

Social psychology to understand the challenges of educational inclusion

María Minerva López-García
minerva@unach.mx
ORCID: 0000-0003-0629-2684

Luis Salvador Aguilar-López
Luis.salvador@unach.mx
ORCID: 0000-0001-8358-166

Guillermo Escalante-Rodríguez
guillermo.escalante@unach.mx
ORCID: 0000-0002-3666-0495

Fulvia Eréndira Pérez-Cerda
fulvia.perez@unach.mx
ORCID: 0000-0002-6076-5586

UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE CHIAPAS. FACULTAD DE HUMANIDADES CVI,
TUXTLA GUTIÉRREZ CHIAPAS

To quote this article:

López García, M. M., Aguilar López, L. S., Escalante Rodríguez, G., & Pérez Cerda, F. E. La psicología social para comprender los retos de la inclusión educativa . *Espacio I+D, Innovación más Desarrollo*, 14(41). <https://doi.org/10.31644/IMASD.41.2025.a02>

— Abstract —

Educational inclusion represents a challenge for all educational institutions, since despite the fact that important changes have been generated in both educational models and educational policies, exclusion problems still persist. The objective of this article is to present a general overview of what the exercise of educational inclusion implies from the perspective of social psychology to promote reflection on the actions of all those involved in school spaces. The analysis from social psychology on stereotypes, prejudices, and attitudes can help understand the complexity of the discriminatory and exclusive responses of those who fail to understand diversity and therefore respect the condition of each person. Collaboration and dialogue can be elements in favor of advancing in this task of learning from and with differences.

Keywords:

Inclusion; prejudices; stereotypes; attitudes; challenges .

Social inequalities exist in our society. The conditions that generate them must be recognized in a specific analysis to identify the challenges that must be faced in this situation and that lead minority groups to experience discrimination, risk of exclusion, violence, among others, which do not favor equity and therefore inclusion.

The state of Chiapas is characterized by a wide cultural richness, but also with serious deficiencies with respect to the rest of the country, inequality can be expressed for example by not speaking the same dominant language that in this case is Spanish, being a woman, being a child, having a sexual preference and orientation different from that of the majority, being of African descent, being an elderly person, living in extreme poverty or having a disability condition, since there is a risk of being excluded from actively participating in society, in education and even in important family or community decisions.

This risk of being excluded undermines what has been established at the international level from the Sustainable Development Goals proposed by the United Nations (UN) because it fails to eradicate everything that allows people to live in a more just and equitable society. In particular, with regard to Goal 10 "Reduction of inequalities", an interesting fact is that "one in six people in the world has suffered some type of discrimination, disproportionately affecting women and people with disabilities" (p. 32), which represents a challenge for all nations, but in particular for those where discrimination against these minority groups is still part of everyday life. Despite this slogan, both nationally and globally, we find many cases of extreme poverty, displaced or damaged people who cannot claim their rights or seek to survive, leaving aside the opportunity to receive an education in schools.

To avoid the risk of exclusion, it is necessary to propose or give continuity to a series of strategies of diverse nature to minimize the disadvantages of the condition in which these people find themselves, in a climate of collaboration, so that everyone has a place. One of the subjects that will be highlighted in this article is educational, since it is imperative to generate changes in training, in how to feel and think about others. This is important since in our societies it is common that hierarchies of excellence are privileged (Perrenoud, 1995) by measuring people only for some of their qualities without a holistic vision in terms of competitiveness.

Therefore, this article exposes educational inclusion and what can be done to break down the barriers that generate these unequal conditions and make sure education is for all. Firstly, a brief history of inclusive education is presented to understand the importance of its origin from the Education for All policy, secondly, the concept of educational inclusion will be addressed, thirdly, the factors that may interfere for inclusion to occur will be analyzed

from a psychological perspective and finally some ideas will be presented to contribute to a favorable climate that avoids the risk of exclusion.

EDUCATION FOR ALL, IN SEARCH OF EQUITY

To understand the importance of inclusion, it is necessary to refer to the concerns that were expressed at the meetings of UN member countries in 1990, carried out by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which as the body in charge of evaluating and proposing the main changes in education at the international level, identified the need to discuss strategies to make education for all a reality and not a simple aspiration.

