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Life Transitions and Disability: A Scoping Review of School-to-work Guidance in an Inclusive Perspective

By Filomena Izzo[*] & Fausta Sabatano[±]

The research aims to explore the current state of sectoral studies in Italy on school-to-work guidance from an inclusive perspective, by conducting a scoping review. School to work guidance aims to support all students, particularly those with disabilities in their journey towards adulthood and in the realisation of their own life project. It's about supporting these individuals during transitional phases and empowering them to find opportunities to identify and select from various possibilities offered by the local community and society at large. In this sense, school to work guidance contribute to promoting process of self-determination and preventing phenomena of social exclusion. From this perspective, school to work guidance could function as a formative and inclusive tool in a lifelong and lifewide dimension, indispensable constrasting school dropout and educational failure. Preliminary findings suggest that only a limited number of relevant studies exist. This comprehensive review examines how school-to-work guidance has been conceptualized from an inclusive perspective in Italian literature over the past decade, attempting to identify predominant theoretical frameworks, their evolution, and emerging trends.

Keywords: *school – work guidance, disability, scoping review, inclusive education, quality of life*

Introduction

Through a scoping review, this study sought to map the current state of Italian research on school-to-work guidance from an inclusive perspective. The research was conducted in Italy, using the PRISMA 2020 model (Page et al. 2020) and consulting the multidisciplinary databases ProQuest and Zenodo and the search engine Google Scholar. For our purpose, we only considered Italian-language scientific publications in open source from the last ten years, which referred to a population segment between 14 and 30 years of age consisting of persons with disabilities. This scoping review, which is part of a broader research project, aimed to examine the various conceptual approaches from the past decade regarding career guidance in Italian educational settings, highlighting prevailing theoretical frameworks, their evolution, and emerging perspectives. The objective is to identify theoretical models and practices currently implemented in school contexts, while also enabling the identification of barriers and facilitating factors involved in the implementation of such guidance programs. The research question underlying this scoping review is the following:

[*]PhD Student, University of Macerata, Italy.
[±]Associate Professor, University of Salerno, Italy.

How is school-to-work guidance conceptualised in the Italian scientific literature of the last ten years?

The opening section presents an introduction followed by a literature review examining how the construct of guidance, particularly school-to-work guidance, has been theorized up to the present. Subsequently, a methodology section outlines the research methods employed, databases consulted, and key characteristics of the investigation. Two further sections address the results and their discussion, with a final paragraph dedicated to conclusions.

Literature Review

School-to-work guidance pathways contribute to the process of identity construction and consolidation within which experiencing different professional roles promotes the development of students' own life projects, due to the centrality of the personal and social value of work itself (Giaconi 2015, Caldin & Scollo, 2018). In this sense, life transitions may represent a middle ground, a space between "no longer" and "not yet" (Demetrio 1997, p. 17) that often brings with it experiences of disorientation and confusion (Malaguti 2019). This perspective suggests the need to test oneself in real-life contexts, in order to enhance personal and working skills, becomes particularly important for people with disabilities (Caldin & Scollo 2018).

This is essential in the phases of transition to adulthood and in the process of self-determination, considered as "la capacità di scegliere fra varie opportunità e di impiegare quelle scelte per determinare le proprie azioni personali"[1] (Deci & Ryan 1985, p. 38, in Cottini 2016, p. 16). However, people with disabilities often remain trapped in stereotypical representations that describe them as fragile, immature individuals not able of taking on the active social roles typical of adulthood (Lascioli 2001, Lepri 2011). Frequently, stereotypical representations have negative repercussions on the professional lives of people with disabilities and their career prospects (Caldin & Scollo 2018). As a matter of fact, people with disabilities often are excluded from the labour market and this exposes them to the risk of experiencing conditions of poverty and social exclusion It is estimated that in 2021 only 30.1% of men and 19.3% of women with disabilities had an educational qualification equivalent to at least upper secondary education (Giovannone 2022). Data shows that in 2021, only 28.9% of people with disabilities aged 15 to 64 were employed (*Ivi*). This percentage drops to 25.4% for the year 2023, compared to data for the five highest- ranked European countries, which range between 41 and 56 percent (ILO 2023).

Considering the above, it would seem appropriate to highlights how is important to promote the implementation of orientation itineraries specifically designed to support people with disabilities in the difficult phases of transition and all that they entail.

[1] "The ability to choose among various opportunities and use those choices to determine one's own actions."

