

Inclusive Education: Lessons from Italy

Presented by:
Dr. Carrie Wysocki



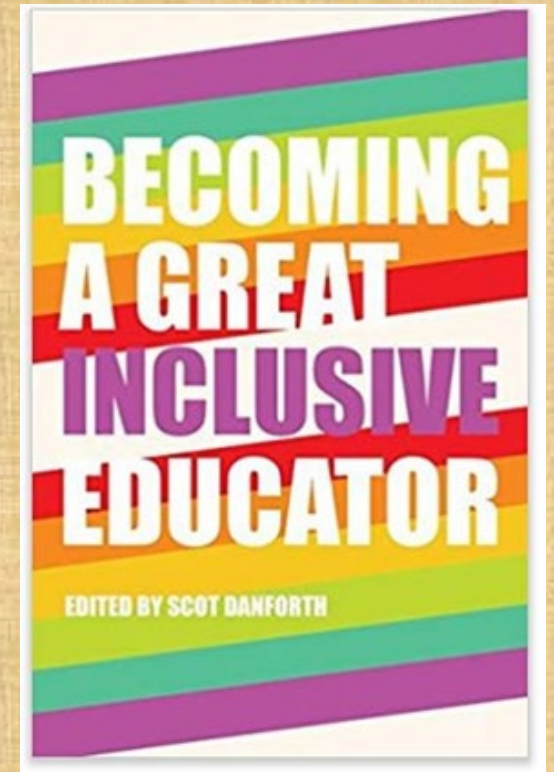
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Prior Research at



2014: Investigating Inclusive Education in the United States

Inclusion:
a commitment to
all children in
the same
classrooms, in
the same
schools,
regardless of
ability.



Two decades after the historic Brown v. Board of Education decision in the United States in 1954, the 1970s marked a watershed decade for policies ensuring the right to education for children with disabilities. Like the United States, which passed Public Law 94-142 in 1975 (reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA in 1990), Italy also enacted progressive, groundbreaking laws affecting students with disabilities during this time.

What distinguishes Italian educational policy, however, is its **early implementation of full inclusion**— beginning more than twenty years before the Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994), which called for the universal implementation of inclusion.

What Happens When Everyone Belongs

By: Beth Ferri, 2008





So why Italy?



US Schools

Too many parents of children with disabilities report they or their child do not feel welcomed in school.

Some families have to advocate for access to the same educational environments and opportunities that are readily available to students without disabilities.

Particularly prevalent for families of students with more intensive supports, ie: intellectual disabilities, autism, multiple disabilities, etc.

Students with more complex needs are more often educationally segregated.

Italian Schools

Students with a wide range of disabilities, including those with intensive support needs, are more consistently welcomed in typical classrooms

Many are astonished to learn the extent to which students with disabilities in the U.S. are separated from peers without disabilities.

There is a pervasive sense that students with disabilities should be as valued as those without disabilities and have equal educational access.

Including students with disabilities is not controversial, an experiment, a passing fad, or a right that needs to be earned by meeting certain criteria or functioning at a particular level. Students with disabilities are welcomed simply because they are human.

TRAVEL COURSE PROPOSAL FOR ETS GRANT: MAY 2024

The goal of the trip was to establish important connections to design a travel course:

- Students in UF Education who are preparing to be inclusive licensed teachers, especially in general and special education, all are invited to participate in this travel opportunity!

The travel course will engage students in co-authoring with faculty the following ways:

- An article for the Journal of Inclusive Education regarding the experience and research on the variances of education in the two countries and how to improve the Inclusive Education program at the University of Findlay.
- Prepare for a Conference presentation the students will research and collaboratively find to design their presentation.



Our partnership is with “Unicollege”

The first private Italian accredited university that hosts an integral Study Abroad program for international students

Prof. Giosuè Prezioso

**I taught in 10+
countries,
designed 500+
courses and met
1000+ students**

Advanced Education Leadership

Harvard University, **PhD** C– University of
Reading, **MSc** University of Glasgow.