This year, the World Conference on Education for All and the Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs was held in the city of Thailand, specifically in Jomtien, which expressed the need to design strategies so that by 2030 the problems encountered regarding the number of people who still did not have access to education, a fundamental right for all people regardless of sex, age or condition, were eradicated. The diagnosis that led to this proposal indicated that:

More than 100 million boys and girls, of whom at least 60 are girls, do not have access to primary education. Over 960 million adults – two-thirds of them are illiterate, and functional illiteracy is a problem in all countries, both industrialized and developing. More than a third of adults lack access to print knowledge and to new skills and technologies that could improve the quality of their lives and help them shape and adapt to social and cultural changes. More than 100 million children and countless adults fail to complete the basic education cycle, and there are millions who, even by completing it, fail to acquire essential knowledge and skills (UNESCO, 1990, p. 1).

As a brief summary, this conference highlighted the importance of providing primary education in addition to eradicating illiteracy. In the same document, this body (UNESCO, 1990) stated that "education can contribute to a safer, healthier, more prosperous and environmentally amiable world" (p. 6). Therefore, emphasis is placed on the social function of education by fostering social, economic, and cultural progress, while promoting tolerance and cooperation at the international level. It is through education that it was hoped to suppress discrimination against minority groups, such as children in the street, the poor, migrants, refugees, or displaced people, as well as people with disabilities.

In three decades, more international conventions have been held, such as those in *Dakar* in 2000, *Incheon* in 2015, and the United Kingdom in 2019,

which were expected to meet the Millennium Development Goals and the current Sustainable Development Goals. The latter with a call to the private sector to meet the proposed goals, but what was suggested in 1990 has not yet been achieved. While there has been important progress, there are still great challenges to making equity in education a reality. As the achievements at each meeting are reviewed, the factors involved in the results are identified, proposing specific strategies and programs, such as the inclusive education proposal, in which it is proposed to eradicate the barriers that limit educational changes.

In the case of Mexico, in the data found in the census carried out by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) (2020), by educational level regarding the percentage enrolled, 49.3% of students were enrolled in basic education, 24.0% in upper secondary education, and 21.6% in higher education. However, they also point out that 4.9% were out of school, and 0.2% unspecified. This is to point out some figures related to school access in our country. Likewise, it was reported that out of a total of 126,014,024 inhabitants, 7,168,178 have some type of disability (INEGI, 2021).

On the other hand, the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination (CONAPRED) recognizes different discriminated groups, such as women, children, young people, the elderly, indigenous peoples, persons and peoples of African descent, persons with disabilities, persons of sexual and gender diversity, domestic workers, migrants and refugees, persons with HIV, day laborers and agricultural workers, as well as for their precarious economic condition. The discrimination to which they are subjected can range from hindering access to public education to the prohibition of freely choosing their employment, as well as wage differences, among others.

This discrimination may be part of "an everyday practice that consists of giving unfavorable treatment or undeserved contempt to a certain person or group" (CONAPRED, 2024, parr. 1). It is highlighted that the effects on the people who suffer from it have a negative character with an impact on dignity with consequences that in extreme cases can lead to loss of life. From this perspective, it is important to consider the search for alternatives to improve coexistence with equity.

INCLUSION AND EQUITY IN EDUCATION

Equity is a serious issue, since not all people are in the best social, political, and economic conditions, and this will significantly affect the results that are measured not only at the national level but also at the international level. Access to education and health, social security, or housing services is not the same for everyone, which will influence educational outcomes. In a review carried out by UNESCO, it considers that in terms of gender parity

(equality between men and women) there has been significant progress, although it recognizes that there are still gaps, that is, inequality between those who live in rural and urban areas or in those spaces in which they continue to be subjected by patriarchal practices.

From the point of view of Santiago, Tremblay & Arnal (2008, as cited in Toscano, Ponce, Cruz, Zapién, Contreras & Pérez, 2017), to talk about equity it is important to take into account two dimensions; the first related to the review of personal circumstances so that they are not an obstacle to the educational potential they may have and the second, ensuring access to quality education regardless of people's conditions.

