



101 GUIDE TRAINING OF TRAINERS

METHODOLOGIES FOR SUPPORT EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

A.W.A.R.D. Autistic World a Real Dimension

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EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE

WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM

DISORDER

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Dedicated to prof. Lucio Moderato,

who recently passed away, victim of COVID - 19

Lucio Moderato, psychologist and psychotherapist, was not only the author of some parts of this manual and one of the teachers in Chemnitz training course, but he was the source that inspired the whole A.W.A.R.D. project.

Lucio Moderato was above all a great person, generous and available to everyone. A real "guru" in the psychology of autism. Cultured, smart and gifted with a sense of humor, Lucio had always a good advice and a natural understanding for the sufferings of others, which made him an almost unique human being.

With his patience and superior humanity, he changed the life of lots of people, among these there are those who sign this moving memory and who will never forget him.

GUIDE TRAINING OF TRAINERS



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THE A.W.A.R.D. TRAINING MODEL

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- Specific objectives of the training
- Who is the job coach / teacher for autism?
- The role of monitoring in the phases of the model
- Reflections and analysis of the countries involved



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CONCLUSIONS

WHAT WE LEARNED...

A.W.A.R.D. training model represents an excellent methodology for providing a **NEW DIMENSION** in the profile and roles of trainers, job coaches and teachers, rising awareness concerning their responsibilities about professional life of **AUTISTIC** students and young adults

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INTRODUCTION

Project presentation

Autism is a syndrome of global extension and with lasting implications, it involves the entire personality, and is assumed to be a Generalized and Pervasive Developmental Disorder. Autism has no geographic or ethnic prevalence, but instead has a gender prevalence: it affects males 3 to 4 times higher than females. The prevalence estimate is 10 - 13 cases per 10.000 (*The treatment of autism spectrum disorders in children and adolescents* - Guideline, Istituto Superiore della Sanità, 2015). The median prevalence value in Europe is 19 / 10.000 (Chiarotti and Venerosi, *Epidemiology of Autism Spectrum Disorders*, Erickson Study Center, 2016).

For learning, social inclusion and work placement, the person with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) may need specialized support throughout the course of life, which takes into account the peculiarities of the person on the spectrum and who can identify the different requests present in the different phases of the life cycle.

Although there is a lot of literature on the subject and numerous scholars in the sector have dealt with autism, little or almost nothing is still being talked about and little or almost nothing is being done to insert them into the world of training and work.

It is estimated that people on the spectrum represent 1% of the European population and 90% of them are unemployed (Source: *Fostering equal opportunities for people on the autism spectrum*, Autism Europe, 2016).

As also highlighted by the Recommendations published by Autism Europe (2016) many people on the spectrum could be inserted into the labor market if training really meet their needs and if the world of business and training were sensitized and aware of the potential of people with SLD.

The huge attention to detail, zero tolerance for mistakes and the determination to complete a job, characteristic of people with autism should not be seen as an obstacle to work, but must be valued and seen as an index of good performance and reliability.

This underlines the importance of putting in place training, support and accompaniment to work measures that take into account the learning characteristics of people with autism spectrum disorders, especially when they leave the school and need other forms of social inclusion. Usually people on the spectrum, even those with good skills, are nearly excluded from these opportunities. The logic of school integration is replaced, at the age of 18, by that of the opposite sign: institutionalization or abandonment to the family. Instead, it is necessary to strive for the maximum possible inclusion without forgetting the sense that a job placement has for this type of discomfort that affects communication and relational skills in order to favor a life project that aims at the maximum of its well-being. In Italy, only 3.3% of people with spectrum disorders autistic participate to the VET¹ courses (Fonte: *Fostering equal opportunities for people on the autism spectrum*, op. cit.). In Romania, specific and inclusive paths support just 4% of autistic people. Germany instead applies an education-oriented system with differentiated schools aimed at learning disabilities: those with medium and low disturbance usually attend schools for the mentally disabled (approximately 60 to 70%), pupils with a higher functional level attend special schools for the disabled or - as part of individual integration - elementary or secondary schools, together with non-disabled children. After school age there are specialized centers for people with autism, but when it is possible, people with autism are included in simple jobs or more intellectually advanced work situations. It is necessary to identify and develop an approach that takes into

¹ Vocational Educational Training.

account the strengths of the various models in use in the countries involved in the project at European level, a shared approach that finds its validity in being born from comparison, synthesis and analysis in a context that goes beyond national logic / practices. It is therefore necessary and important to give life to concrete projects, to promote them to talk about the problem and thus shake public opinion, so that policy makers understand not only the present but begin to equip themselves for the future as more and more people are recognized in the spectrum.

A.W.A.R.D. therefore aims to build a new training system in the field of VET and to support work placement by directly involving all the various parties in the process: trainers, educators, corporate tutors and young people with autism spectrum disorders. The importance of the project also lies in the fact that, given the high level of transferability of its contents and methodologies, a "cascade" relapse is foreseeable up to the definition of a system of good practices which, albeit slowly, can begin to create at a European level, a system capable of including people on the spectrum. This would lead to a "standardization" of the procedures, which would also facilitate the analysis of the results obtained and the possibility of creating a set of data on a continental scale useful for scientific research in the specific context.

The project responds mainly to the horizontal priority "Inclusion" since it aims to facilitate and support the professional inclusion of young people with autism spectrum disorders (17-29 years old) by improving the tools and methods of training and coaching in WBL (Work Based Learning) in VET courses with the direct involvement of the various subjects involved in the process: trainers, company tutors and young people with autism. This is because despite the fact that in most member states there is evidence of the inclusion of young people with disabilities in schooling and in work inclusion measures, people with autism spectrum disorders currently

remain the most excluded and distant from the world of work.

Only 12% of people on the high-functioning spectrum are hired on time and only 2% in the remaining cases (Britain's National Autistic Society, Munich 2016 conference). An American study has shown that 87% of young people with autism spectrum disorders who have had targeted coaching for job placement manage to find work while only 6% of those who do not use this manage to enter the job market (The economist, April 2016).

Further confirmation is given by Autism Europe (*Recommendations to mainstream disability in the future Pillar of Social Rights 2016*) which underlines that 90% of people with autism spectrum disorders are unemployed but could instead enter the world of work if there were valid supports school-to-work transition. However, in most European countries, support services end with "compulsory schooling" and for most young people on the spectrum, the end of the school cycle also represents the end of a daily and a real, at least formal commitment, inclusion.

The percentage of those who enroll in VET courses is low compared to the number of those who attend high schools and very few are those who access post-diploma VET courses (in Italy, for example, only 3.3% are Autism Europe-AR , Recommendations 2016). Among the main elements that determine the difficulty of job placement, as is also found in Recommendations -AE 2016, we can include:

- widespread lack of awareness of the characteristics of autism and needs;
- limited attractiveness and effectiveness of VET pathways that are not adapted to the learning difficulties of people on the spectrum;
- lack of specialized training of teachers, trainers and finally of company tutors. The lack of training of trainers is highlighted in the aforementioned Recommendation as one of the main causes of discrimination against people on the spectrum.

The Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) reiterates the need to guarantee people with autism spectrum disorders access to quality training throughout their lives and in art. 24 emphasizes the need for particular attention so that professional training truly responds to the educational needs of the autistic population and is adapted to the learning characteristics of the latter.

The project fully responds to these needs. It envisaged a design and development of a training model for trainers and company tutors on the methodologies that support the training of young people in the spectrum and their support in their placement in the company. A model that will allow to combine psycho-educational skills and effective methods of coaching the autistic person in order to be able to operate as a "job-coach" and also to strengthen the ability to adapt training contents to the learning characteristics of autism and to new information technologies that are becoming effective support in training processes even for people with autism spectrum disorders. The teachers and tutors involved will represent the nucleus of a group of a new class of trainers who will act as a link between autism and the world of work in the three countries involved.

A model of job placement for people on the spectrum has been developed and validated in a pilot phase, with a close connection between training and enterprise. The training phase has taken place in a pseudo-enterprise classroom setting and aimed to acquire the skills to carry out the specific activities that the young person would have done in WBL. A game has been developed to facilitate the acquisition of transversal skills while a video-modeling system enhanced the acquisition of professional skills since videos have been shot by the teachers themselves, tutors during the execution of the work activities, by the students during the pilot phase (self

video-modeling). A short has been born from the collection of videos and will represent a tool for immediate communication of the results of the project and the concrete possibility that specifically designed VET paths and specialized trainers can be concrete tools for training and socio-work inclusion for young people in the autism spectrum.



