



UNIVERSITÀ
CATTOLICA
del Sacro Cuore

Inclusive Educational Design for Disability

PROF. SILVIA MAGGIOLINI

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In recent decades, educational inclusion has evolved from a principle of access to a broader cultural, pedagogical, and political challenge. This course focuses on the role of educational design as a key factor in promoting meaningful inclusion for learners with disabilities. “Design for disability” is not simply about adapting existing systems, but rethinking the foundations of educational environments so they are built to welcome and empower difference from the outset. Starting from international rights-based frameworks—such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Sustainable Development Goals—the course explores how schools and educational institutions can become inclusive by design.

A first section of the course will be dedicated to tracing the historical and cultural evolution of the concept of disability, from deficit-based views to the current multidimensional and interactional approaches. Students will explore how different models—the medical model, the social model, the biopsychosocial model, and the capability approach—have shaped policies and pedagogical practices. Attention will be given to how disability is constructed in different cultural contexts, and how such constructions influence educational inclusion.

The course will then introduce key categories of disability, including sensory, physical, intellectual, developmental, and psychosocial disabilities, along with neurodivergent conditions. For each, the focus will be placed not on clinical features but on the educational implications and potential barriers within learning environments.

Students will engage with principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), inclusive curriculum planning, and accessible assessment. They will be invited to critically examine how educational spaces, teaching strategies, relational dynamics, and institutional practices can be reimagined to foster full participation and agency. A selection of international case studies and inclusive practices—from early childhood to higher education—will guide practical reflection and collaborative project work. The course frames inclusion not as a fixed goal, but as an ongoing design process informed by values of equity, participation, and respect for diversity.

PREREQUISITES

A background in Education may prove helpful, but it is not compulsory.

METHOD OF TEACHING

Lectures, Case studies, Group discussions.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students have to comply with the following requirements:

- Students are expected to actively contribute to in-class debate.
- Students are expected to study in advance some course readings, when assigned.
- Students are required to do a short presentation on a course-related topic.

CREDITS

5 ECTS



UNIVERSITÀ
CATTOLICA
del Sacro Cuore

GRADING

Attendance and Class participation	20% of final grade
Group assignment	30% of final grade
Written test	50% of final grade

COURSE READINGS AND MATERIALS

All the readings will be available in a course pack and the lecturer's slides will be available on Blackboard.

INSTRUCTOR BIO

Silvia Maggiolini is Associate Professor of Special and Inclusive Education at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. Her research focuses on inclusive educational practices for people with disability, the role of families in educational settings, and the intersection between disability studies and educational innovation. She is involved in national and international research networks on inclusive schooling, early childhood education, and the pedagogical design of accessible learning environments. She collaborates with institutions, schools, and NGOs promoting rights and participation of people with disabilities.

E-MAIL ADDRESS

silvia.maggiolini@unicatt.it