Derived from the above, it is necessary to see how a condition related to access to services in an unequal way becomes a limitation for some people to enter the education system. It should be remembered, for example, that in our country, there are regions with extreme poverty where education may not be a priority, as survival would be. Such is the case of the extreme poverty data measured by the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL, 2023), in which they indicate that there was a decrease of 0.5% going from 38.3% in the second quarter of 2022 to 37.8% in the second quarter of 2023. However, this organization recognizes that still 9.1 million Mexicans are in this condition, bringing as consequences, among others, the problems of educational lag.

Because there are areas in our country with higher poverty rates, there are also some geographical regions with high economic development, showing the situation of inequality that is experienced on a daily basis, especially in the southern region, including Chiapas, Guerrero, and Oaxaca. This may explain the results of UNESCO's measurement of reading competence, finding that our country is at a proficient level with 63% compared to Ireland, which has 98%. Although progress has been made in this aspect, many indicators are not at all flattering and show the great problems that must be addressed for the achievement of equity.

Educational inclusion emerges as an alternative in favor of equity, providing, from the point of view of UNESCO (2009), proposals adjusted to the needs and conditions of people to promote access, permanence, and graduation from the educational system, taking advantage of all possible opportunities.

Talking about inclusion is thinking about the global change of the entire educational system, both in nature and in the culture and identity of people. In this sense, it is pertinent to think that the impact must reach the configuration of the curricula in attention to diversity and the recognition of what is culturally specific to all people. Thus, for example, Valenzuela, Guillén-Lugigo, Campa, and Sánchez (2020) recognize that "the introduction of indigenous knowledge in higher education for many years has been positioned as a problem of equity or social justice as a study on indigenous

peoples in unquestioned colonial disciplinary spaces " (p. 26). Therefore, the discussion about what and how to promote inclusion is broad and complex because of all the implications in a culture characterized by individualism and little solidarity with others.

To understand inclusion, it is important to address what exclusion is. This phenomenon, which has many causes, is understood as opposed to inclusion, since, while one side integrates, the other excludes (Jiménez, 2008). So, under this idea, exclusion is a substantial part of inclusion, that is, they are two sides of the same coin, which happen in processes of interaction. It is included so as not to exclude, or when excluded, you want inclusion to exist. Exclusion happens in all groups; it is only important to pay attention to what is happening around us and to realize the hidden ways in which violence is sometimes exercised by excluding others.

THE ISSUE WITH DISCRIMINATION AND THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Educational systems in general and schools in particular have been guided by the hierarchies of excellence, measuring and placing people according to the demonstration of what they have learned, as proposed by Perrenoud (1995) when he talks about the construction of school success and failure, recognizing that even when people have exercised their right to education they can also abandon it if they have problems of failure and academic lag. From the point of view of Díaz Barriga (2023):

The qualification was developed as an instrument that allows students to be classified, assigned a school place, but also socially, an instrument of social discrimination through which the future of each subject is decided in some way: to obtain a qualification to survive in the school system or to be expelled from it. Qualification is a need of the education system. This means that through measuring what is known, some may not continue in educational spaces or remain in them while being discriminated against (p. 110).

School learning has been shown to depend on many factors, which are presented differently in urban and rural environments, or those living on the periphery of cities. Working children who arrive at schools, the children of migrants who partially leave school to harvest together with their family, are characteristic examples that conditions are not the same for everyone, and that this can influence their academic performance. These may have few or poorly developed skills to understand educational content. Poor vocabulary or reading habits can trigger problems not only in reading competence and comprehension but also serious problems in academic performance; hence, it is interesting to reflect on how the condition of each person in the classroom

differently affects what they learn and how they learn it. However, the measurement does not include these personal characteristics, and therefore, they may end up leaving school with the idea of "I am useless", explained from the helplessness learned since the proposal of the concept by Seligman (1960, as cited in Galindo & Ardila, 2012).

In addition to the above, in some cases it is inevitable to observe the attitudes of the rest of these students' classmates, the least who offer help, and the majority who may prefer that the "bad students" withdraw to have less school competence and continue to maintain the status of "best student". With this, it is shown that, although inequality is a strong problem that is related to the economic structure of a country or a region, in the end, it is perceived in the classroom through the interactions that are established between both students and teachers. The latter is when you have the firm belief that "not everyone should reach the goal, only the best".