Fig. 1 Lucio Moderato, Chemnitz

FIRST SECTION

Edited by Lucio Moderato

1.

BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE GENERAL PECULIARITIES OF THE AUTISTIC PERSON

Describing and summarizing what autism is and which are the characteristics of an autistic person is as complex as describing what a man is with his individuality, his characteristics, his uniqueness.

Some clinical-diagnostic aspects include an apparently normal development in the first months of life, the lack of the "theory of the mind" (i.e. to understand and interpret the intentions of other interlocutors), the lack of eye contact, the stereotyped use of toys, the inability to create games based on imagination, fascination with water and moving objects (especially rotary and circular), obstinacy in maintaining the environment unchanged, severe alteration of language, self-injury, motor stereotypes, a global motor embarrassment and, often, the coexistence of affections of clear neurological relevance such as epilepsy. It is currently believed that the psycho-functional modalities of the autistic person differ from the typical development by a preference for the use of visual, auditory and sensorial stimuli and by a greater difficulty in the use of linguistic categories such as the ability to conceptualize, to translate the meaning of words and to use metaphors.

Autism has organic and genetic origin and is not a disease in the traditional sense of the term. The autistic spectrum has a wide functional variability and it ranges from forms with severe intellectual disability, to the syndromic forms considered less serious in which an intellectual disability is not necessarily present and in which the

language appears correctly structured even if often monothematic and “verbose” .

The fact that autism is not a disease implies that there are no clinical treatments and medicaments to recover not existing a possibility of healing. On the other hand, educating, enabling and assisting is essential to improve the quality of life of the individual with autism. In fact, while people with autism without important cognitive and functional disability can reach an acceptable quality of life, instead when there is a considerable disability with impaired skills and functional independence, the quality levels of life are lowered. It is therefore essential to study and learn how an autistic brain works in order to find strategies to teach all those daily life-skills that allow us to have an acceptable social life, personal satisfaction and the possibility of living as independently as possible; in short, that is, to have a life as close to that “normality” that all human beings have a right to.

1.1 Diagnostic criteria of the autistic syndrome

In the recent DSM 5 the diagnosis contains two fundamental elements:

- Persistent deficit in social communication and social interaction.
- Restricted and repetitive behaviors and / or interests and / or activities.

It should be noted that, with respect to the previous DSM, it was removed from the category Delay / Impairment of language, while the unusual and accentuated sensitivity to sensory stimuli was introduced.

These elements are continuously interacting each other and it is not possible to define each single aspect without taking into consideration also the others (element of pervasiveness). Furthermore, the

disturbances in the different areas of development are not only pervasive but also disharmonious, in the sense that the difficulties and the "spread" differences are not found in a uniform and harmonious way. For example, a subject can present an almost adequate and typical repertoire of social interactions while at the same time it can present significant difficulties in verbal communication and a high number of stereotypies and rigidly routine activities. In addition, this disharmony and non-uniformity constitute a further difficulty in precisely defining the diagnosis of autism.

However, in this new definition of autism the three old diagnostic categories are still present:

1. Qualitative anomalies in social interactions.
2. Anomalies in the communication mode.
3. Limited, stereotyped, repetitive repertoire of interests and activities.

1) Qualitative anomalies in social interactions

These alterations can be summarized in:

- a) Significant difficulties in the relational and functional use of non-verbal gestural behaviors (the gaze, the mimic expressions of the face, the body postures and the gestures that define social relations).
- b) Total or partial inability to have relationships with peers appropriate to the level of development (and to the cultural and social ecosystem of reference) and connected with difficulties in understanding and imitating the behaviors and attitudes of their own kind.
- c) Notable difficulties in understanding, in the subsequent sharing of emotions, interests and attitudes with other people.
- d) Fatigue in understanding social and emotional reciprocity.

2) Qualitative communication anomalies

- a) Delay or total absence in the development of verbal language (often not replaced by modes of gestural communication).
- b) Marked inadequacy in the ability to begin and sustain a conversation with others even in the presence of adequate verbal skills.
- c) Use of words in a stereotyped, repetitive and out of context manner; use of the word phrase by adopting the same words to identify different objects and situations.
- d) Inability to symbolize, to use metaphors and meanings translated by the context.
- e) Literal use of the meaning of words.

3) Limited, stereotyped, repetitive repertoire of interests and activities

- a) Complete and absorbed attention to one or more single parts of a whole, and narrow, stereotyped and repeated interests in terms of frequency and intensity.
- b) Presence of apparently useless ritualistic, compulsive, rigid and sometimes unchangeable habits.
- c) Stereotyped and repetitive motor patterns and mannerisms (e.g. beating parts of the body, clapping and flapping hands, etc.).
- d) Pervasive and excessive interest in single parts of one's body or of objects.

1.2

Characteristics of behavior and cognitive functioning in autism

The most recent researches have made it possible to better understand how the mind of an autistic person works and they come up with hypotheses on why the autistic subject uses certain behaviors and attitudes. A great support to these studies has been given by the reports of high functioning subjects, able to describe what they feel or how they perceive the world around them, confirming that in autism there are ways of thinking, feeling and learning different from those of subjects with typical development. Among these peculiarities, there is a strong propensity to better understand and learn through the use of images, that is elements linked to a certain concreteness, both real and represented. The more the image corresponds to their mental image, the easier it will be the discrimination by association (matching) and the consequent labeling. In the autistic subjects, this matching process is so strict and precise as to make generalization and consequent classification difficult.

For example, it may happen that if the external object does not correspond perfectly to the mental image it is not considered to belong to the same category and therefore not used in a functionally appropriate way. If in a vocabulary a single word can correspond to different objects belonging to a category, in the memory of an autistic subject, single images are stored, as in a "photo album", which correspond only to that particular object of the category. In this way it manifests a generalization difficulty which must be taken into account in psycho-educational strategies. Another issue in the learning modalities of an autistic person lies in the "processing" of information. Indeed, good "intellectual" functioning harmonizes "pure" intelligence (cognitive and analytical), with the communicative, relational, emotional, and motor intelligence. In other words, using an informatics metaphor, in order to obtain good performan-

ces it is not enough that the computer is powerful in processing information and with good memory capacities, but it is essential that at the same time there be a series of programs / software able to use and manage information from both the internal and the external environments.

Therefore, what is important is not only the capacity of the container, but the way it is filled, providing information in an orderly and programmed way. If the brain of a subject with typical development can be seen as a barrel with a wide neck, a large amount of information can be reversed at the same time, which the subject will then catalog and order. In the person with autism, often the amount of information that can be handle is the same, but the entry neck is tight, and this forces to transfer information into it with a certain slowness, accuracy, order and consistency. Trying to fill their mind more quickly is not useful, just as it is not useful to use a funnel to speed it up.

Similarly in the educational programs, in order to make a truly useful and effective intervention in favor of autistic people it is absolutely necessary to avoid doing too many operations simultaneously or bombarding them with stimuli and thus creating unnecessary traffic jams and dangerous saturations; it is preferable to provide the necessary information in a structured, serial, slow, constant and progressive manner. Too many information to process at the same time can be confusing for the autistic subject and can make the understanding and subsequent learning difficult, and therefore not only ineffective but also destabilizing.

Hearing abilities, for example, can be impaired not because the sounds are too weak, but rather because the sounds and the background noises are perceived with such intensity so to disturb and distort the principal signal to be decoded. Other disturbing sensations can be itching, bites, flashes of dazzling light, and reflections on the PC screen, excessive caregiver gestures, or too high tone of the voice.

For an autistic person these hyper-perceptions of stimuli, which in neurotypical people are absorbed and managed without consequences, are not only painful, but are also incomprehensible and therefore even more unacceptable. It can be hypothesized that motor agitation and stereotypes (i.e. those repetitive and prolonged behaviors that come into conflict with the acquisition of abilities and with social and relational life) present in most autistic people can be induced by feelings of discomfort due on one hand to the “annoyance” toward the stimulus, on the other hand to the difficulty of understand and manage it.

Therefore, when dealing with autism it is necessary to build a series of ordered and sequential information also through supervising and structuring the environment. The re-hab programs must be carried out in well-ordered, sequential and structured skill paths to enrich the wealth of information baggage in the people on the spectrum, but at the same time must provide skills and strategies so that this information is stored in the right place in the brain so to be easily accessible, recoverable, and usable when it is needed.

