

# A first experience with learners with Special Educational Needs: lesson learnt for participatory - design activities

Maria Rosita Cecilia, Pierpaolo Vittorini, Ferdinando di Orio

Department of Life, Health & Environmental Sciences, University of L'Aquila, Piazzale S. Salvatore, Ed. Delta 6  
67100 L'Aquila, Italy  
{mariarosita.cccilia, picpaolo.vittorini, ferdinando.diorio}@univaq.it

**Abstract.** The paper reports on a project developed under the Regional call "Action 1. Friendly school – Activity A" in P.O FSE 2007-2013, CRO Objective Axis 4, Human capital - Special Project "Friendly and inclusive school", focused on learners with special educational needs. In particular, the paper discusses how the project – through brainstorming and debriefing activities – stimulated several verbal and non-verbal social skills of learners with special educational needs, that the literature suggests to be powerful pre-requirements for involving them into the process of participatory design.

**Keywords:** Children; Special Educational Needs; Teachers; Participatory Design

The Italian Ministerial Directive "Instruments of intervention for students with special educational needs and territorial organization for school inclusion" (27 December 2012) has recently defined that a "special" attention is needed for a large number of students, because of biological, social and/or environmental differences [1]. More precisely, children with "Special Educational Needs" (SENs) are either:

1. Children with handicap, Law 104/92 ("Framework Law for assistance, social integration and rights of the handicapped");
2. Children with specific developmental disorders, e.g. specific learning disabilities, Law 107/10 ("New rules concerning specific learning disabilities in schools"), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, language disorders, non-verbal skills deficit, motor skills disorder;
3. Children with difficulties related to cultural, linguistic and socio-economic factors, such as the difficulty of learning the Italian language in children of other mother tongue.

In such a context, together with the Comprehensive Institute "G. Rodari" (L'Aquila, Italy), we proposed a project, that was funded under the Regional call "Action 1. Friendly school – Activity A" in P.O FSE 2007-2013, CRO Objective Axis 4, Human capital - Special Project "Friendly and inclusive school" – "Portfolio Project" [2].

The project consisted in the use of a compensatory technological tool, i.e., the TERENCE software ("An Adaptive Learning software for Reasoning about Story with Poor Comprehenders and their Educators") [3] for children with SENs. The TERENCE software was originally designed and developed for poor comprehenders, i.e., children that read words and sentences accurately, fluently and at age-appropriate