BUILDING A SCHOOL CULTURE AND BEING PROACTIVE IN REMOVING BARRIERS AND OBSTACLES THAT LEAD TO EXCLUSION

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Abstract: Deviant juvenile behaviour is increasing proportionally with the decreasing educational control, whereas the urban areas are more exposed to antisocial actions, compared to the rural ones. If in the past, sociologists considered as necessary a certain level of anomie to support the social balance, today, the reverse of the normal-abnormal dichotomy draws a question mark. For this reason the sociologists introduced the concept of juvenile pre-delinquency, defined as all deviant behaviours of young people, without harmful content, that lead to antisocial acts. The purpose of the program detailed in this study is to bring together the educational services in order to adopt a set of preventive measures, and practical approaches aiming at reducing deviant behaviours among juveniles.

Keywords: socio – educational strategies, classroom behavioural strategies.

1. Introduction

The concepts used for defining the category of disabled people are: *deficiency, handicap, disability, special needs*. While *deficiency* means the absence, loss or alteration of an individual's structure or function (anatomical, physiological or mental) – generated either by the genetic inheritance, a disease, an accident, or the negative environmental conditions throughout the development period, particularly the psychological and emotional ones. The *handicap* is more related to the social disadvantages that trigger the loss or limitation of an individual's opportunities to reach the same level of social life as the others. *Disability* refers to the result of a complex relation between an individual's health condition, the personal aspects and external factors (OECD, 2007). Due to this relation, the impact of different environments on to the same individual may vary considerably.

The phrase *special educational needs* (SEN) assumes the existence of educational needs in addition or complementary to the main educational goals and adjusted to the personal specifics (UNESCO, 2009). SEN also implies a comprehensive assistance, including, firstly, the educational aspects, and secondly, the medical and social ones. The SEN concept became one of UNESCO's terms as an indicator of the child and community centred education. The children with SEN are those whose special needs are of educational nature, and mainly generated by intellectual, physical, sensorial, language, social, emotional and behavioural deficiencies, either single or associated, regardless the degree of severity. A wider semantic area (OECD, 2007) also includes, beside the abovementioned criteria, the following: children coming from disadvantaged social environments and families, institutionalized children, pre-delinquent or delinquent, children belonging to ethnic or religious minorities, homeless children, physically or mentally abused children, children with chronic diseases (TBC, HIV-SIDA, diabetes etc.). In the absence of a proper approach to the special educational needs there are no real chances to ensure equal opportunities, and the premises for accessing, participating and integrating in school and social environments.

Walker (1998) makes the distinction between two apparently synonymous concepts: *integration* and *inclusion*. The integration of children with special educational needs envisages their insertion into the public education system and provision of support for

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adjustment and networking. The inclusion involves structural and functional changes on both sides: for those to be integrated, and for those who accept/include new students in their environment. The *Salamanca Statement* (1994) stipulates that common inclusive schools are the most efficient means for combating discrimination, as they build welcoming communities, an inclusive society and provide education to all people; moreover, they ensure an efficient education and, eventually, the added value of the entire educational system. The first requirement addressed by the inclusive education consists in reducing exclusion until eradication. The inclusive school is affordable, and fulfils its mission of being available to all children in order to make them acquire and improve the skills essential for social integration, and the development of education must be headed towards shading away the differences and erasing gaps.

2. Models for organizing the education of children with special educational needs

Kugelmass (2004) identified two fundamental models for organizing the education of SEN children. The first model centred on *selection, separation and segregation* is grounded on the thesis on differences imposing a tailored teaching process. Students are selected using the school results criterion. The basic social and educational thesis of this model consists in including children in public schools, while their failure to adjust leads to the enrolment in special schools. The model corresponds to the *individual perspective* (OECD, 2007*)* of approaching education which defines the school difficulties in terms of personal features (deficiencies, particular mental aspects). Children with similar problems learn together in groups, classrooms or special schools but they are considered *different* from the *normal ones* in terms of benefits from the common educational forms. According to this perspective, the educational process is based on labelling and segregation (Rix, 2009). The most concerning peculiarity of labelling is related to the attitude of others that leads either to overprotection, indifference, isolation or mistreatment.

