

THE ORIENTATION PROCESS FOR GRADUATES WITH DISABILITIES: A PILOT PROJECT

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Abstract: *In the European and national policies for the realization of the objectives and strategies of “Lisbon 2010” and “Horizon 2020”, lifelong guidance is recognized as a permanent right for every person. The main objective of the research is to develop a self-orientation online path that helps to increase and improve the self-reflection of people with disabilities on their own knowledge, soft skills, interests, strengths and weaknesses. The final result is supposed to be the recognition of the career project closer to their personal and professional profile. The platform value is related to the active role played by the person with disabilities in the orientation process.*

Key words: *guidance process, self-orientation, disability, awareness.*

1. Introduction

In European and national policies for the achievement of the Lisbon 2010's and Europe 2020's targets, guidance is recognized as a permanent right taking place in different and specific ways according to needs, contexts and situations. Nowadays orientation is not only the tool to manage the transition from school to work place, but it assumes a permanent value in each person's life ensuring choice support. Only in this way the guidance process can promote active employment, economic growth and social inclusion. In this context, a guidance activities' reinforcement is provided in schools and universities to support students in professional project's development, in line with their own skills and expectations. Lifelong guidance thus becomes an opportunity for everyone to build their own future, especially for those at risk of exclusion from the labour market, such as students with disabilities.

Finding a job is difficult nowadays for many people and for persons with disabilities it is a path with more obstacles. Among those who have a disability, unemployment rate is between 50% and 70% in industrialized countries, with peaks of 80% in Italy, despite the fact that Law 68 has an overview of the most advanced in Europe.

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There are several reasons that lead the unemployment rate of disabled workers to more than 80%, the first being the difficulty to achieve a cross demand/supply because the required tasks of the companies do not coincide with the characteristics of human resources in the area of reference (the province).

The current conceptual framework of reference in the field of disability is the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), which has led to a real reversal of the meaning of disability: no longer as a mere consequence of a physical or a cognitive condition, but the relationship between an individual and the context in which he/she lives (World Health Organization, 2001). The ONU Convention on persons with disabilities rights is in line with the basic concepts of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020, which supports programmes against discrimination, and adopts equal opportunities and active inclusion as priorities (ONU, 2006).

From the perspective of orientation to work for people with disabilities, all those actions that lead to an “awareness of their abilities / skills” assume importance, both for the subject and for the company where he/she could usefully be joined.

2. Objects

The main objective of the research is to develop a self-orientation online path to support reflection skills in students with disabilities, who are preparing themselves for the labour market. An online platform has been developed to carry on self-evaluation by the students with disabilities so as to identify the career project closer to their personal and professional profile. The platform value is related to the active role played by the student in the orientation process. Self-reflection will facilitate the next dialogical contact with counsellors and will be a competence that the individual will bring as a value in the world of work.

3. Methods and Activities

The theoretical and methodological paradigm adopted is a constructive approach: each component of the research can be reconsidered during its course and so the process is characterized by circularity; the research’s tools are in connection with the specific goals.

First of all, a data collection has taken place, throughout bibliographic and web research. In particular, referring to Isfol-Istat’s investigation on professions (2012), we have proceeded to operationalize different professional profiles articulating them in:

- knowledge;
- hard and soft skills;
- working conditions related to disabilities’ needs;
- intelligence profile.

As for the latter area, it has been referred to Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences

(1987): he challenged the traditional intelligence's view, defining it as a problem solving ability linked to specific socio-cultural contexts, and identifying more mental abilities or intelligences.

The online orientation path is composed by different self-assessment questionnaires to evaluate different variables and identify professional areas related to student's personal and professional profile, compatible with the specific disability's type and personal conditions.

3.1. The Pilot Project

To evaluate the self-orientation path's effectiveness in activating self-reflection process, a pilot study has been structured to test the path itself and to collect qualitative data. The experimentation has taken place with a sample of university students with disabilities and it has been divided into three stages:

- a collection of incoming data has been carried out using two instruments, the self-presentation and the Multidimensional Self-Esteem Test (TMA) in order to detect in the sample the personal direct and indirect images in different contexts (family / work / peer) and self-esteem linked to different areas (relational, environmental control, emotional management, university / work success, family life and body experience);
- the participants has completed the self-orientation path and, after compilation, an individual report on the main results obtained by the path has been sent to the students by the orientation counsellor;
- finally, an outgoing data collection took place after around 1 month, asking a second time to answer the same self-presentations and TMA test, to detect any changes in the self-representation and in terms of self-esteem following the compilation of the path.

The self-presentation is part of the self-descriptive techniques generally used to explain the self-concept. The self is a complex object of study and can only be known indirectly: the main access is verbal. The term self-presentation is, very different from the self - concept: while the latter is the image that an individual has of himself and gives to himself, self- report is what a person says to think of being (Pojaghi & Nicolini, 2008).