1.3

Psycho-educational intervention

Despite the relatively poor knowledge on the causes of autism, the effectiveness of the cognitive-behavioral and educational techniques associated with generalization of acquired skills, included in the ABA (Applied Behavioral Analysis), has already been proven from long time. These strategies are certified by the main International Guidelines (to which the Guidelines 21 of the Higher Institute of Health also refer) for their positive results reported in the scientific literature. They are integrated interventions, that rely on the study of behavior and of the variables that reinforce it; they address communication, maladaptive behaviors, and promote daily life-skills and personal care.

Since this model is meant exclusively for taking care of the person with autism at 360 °, it involves all the people around it, first of all the relatives, but also the caregivers and the community that surrounds and interacts with them. These psycho-educational interventions must be structured starting from simple abilities (autonomy and personal care) and continuing towards increasingly complex abilities, such as reading and writing, calculation, deductive logic skills, problem-solving skills, learning of a trade. To do this, it is necessary to have a scientifically defined and qualified program / system that must be shared in its goals and strategies with relatives, caregivers, operators of the various institutions, educational agencies and workplaces.

1.4

Models and experiences for autism in adult age and work-related problems in Italy, Romania and Germany

1.4.1 Autism-work and society

Terms such as handicap, invalidity, incapacity, etc. are often confused in both specialized literature and the common mentality. In fact, even if they seem to indicate the same phenomenon (ie an inability to perform certain types of activities and tasks), it is nevertheless appropriate to point out the substantial difference that exists between motor, sensory, psychic and intellectual disabilities. In Italy, the greatest confusion can be found in the diagnosis of invalidity, on the basis of which civil invalids are sent to companies for job placement. In fact, this category includes both those who are physically handicapped and the "psychic / intellectual" disabled and / or with autism spectrum syndrome. These two "categories" of disability do not have different paths and in the vast majority of cases companies prefer to hire physical disabilities due to the less complexity of their management.

In Romania, according to the existing legal framework, specific services are provided for ASD children and young persons until the age of 18, after this age, when they become formally adult, they are included in the broad category of Mental Disorders. This means, that a possible employer that is looking for an ASD person for an interview, will have to face with a general category of Mental Disorders, without having the needed knowledge to make a difference between them. This situation is very difficult also for the person with ASD and their families, indeed when they were young they were supported as ASD with specific special needs, on the contrary in the adulthood they are simply stigmatized in the category mental disorder. For example, an employer involved in supporting students with ASD,

when they are legally employable as adult they are anymore autistic but people with mental disorder; according to these legal categories in Romania (but not only) we have children and students with ASD, but no autistic adults since they become adults with mental disorder. This unacceptable situation could be one of the reason for which many parents of high functioning ASD people, develop hiding mechanisms for their son diagnosis, so to prevent and avoid to be included in the category of mental disorders. These parents don't want to be involved in various educational programs, and are not willing to be part of the autistic community.

The other effect of this situation is that a high percent of the adult with ASD appear to be those with more severe symptoms, thus leading to the idea that autism is represented by low performance, preventing the possibility of occupational integration. In the light of these observations, it is imperative that the REAL DIMENSION of the autistic world, with all its diversities, must be more deeply known, in Romania, and not only.

In Germany, unemployment affects people with autism spectrum disorders 5-10 times more than neurotypical people of the same gender, age and education, despite being often well educated, having good educational qualifications and their characteristics can be an advantage in life professional.

In Germany, practical experience from discussions with companies and institutions shows that most regional employers consider the possibility and also the need to employ people with disabilities to be important and have already experienced this. Despite this employing people with autism is "new territory" for most companies and requires in-depth education. Because people with ASD like to keep what they are used to and have difficulty adapting to new things, the transition to the labor market can create difficulties. In order

to bridge the gap between vocational training and the beginning of a professional activity, the close collaboration between integration support organizations, employment agencies and potential employers is very important.

An important step was to increase the knowledge of the characteristics of people with ASD in employment agencies through measures aimed at raising awareness among people working on these aspects. Another important step was making the employer aware of the strengths of employees with ASD. If a person with ASD is successfully placed in a workplace they will need specific reference conditions in the workplace and will depend on a coach to be supported and accompanied. The central commitment is to create suitable working conditions for the autistic employee as a result of the collaboration of different parties including the company, employment agencies and inclusion consultants.

In general, for physical disabilities the more widespread use of computers and very sophisticated technologies reached by machines of reduced size with the introduction of chips, have contributed to considerably improving the quality of life of these subjects, allowing the execution of work and tasks previously deemed as impossible. The problem is, however, of a different nature when dealing with "psychic / intellectual" disabled and / or with autism spectrum syndrome, as the diversity of mental functioning delays or slows down the possibility of learning specific skills, giving the impression that they may not be able to learn.

It should therefore be emphasized that this diversity of functioning does not destroy ideas, concepts and skills, but simply delays learning: consequently, the intervention on these subjects will not be exclusively of an ergonomic type, meaning this term in the traditional sense, but it will concern the study of technologies that can allow the learning of the individual skills required with a saving in ac-

quisition times. The axis of the intervention therefore shifts from a medical-biological and engineering plan to a more properly educational plan in the sense that not only the objectives to be achieved, but also the teaching methodologies to achieve these objectives must be programmed. Our experience and other pilot researches carried out in recent years show that this path is not only viable but also desirable, as the greatest difficulties lie mainly in the more or less high teaching time. However, this longer period will then be recovered with a “normal” performance of the task.

1.4.2 Method of intervention

For many years the technology derived from the psychological and social sciences has been dealing with the learning of subjects with autism by developing very refined methodologies and techniques that allow the treatment of almost the entire range of disorders. Precisely because of the characteristics of these methods of intervention, it is necessary that the whole community participate in the qualification and recovery of the subject, as he will modify his old behaviors and learn new ones, both cognitive and social, based on the motivations and gratifications, or, to use a technical term, to the reinforcements that the surrounding environment (and therefore all the people who are part of it and with whom the subject will interact) will be able to emit.

What has just been stated may be the definition of a new way of conceiving socialization, no longer understood as an abstract word with little operational content, but as a series of processes and methodologies to be transmitted to workmates, so that they are the cornerstones of re-education precisely because, in the final analysis, they are the ones who personally conduct the recovery intervention on the disadvantaged workmate.

This also allows for the continuity over time of the learning of social, cognitive and motor skills by the person with autism, making work the only true form of social integration.

It is clear, at this point, that such an intervention cannot be left to chance, but, in order to be successful, it must be properly planned. The education / qualification must, therefore, be developed in such a way that the individual qualifying stages are formulated based on the criterion of making the previous acquisitions the prerequisite for other skills which, in turn, will become the prerequisite for other skills. To achieve this, it is necessary to implement, for each person, an individual intervention program, calibrated on his specific characteristics and attitudes, potentialities and problems: in other words, after having carried out an accurate functional diagnosis, the areas of major weakness will become the objectives to be pursued in the different existential contexts (rehabilitation, free time, etc.) both with individualized and with small group interventions, while the mastered skills will be the basis of the entire life program. To create this model and achieve "strong" psycho-educational and qualifying goals, it is necessary to respect at least three conditions in the structuring of the model itself:

1. To develop individualized and personalized qualification / educational programs defined operationally both in the objectives and in the methodologies to be shared with the user / family.
2. To carry out task-analysis and work algorithms concerning each occupational activity of the ateliers that you want to teach.
3. To have and maintain a "generalist" approach and to take global responsibility with the division of tasks and skills of the operators on a functional basis, while respecting the different professional specificities. This is to ensure that learning develops not only in certain time segments traditionally considered qualifying, but in all acts of daily life regardless of the presence of the individual sector specialist.

With the rigorous application of this model in all phases of everyday life and with the involvement and participation of the entire social fabric of the territory, the ultimate goal of empowering people with autism can be achieved: to connect to daily reality and build that intelligence which is nothing but the correct use of one's abilities in different times and situations.

SECOND SECTION

2.1

THE A.W.A.R.D. TRAINERS TRAINING MODEL

The trainers training model was developed and tested within the European project A.W.A.R.D e. aims to build a new training system in the field of VET and support for job placement by directly involving all the various subjects in the process: trainers, educators, corporate tutors and young autistic people.