A disadvantaged group with the right to education is people with disabilities, who are allowed to stay in regular schools, that is, with everyone else. Some time ago, there were special education schools that helped them, but it did not benefit them because they were considered "special" and it was better that they were distanced from the rest of the people. Although it sounds difficult, deep down, when these people started entering regular schools, there were and are people who still think that "special children" should stay in special schools. The above is due to ignorance or misconceptions about the characteristics of people with a certain disability. These people show resistance to accepting coexistence in the same classroom and school space between the "normal" and the "special".

Attitudes of rejection, mockery, and discrimination persist, even leading to overt or covert violence, disguised as good intentions by the community in which people find themselves. In particular, the analysis of negative attitudes to inclusion in teaching staff shows through the research carried out that the common denominator is rejection attitudes, with the argument of not being sufficiently prepared to teach them (Paz-Maldonado & Flores Girón, 2021; Sisto, Pérez-Fuentes, Gázquez-Linares & Molero-Jurado, 2021).

To address this set of problems Both and Ainscow (2002) proposed more than two decades ago the *Index for Inclusion* which was published by UNESCO in an effort to promote the dissemination of this model in which inclusion will involve first of all the review of the relationships, values and beliefs that exist in schools to generate changes to the school culture. Secondly, they suggest a thorough analysis of the policies that may be generating exclusion, and thirdly, reflect as a collective, practices that are also considered as obstacles that do not favor the integral development of all people in school premises, regardless of their condition.

In 2018, the Mexican Ministry of Public Education (SEP) published a book called *Key Learning Techniques for Comprehensive Education. Strategy for equity and entry into basic education: for students with disabilities, outstanding abilities, and severe learning difficulties*. This document discusses the concept of inclusive education, focusing on guidelines on inclusive practices and how to work with a document called the *Index for Inclusion*, which proposes a diagnosis of the school and then generates specific strategies for inclusion. At the international level, this document is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the 2030 Global Agenda for Sustainable Development. While inclusive education is thought to be associated with disability, this paper mentions that it is not unique to the care of this group of people. The important thing is to "foster educational communities where diversity is valued and appreciated as the prevailing condition" (Sep, 2018, p. 14).

Likewise, it proposed the Universal Learning Design (ULD) with emphasis on the design of didactic strategies so that people with wide differences in their abilities could achieve their educational objectives, because, in the classrooms, people have multiple forms of representation, action, and expression, as well as motivation.

Recently, the SEP (2024) in its Model of the New Mexican School (NEM) recognizes inclusion as an articulating axis from its curricular organization, because:

The state is obliged to guarantee this right from the initial level to the higher level, especially monitoring the students from indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, migrants, women, people with disabilities, and marginalized sectors of the country, have the conditions to exercise their right to education at all levels and modalities (p. 15).

Unfortunately, this is for basic education. The question is, what are the guidelines for secondary education and higher education? Unfortunately, few students reach these educational levels because they were very likely made to feel that they had no capacity to move forward, being carried away by opinions based on negative prejudices.

Toscano, Ponce, Cruz, Zapién, Contreras and Pérez, (2017), point out that in the case of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) they have difficulties in integrating the procedures to address the diversity of what they call vulnerable groups and although "they are allowed to enter the university, but they do not achieve permanence or graduation" (p. 44), among other things due to infrastructure problems, thus offering a deficit education in which policies, plans, processes and techniques for quality care must be improved.

The inclusion of people with disabilities at the higher level was the object of study of Pérez-Castro (2016) who analyzes the problem, realizing that some of the main HEIs strategies have been in a) institutional regulations and policies, b) in academic and economic support, c) in physical and information accessibility and d) in other measures and services, although it recognizes that an educational policy is not yet consolidated, due to the unsystematic nature of the information generated to know what the impact is.

An interesting exercise regarding the inclusion of university students from indigenous peoples is the model proposed from the ICT of Valenzuela and collaborators (2020) who, from a descriptive-correlational study to a sample of 86 students from the University of Sonora, Mexico, found that the use that students make of ICT facilitates inclusion with the guidance of teachers is necessary for its correct use academically and to have greater communication in didactic terms. Likewise, an important relationship was found between inclusive policies and practices from the model proposed by Ainscow and Both (2000), allowing the former to promote an inclusive culture with the use of mobile devices, fostering inclusion.