PURPOSE OF THE TRIP

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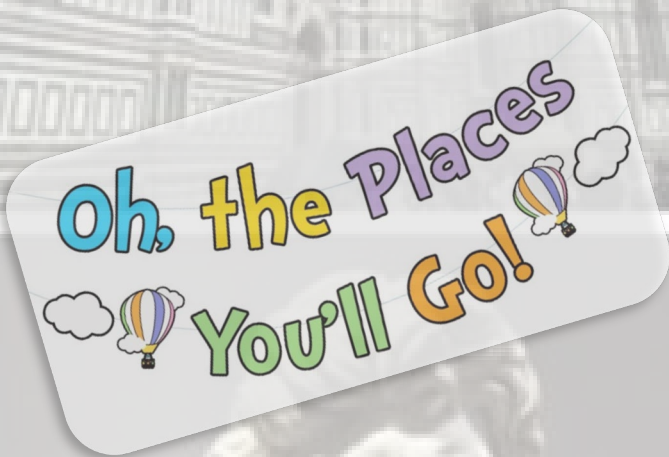
- To examine Italian federal laws, educator practices, and inclusive classroom models.
- To gain firsthand insight through classroom observations, educator interviews, and policy discussions.

Transformative Learning Opportunity:

- Immersive experience for students and faculty to learn globally and apply findings locally for more inclusive classrooms at home.

A photograph of Michelangelo's marble statue of David, standing in a museum setting with a curved wall in the background. The statue is shown from the waist up, with its right hand raised to its chest and its left hand resting on its hip.

*WE LOVED THE
FOOD, THE
CULTURE AND...
THE ART!*



Ministry of Education

Local education authorities

Inclusive primary and secondary schools

Disability rights advocacy organizations

Panel discussion: Educators and policymakers

Art Museums through disability lens

Rome

Florence

Sienna

Venice



Student Voices: Educators with a Passion for Inclusion

Each student brought a unique perspective shaped by their academic training and professional goals.

They enrolled in the 6-week summer course because of their interest in inclusive education

They are committed to becoming educators who advocate for equity and access for all learners.

The experience provided an invaluable opportunity for these current and future educators to deepen their understanding of international inclusive practices and reflect on how it impacts their work and/or research.





The Participants!

A diverse group of undergraduate and graduate students from the University of Findlay's College of Education participated in the trip:

- Caitlin Kosec~ EdD Student
- Hannah Hill~ EdD Student in School Psychology
- Lilly Ahmed~ Masters in Education
- Bri Greer~ Masters in Education
- Anna Haren~ Junior in Primary Education, Dual Licensure
- Jared Hill~ Junior in Primary Education, Dual Licensure
- Katie Singleton~ Senior in Primary Education
- Zoe Sleasman~ Sophomore in K-12 Intervention Specialist
- Gabby Wysocki~ Carrie's daughter with Autism and intellectual disabilities

~Lilly Ahmed~

Graduate Student~ Masters in Education
High School Science Teacher at Bowling Green



- **Relationships:** Creating life-long friendships that I did not expect.
- **Education:** Observing students and teachers in a different country helped open my eyes to new educational approaches that I can use in my classroom!
- **Culture:** We got to experience true Italian culture through our guides and partnerships. The best, authentic opportunities.
- **Travel:** Two weeks that were jammed packed with different locations to make the most of our time!

Bri Greer ("Queen")

Graduate Student~ Masters in Education Intervention Specialist at Van Buren

- Classmates over zoom to best friends in life!
- Learning through lectures and experiences!
- Beautiful country and people that made saying "goodbye" a truly difficult task!
- Long dinners to catch up with family and friends while sharing a meal together!
- Seeing a place that I recently taught my students about, new level of appreciation!



~Anna Heren~

Primary Education MAJOR~ Dual License
Junior

- Schools: my highlights included visiting the various schools and seeing teachers and students in action
- The food: I love the pasta and my juice :)
- Relationships: I loved going with such an amazing group and having Unicollège as our partners
- Learning: I really enjoyed learning about disability laws in Italy



~ Hannah Hill ~

EdD School Psychology Doctoral Candidate

- **Relationships:** I met some of the most amazing people and formed friendships that will last a lifetime!
- **Educational:** Learning about the differences between my position in the educational field versus what it would be in Italy
- **Culture:** Getting to experience Italian culture straight from the sources (Alex, Josh, UniCollege)
- **To Be Continued:** With the experience, I have decided to return to continue my dissertation research in Italy!



Jared Hill

Primary Education Major Junior

- Josh and Alex from Unicollege were remarkable! They were knowledgeable and curated the trip to our educational needs.
- The sights we saw and the things we did- all phenomenal!
- I truly believe that everyone on the trip left as a better person and educator!
- The new friends we made- amazing!



