

The Voices of Disabled Persons **Mr. Claudio Imprudente**

I am going to tell you about our project called “The Inkpot”.

I want to tell you about this project. How did we come to this idea? We started by reflecting about the word “disabled”. What does it mean, “disabled”? It means “unable to do something”. So we start from a negative picture. If a person is unable, then can you have confidence in such a person? Obviously no. This means we have to be aware of this cultural view, which looks at disabled persons as inferior to non-disabled persons. We need to change this cultural view, but how do you do that? Very simply, I think that we have to start from self-awareness in disabled persons so that they are aware about their own potential and capabilities.

For me, disability is not something negative, it is something enriching. You have to change the perspective through which, you look at the issues.

You may be asking yourself, how am I communicating, if I am not speaking? Have you understood my way of communication? I look at the alphabets on this transparent board and Roberto, sitting on the other side can follow my eye movements, and read out to you my words. I am not disabled for reading in this way, I am only doing things differently. This simple way of communication is a cultural revolution.

To make this concept understood to the children, I and other disabled persons from our association, we visit schools and interact with school children. Children will be the adults of tomorrow and they must be educated to look at diversity as cultural richness, as a resource and not as a misfortune. By changing the point of view, a disabled person becomes a differently able person. We must emphasise the ability and not the disability. If do not speak, then it is a disability but I find this simple way of communicating then I am only speaking differently, so I am differently able.

This is a revolutionary concept because I am not an object of treatment or assistance, but I am active subject of the culture. Sometimes, they invite me to the meetings of the associations of the sick persons, so you what do I do? I take a thermometer and measure my temperature. If I have fever, obviously I do not go, and if I do not have fever, I do not go as I am not sick any way.

This is to explain that often persons equate disability with an illness. **Disability and illness** are two different things. I am all right, I just have an impairment, from which my disablement comes. However, **impairment and disability** are two different things and these should not be mixed together. I may continue to have my impairment, but my disability can change. For example, if I have the wheel chair, I can move around. A large door decreases my disability, as I can enter with my wheel chair, a ramp in front of the cinema hall decreases my disability, if people have confidence in me, it decreases my disability. However, lack of confidence in my abilities and barriers like the stairs, increase my disability.

So having confidence of the others is very important for me. In my own life, I have received lot of confidence, thus I can also give my confidence to others, and from confidence starts more confidence. If I can share my experience, if I can show my confidence in others, slowly we create a culture of confidence.

Let me conclude by talking about **visibility**. Usually, you do not see the differently abled persons. They are not visible, because they remain hidden. For example, you do not see them in the television. I believe very firmly that we have to be visible, because it is important for our political role, to do advocacy, to put pressure on policy makers. Some times, I have gone to the television programmes because I believe that we must be more visible.

Similarly, if this workshop is talking about poverty and poor persons, who remain invisible, no one is going to know about it. When we talk of poverty, we also need to talk about making poverty visible, making poor persons visible. If it remains hidden, it is only a weakness, only when it becomes visible then it becomes strength for a change.