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Inclusive Education and Psycho-Pedagogical Counseling of Pupils with Educational Risk from Disadvantaged Backgrounds

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Abstract

The risk behaviours of pupils in disadvantaged environments have an influence on the pupils' personality, causing school, educational and social dysfunctions. An inclusive education program, motivational techniques and psycho-pedagogical counselling for students with educational risk from disadvantaged backgrounds provide some clarifications of the concepts: risk behaviours, school dropout, pupils with special needs, school inaction, school and social inclusion. Knowing these characteristics is a prerequisite for achieving an effective educational act, an intervention program tailored to the educational needs of the beneficiaries. The approach of these problems is practically-applicative, by offering psycho-pedagogical intervention techniques. This module / program focuses on the dimension of prevention of behavioural disorders, change, problem solving and personal development, using an educational model and development model. The psycho-pedagogical counselling, motivational techniques and supportive strategies are the practical premise of diminishing deviant behaviours and school inclusion. Case studies, programs and intervention plans realized by teachers who participated in the training program provide paradigms for the analysis and interpretation of risk situations and groups as well as patterns of action on them to achieve attitudinal and behavioural change in order to optimize the development of pupils' personality and reintegration into the school environment

Keywords: *psycho-pedagogical counselling; school inclusion; disadvantaged educational environments; educational risk.*

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1. Introduction

The current educational policies support and promote the principle of adapting the school to the needs and abilities of the students, taking into consideration the objectives and directions of action promoted both nationally and internationally, with the aim of creating a quality education, centered on the student and on his/her needs, interests and requirements, ensuring equal opportunities during the studies, for all students.

Based on the theoretical and pragmatic approach to education and integration / inclusion, the truth lies in the fact that the educational systems and practices must lead to the activation of the genuine psychological potential of each child and to the acceleration of their psychological development, based on corrective, compensatory, formative and personalized educational programs, elaborated through the work in multidisciplinary team. In this regard, it is necessary to implement programs for equalization of opportunities, education and development of children from disadvantaged educational environments.

The new system of inclusive education, at all levels and school cycles, it is no longer one that responds separately to the needs of certain students, but it is one that responds to the various specific and unique characteristics of each student, focusing on children at risk of marginalization or coming from disadvantaged environments.

Inclusive education, based on teamwork, supports the need for a socio-constructivist pedagogy, associated with the model of a reflective and specialized practitioner. The psycho-pedagogical principles have a general-normative, systematic and dynamic, open character, based on fundamental theses, on general norms, which are the basis of the design, organization and development of the recuperative, compensatory and teaching-learning activities, in order to achieve the optimal educational objectives. In this respect, teachers become co-developers of an inclusive curriculum, capable of responding to the requirements and needs of all educators. The teacher becomes the basic binder, the source of team thinking, of a sustained work within the multidisciplinary team, in order to collectively elaborate and develop curricular design, which contributes to creating a better life for students in the inclusive education system. The counsellor, the psychotherapist, the specialists from various fields are the professionals who work in collaboration with the multidisciplinary intervention team, of which they are part, to respond to the complex needs of the people requesting support. It is very important the relationship based on collaboration both in the professional team, and between the professionals and the beneficiaries of the services and their families, as well. The positive attitudes of the staff in

the educational environment towards inclusion and towards diversity should manifest permanently, in order to support the independence and quality of life, both at the level of the school institution and at the society level.

2. Problem Statement

In disadvantaged educational environments, the risk behaviours of the students predominate, causing school, social and professional dysfunctions. These behaviours may occur in different environments and may include different forms, variable evolutions, occurring at different ages, etc.

Starting from the educational policies promoted at national level regarding the adaptation of the school to the needs and capacities of the students, "There is a tendency to unify the efforts of the different organisms, both at central level and at the level of the communities, in the development of joint programs of cooperation in the aim of improving the participation of the gipsy population in education."[2].