4. Data Analysis

There were 15 university students participating in the phase of experimentation on the effectiveness of the self-guidance path, from Macerata University: 13 female (86.67%) and 2 male (13.33%), aged between the year of birth 1962 and 1997.

In terms of type of disabilities, 5 (33.33%) of them have a *physical / motor disability*, 5 (33.33%) belong to the *protected category*, 2 (13.33 %) have an *intellectual / mental / psychological disability*, 1 (6.67%) has a *sensory disability of hearing* and 1 (6.67%) a *sensory disability of sight*, while the last (6.67%) has a *rare disease* in comorbidity with a sensory impairment of hearing.

The main results obtained from the self-presentation are summarized in table 1.

Direct self-image's adjectives

Table 1

Before	Frequency	After	Frequency
Reserved	3	Stubborn	3
Curious	2	Curious	3
Determined	2	Determined	3
Worker	2	Precise	3
Reliable	1	Headstrong	2
Cheerful	1	Fussy	2
Anxious	1	Scrupulous	2
Brilliant	1	Sensitive	2
Stubborn	1	Solar	2
Coherent	1	Reliable	1
Creative	1	Friendly	1
Available	1	Active	1
Funny	1	Collaborative	1
Educated	1	Resolute	1
Emotional	1	Available	1
Empathetic	1	Gentleman	1
Imaginative	1	Kind	1
Generous	1	Clever	1
Tireless	1	Hardworking	1
Clever	1	Worker	1
Enterprising	1	Mature	1
Hardworking	1	Optimistic	1
Motivated	1	Persevering	1
Orderly	1	Multifaceted	1
Optimistic	1	Strict	1
Perfectionist	1	Confidential	1
Finicky	1	Sarcastic	1
Precise	1	Serious	1
Thoughtful	1	Cute	1
Scrupulous	1	Tenacious	1
Sensitive	1	Willful	1
Serious	1	Keen / a	1
Sincere	1		
Solar	1		
Spontaneous / a	1		
Tenacious	1		
Headstrong	1		
Shy	1		
Versatile	1		
Keen	1		

The first self-presentation required participants to describe themselves using 3 adjectives with the intent of investigating their self-image: before the self-orientation path, the

adjective with a greater frequency (3) is *reserved*, after the path adjectives increase with frequency 3, such as *stubborn*, *curious*, *determined* and *precise*; before, adjectives with a frequency of 2 are *curious*, *determined*, *worker*, while after are *headstrong*, *fussy*, *scrupulous*, *sensitive* and *solar*. If before the path we find adjectives from the socio-emotional area of meaning, followed by cognitive adjectives, after the compilation we see an increase in the use of cognitive adjectives to describe themselves, followed by emotional and social adjectives. In addition, after the path there are also adjectives of negative valence, such as *headstrong* and *fussy*, highlighting a greater self-awareness, both in its positive and negative aspects (Table 1).

Indirect self-image's adjectives: family

Table 2

Before	Frequency	After	Frequency
Clever	4	Available	4
Reliable	3	Altruistic	2
Willing	3	Anxious	2
Good	2	Good	2
Strong	2	Determined	2
Kind	2	Clever	2
Sensitive	2	Precise	2
Sincere	2	Shrewd	1
Stubborn	2	Affectionate	1
Unselfish	1	Reliable	1
Anxious	1	Cheerful	1
Capable	1	Friendly	1
Headstrong	1	Active	1
Curious	1	Coherent	1
Determined	1	Decided	1
Available	1	Whimsical	1
Funny	1	Generous	1
Generous	1	Kind	1
Undecided	1	Mature	1
Tireless	1	Headstrong	1
Ironic	1	Patient	1
Weighted	1	Responsible	1
Precise	1	Confidential	1
Confidential	1	Resolute	1
Scrupulous	1	Unlucky	1
Tenacious	1	Sincere	1
Shy	1	Solar	1
Humoral	1	Scholar	1
Helpful	1	Talented	1
		Wilful	1
		Scabby	1
		Humorous	1

In the second part of the self-presentation questionnaire, participants were asked to describe how they think they are seen by their family members: in entrance to the survey the adjective with greater frequency (4) is *clever*, followed by *reliable* and *willing* with frequency 3 and *good*, *strong*, *kind*, *sensitive*, *sincere* and *stubborn* with frequency 2; in exit, the adjective with frequency 4 is *available*, followed by *altruistic*, *anxious*, *good*, *determined*, *clever* and *precise*, all with frequency 2. Both before and after, therefore, are present cognitive, emotional and social adjectives, although after the path there is more equity in describing with adjectives belonging to the three different areas (Table 2).