In this sense, school - work guidance is not a new topic. In fact, over the years increasing attention has been paid to the issue and institutions committed to building ad hoc itineraries to support all those going through moments of transition, especially students. From the 1990s, interest in school guidance pathways in Italy has grown significantly in both quantity and quality grown, expanding beyond their previous limitation to middle schools. Specifically, Circular Ministerial 160 with Ordinance 159 of May 11, 1995, and Circular Ministerial 197 of June 2, 1995, extended these interventions to all school cycles. Later, Ministerial Decree 245 of July 21, 1997[2], incorporated university contexts as well. Law 107/2015, also known as "Buona Scuola"[3] (Good School), marked important progress by structuring previous attempts to connect educational and professional environments through the implementation of school-to-work alternation programs.

Also worth mentioning are the 2019 Guidelines for Transversal Skills and Guidance Pathways and the 2022 Guidelines for Guidance, which aim to consolidate the interaction between the first and second cycle of education, focusing on the enhancement of students' potential and talents and the construction of a customised Life Project. Emphasis is placed on the need to promote the pursuit of scholastic success for all students, in an inclusive perspective that does not take into account social, cultural, socio-economic differences, by strengthening scholastic guidance, vocational guidance and training aimed at job placement.

School-to-work guidance seeks to accompany all students, and above all those with disabilities (Mura 2018), on their path to adulthood and towards the fulfilment of their life project (Giaconi et al. 2020). It involves supporting them through transitional phases (Canevaro 2017) and enabling them to recognise and choose among the opportunities available in their local community and in society more broadly. In this respect, guidance fosters self-determination (Wehmeyer 1996) and helps prevent forms of social exclusion, offering people with disabilities the possibility to direct their lives consciously, becoming primary causal agents in their own futures, while lower forms of dependence that limit their autonomy and undermine their sense of self-efficacy. In fact, "gaining access to certain roles typical of adulthood, including work, facilitates a practical transition into the adult world and the assumption of greater responsibilities, which require a process of emancipation from the image of childhood and family protection, as well as from that of a service user in need of rehabilitation"[4] (Malaguti 2019, p. 328). Therefore, when one is involved in the process of educating young people with disabilities, either as family members or as educational agencies, there is a risk of limiting their potential and hindering their autonomy and self-determination, out of fear that their goals might be too difficult to achieve (Dainese 2023). On the opposite, family, school, and society may implement guidance strategies aimed at fostering in people

[2]Ministerial Decree 245/ 1997 https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:ministero.:decreto:1997-07-21;245

[3]Law107/2015. *Riforma del sistema nazionale di istruzione e formazione e delega per il riordino delle disposizioni legislative vigenti.* (Reform of the National Education and Training System and Delegation of Authority to Reorganize Existing Legislative Provisions.) https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/gazzetta/serie_generale/caricaDettaglio?dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2015-07-15&numeroGa. zzetta=162

[4]Transaltion by the author.

with disabilities the belief that they can improve and collaborate effectively with those around them, while remaining aware and conscious of their potential (Friso & Caldin 2022).

Interventions aimed at providing orientation itineraries, therefore, aim to contrast school drop-out, to ensure the active participation of the people by enhancing their desires, expectations and choices (Legislative Decree 62/ 2024)[5] and to stem phenomena of social exclusion. In light of these considerations, it seems necessary to develop interventions that consider the deepest dimensions of the person to help them interpret the reality that surrounds them and encourage them in project choices that meet their need for growth and development (Mura, 2018). In this sense, school to work guidance serve as a formative and inclusive tool in a lifelong and lifewide perspective, "in its dual sense, both active and reflexive, of guiding and being guided, it refers, on the one hand, to the individual process of seeking a direction and, on the other, to the social process of seeking it 'together'"[6] (Aiello et al. 2023, p. 170).

School to work guidance is therefore an indispensable tool in preventing school dropout and educational failure (MIUR 2018). It enables students to orient and reorient themselves and promote their ability to "being able to be oneself", (Aiello et al. 2023). Supporting young people during their education, particularly those with disabilities, appears crucial, as the failure to recognize and develop individual talents and inclinations may compromise educational and professional success (MIM 2022).

Given all these premises, it seems essential to investigate how guidance is conceptualised in the scientific literature in order to understand the theoretical development and reference models in the field of guidance for people with disabilities.

The main aim of this scoping review is to examines how school-to-work guidance has been conceptualized from an inclusive perspective in Italian literature over the past decade, attempting to identify predominant theoretical frameworks, their evolution, and emerging trends. This review may serve as a foundation for future studies aiming to analyse the consistency between the identified theoretical models and practices actually implemented in school contexts. Furthermore, it might help identify both obstacles and facilitating elements involved in the implementation of such guidance pathways.