The second model, the *inclusion* one, is based on the philosophy encouraging the development and expression of children's capacities in social contexts. The basic social and educational thesis on this model consists in adjusting the school to the child and, correspondingly, the equal treatment based on teaching about positive discrimination and fair play. The acceptance of disability concept eliminates the possible segregation and promotes the existence of differences between people with the purpose of cohabitation. The differences impose more normal and specific solutions, in compliance with the individual adjustment and development needs. This approach generates the need for a very flexible curriculum adjusted to the real learning and development possibilities of all children, as well as for an efficient infrastructure of support services. The model corresponds to the *curriculum perspective* in education, defined in terms of tasks and activities designed for all children. All persons may face difficulties at school, and such difficulties are generated by decisions and/or tasks insufficiently adjusted to the pupils' needs, thus leading to specific intervention, recovery, improvement ways for the educational process. Concrete interventions improve the efficiency of all educational diligences. The diversity of pupils is a resource whose best use facilitates the school integration opportunities of all those facing learning difficulties.

According to OECD (2007), the elements facilitating the school inclusion focus on three dimensions: *culture, strategy (education policy) and practice*. *Culture* refers to how the inclusive education philosophy is shared by all teachers in a school and can be observed by all the school community members. Building a school culture must become a process as important as those of teaching knowledge and developing skills. Such philosophy may consequently form the grounds for developing new strategies and making actual decisions on practice. This dimension refers to both the reality of a school and to its image seen from outside. *Strategy* refers to placing the inclusive approach at the core of school development in order to make it visible in all measures taken and not as a new distinct strategy. The concept

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of inclusive education must be present in all school planning documents. *Practice* refers to ensuring the presence of school culture and inclusive policies in classroom activities. The teaching-learning activities must encourage the participation of all people in the educational process.

3. Causes of delinquent behaviour

The juvenile delinquent behaviour is increasing proportionally to the decreasing control over education, urban areas being, in this regard, more exposed to antisocial actions than the rural ones. If the sociologists considered necessary the existence of a certain level of anomia to support the social balance, the disproportioned normal/abnormal ratio nowadays is raising question marks. Delinquent actions consist in: aggressive behaviours, hyper-motivation, lack of self-confidence, communication deficiencies and blockages, anxiety, depression, fear, suicidal attempts, runaway, wandering, integration into gangs, regular consumption of drugs, alcohol and tobacco. These elements lead to failure to adjust, low learning performance, school abandonment. The abovementioned conducts are not delinquent per se, as they breach no penal laws but jeopardize those committing such actions. Despite the absence of a pathology, these conducts may represent real *opportunities* for committing delinquent actions of penal nature, and symptoms of a potential *delinquent career*. For this reason, the sociologists introduced the concept of *juvenile pre-delinquency* defined as the set of deviant behaviours in youth that might lead, under specific circumstances, to antisocial acts.

Joining educational services in order to adopt a set of measures for both prevention and intervention purposes, aiming at reducing deviant behaviours among minors, represents a pre-requisite for the development of programmes adjusted to the typologies identified.

The issue, although imposed, in most of the cases, by poverty and the proximal social model, is, in fact, the inadequate education or its absence, and the deficient reference of such children to the norms.

There have been noticed two categories of *causes* leading to deviant behaviours: *the family environment* assessed based on: the use of rewards and sanctions, the changes in family life organization following the divorce, the conflictual, immoral, or excessively permissive context, divergent educational methods, lack of authority, parents' attitude of indifference / autocracy/tyranny; *social and economic aspects* like the decreasing living standards, the increasing unemployment rate within the family, misinterpretation or absence of certain norms, weakening social control, discrepancy between purposes and legal means to satisfy personal needs, caused by social inequalities, different social classes, the decreasing prestige and authority of social courts.