Indirect self-image's adjectives: employer

Table 3

Before	Frequency	After	Frequency
Reliable	5	Precise	5
Determined	2	Reliable	3
Kind	2	Determined	3
Precise	2	Professional	3
Professional	2	Punctual	3
Punctual	2	Willing	3
Serious	2	Polite	2
Scrupulous	2	Organized	2
Willingly	2	Respectful	2
Active	1	Friendly	1
Individual	1	Coherent	1
Capable	1	Collaborative	1
Collaborative	1	Gracious	1
Dynamic	1	Curious	1
Available	1	Dynamic	1
Demanding	1	Available	1
Tireless	1	Efficient	1
Intrepid	1	Engaged	1
Worker	1	Essential	1
Industrious	1	Intuitive	1
Ordained	1	Honest	1
Organizer	1	Finicky	1
Perfectionist	1	Prepared	1
Prepared	1	Rational	1
Responsible	1	Responsible	1
Confidential	1	Resolute	1
Respectful	1	Serious	1
Outspoken	1	Solar	1
Solar	1		
Tenacious	1		
Shy	1		
Versatile	1		

The last two self-presentation requests are focused on the indirect image in the work context: in the first one to describe how respondents think they are seen by their employer or by a hypothetical future employer was asked; in the second request is about how they think they are seen by work colleagues or hypothetical future work colleagues. In entrance to the survey, the adjective that got more frequent in describing how they think they are seen by their own or a future employer was *reliable*, used 5 times, followed by *determined*, *kind*, *precise*, *professional*, *punctual*, *serious*, *scrupulous* and *willingly*, all adjectives with frequency 2. Although the adjectives with more frequency are from the social area of meaning, it seems to have a greater importance the cognitive and professional performance. On the other hand, after the participation to the orientation path, the adjective with frequency 5 is *precise*, followed by *reliable*, *determined*, *professional*, *punctual* and *willing*, with frequency 3, and by *polite*, *organized* and *respectful* with frequency 2. It seems, therefore, that adjectives that outline the cognitive performance aspect are present, but also adjectives that underline the importance of the relational component in the workplace, the use of soft skills, that allow to adapt to different working environment (Table 3).

About work colleagues, before the path adjectives with greater frequency are *available* and *sympathetic* (frequency 4), followed by *reliable* and *reserved* with frequency 3 and by *fun*, *precise* and *punctual* with frequency 2. After the path, the adjective with more frequency is *kind*, used 3 times, followed by *reliable*, *collaborative*, *determined*, *available*, *loyal*, *organized*, *prepared*, *professional* and *serious*, all with frequency 2. After the orientation path, the importance given to the social aspect is also supported by the relevance of the cognitive / performance component, highlighting once again the value of both components within a working context (Table 4).

Indirect self-image's adjectives: colleagues

Table 4

Before	Frequency	After	Frequency
Available	4	Kind	3
Sympathetic	4	Reliable	2
Reliable	3	Collaborative	2
Reserved	3	Determined	2
Fun	2	Available	2
Precise	2	Loyal	2
Punctual	2	Organized	2
Friendly	1	Prepared	2
Attentive	1	Professional	2
Active	1	Serious	2
Brilliant	1	Obliging	1
Collaborative	1	Unselfish	1
Combative	1	Friendly	1
Determined	1	Coherent	1

Table 4 (continuation)

Before	Frequency	After	Frequency
Sweet	1	Comprehensive	1
Enigmatic	1	Funny	1
Kind	1	Introvert	1
Meticulous	1	Not competitive	1
Honest	1	Honest	1
Organizer	1	Headstrong	1
Finicky	1	Patient	1
Thoughtful	1	Present	1
Prepared	1	Punctilious	1
Professional	1	Rational	1
Punctilious	1	Confidential	1
Scrupulous	1	Decisive	1
Sensitive	1	Scrupulous	1
Sociable	1	Sensitive	1
Smiling	1	Cute	1
Witty	1	Sincere	1
		Sociable	1
		Solar	1
		Keen	1

Regarding the results of the self-esteem test, after the self-orientation path, the average scores of the sample increase in 3 of the subscales: the scale of *interpersonal relationships*, related to the *emotional management*, and the scale of the *body experience*. There are changes between in entrance and in exit scores obtained from the sample to the self-esteem test, probably due to the reflection triggered by the self-orientation path on their knowledge, skills, intelligence and their limits: for some subjects this has determined a decrease in score while for others a score increase in certain scales of the instrument. It is, in fact, within a process of awareness, self-reflexive, that one can know one's own potentialities but also one's own limitations.

5. Conclusion

The data obtained from the pilot study have highlighted some changes in the direct and indirect images of oneself and in the evaluation of one's own self-esteem following the self-orientation path and the report with the main results obtained. In particular, these data have allowed us to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the path created and to make changes for a more comprehension and adaptability of the product itself.

The present research does not want to exhaust the orientation process in the self-assessment that the person makes of himself/herself, but it is considered essential to support this first phase with a subsequent dialogue with an orientation counsellor. However, it is considered essential to provide an instrument that supports the processes of self-reflection on own identity, enhancing the active role of the person with disability. In

this way it will be possible to activate a process of self-knowledge. This knowledge will enable the person with disabilities, not only to choose effectively their professional future, but also to play an active role in the study and work environments.

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