Inclusive education means different things to different people. Its definition also changes depending on the country, the social and political conditions, and the historical period in which it is constructed. From my viewpoint, inclusive education is the educational principle which aims to reform education systems and to create more equal and just societies.

Italy has had to face many challenges linked to inclusive education, not least the struggle against discrimination, and the exclusion that is inherent in “special education” in segregated settings.

Italy made a truly inclusive choice in 1971, despite the difficulties of systemic constraints and the lack of research and resources, the country passed the Law No. 114 implementing an inclusive education policy. This paved the way for discussing the issue of special education and the process of mainstreaming disabled students into regular classrooms.

Inclusive education has changed through actions, rather than words. It is the practical place of disabled students outside the “special education” system. This is a human right that all children should have access to. There is no waiting list for enrolment and all disabled students can be accepted at anytime of the school year, without going through screening measures, and without any risk of being rejected.

It is thanks to this “inclusive policy” that Marco Borromelli, 15, is now attending his local upper secondary school. When he was born he was diagnosed with Down’s Syndrome, and given a medical certificate that stated nothing about his love for the outdoors, his personality, his friends, his family, his school, his dreams, the potential of his mind. Luckily enough, a support teacher and a learning assistant provided with additional material resources (IT tools and specialised teaching materials) appears to provide strong evidence to counter arguments that inclusion is an utopian ideal.

In Italy, all students have the same structures as other children. Marco, therefore, has the right skills to teach alongside, and the ability to learn along with his regular schoolmates. Teachers felt that it was not a risk, and that it was important that he should take on the tasks of teaching the visually impaired child because they had the right skills to teach them successfully.

The Golden Key project in China and Inner Mongolia aims to integrate blind and visually impaired children into mainstream education. It is the result of an experience older disabled had been in another country, he may have had education through regular and special education systems.

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The UNESCO Office in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, together with the Division for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the UN in New York, and the Cambodia Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS), organised a Regional Asian Workshop on Inclusive Education from 16 to 19 January at the Cambodian Hotel in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Policy makers, educators and practitioners from Cambodia and other countries, as well as various international experts met to discuss different aspects of Inclusive Education, from a national and regional perspective, and to further promote Inclusive Education towards achieving the Education for All (EFA) goals by 2015.

Mr. Teruo Jinnai, Representative of UNESCO in Cambodia, provided the opening address, with Dr. Pralitha Chhetri, Senior Minister of Cambodia MoEYS, providing the opening address, with Dr. Pralitha Chhetri, Senior Minister of Cambodia MoEYS, providing the closing address. The workshop was followed by introductory and keynote presentations, followed by workshops, and an expert from Australia.

The workshop had a packed agenda: presentations from experts, country specialists, NGOs, UNICEF, disability, and the EFA Flagship Secretariat, as well as two one-day-based discussions ranging from policy issues to the ground practices. These presentations addressed persons with disabilities, ethnic minority children, street children, teacher training and community.

Various members of Cambodia’s civil society organisations also participated in the discussions. Working groups of the Asia Regional Workshop met and consistently placed the need for a holistic approach to Inclusive Education, which is presently reflected in the system.

The highlight of the workshop was a moving and beautiful performance by the Chinese Disabled People’s Performance Troupe, “Three Flags,” recently nominated as UNESCO Artists for Peace. The performance was attended by His Majesty the King of Cambodia and Ms. Kim Soeung, together with other honorary guests for Peace. The performance was followed by an introductory and keynote presentations, followed by workshops, and an expert from Australia.

This regional workshop held in Dakar in 2000, aims at providing a common platform and an agenda for all, including individuals with disabilities, NGOs and children and youth around the concept of inclusive education. UNESCO seeks to ensure the development of effective strategies to encourage education to reach out to all those excluded from the education system, so that all children and young people may have access to quality education by 2015.