'norm'.

While the Salamanca Statement officially introduced the first cross-cultural definition of inclusive education interpreted as an opportunity for all children to learn together, the boundaries between Special Needs Education and inclusive education became blurred, as were actions related to them. Inclusive education began to be seen as a new terminology for Special Needs Education (Armstrong, 2003) with a focus on disability (Miles & Singal, 2010). This is also evident as Salamanca endorsed the option for segregated education for children identified as having disabilities and Special Educational Needs. The Statement, in fact, reports that students with Special Educational Needs would be placed in common regular settings 'as far as possible' and only if this was not be detrimental for them and for the other non-disabled children (UNESCO, 1994, p.17). A truly inclusive policy would have reduced the options for opting-out for special schools. Instead, the Statement reinforced the practice of assigning a label to children who differentiated from an established norm, while existing education systems remained unquestioned. In other words, Salamanca did not manage to strengthen a transformative agenda for inclusion; instead, it paved the way to a tamed version of inclusive education (D'Alessio, Grima-Farrell, & Cologon, 2018), as it failed to disrupt established education systems and routines. Its potentially revolutionary power was diluted by discourses of special needs education and additional, individualized resources, reducing it to a tool of containment and immunization of existing education systems (ibid.).

As the data presented in the paper highlight, most of the inclusive education structures in Italy and in the U.S. are still disabling multiply-marginalised students, putting them at increasing risk of micro-exclusion. We argue a possible way to address and overcome the limitations of the Salamanca Statement is by reorganizing its conceptual framework in light of an intersectional stance to inclusive education (Connor, Ferri & Annamma, 2016; Artiles, et al, 2011). Primarily, this will help educational stakeholders at the international level to shift from a deficit perception of individual difference toward an authentic transformative view of inclusion. It will also influence the way in which the Statement is implemented at the local level, since attention will be given not just to the characteristics of children but also the system in which they operate (see Annamma & Morrison, 2018). Practitioners will better understand the ways students are systemically oppressed, how these oppressions are (re)produced in classrooms, and what they can do to counter and resist those oppressions in terms of pedagogy, curriculum, and relationships.

A commitment to an intersectional approach to inclusion in Italy, the U.S., and indeed globally, would address much of the ableism, racism, and intersecting oppressions that are reiterated through current inclusive education policies and practices. Reflecting and modifying these policies through an intersectional perspective will improve the achievement, behaviour, and categorization of migrant students and all students. Without explicit commitment to address the interconnection of racism and ableism, the continuation of intrinsically disabling practices and policies will persist. Finally, an intersectional approach to inclusive education can guide educators to understand how multiple forms of discrimination push students out of schools, and lead parents to mistrust schools and education.

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