The importance of the Project also lies in the fact that, given the high level of transferability of its contents and methodologies, a “cascade” relapse is foreseeable up to the definition of a system of good practices which, albeit slowly, can begin to create at a European level, a system capable of including autistics too. A.W.A.R.D. is therefore an ambitious and complex project which by its very nature has identified several experiments to be carried out that we, for simplicity of transfer and definition, will call modules including:

- training module aimed at the job placement of young people with autism spectrum disorders;
- trainers training module;
- company tutor training module;
- job placement module for young autistic people with the support of a job coach and a company tutor.

The project therefore envisages actions to be addressed to all the actors involved in the process:

- young people with autism and their families;
- job coach / teachers / teacher (intermediate figure between the trainee and the company and the sending organization);
- companies and company tutors;
- other stakeholders, recipients of the intellectual products envisaged by the project.

In fact, the objectives of the project are:

- Raise public awareness of autism and its intrinsic and extrinsic meaning.
- Activation of internships for 15 young people with autism between the ages of 17 and 29 (by country) through a 3-month simulation course and 6-month internship in order to enhance the potential of the autistic person and demonstrate its possible validity within jobs.
- Share good practices between nations in order to spread a greater culture of acceptance and dissemination of the importance of professional training and work for autistic people.
- Enhance the role of monitoring in training and job placement projects as it is only by analyzing the intervention and result indicators that everyone's performance can be improved.

2.1.1 The phases of the model

The A.W.A.R.D. model envisaged, in its pilot application, the training of a first group of job coaches (three per nation), beneficiaries of an intensive 5-day training in Chemnitz in Germany and in charge of transferring what they learned to a second job coach group. (7 more for each nation).

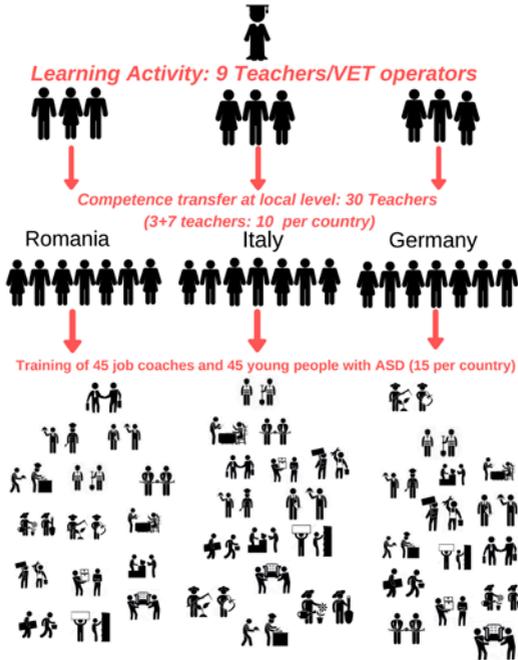
The pool of ten job coaches per country was then charged with making the most of what they learned by interacting with young students with autism spectrum disorder in a three-month simulation course (in the classroom) and also interfacing with company tutors, to transfer them tools and techniques to support the young person while working in the company.

The internship in the company lasted six months.

Steps :

- a) Selection of the teachers.
- b) Intensive training activity for the first job coach core.
- c) Transfer of training according to group of trainers.
- d) Participatory planning of the pseudo enterprise course
- e) Simulation course (3 months).
- f) Technical supervision of trainers.
- g) Internship in a company (the methods of which are subject to analysis in the context of another IO.
- h) Monitoring of all phases.

Fig. 2 The main steps of A.W.A.R.D. project.



Video modeling

WORK IN PROGRESS



video modeling

for each placement, the job coach with the assistance of the teacher realizes a video modeling of job tasks

Self video modeling

The young person with ASD is the protagonist of the video

a) Selection of trainers

Method of selection

Each project partner nation has identified the first core of job coach through an "expression of interest".

The expression of interest was written in both Italian and English and shared on the website and on the partners' social networks.

Selection criteria

In each country, a group of 10 trainers has been selected. Within this group the first core of teachers has been identified. This group has been involved in the Learning activity phase.

A group of 10 trainers was selected but, in carrying out the interviews, it was decided to identify the first group that could have been involved in the Learning activity phase. The following criteria were used for the first job coach core:

- Master's degree and at least two years of experience in professional training and / or school.
- Minimum and documentable experience in autism.
- Level of knowledge of the English language equal to at least B1
- Autonomy in the use of the Office package.
- Willingness to travel to Germany for 5 days in May 2019 for the purpose of intensive and targeted training.
- Communication skills that facilitate the transfer of skills to others, as well as a propensity to teach even towards people with learning difficulties (SLD, children in difficulty, autistic).

Romania has given priority to the teachers and psychologists of Liceul Ioan Slavici, eager to improve their knowledge of autism in order to be of support to their students.

Germany involved the Job coaches of the Chemnitz Zentrum für Autismus.

b) Intensive training activity for the first job coach core

Learning Activity in Chemnitz

A core of trainers (3 from each country)² from the partner organizations of the project was involved in an intensive training course in Germany, in Chemnitz, lasting 5 days (40 hours).

Before the training in Chemnitz the trainers were invited to prepare by studying functional material to be able to follow the training course with a broader overview of the "autism" context. Among the topics covered by the preparatory study: notes on the general peculiarities of the autistic person, diagnostic criteria, characteristics of cognitive behavioral functioning in autism.

Teachers of the highest level conducted the training in Chemnitz³.

General overview of the topics covered during the Learning Activity:

- Neurobiological basis of autism spectrum disorder.
- Pharmacological treatment of autism spectrum disorder.
- Management of maladaptive behaviors.
- Characteristics of autism in adulthood and work placement.
- Evaluation of the person with autism for the purpose of job placement.

² Staff members of the organizations were also involved in the training in Chemnitz in order to acquire the model and be able to coordinate its transfer and implementation. It is important to remember that, in the context of innovation projects, such as A.W.A.R.D., the responsibility to achieve the objectives and transferring the project and its results lies on the partnership. It is therefore essential that the model tested and validated in the project is fully acquired by the staff.

³ Alessandro Zuddas, professor of Child Neuropsychiatry at the University of Cagliari. Irene Fusaro, psychologist, director of the Autism Center of Monastir, Cagliari. Lucio Moderato psychologist, Director of autism services, Sacra Famiglia of Milan.

- Interview techniques and assessment of the skills and talents of people with autism aimed at job placement.
- The adaptation of the workplace in the company for the well-being of the autistic person.
- How to talk to the company about autism.
- Tools for preparing people with autism for work: task analysis, social stories, token economy, video modeling.
- Techniques for the realization of video modeling and self-video modeling.

c) Transfer of competences to the second group of trainers

After the intensive training of a small group of trainers, the transfer of the skills acquired in Chemnitz to the second group of teachers is organized.

Given the characteristics of the group and given the complexity of the subject, the need to train the remaining 7 aspiring job coaches on autism emerged immediately, entrusting the transfer of skills to a highly qualified teacher in order to take the opportunity to enhance further the skills of the first group. In fact, the first trainers involved in Chemnitz decide that they play a role of reinforcement and support for the expert who forms the second group.

The first core of the job coach appeared to be “too little competent” to be able to train 7 totally new teachers with respect to autism.

The training intervention for the second group of trainers focused on the following aspects:

- Assessment of job skills in individuals with autism.
- Visual tools, how to prepare them and when to use them.
- Structuring of the working space and use of supports.
- Prepare the working environment (employer and colleagues).
- What to say, what are the expectations.
- Management of maladaptive behaviors and anxiety management.

- Mind maps.
- Prepare the person with autism for work.
- Social skills in the workplace.
- Social stories.

This first variation of the project was fundamental because it allowed to further strengthen the teachers who had trained in Chemnitz and to train in a more adequate way the new 7 teachers⁴.

Another innovative aspect not contemplated in the first version of the project was to appoint a supervisor to periodically monitor the work of the teachers, supervising particularly problematic situations and reporting on professional and more targeted levels all the possible deviations of teachers who are not perfectly masters of the topic "autism".

In Italy the role of supervisor and trainer of the group of aspiring job coaches was entrusted to the Director of the Center managed by A18⁵ who held four meetings, according to the following program, assisted by the "Three" teachers who had been involved in the training in Chemnitz.

⁴ In the first hypothesis they should have been trained by the first group trained in Chemnitz.

⁵ Dr. Irene Fusaro, psychologist, director of the A18 Autism Center, with 15 years of experience in autistic people with whom she worked using highly innovative methodologies and approaches.