Methodology

The review discussed in this article was carried out in Italy. The research followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al. 2020). The databases consulted were ProQuest and Zenodo, which are multidisciplinary, and the Google Scholar search engine. For this purpose, only Italian-language scientific publications available in open access from the past decade were considered. This time interval represents a period of sufficient duration to identify possible theoretical evolution in field studies. The search terms used were: school-work orientation and disability. Regarding the target population, this review reports on studies focusing on young adults with disabilities, with particular attention to literature involving individuals in the 14-30 age range. This specific demographic segment was selected because people in this

[5]Legislative Decree 62/2024. https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2024/05/14/24G00079/SG
[6]Transaltion by the author.

period navigate transitions between different developmental stages, culminating in the transition to adulthood. These transitions are especially crucial for people with intellectual disabilities as they establish the foundations for their future (Malaguti 2019).

The research question this study attempts to answer is: How is school-to-work guidance conceptualized in Italian scientific literature from the past decade?

The first data resulting from the exploratory survey of the selected databases reveal a limited availability of relevant studies. In fact, initially the search was also conducted in the multidisciplinary Scopus, Iris, Taylor & Francis and EBSCOhost databases and in the disciplinary Eric database, which however did not provide any results. The search string used was "school-to-work orientation AND disability".
In both the Zenodo and ProQuest databases, as well as the Google Scholar search engine, the same search string was applied. For the Zenodo database, the Open filter was employed, resulting in 8 results, as we can see in the following flow diagram (Figure 1); for the ProQuest database, the Last 10 years filter was used, which provided access to 79 resourcesIn the Google Scholar search engine, the filters 2015-2025, scientific articles, and pages in Italian were applied. This search returned 196 results. From the total of 283 publications found, 277 articles were excluded, restricting the analysis to only 6 considered relevant, 5 of which emerged from the search conducted in the ProQuest database and 1 identified in the Google Scholar search engine. The results were first analyzed by examining the titles and abstracts. Papers were accepted as relevant when they satisfied all the inclusion criteria: relevance to the topic, target audience, time window, country of reference, article type, and open access availability.