PREJUDICES, STEREOTYPES, AND ATTITUDES IN EDUCATIONAL INCLUSION. BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

Being part of an inclusive culture must be common in all groups of people, since it is a natural process and is expressed in the forms of communication and interaction; inclusion has been institutionalized in most countries, so that governments have worked hard to ensure that schools have protocols and contents in textbooks that allow an inclusive, democratic and participatory coexistence.

This, in turn, has generated research to understand and identify the problems in the process of incorporation into educational spaces, as well as the design of proposals to make this possible. A task that is clearly titanic in some cases, when unpleasant experiences of exclusion are known, because it seems that violence persists in various forms and manifests itself in almost all spaces of coexistence, particularly in school spaces, where relationships are very important for school success.

An approach to the origin of the problems of exclusion, discrimination, and violence for being different can be found in the concept of stereotype from social psychology, which according to Allport (2000) cited in Gómez & Espinosa (2021) refers to a negative attitude towards something or someone based on a series of overgeneralized beliefs, but at the same time erroneous (given the nature of the belief) that gives rise to discriminatory behaviors. On the other hand, in the case of prejudice, it allows the justification of these behaviors and can be expressed openly or covertly, even reaching

rejection, all based on a comparison of superiority, putting the other in the place of inferiority. An example is the perception of threat studied by Gómez and Espinosa (2021) to understand its role as a mediator between migrant Venezuelans, from the perspective of Peruvians.

The complexity of both concepts studied in social psychology clarifies the expressions of actions of some people against others, from a series of misconceptions that are shared by the majority about a minority. One may be experiencing exclusion or discrimination by moving away from people by labeling people with negative attributes, based on the impression of some stereotype or prejudice, altering coexistence, and even generating overt or covert violence towards this particular person or group of people. Because excluding implies an act of violence.

The various prejudices about a person or group can unleash attitudes and behaviors that exclude either because of some physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, social and economic class, religion or socio-cultural context of origin, for example, a prejudice based on a stereotype can lead to attitudes of racism by not interacting or doing so as little as possible with people with Afro-descendant traits (due to their black skin color and curly hair), because historically from the position of "whites", they are untrustworthy people. Another example of prejudice based on stereotypes is of a student declared homosexual for considering her "masculine" (some call them "tomboy"), so that her peers will treat her rudely, she can be excluded from some meetings, believing she does not fit in with the rest of the girls.

Cardona (2023) carried out the analysis on gender stereotypes and their relationship with employment, identifying that:

Gender gaps exist from the beginning of professional careers, given the expectations that society establishes about the life trajectories of people, men, and women. But it increases when those expectations are met and women are placed in female-oriented careers, such as caring for their family or other dependents (p.693).

The above examples are situations that happen on a daily basis in schools, causing effects on students, and, although it may seem surprising, the exclusion is so subtle and invisible that often teachers and authorities fail to distinguish them from everyday behaviors and are justified as normal. It may be that the teacher himself, without manifesting it or having full awareness, may be sharing a prejudice, which needs to be recognized in order to act in a different way, especially by generating inclusive processes in the classrooms. Now, how is it that excluding others is normalized? The answer can be found by analyzing prejudices, as a psychosocial phenomenon, which is part of our reality, since it helps us to gather a series of negative characteristics

about a person or object and thus avoid a danger created under our experience; on the other hand, the stereotype as a set of generalized ideas helps to order the experience we have about the context and then the attitude appears conceived as the way we act or react to an event, person or situation, regularly in a negative way.

These phenomena must be raised when talking about inclusion, since they all have a cultural root, that is, what has been learned at home or from a very young age will influence our interaction with others. Surely a lot of people have wondered: why do we have a negative opinion towards people with tattoos? Or why do we believe that women should study socially oriented careers and not engineering? As well as this, there are prejudices and stereotypes of which we have a pre-established attitude. The conflict is when they are confronted with other ideas that can unbalance the cultural mindset and put us in check, but isn't that the sense of unlearning that damages others?

WHAT CAN BE DONE FOR INCLUSION?