The lessons were carried out using the following methodology:

- an active role of the recipients, who were asked to get involved by experimenting with tools and situations;
- alternation of moments of theoretical presentation with experiments and exercises;
- use of real cases for the purpose of studying behaviors and situations that occurred forming part of the case history of the teacher who for over 15 years worked at the Sacra Famiglia of Milan.

During the lessons we tried to work in a targeted manner on the "figure" / role of the job-coach "in order to prevent or stem maladaptive behaviors and not to create confusion of roles and / or to assume behaviors unsuitable for the job coach's task.

In fact, the job coach acts in the here and in the hour of his function, supporting the autistic person in the job placement.

The supervision activity was kept constant on a fortnightly basis while the targeted interventions on specific cases and / or situations were carried out without a predefined periodization but at the requests of the trainers or on monitoring reports.

There was, therefore, a change from what was originally planned to ensure the highest possible quality of the project at the expense of the economic resources of the partners.

In Romania and Germany the transfer of skills took place regularly by job coaches trained in Chemnitz, with the support of the staff of a disability center based in Timisoara.

In Romania, the partner institution, Liceul `Ioan Slavici` perfected a contractual cooperation with the Centrul de zi `Podul Lung` Timișoara, and we established mutual support in implementing the pilot actions for the autistic children and their families. The experts from the center shared their expertise in concrete working with autistic children, and offered the needed supervision for the staff from the school, and the tutors from companies.

Sharing knowledge and experiences can guarantee a better impact

on the target group and a better acceptance of the interventions by the beneficiaries.

Regarding the contact with the employers, the school can have the role of the interface between the autistic person and its family and the envisaged employer. The school is easier accepted as partner in cooperation for a further employment than the rehabilitation center. The school has the experience to mediate between students and employers, on regular basis, and based on this existing cooperation, they are easier accepted as partners, in supporting the employment of the autistic person, for which the school can demonstrate the results of integration within the school-life, and the school-community and therefore reassures about and/or problems in general.

d) Participatory planning of the pseudo enterprise

After the training phase, the job coaches / teachers were involved in the design of the simulation activities.

The partnership has chosen not to impose / drop any pre-established model with ready-made forms and materials from above but rather to involve the job coaches personally, making them an active part of the entire design process with the specific objective of:

- Empower them.
- Put them to the test in a "protected" way, with the coordination and the supervision of various technicians.⁶
- Produce the training plan of the pseudo enterprises.
- Produce lesson calendars.
- Produce the teaching material for the lessons.
- Adopt a common method of work between all 10 teachers, compatibly with the.

⁶ Expert trainers and technical supervisor.

- Different types of previous training of each of them and the type of degree, to standardize didactic approaches.
- Confront, exchange experiences, grow together.

Designing together was undoubtedly the added value of experimentation, even if it was not an easy to manage process. On the contrary, it showed a whole series of problems, in fact the most reliable referents were two teachers involved in the training in Chemnitz⁷.

It was not easy to be all-together, to divide the tasks, to obtain contributions from individuals. In general it was tiring but necessary because from the very beginning it allowed us to understand who to really rely on, what were the possible frailties and / or difficulties of each one. Fundamental information when you have to bring in teachers to work with groups that are already difficult in themselves. The design was always updated and modified before and during the three months of pseudo enterprise while more contact was made with the students, knowing their problems directly as well as based on the results of monitoring the activities.

The three months of pseudo enterprise marked the beginning of the job placement experience for the students and were essential to get to know them, deepen their characteristics, expectations, talents and passions and “train them” to work.

The shared planning has made it possible to design simulation activities, prepare the calendar of lessons, define and share the tools to be used in the training space in order to create an environment around the students as similar as possible to a working context, adopt a common method , grow together.

Numerous planning meetings were held between the teachers and the project staff.

⁷ Maria Franca Frau, Chiara Canepa both psychologists with previous experience in autism

The methods of selecting young people are shown in the IO2 Job Placement Guide, to which reference is made in case of interest.

e) Pseudo enterprise

The simulimpresa is, in the A.W.A.R.D. project, the phase of direct experimentation of the methodologies and tools acquired by the job coaches with the sample of 15 students (for each nation).

In fact, 3 months of simulation have been planned which, as a model, mark the beginning of the job placement of young students and are a fundamental step for the success of the entire process.

In this phase, the job coaches trained in the previous phases had the task of supporting the students in the acquisition of professional and relational skills. They then prepared the young autistic person in a simulated enterprise environment with the aim of reducing the risk of potentially anxious situations for the boy when he would have to face the work environment.

The job coaches therefore implemented the training path they shared the design of, as described above.

The job coaches therefore used and implemented the tools and approaches learned, finding themselves, in fact, calibrating and adapting them, where it was necessary and they worked to ensure that young people achieved the following objectives:

- Knowledge of personal characteristics.
- Analysis and verification of skills.
- Strengths and weaknesses analysis.
- Strengthening of life skills, self-esteem and individual autonomy
- Acquisition / strengthening of relational skills.
- Acquisition of knowing how to operate safely within a work context.
- Preparation for entry into the company, accompaniment to work and acquisition / reinforcement of skills on specific work processes.

Days were also used to re-elaborate and re-analyze what was done in order to understand where it had come, what was the level of understanding and elaboration of individuals.

During the simul-enterprise phase, the supervision by the expert technician was fundamental as well as the monitoring that signaled anomalies, highlighted any risk situations and / or anomalies both from a methodological and content point of view. This was necessary because by virtue of the fact that A.W.A.R.D. is an experimental project and the methodology and model are being analyzed for validation purposes.

f) Coordination and technical supervision

Also in this case, it was not foreseen in the project, but the need emerged to carry out fortnightly coordination meetings with the teachers to support, to "align" with what was the spirit of the project "and to ensure that no one acted in the classroom on the basis of their previous experiences. Action was taken to minimize the autonomous interventions of teachers to maintain an approach with the students at least uniform and consistent with the model to be tested. This work has clearly been done considering, from the very beginning, the peculiarities and subjectivities of the individual teachers. In fact, another particularly relevant aspect that we still had to take into account was that of inserting some teachers in the various working groups rather than others because some "fragility" of the character of some teachers could be fine in some groups rather than others. This arrangement was possible because we had the possibility of being able to make choices and freedom to decide. This phase was not foreseen by the project but it proved necessary during the experimentation to be able to support the teachers in their work with young students.

Time and methods: monthly supervision during the teaching "staff".

Some aspects of discussion that may be useful in order to enhance the training of job coaches are highlighted:

- It is important to maintain the “role” in the relationship with families. In fact, the daily conversation with the parent / operator accompanying the young person is avoided and, where the parent insists on a reply, give a brief answer referring to the official meeting moments between the organization and the parent. This is in order to limit the risk that the parent seeks a “shoulder” and “listening function” to be able to share frustrations and doubts about their loved one. The job coach must prepare the young person for his job placement and must not substitute for other professional figures.
- The messages addressed to young autistic people must be clear, unambiguous and linear.
- It is essential that the job coach himself is consistent in assigning and enforcing breaks, for example. These are fundamental and necessary and must be established a priori at specific times.

g) Internship in a company (whose methods are subject to analysis in the context of intellectual output IO2 ...)

2.1.2 Specific objectives of the training

- Define a training model for teachers on autism and methods and tools to support the training and job placement of young autistic people.
- Definition of a training model for job coaches
- Define a training model for company tutors, specifically as many company tutors as there are companies involved.
- Making the training model transferable to encourage vocational training systems to include specific modules in projects, in order to facilitate the learning of autistic young people in the VET system.

2.1.3 Who is the job coach for autism?

The job coach is an element of connection between the young autistic, the family and the company, and, if involved, the school. A sort of interpreter - translator of the needs of two worlds, that of the autistic person and that of companies, each with its own peculiarities and language. The role of the job coach is to facilitate learning by using tools and languages suited to autistic people, as well as to facilitate a hypothetical job placement because of its ability to translate work processes into clear language for both the autistic person and the company.