~ Caitlin Kosec ~

EdD Doctoral Candidate

- **Rome**-Camping on the first night and forming friendships, exploring the Colosseum, the Vatican, and the Roman Empire
- **The Energy**-Josh and Alex's passion and energy turned ordinary topics and events into unforgettable learning moments.
- **Inclusive Education**-Seeing it in action was inspiring and deeply moving. Students are always in the general education classroom first.
- **Italian Culture**-The strong role of family in every part of life was surprising and heartwarming but I also appreciate how much American schools provide to their students.
- **Siena & Venice**-Climbing the Torre in Sienna with Alex felt magical and Venice's gondolas were a dream.
- **Classmates**-Strangers on day one, classmates became life-long friends.



~ Katie Singleton ~

Primary Education Major Senior

- Education: Learning the main differences between the U.S. and Italy and hearing all of the speakers' points of view
- Relationships: I met the most amazing people and I can see all the friends I made for my future!
- Favorite Memory: making pasta with everyone, the laughing and singing during our lasagna night
- Another highlight: meeting Josh and Alex and everyone at Unicollege! They are people I will remember for the rest of my life





~ Zoe Sleasman ~

K-12 Intervention Specialist ~ Sophomore Minors in Museum Studies and Theatre

- **Graduated Student Opportunities (Transition)**- Support through college or the workforce
- **Inclusive School Environment**- Support teacher in the classroom for students with a 104 certificate (equivalent to our IEP)
- **City Exploration**- Gondola ride in Venice, Colosseum at night, the Uffizi (world's oldest gallery) and literally everything a history nerd could ever need
- **And the most important thing...food!**- Italian Fanta, eating pizza in Italy, kiwi gelato and all the pasta anyone could ever wish for
- **Future career/life**- Museums, theaters, traveling and teaching

Gabby Wysocki

daughter to Dr. Wysocki
Student at MVNU, Individual with Autism

- Loved the food AND the gelato AND the wine!
- I loved the museum and buildings
- I made new friends!
- My favorite place was Florence because I got perfume there.



The Heart of the Journey: People, Partnerships, Purpose



We wrote a book!

This collaborative book, *Disability in Society and Education: Insights from a Collaborative Study Abroad on Historical, Legal, and Cross-Cultural Perspectives* offers a cross-cultural and historical exploration of how disability has been perceived, treated, and integrated from ancient civilizations to the present day.

Through ten student-authored chapters, it examines:

- Historical and philosophical foundations of disability
- Shifts in societal and legal responses over time
- Education practices in the U.S. and Italy
- Evolving global perspectives on inclusion, advocacy, and rights

Together, these insights provide a rich, comparative framework for understanding disability in both historical and contemporary contexts.



What We Learned: Comparing U.S. and Italian Education

U.S. – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

- 13–14 specific disability categories
- Diagnosis by a school-based multidisciplinary team
- Services guided by an Individualized Education Program (**IEP**)
- Focus on Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) – more often to include separate settings
- Emphasis on **labeling and eligibility criteria**

Italy – Law 104/1992 & Law 170/2010

- No fixed disability categories
- Diagnosis based on functional need by a neuropsychiatrist
- Students receive a PEI or PDP depending on needs, (PDP for SLD, but not categorized as a disability- just support needs)
- Emphasis on **full classroom inclusion** with a support teacher
- Focus on access and participation, not labels



Key Takeaways:

Italy prioritizes functionality and inclusion, while the U.S. focuses on categorization and placement.

Both systems aim to support students with disabilities, but through distinctly different approaches.

Recommendations

Adopt a Functionality-Based Framework:

- Shift focus from categorical eligibility to *functional profiles* and *barrier identification*.
- Encourage use of *Universal Design for Learning (UDL)* and *multi-tiered supports* for all learners.

Reconsider “Label Dependence”:

- Promote *proactive intervention* through general education, not reactive identification.
- Fewer labels can lead to greater inclusivity with educators designing supports on learning profile versus fixed classifications

Increase Collaborative Teaching Models:

- Fund *co-teaching* and *dual licensure* preparation (general + intervention specialist) (Thanks Deans Compact for my grant to support creating a dual at UF!)
- Align with Italy’s model of *insegnante di sostegno* (support teacher) embedded in classrooms

Invest in Training and Cultural Mindset:

- Develop professional learning that centers *disability as diversity* and *inclusive pedagogy*.

Policy Implications:

- Review current reliance on IDEA categories.
- Consider a hybrid framework emphasizing *function*, *participation*, and *contextual supports*.

When in Rome, do
as the Romans do.

Ambrose

quotekey

Any Questions?

Italy 2026