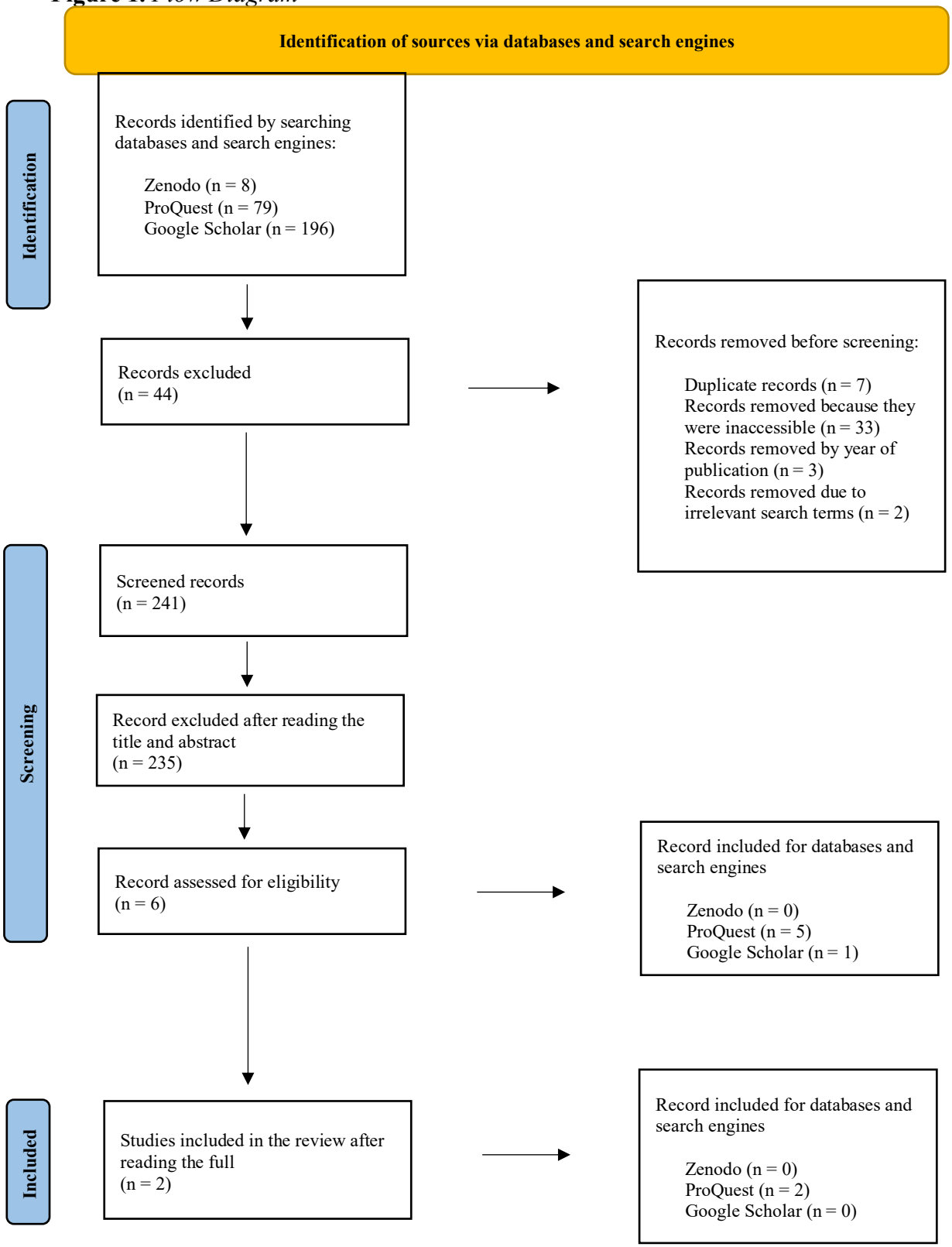
Results

A more in-depth analysis of the literature reviewed, which included examining each work in full showed that only two of the initially selected articles met the research criteria. Finding such limited research on school-to-work guidance for people with disabilities leads to different possible explanations. One possibility is that guidance is a relatively new area of study in academic research. However, this is not the case, as references to the concept of guidance appear as early as Presidential Decree 416/74 *Istituzione e riordinamento di organi collegiali della scuola materna*, *elementare, secondaria ed artistica*[7], which established the district school council, whose task was also to organise school and career guidance activities.

Rejecting this hypothesis, the scarcity of contributions might instead be attributed to the use of different terminology when referring to the concept of guidance. Moreover, the topic of school-to-work orientation is often included in the broader discourse on guidance paths in general. These also include purely scholastic guidance itineraries, which concern the vertical transition between one school grade and another or horizontal between different courses of study, and career guidance itineraries, aimed more at an adult audience wishing to orient or re-orient themselves in the labour panorama.

[7]*Establishment and Reorganization of Collegial Bodies in Preschool, Primary, Secondary, and Arts Education.*

Figure 1. *Flow Diagram*



Specifically, two articles qualified as eligible for this research: *The employability potential of young disabled adults in Campania: negotiation between resources and obstacles* by Valentina Paola Cesarano and Maura Striano and *Quality of life and professional orientation for people with intellectual disabilities: a case study in Lombardy* by Emanuela Zappella. Both papers were found in the ProQuest database.

The employability potential of disabled young adults in Campania: negotiation between resources and obstacles presents exploratory-descriptive research examining the employability potential of 200 people with disabilities between ages 18 and 30, equally distributed between males and females. The study includes motor, sensory, and cognitive disabilities. This contribution conceptualizes guidance as an educational need fundamental to developing an individual's professional project. The disabilities examined were motor, sensory and cognitive. In this contribution, guidance is theorised as an educational need underlying the process of defining an individual's professional project. It is identified as an accompanying action for the person, gradual and constant over time. Such a vision of the guidance process invests the school with the responsibility to promote the development of transversal competences, expendable in a lifelong perspective (Botes 2023), and to interact with the other actors involved, such as the community and the family, to collaborate in the predisposition of an individual Life Project that promotes the principle of self-determination of each person and "a gradual realisation of oneself and one's own characteristics"[8] (Dainese 2023, p. 72).

The article named *Quality of Life and Vocational Guidance for People with Intellectual Disabilities: A Case Study in Lombardy*, is a case study on the process of professional inclusion of a girl with Down Syndrome, starting from the last three years of secondary school up to the time of her employment. The vision of guidance that emerges from this article invests it with a fundamental role in accompanying young people with disabilities in the transition from school to the working context, focusing on the need to understand and enhance the subject's potential.

Discussion

Although limited in number, the articles reviewed still offer valuable insights worth considering.