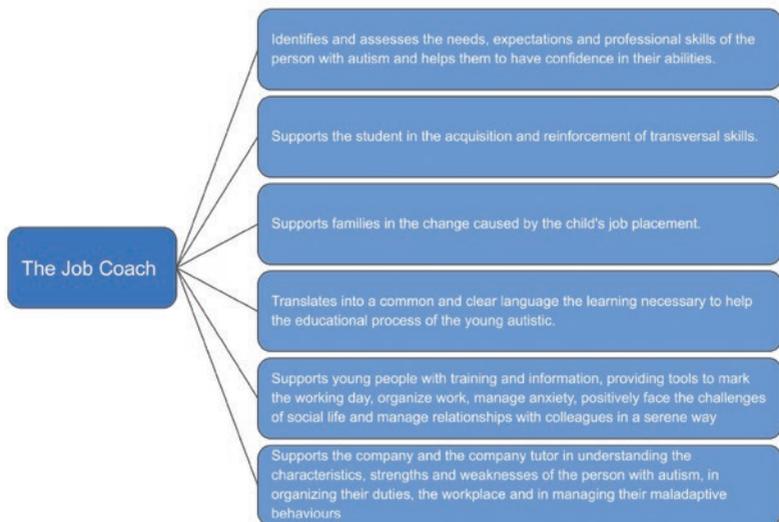
The job coach therefore:

- Identifies and assesses the needs, expectations and professional skills of the people with autism and helps them to have confidence in their abilities, enhancing their selfesteem.
- Translates into a common and clear language the learning necessary to help the educational process of the young autistic.
- It supports the student in the acquisition and reinforcement of transversal skills.
- Supports young people with training and information, providing

tools to mark the working day, organize work, manage anxiety, positively face the challenges of social life and manage relationships with colleagues in a serene way.

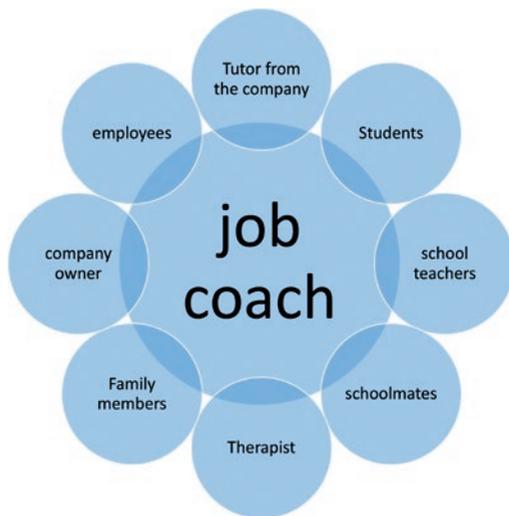
- Supports the company and the company tutor in understanding the characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of the person with autism, in organizing their duties, the workplace and in managing their maladaptive behaviors.
- Compares with families, collects information and supports families in the change caused by the child's job placement. • Compares with the school⁸ of the young person and with its teachers, collecting information on the student (strengths and weaknesses during the school career) to facilitate the transition to the world of work.
- If possible, he gathers as much as possible information about the student speaking with its therapists or educators.

Fig. 3,4,5: The job coach



⁸ Only if the school is involved in the project.

Thanks to the work of the job coach, the meeting between the parties is facilitated and becomes an opportunity for mutual growth.



According to the experience of the A.W.A.R.D. project, the role job coach is essential for the effective functioning of the whole process and plays a central role in the transition between the world of school and the world of work.

This transition is difficult for everyone and even more for young people on the spectrum: they need specific support as they move from school to work environment where they are required to take responsibility and ensure achievement of goals in a given time.

In this transition phase, therefore, the young person can feel a strong pressure on him and the job coach becomes a fundamental support.

The skills of the Job coach can absolutely be acquired by teachers who wish to enrich their toolbox to be able to communicate effectively even with autistic person..



Basic skills of the job coach and technical supervision

In order to guarantee a suitable transfer of skills from the first to the second core of job coach (as per model) and to be able to better manage the simultaneous activities, the A.W.A.R.D. experience has taught that a greater experience in autism is needed by job coaches.

Autism is a very vast and complex subject and working with autism requires many skills that can be acquired through study and many years of field work. The A.W.A.R.D. model provides for the training of job coaches from professional training, not necessarily autism experts, on the basis of the idea that any interested and motivated person can be enabled to work with disabilities. In addition to having a strong passion in working with others and a heart open to differences.

The application of the model has taught us that it is certainly possible to train job coaches motivated to work in this sector (even if they have no initial experience) but that, for the management of complex situations and the planning of teaching / training activities, a Technical supervision by an expert is absolutely required, as well as a lot of practical experience and some important personal / character skills. The expert has the function of supporting teachers in addressing any problems that emerged in the classroom or during the internship in the company, in the production of teaching materials and in the preparation of tools for use by interns and companies.

Self-training of job coaches/Teachers

Autism is a complex subject and it is therefore important to combine official training with self-training in order to grow and acquire tools faster. After all, as in all professional fields in which a person wants to work professionally.

2.2

The role of monitoring in the phases of the model

Evaluation is *"an art based on science" ... a "transdisciplinary and extra-disciplinary⁹ practice*. Thus defines Scriven, one of the 'fathers' of evaluation understood as an autonomous disciplinary field.

Monitoring and evaluation are strategic processes in a project because they allow on the one hand (with monitoring) to keep the progress of the activities under control and verify their compliance in terms of quantity with respect to the project, triggering any alerts in case of anomalies¹⁰. This allows the organization to be able to activate any improvement actions in time and always have an updated photograph of what has been achieved.

On the other hand, the evaluation allows you to verify the impact of the project itself on specific areas / targets. This allows us to understand if the project has really brought about the expected change, if how much and how it was achieved was functional to bring about a positive change in the subjects and / or systems

⁹ Transdisciplinary and extra-disciplinary practice that "is interested in all those evaluative elements that not only concern the weighted judgment on the result of actions (projects, policies, services), but also of those little visible and tacit aspects that involve some form of judgment regarding events that occur during each process.

¹⁰ Monitoring answers questions such as: are activities on schedule? Are the activities consistent with what is planned? Does the number of people involved correspond to what was expected? Are the subjects involved satisfied? How many users complete a specific activity? etcetc

that were involved in the project in different ways or that, even transversally, they used it.

In summary, monitoring and evaluation, which are closely related¹¹ to the extent that one provides different information than the other, make it possible to demonstrate the implementation of the project itself and its actions and to assess its impacts from a quantitative and qualitative¹² point of view.

In this specific context, in the A.W.A.R.D. trainers training model, monitoring had the proper function of allowing the organization¹³ responsible for the evaluation and monitoring and the entire partnership to have an always updated quantitative and qualitative framework of what was being made.

Among the elements monitored: number of professionals involved, number of training hours carried out, number of skills transfer hours, adherence between the actions carried out and what is planned from the point of view of time and the type of action itself, satisfaction with the path taken and acquisition of knowledge and skills.

The collection of information for monitoring activities is a so to speak "linear" process if, in the project start-up phase, as in this case, a precise monitoring plan is defined with the identification of all the elements to be kept under control. The collection of information, also in this case, was strategic for keeping the project and its specific phases under control and for promptly observing anomalies and discrepancies.

¹¹ From a "temporal" point of view, the monitoring is carried out during the entire process / project being analyzed, the evaluation includes an ex-ante phase to photograph the situation before the start of the process / project being evaluated, an intermediate phase and a final and / or ex post phase aimed at verifying the real impact of the process / project in relation to different fields.

¹² The evaluation focuses on some specific areas of investigation, for which it defines measurement indicators and expected "goals"

¹³ Studio L&P Association

What has played a more important and decisive role is the evaluation process as it has investigated different subjects of investigation, qualitative aspects related to the impact of the actions and the model itself with direct involvement of the targets involved in different capacities. Aspects and indicators considered important and representative to give the dimension of the real achievement of the project objectives and their impact.

The evaluation concerned:

- The level of involvement of trainers / job coaches with respect to the training experience in Chemnitz¹⁴. Unlike most of the training courses in which trainers are involved, this activity was carried out in a multicultural and European context. So the level of "involvement" takes on a different meaning that touches not only the sphere of participation but also the interrelationships with one's peers from other nations, the ability to adapt, the ability to negotiate, the ability to communicate in another language, intercultural respect.
- The change in the representation that each trainer / job coach involved had with respect to autism and the autistic person.
- The self-assessment, by the trainers involved, on the acquisition of skills and tools in the skills transfer phase at the local level, to effectively support a young autistic person in the job placement.
- The level of collaboration between teachers from the same nation and from different nations.
- The degree and level of response to stimuli and unforeseen situations, during the same co-planning of the job placement path for autistic young people.

¹⁴In this case "closed methods" were used which involved a pre-selection of the data to be observed. Structured tools such as grids and lists of elements to be observed were mainly used to facilitate data collection.

