

BETWEEN DEFICIT AND HANDICAP

The fundamental distinction between deficit and handicap

Let's begin with the fundamental distinction between deficit and handicap. This could be "interpreted" through the concept: "accepting deficit and reducing handicap".

This distinction proves essential every time integration processes involving people with deficits or difficulties are activated.

By **deficit**, we mean an absence, any kind of "malformation", a lack of or anomaly in an organ, etc. of a mental, psychological or physiological function.

This is a "given" element, which cannot be modified and, in contemporary medical terms, is irreversible. It must therefore be considered a permanent part of the structure of the individual.

Example of a deficit situation

Let's take, for example, a deaf person: their sensory deficit, manifested through a reduced or total inability to perceive sounds and noises, represents a permanent characteristic. It's an "objective" feature, measurable in the same way as their body type, colour of hair, colour of eyes, etc.

The use of a hearing aid which compensates for or amplifies the missing function of the sensory organ can, to some extent, reduce the effects of the deficit: helping increase auditory perception, but without modifying the deficit or malfunction of the auditory system, which remains unchanged.

By handicap, in contrast, we mean the result of a social and cultural process: it is the consequence of the meeting between the individual – with his/her own physical and psychological (including any deficits) characteristics – and his/her personal history and context.

Example of a handicap situation

Beginning with the existence of a certain degree of auditory deficit, a subject can develop a personal history of adaptation to the different contexts in which they find themselves growing up and living. This deaf person may be surrounded by an environment which does not consider their deficit a serious impediment and, therefore, does not undervalue them as an individual. Or vice versa.

Handicap is not innate in a person, but is a "contextual condition". We speak of a "**handicapping situation**" (which can occur even when there is no deficit), determined by the meeting between diverse variables, therefore modifiable.