Many researches have tried to identify students at risk from school. Walsh [5] drew a picture of those factors that can lead a student at risk of school abandonment. He included in the analysis factors related to student, family, school and community:

- the students: they are not attracted to the school / they do not like the school, they have a low level of abilities, they have behavioural, disciplinary problems, they are prone to drug abuse, they are isolated, they do not participate / have a low degree of involvement, have low self-esteem, have disabilities;

- family: low socio-economic status, dysfunctional family life, non-involvement of parents, low expectations of parents, abuse, increased mobility;

- community: lack of community support services, lack of community support for school, increased incidence of criminal activities, lack of school-community network links.

We argue that the incongruence between the school culture and that of the families, community, interaction group, has direct effects on the phenomenon of school inclusion, in the sense that in situations where the school values do not agree with those supported by the child interaction groups, colleagues, family, it is difficult for the student to identify and comply with school rules. In this respect, the interventions must strengthen the alliance among school - family - community, through different strategies for carrying out activities together, of some workshops for parents in order

to train their skills to educate and bring up the child, in accordance with the structure of personality - value - that education promotes.

The main concern is focused on the fact that within the educational environment in which there are students with risky behaviours, school dropout, students with disabilities present problems similar to those without disabilities, which requires professionals to focus on their individual and unique needs. The specialized literature highlights that in the process of psychological counselling; account must be taken of the discrimination to which persons with disabilities are exposed [1]. Thus, within the counselling services offered, the role of people with disabilities and their family is an active one, which is why the development of decision-making skills and the increase of self-determination are goals and themes of the counselling process. The counselling process will focus on "assisting students in increasing their understanding of themselves and their relationships with others, developing more resource-rich lifestyles and bringing beneficial changes to their lives."

Counselling is defined by the Commission on Certification of Rehabilitation Counsellors and quoted by Berven, Thomas and Chan [1], [3] as the therapeutic intervention that involves: applying cognitive, affective, behavioural and systemic counselling strategies, which include principles of development, well-being, pathology and multicultural human behaviour.

The psychological and psycho-diagnostic assessment of children with difficulties of adaptation, integration and development is the first attribution of the school psychologist counsellor.

The psycho-pedagogical assessment, as Hollins and Sinason [3] point out, highlights the significant increase in the incidence and severity of emotional problems in children with integration, learning, behavioural problems etc., who often face a multitude of problems. It is certified that often the emotional problems of these people are considered as part of the main diagnosis and are not considered symptoms that require special attention, although the psychological services have diversified, they are still inadequate. In addition to this, the social factors exposed to people from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as social rejection or negative attitudes at community level, have a negative impact on personal relationships and attachment, which maintain the occurrence of problems that are often expressed through behaviour. Therefore, the availability of evaluation and intervention in the field of mental health for these people is a necessity in order to be able to promote the healthy lifestyle that supports mental health.

3. Research Questions/Aims of the research

The identification and evaluation of the difficulties of school adaptation of the students with educational risk represented the first step in diagnosing the situation at the level of schools in disadvantaged areas. The intervention process / training program had as a general objective the continuous training of teachers from underprivileged educational environments regarding psycho-pedagogical counselling, and the motivation and support of the students with educational risk to carry out the inclusion process as well as the design, organization and evaluation of some programs / plans of personalized intervention for psycho-pedagogical support of students experiencing difficulties in school adaptation.

During the training program, the aim was to integrate new approaches, activities and motivational tools in the fields of psycho-pedagogical counselling, quality educational process, with the aim of ensuring equal opportunities, the right to education for all students. The program proposes innovative techniques aimed at supporting schools and teachers in identifying the needs for adaptation and prevention of school failure and dropout and the knowledge of inclusive practices for disadvantaged students and schools.