- The critical analysis of the results of the mid-term evaluation played a decisive role in leading the partnership to envisage, in the case of the Italian group, a more important intervention by the supervisor in on-site training and, at the level of the group of teachers of the 3 countries, a increase in support meetings with the supervisor.
- The evaluation of trainers' training, in the A.W.A.R.D. project, being experimental and subject to validation, also provided for a focus during the experimentation period in the simulation company and during the traineeship.
- In this case, the evaluation was carried out in particular through silent observers¹⁵ and focus groups with the trainers with the presence of the supervisor and / or evaluation and monitoring team which has training experts within it.

In this case, the evaluation investigated aspects including:

- level of application of the model learned in the classroom path by the trainers;
- ability to adapt tools based on the target;
- ability to manage anomalous and problematic situations;
- use of specific tools (videomodeling, task analysis etc);
- ability to read and analyze situations and cases;
- degree of response of the student group and / or individual student.

¹⁵Silent observer: reference is made specifically to a descriptive observation, a tool widely used in the field of clinical psychology. The descriptive observation is based solely on the "ability of the observer to identify the elements to be observed and to transcribe them faithfully, taking notes during the observation or recording the collected data in subsequent moments".

The team shared the objective of the evaluation, how and when to "observe" with which methods and tools for conducting the observations. Ref. Mantovani, S. (edited by) (1998), *Field research in education. The qualitative methods*, Milan, Mondadori.

The evaluation process played a decisive role in the validation of the model. All the results of the evaluation were taken into consideration to observe the functionality of the model, its effectiveness and its replicability and transferability.

The transversal importance of evaluation in all projects and in particular in experimentation projects in multi-cultural contexts as in the case of A.W.A.R.D., is well summarized in Hirsham's definition: *"the evaluation action is a 'trust exercise of transparency) and a way to give 'value' to something "*.

THIRD SECTION

3.

Approaches and tools for job coaches and tutors

Management of maladaptive behaviors

It is essential to investigate what may be maladaptive behaviors that hinder or slow down the learning processes: stereotypes¹⁶ and problem behaviors¹⁷. There is a need to know the differences between one and the other and the methods of their management. It is important to reflect on the fact that “the behavior is related to the environment”. The educational, environmental, social and individual variables are in fact determined by the behavior of the individual (Ri f. I. Fusaro, 2019).

In relation to “how to identify problem behaviors”, reference is made to Interviews and structured questionnaires (intensity, frequency, types of behavior) - see for example M. Demchak, K.W. Bossert 1996.

It is suggested:

- data collection module on the frequency-rate of maladaptive behavior, reporting: day, when, where, type of behavior, who collected the data etc..
- Module A-B-C: when problem behavior clearly occurs during specific activities systematic and direct observations are therefore essential: A-B-C analysis. That is, to observe and write in the module: antecedent, behavior, consequences.

¹⁶ Stereotypy: repetition of an unchanged and constant sequence of one or more behaviors; rigid behavioral pattern, carried out in a repetitive and continuous manner, without any purpose or apparent function, Ref. Irene Fusaro 2019.

¹⁷ Problem behaviors: destructive behavior, dangerous for the individual, for others, for the environment. Disruptive behaviors that can put someone in trouble and that happen in particular situations.

With respect to this last module, it is suggested, as done in the classroom¹⁸, the possibility that the potential job coach exercises in the observation and transcription of what he observes and / or in filling in the form in compliance with the sequences: antecedent, behavior, consequences.

At this point, it is necessary for the potential job coach to deepen the ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis). "The basic assumption is that behavior is a function of its consequences" *"What interests us is not only how the behavior-problem manifests itself, that is the modality, but to understand what happens before - the antecedence, and what happens after - the consequence¹⁹ "*.

ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis)

The subject of analysis and study, even for the potential job coach, must be the reinforcement: "it must be administered during or immediately after the behavior we want to increase²⁰".

It is also important to always implement STRUCTURED teaching, where to design the structure "It means thinking and preparing the environment so that it clearly gives the answers to these questions: what should I do? With who? How long? When it starts? When does it end? ". The purpose of this type of methodology is to prevent problematic behaviors and to use all those strategies and techniques that allow the person to be able to operate overcoming any limitations and using their strengths.

"Structuring is important to introduce changes and to help" export "learning in different, natural and increasingly complex contexts (generalization)²¹".

¹⁸ During the trainer course in Cagliari, by Irene Fusaro in 2019.

¹⁹ I. Fusaro, Cagliari 2019

²⁰ I. Fusaro, Cagliari 2019

²¹ I. Fusaro, Cagliari 2019

The job coach must take into account the strengths and weaknesses of the person and also structure the environment which, in general, must be well organized and with visual aids where necessary or helpful. In any case, the logic that must be respected is that materials must "speak for themselves" from a visual point of view! The agenda is of particular importance and usefulness, in fact it should be noted that the agenda is a tool to support the independence of the young / autistic person. "Use visual agendas to make people understand when it's time to do that activity". Visual aids can be particularly useful, although "*however, as Volkmar and Klin (2005) pointed out, not all people with autism process visual stimuli better than linguistic ones, and not all benefit equally or have need for visual aids to achieve these specific objectives: it is therefore essential to conduct a careful assessment*"²².

Management of anxiety

It is important to deepen the knowledge on constructive techniques for anxiety management.

It has been reported that, during the subsequent experimentation during the project, some job coaches held meetings with autistic young people on anxiety management. This issue has to be carried out only by job coaches with specific education in the field such as psychologists and expert counselors, as it is a particularly delicate problem and requires specific skills to be adequately managed.

During the A.W.A.R.D. training, the problem of anxiety management has been frequently reported by the autistic young people. However, we have to consider that this period of the project unfortunately coincided with the COVID-19 emergency and lockdown.

²²I. Fusaro, Cagliari 2019

The possibility of working with the autistic young person on aspects such as:

- awareness of situations that cause anxiety;
- awareness of situations that cause agitation and behaviors adopted or to be adopted to overcome the situation in a positive way;
- awareness of the different severity of the various situations that can cause anxiety.

It is up to the job coach (competent in the matter) to know how to use specific tools (cards, tables, graphics) and to be able to manage the results of their use.

Prepare for work

The potential job coach should acquire the ability to create, adapt, use tools that help the autistic young person to “understand” the motivations that lead people to be willing to work and reasoning with the young person about the changes that work can bring about. The job coach has, therefore, to work with the young person on how to prepare a new schedule in which the work-routine has to be introduced.

The potential job coach should be prepared to work with the young person on correct behaviors and social relationships (communication, conversation levels) at the workplace

In our experience, training as a job coach presupposes an important reflection on these issues and the preparation of the job coach in dealing with these issues.

It is therefore assumed that the potential job coach has knowledge on the main elements of effective communication, knows “the world of work” and knows how to move professionally within it.

We cannot expect a person who has never entered the company to explain to a young person (whether or not he is autistic, it makes no

difference) how to behave within it. It is not possible that those who cannot communicate and do not know the basics of communication can work alongside another person on this subject ²³.

Making another person ready for work, in an adequate and functional way, cannot be separated from a balanced and coherent vision of the world of work and of life itself on the part of the trainer. It is therefore important to work on the representation that the trainer / future job coach has of work, social relationships, the different.

Social stories

Useful tool in many situations and particularly functional for some autistic person. It is important that the potential job coach knows how to use them. It is also important to know when and how this tool is useful and when it is better to avoid it.

Task analysis

The job coach must learn how to use task analysis. *"The task analysis is a procedure that teaches you to break down an activity into various sequences, into individual phases that constitute it"*, a useful and important procedure in the daily life of the autistic person, particularly effective in which he will have to learn one or more work processes. It will therefore be essential that the job coach learns how to carry out the procedure.

It is specified that, during the classroom training, potential job coaches practiced individually and with plenary discussions on the drafting of task analysis. The drafting of a task analysis, even a simple process, may seem trivial. The experimentation instead highlighted the possible difficulties in drafting a task analysis.

²³ This awareness should be an alert in the selection of job coaches.

It is therefore important to remember to:

- break down the process meticulously;
- report the operational steps that may seem obvious (eg: in the case of cleaning the exterior of a car, "open the tap" "fill the bucket (and in this case it may be necessary to put a notch to show how far it must go water)... .etc etc "close the tap".

Video modeling

Video modeling is a teaching method that uses technology (computers, digital cameras, etc.) as the main component for learning:

- 1) It involves the following basic components:
- 2) the individual himself or others acting as role models are videotaped performing the target behavior the video recording is then played back to the student;
- 3) the student is required to perform the behavior.