There are many alternatives to promote inclusion. Reflection on what is apparently "normal" can be the first step to intervene; the other is dialogue, not imposing ideas but establishing communication with others by accepting their way of thinking and having their own opinions. Through dialogue and confrontation, the ideas and experiences of others are communicated and discussed, and how what happens to others and their environment is perceived, which are the main concerns, doubts, ideas, and proposals about someone or something in particular. Therefore, as members of a group, it must be ensured that everyone has an equal opportunity to speak, to dialogue, and to resolve conflicts through democratic and participatory coexistence.

Another tool that works, but from the teacher's perspective, is to promote participation. It is a perfect formula: inclusion is achieved only and exclusively through participation. Although it seems like a simple class exercise, achieving the genuine participation of everyone implies having a closer idea of who the students are, giving the opportunity for everyone to express themselves, respecting points of view, recognizing the possibilities of developing creativity to learn, which allows us to identify that, while being different, our world is expanded. It is no longer just a personal vision but the shared vision in which others offer new ways to understand our reality.

Likewise, it is important to become aware of civic responsibility towards others, that is, that being members of society implies understanding that the "other" also has rights and an interpretation of reality that is different from their own. This is crucial because inclusion requires the ability to

recognize others and understand the diversity of beliefs and personalities. With this, we must bear in mind that all people are free to say what they think. However, if what is said is lacerating the other person in any way, it means that there is a prejudice or attitude that is being counterproductive in the interaction towards those who maintain that attitude. Therefore, it is relevant to question stereotypes, prejudices, and attitudes about other people.

It is recognized that one of the main barriers to inclusion in school has to do with the resistance to changing the way in which the school is perceived, the function it has, and that it should not be only for a few but for all. From this idea, it is necessary to take into account that exclusion is also a cultural pattern, that is, that society also excludes. With this, the fragmentation in which the various groups live can be analyzed based on political, economic, and social conditions. The work of educating for inclusion has to break barriers and promote equity.

Each person can do many things in favor of inclusion, first at the personal level, since to the extent that people change their way of seeing others, this will allow them to generate changes at the institutional level. The school should no longer be selective, and its idea of learning should be more open, creating scenarios to learn from everyone, from their differences. It has been taught that to be successful, it is necessary to think and be equal to others, and that being different is bad. "You have to deliver the tasks all in the same format", "whoever finds a shortcut in a mathematical problem is cheating". These are the phrases that make us assume that being different is not good. However, the difference allows us to approach a view of the world that is not our own and broadens our perspective.

On the other hand, this old belief that disability is a disease or a punishment must be eradicated; it is a condition, and from there, you can live well. Some people are short, and that can't be changed; that's an example of a condition. Others are born with a skin color that will not be modified either; that is another condition. Being born with Down syndrome is a condition, and you can live with it as with the color of your skin. Therefore, it is important to respect the condition of each human being and contribute as much as possible to avoid exclusion.

It is also important to remember that poverty leads people to make decisions that can cause little attachment to school, hindering motivation to overcome. It is not the absolute responsibility of the person to have been born in a context of vulnerability. They work hard every day to get ahead and deserve respect. In general, everybody, regardless of their status, must be respected.

In schools, while they regularly teach competing to be better than others, that doesn't make them better people. If it happens when you are sensitive to other people's problems or conditions, when you have the ability to put yourself in the shoes of the other. That's called empathy, so one of the core

values that should be cultivated in classrooms is to be empathetic. Everyone deserves a chance, and we can all learn from each other. Our differences and those of others must be learning opportunities; it must be what complements us, rather than what divides us.

Finally, inclusion is greatly enhanced by diversity; this variety of beliefs, thoughts, tastes, inclinations, and desires makes collaborative work richer. It is possible to imagine that all people are equal on the basis of their differences, which implies uniqueness. Understanding that there is a diversity of experiences commits our identity to a dynamic of solidarity and growth, in which we can learn from others, get involved in their topics of interest, as well as teach the group what we know. Thus, in our classroom, even in our family, we must provoke inclusion by recognizing the great diversity, but, above all, by learning to be responsible and respectful of others.

Something to keep in mind is that due to technological advances, access to information can allow both teachers and students to obtain reliable knowledge to rethink old beliefs and stereotypes that have been regularly discriminated against. A good digital and informative competence can become a strong ally in learning communities and favor a culture of inclusion.

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