4. Research Methods

This study is part of a complex investigative approach that was based on the research-action method, previously analysing educational environments in schools and selecting for attending the training program, only the schools at educational risk. This type of research allowed the analysis of the inclusive or integrated education process; the scientific and formative methods used were adapted according to the type and the problem in school. The main indicators for analysing the problematic situations reported at the selected schools were: the duration of the behavioural deviations; frequency; consequences at group level - group contamination; the consequences in the plan of the rational evolution of the respective students. We used the survey method based on a questionnaire, focus-group, which involved a qualitative analysis regarding the diversity of counselling experiences and efficient integration of students at educational risk.

The batch of research participants was made up of 120 teachers from five schools in Galati and Galati County. The students were stimulated to apply the information of the program, in order to use efficiently the

methods and techniques of knowledge, counselling and integration of these students in order to increase the inclusion rate of the education system and to reduce the phenomenon of early school leaving. The training course also integrated the teaching experience of the attendees and provides strategies that involve them actively-participating. The following training strategies were used in the training activities: interactive presentations, debate, heuristic conversation, explanation-argumentation, case study, problematization, exercises for designing and conducting an educational research, individual study.

5. Findings

The training program has contributed to the optimization of the education system from the perspective of improving the quality of the teaching process and the inclusion of students with educational risk and with ESC at all levels of schooling. All participating teachers applied the techniques of effective learning and differentiated education of students with educational risk. There has been an exponential increase in the interest and responsibility of the teachers regarding the optimization of the teaching process in school institutions from disadvantaged environments.

Another aspect with the same aim was to increase the degree of applying psycho-pedagogical counselling efficiently, adapted according to the level of the school, the school phenomena loaded with conflicts and relational situations that are difficult to control especially among students. The most common ones were from the category of insults, beatings, thefts, infiltration into delinquent groups. The design and implementation of the counselling / psychotherapeutic program focused on the child and family, where it exists, included psychotherapeutic techniques, strategies of education and social integration, personal and group optimization programs, so as to optimize the child's functionality and the appropriate integration in all interaction media. Throughout the implementation period, a dynamic, permanent evaluation of the individualized / personalized intervention plan was pursued on all dimensions of children's personality, thus ensuring an adaptation to the increased environment, which ultimately determines the social and educational integration.

The diversity of these actions has led to a detailed diagnosis process of the phenomena, to their analysis and elucidation. The causes were explored multi-characteristically. All the aspects were analysed and then were developed personalized intervention plans for the students with educational

risk as well as psycho-pedagogical measures of improvement, prevention and reintegration in the school environment.

Another result was the increase of the institutional capacity of the schools from underprivileged areas in providing an adequate learning environment and innovative and motivational pedagogical practices.

On the one hand, the personalized approach of these children aimed to reduce the negative impact of some factors related to the primary socialization in the family (lack of support from parents, involvement in domestic activities to the detriment of school involvement, lack of conditions necessary for family study, lack of a minimum cultural / linguistic baggage within the family, etc.) and, on the other hand, the prevention or diminution of negative interventions of some factors related to schooling experience (adaptation to the school timetable and to the demands of the school curriculum, inclusion in the collective, etc.).

The data collected and analysed can help school in several directions:

- acknowledgement of the situation in their own school compared to other schools in areas closer or farther from the county;
- the possibility to aim the achievement of some objectives in the development plan of the school and to be able to implement, in time, corrective measures; the possibility of reporting the situation to various decision forums, at any time during the school year;
- the possibility to get to know better the students and their families, with a view to a better collaboration and an educational approach adapted to their specifics.

There are at least four general areas in which activities to combat and prevent educational risk situations can be supported by the statistical data obtained using the information collected at the end of the semester / year:

- making a display regarding the state of fact in the field of participation in education at the level of its own educational unit; a diagnosis based on quantitative data eliminates subjective assessments regarding the incidence of absenteeism and abandonment phenomena;
- performing comparative analyses of the situation registered in the own school with those registered in the other educational units in the county / at national level;
- elaboration of forecasts regarding the future evolutions of the monitored risk and abandonment phenomena, as well as the frequency with which certain causes are manifested; these forecasts can be developed based on data series over several school years (3 to 5 years or more);
- evaluation of the impact of the interventions initiated by the school in order to reduce the phenomena of school risk through the use of targets and quantifiable results.