There are 4 types of video modeling:

- Self-modeling video.
- Video modeling.
- Point-of-view video modeling.
- Video prompting.

Also in this case, it is important to experiment in the classroom in order to be able to use the tool with young autistic people

FOURTH SECTION

4.

Validation of the model, strengths and weaknesses

4.1

Strengths of the trainer training model

- It is transferable to anyone who wants to learn to work, talk, teach people with autism spectrum disorders.
- It can be used for job placement in any type of company.
- It is transferable and usable, with the necessary modifications, also with people with other types of disabilities and also with young people coming from situations of great discomfort (often obstacles to a job placement).
- It is international as it is defined through the exchange of experiences between three European nations: Italy, Romania and Germany.
- It can be integrated thanks to the possibility of inserting additional tools / models resulting from the progress of research.
- It is dynamic and expandable thanks to the addition of other steps, should it be deemed necessary.
- The implementation of the Model, encourage the cooperation between the school-staff, the experts, the families and the companies.
- The model enables the staff from the VET centers to develop dedicated approaches for understanding the needs and the abilities of the autistic children.
- The staff from the VET centers has the opportunity to easily integrate the learned tools in their practice, and to further adapt for different concrete situations.
- The implementation of the model generates a new dynamic and

cooperation among students with and without disabilities, by supporting them to work together.

- The use of the model in our school creates the preconditions for a much more better cooperation between the staff, working together around „a case,, and being ready to cooperate in order to find the best solution, within a systemic approach.²⁴
- Implementation of the model encourages thinking “outside the box”.
- It can create economic and other benefits for autistic people and for society.
- Facilitates the methodology by which young people with autism can be included in the labor market.
- Opens a broad spectrum of possibilities for the professional development of young people with autism.

4.2

Weaknesses of the trainer training model

The experimentation of the model led to the implementation of all the steps required by the project. At the same time, however, following a continuous monitoring of the activities, it was necessary to add some improvement steps, which proved to be fundamental for the success of the project including:

- Reinforcement in training.
- Technical supervision of the working group Furthermore, the model.
- Does not offer solutions for teachers and tutors with high reluctance towards working with people with ASD
- The implementation of the model is time consuming - since it needs to be adapted individually for each autistic child and its context.

²⁴ This aspect is important specifically referred to the Tito Slavici high school in Timisoara

- Overlap was found between different competent institutions and between their tasks.
- Some bureaucracy is needed to be able to involve young people with autism spectrum disorder in this system.

Strengths and weaknesses in finding companies

- There were significant difficulties in finding host companies for internships.
- Companies have expressed a general “unwillingness” to internships or have expressed their difficulty in assigning an employee to the role of tutor with the limited time and resources of today's companies, often family-run companies (in the case of Sardinia).
- The companies identified for cooperation with the pilot program, recognized their lack of knowledge concerning How to deal with ASD persons, and in generally every category of disabled persons.
- The most important and crucial aspect for the companies in entering the cooperation, is the support that can be offered by the project, and the tools developed in ensuring the knowledge and skills about How to manage the ASD student? The preparation of the staff of the employer was essential, before the very first contact with the ASD student and the family. The interface role played by the staff of the project is a prerequisite for a successful cooperation.
- Remuneration of trainees.
- Remuneration of company tutors.

4.3.

Conclusions

The experience of this pilot training revealed several new aspects, roles and tasks for the trainers, working with students with special needs, aiming at preparing them for a smooth transition toward the working life.

Traditionally, the good trainers were focused on the teaching-learning process, within the school premises, and some practical training, but the final goal of the activities were established before the end of the schooling period, and nothing after the students left the educational institution.

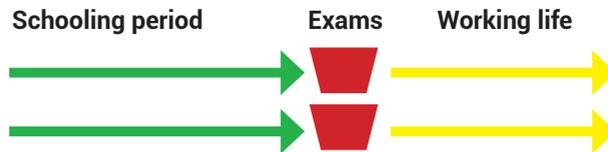
Usually the educational staff, the trainers did not considered themselves responsible for the professional life of the students, their limit of responsibility were established within the schooling years, usually ending with the final exams.

This means, that the trainers were professionally satisfied and appreciated if the students graduated and passed the final exams. Now, the pilot project brought a very new dimension in the profile and roles and of the trainers, by raising awareness concerning their responsibilities for the students future professional life, starting with the first employment. It became very clear that during the training period is necessary to invest systematically and concrete prepare the transition phase, and this requires to extend the limits of the `learning outcomes` of the school/VET agency beyond the standards for the final exams, and to prepare the students before they leave the school/VET agency for their next phase of life, the working life.

These new challenges, responsibilities were transformed in actions, which have been delivered in cooperation with the employers, and especially the tutors from the employer.

We would like to formulate our conclusions by saying that the end and the goal of the school/VET agency are not the national exams,

and the working with the graduates does not start only after they left the school; there should be a very important overlapping of these two periods of their life, in which are an important presence both the trainer and the tutor, in excellent cooperation, which means a very smooth transition from the school to the working life.



AWARD model has a powerful tools and is a great methodology in order to support a change in the role and profile of the trainers and the tutors.

Another difference highlighted by the pilot experience emphasize the socio-emotional components of the competences!

Each of the traditional competence based learning models establish at theoretical level the three structural components of any competence: the knowledge, the practical skills and the behaviors, but in reality the classical approach of the learning is focused on the cognitive part of the learning, the knowledge, information – generally related to the IQ of the students. The final examinations usually measure these knowledge, by cognitive tests, and the final certificates are covered by these knowledge.

In the VET schools, especially if they organize the practical training in the premises of a company, in real working context, the practical skills became the central focus of the activities, with a special interest for the skills directly related to the existing equipment and working processes.

The behavioral – attitudinal component is usually considered `implicit` and only in a very exceptional situation are subject of any feedback or dedicated development process.

In this pilot experience we learned that the emotional aspects

related to e person are very important, not only for the young ASD, and that trainers need to be equipped with specific skills²⁵ to identify, understand, interpret, intervene in various situations, based on a sound knowledge of the specific behaviors of the person with autism, as a category, plus the very specific and personal characteristics of every person.

We learned that the cooperation among the teachers, tutors, parents, experts are crucial in evaluating every single case, and that based on this analysis is possible to create a personalized training path for each student.

The tools provided by this methodology – the task analysis, the agenda, the video-modelling – proved to be very efficient in providing a good environment for the students` progress.

Our observations led us to the conclusion that the methodology has excellent benefits even for neurotypical young people. Working with mixed groups made possible to involve autistic people in the project also in Romania. Without this ruse this participation would not have been possible. It is to be mentioned that the neurotypical people obtained some quicker and easier progress and they appreciated very much the extra interest and preoccupations of the trainers for their emotional wellbeing.

Lastly

Occupational integration can and must become the “keystone” to guarantee a true, stable and lasting social integration and to produce profound changes in the way the social community accepts the person with mental disabilities. Moreover, for people ASD to have a job represents the achievement of an unsubordinated social status that allows greater autonomy and independence, including the economic one. In fact, work takes on a particular connotation for the person with autism, not only because it allows the recovery of that social

²⁵ Here we intend soft skills.

role to which we have just mentioned but also because it becomes a powerful educational tool: in other words the job it is an opportunity for learning to acquire and stabilize certain skills and abilities that can reduce difficulties and problems, and therefore the handicap as a whole. That is, work facilitates the learning of immediately usable knowledge and, above all, the generalization of cognitive, motor and social behavior skills in different or similar situations, but never perfectly identical to each other. Such a conception of training to work needs a more active and direct participation of the community in managing the recovery and integration of these subjects. This participation, however, cannot remain only "political" (in the sense of participation in decisions on general directives and objectives to be given to operators or political forces) but must also be put in practice. Indeed, there is a widespread opinion that delicate and complex problems such as those concerning the social and work integration of people with autism, with good functioning, can be resolved by appealing exclusively to the enthusiasm and to humanitarian and social rightness of one's beliefs. Of course, these two factors are very important for the success of a educational/occupational program, as they ensure a strong intrinsic motivation that drives individuals to action. However, these motivations in the long run, colliding with the harsh daily reality, frequently made up of failures, difficulties and frustrations, often fail or at least strongly falter if they are not supported by a scientific basis of knowledge and techniques through which it was studied and experimentally investigated the problem.



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