In the article "Quality of Life and Vocational Guidance for People with Intellectual Disabilities: a case study in Lombardy", the term "career guidance" appears alongside discussions of school-work alternation pathways leading to employment. This difference in terminology might suggest to readers that the guidance approach described focuses primarily on job placement, possibly overlooking personal aspects. However, attention to individual characteristics is supported through references to guidance paths as "person-oriented projects". This suggests a consensus on the necessity of placing young people at the center of guidance pathways, viewing these as preparation for the workforce that begins with individual potential, aspirations, and desires. Both contributions reflect this person-centered vision.Furthermore, it

[8]Transaltion by the author.

emerges that in the pathway to employment for young people with disabilities, if, on the one hand, they can benefit greatly from specially designed orientation itineraries, which are thus configured as facilitators of the process, on the other hand, they often have to face barriers wich sometimes it colud represent insurmountable obstacles. These obstacles, wich often come from stereotypes and stigmas, play a significant role in the exclusion of people with disabilities from the labour market, who are considered unattractive from a professional point of view. This is also supported by the reduced range of skills that young people with disabilities can boast of in most cases, as there is no guidance system that supports and enhances their employability and that aims to face "the phenomenon of skills mismatch, namely the lack of alignment between the skills possessed by workers and those required by the labour market"[9] (Botes 2023, p. 111). This leads to the fundamental role entrusted to schools, which can be seen in both contributions. On one side, it is seen as an opportunity for young people to put themselves to the test and become aware of the possibilities offered by the context around them, "In these [schools], in fact, there should be an increasing focus on role-based teaching, combined with experiences in a variety of settings, which allows for new situations and opportunities beyond those offered by the family, school or vocational centre"[10] (Friso & Caldin 2022, p. 49). On the other side, instead, it is invested with the responsibility of orienting and providing skills useful for the professional insertion of learners.

In the end, what emerges in both articles is the important function played by guidance as a starting point in the predisposition of the Life Project, identifying employment as one of the most important indicators of the person's Quality of Life level. In fact, "Workplaces can become genuine settings for fostering self-determination, a key factor in achieving a good quality of life that supports a coherent and authentic life plan"[11] (Friso & Caldin 2022, p. 52). To this aim, it is necessary to set up a Life Project according to an ecological approach, which requires the collaboration and co-participation of various actors and the commitment of everyone, at various levels, in the construction of interventions that support people with disabilities throughout their lives. It is for this reason that guidance and, specifically, school-work guidance courses are of great importance: these allow the boy or girl in a condition of disability to look around, become aware of their abilities and potential and, in line with their desires and personal aspirations, understand what opportunities are offered by the context in which they are inserted, becoming the main actors of their own Life Project.

Conclusion

This research may suggest some insights about the role of school work guidance from an inclusive perspective. Guidance may serve as an important tool to help students with disabilities develop their Life Projects and improve their wellbeing and quality of life. School-to-work guidance programs appear very important during

[9]Transaltion by the author.
[10]Transaltion by the author.
[11]Transaltion by the author.

specific developmental stages. School-work guidance pathways, specifically, seem to fit at a critical moment in students' development. Such itineraries, in fact, become necessary in what is one of the most important transitional phases in an individual's life, that is the passage from adolescence to adulthood, as well as the passage from a delimited and protected context such as school to a much broader and sometimes disorientating one such as the world of work. In this complex phase, therefore, an ad hoc designed guidance pathway can prove to be an important trump card both from the point of view of the educational agencies, which would thus be able to move in the direction of full socio-educational inclusion of people with disabilities, and from the point of view of all students, and specifically young people with disabilities, as it would allow them to become aware of themselves, of their natural talents and propensities and, at the same time, to realise the opportunities offered by the territory and the social context in which they are inserted in order to better interweave them with their own desires and personal aspirations in the construction of a Life Project in which they are the real protagonists.

The scoping review methodology used in this study reveals important considerations about school-to-work guidance research. The limited scientific literature discovered suggests this area remains largely unexplored and requires additional studies.

Furthermore, in attempting to address the research question guiding this study—how school-to-work guidance is conceptualized in Italian scientific literature from the past decade—it appears that guidance may be understood as an educational need fundamental to developing the Life Project of people with disabilities. It seemingly serves an important function in supporting young people with disabilities through challenging transition phases they encounter throughout their lives. Based on this question and these preliminary findings, future research might explore whether and how school-to-work guidance pathways are actually implemented in Italian schools and, potentially, identify challenges encountered, as well as factors that might hinder or facilitate the process.

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