The collection of information necessary to build a solid system of values, to develop the self-esteem and the respect for the others, and skills that contribute to the subsequent development of the child in the society, represent aspects related to a final customized educational programme.

4. Educational activities from the curriculum perspective

The concept of curriculum includes the set of strategies defining and developing the contents of formal and informal education, and the educational framework is the document allowing schools to develop their own timetables in order to cover all subjects, that also meet the learning and development needs of all pupils. This context requires the selection of a flexible curriculum that allows the adoption of a customized methodology according to the learning and networking difficulties of the children with deviant behaviours, on the one hand, and the involvement of experts who provide learning support, specific compensation and recovery therapies, school counselling. Pupils are entitled to study all subjects and to

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participate in all school activities, and the strategy for the elaboration of the curriculum must focus on the diversity of all pupils in terms of achievements and deficiencies. Therefore, the school must have an efficient policy for decreasing the absenteeism and expelling rates, the number of situations when pupils are being intimidated or abused.

The actual intervention methods must be selected in compliance with the existing human and material resources, and the learning and socializing difficulties of pupils with deviant behaviours.

The evaluation system should accurately assess the results. It is desired that *inclusive* criteria are as important as the *selective* ones, because the former envisage the number of children integrated in inclusive schools, the number of children who have been helped to avoid school failure, the number of children who improved their school performance. Aspect like development and social and professional integration of students should become priorities, not their academic competences. The evaluation methodologies, for schools and instructors, should envisage the increased access of children to education by measuring the indicators of school progress. Cozma and Gherguț (2000, p. 119) consider that the assessment of children included in integration programmes should not focus only on giving grades or scores (…). It should be descriptive and centred on behaviour, attitude, reactions that justify the levels of integration and adjustment.

There are two categories of instructors who work with children with special educational needs in public schools: school teachers and specialists like assisting teachers, teachers of specific recovery and compensation therapies, school counsellors, and psychologists. The support services dedicated to children with deviant behaviour integrated in public schools should be developed with the help of specialists with special professional training. Moreover, the teachers from public schools should attend training courses on the education of children with deviant behaviour with a focus on the following topics: causes and forms of behavioural handicaps, their impact on school, social and professional performances, prevention, education and integration of pupils with deviant behaviour in the social life. These are the premises facilitating the school re-insertion of this category of pupils. For this purpose, the instruction will be approached from the deficient pupil's perspective, not that of the teacher running educational activities in classrooms with homogenous or pseudo-homogenous pupils (Gherguț, 2005. p. 19).

The teachers and the support staff may run the following activities designed for SEN children: to identify the specific support needs; to elaborate the tailored intervention programme on education with short- and medium-term priorities, depending on the preferences and difficulties of children; to define the work methods for certain chapters, topics, lessons, learning sequences; intervention activities for recovery purposes focused on the existing curriculum in informal contexts (the resource center of the school, trips, etc.); to evaluate curricula and make adjustments and re-adjustments to the deficient areas.

With regard to the other categories of persons interacting with SEN children, there could be initiated activities *for other children in the school* – counselling on the acceptance and integration of children with special educational needs; facilitating interactions with the pupils from the target group through *peer-education* activities, learning in support groups; *for the community members* – awareness and information about the problems of SEN children, their integration in public schools, the role of various institutions in supporting the integration programmes, and in promoting the principles of inclusive and non-discriminatory education.

5. Conclusions

The relationship between partners should be based on cooperation, consistency and coherence in decision-making, where the relationship between parents and the provider of education plays a major role in the achievement of a successful educational development of

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the child. Thus, by promoting the idea of inclusive society, the school will prove its usefulness and necessity; all the actions that improve the living standards of disabled persons lead to the settlement of a flexible, open and inclusive society. The pre-requisites for becoming an inclusive school include the teaching of strategies necessary to solve daily problems based on cooperation and solidarity, where the teaching-learning process is simultaneous and each student *learns how to learn*, without using competition and arbitrary hierarchy-based criteria, but the respect for the others and their acceptance.

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