6. Discussions

Starting from the basic objective of inclusive education at the level of the educational unit, the teachers as well as the auxiliary staff participate in the development of programs aimed at increasing the participation, adaptation and inclusion of students in the school environment by monitoring the desirable behaviours, the rate of school absenteeism, by providing assistance, elaboration and implementation of the action plan, etc. All these actions are carried out in order to increase the degree of prevention, counselling and integration, in order to relate to the individual needs of each child, in order to harmonize the educational climate, to support the students and to ensure equal opportunities for education.

Through this monitoring process, the school can see which measures work and give the expected results and decide what needs to be changed so that the intervention will lead to the desired results.

The reduction of risk behaviours in the school environment has difficulties due to the diversity and complex causality of the students with educational risk, due to the complex school-family-community connection, the particularities of the education system, etc.

7. Conclusions

In the school context, the teachers are the ones who interact mostly with the students and play a decisive role in reducing, preventing, supporting and motivating the students with behavioural and emotional difficulties. Although socio-cultural influences place their mark on school delinquency, the influence of teachers and educational practices can contribute to the prevention and remediation of students' dysfunctional behaviours.

Synthesizing the role of the teacher in reducing educational risk situations and behaviours, we emphasize the importance of correctly interpreting the situations at risk and the ability of teachers to value students, to identify their needs and requirements, and take into account the students' perspective on the situation. In addition, great importance must be given to the affective climate in the classroom, to encourage students to express their emotions, etc. in order to combat boredom, anxiety, frustration, indiscipline, etc. The researchers argue that the main ways of preventing, supporting and motivating students with deficiencies stem from the teacher's ability to listen to the student and to understand their needs, to teach them the specific skills to social maturity, to develop strategies coping with specific situations.

The combination of techniques and strategies aims to make students with low self-esteem from disadvantaged backgrounds feel recognized, important and competent, etc. Therefore, in order to enhance the students and to strengthen their self-esteem it is recommended [4] that the teacher follow the following rules: feedback, specific, precise, sincere; commenting on the action, the behaviour and not the personality of the child, avoiding value judgments; use of body language. The psychological mechanism by which valorisation contributes to the development of the student's abilities to solve problems can be described as follows: by acquiring a strong self-esteem, the student will have more confidence in his abilities and will approach more problems, situations, mobilizing to solve them. Frequently rewarded for his positive behaviour, the student gradually becomes independent, autonomous, and efficient.

The educational counselling is not only limited to the support, help and guidance of the people involved in the educational activities, instructive-formative, but it has a much wider scope, including all the educational-formative activities that the human being goes through both in the contexts of the specialized institutions, as well as in informal contexts, one's own experiences, daily life, etc. All of these are meant to facilitate the efficient and sustainable learning necessary to solve multiple and diverse problems. The activities specific to each type of counselling (psycho-pedagogical counselling, psychotherapy, psycho-pedagogical assistance activities) suppose, and it is desirable to conclude with the learning of the human resource in the educational and social system of new attitudes and behaviours, with pronounced adaptive and innovative-creative valences.

Psycho-pedagogical counselling is effective in disadvantaged environments because it insists on education and training, which determines the development of the personality of the human factor according to its psycho-individual characteristics. This type of counselling combines the psychological aspects with the pedagogical / educational ones in a unitary, coherent and consistent vision, proposing, depending on the problems of the assisted one, a practical-applicative approach of support, help, guidance etc. so that individuals learn to practice a healthy lifestyle, solve problems of life adequately and efficiently, to obtain optimal psychological comfort, to achieve personally, socially, professionally, to live a meaningful and satisfying life personal fulfilment.

Thus, the essential goals of psycho-pedagogical counselling have as content the optimal functionality and development of the person, the promotion of general health and well-being, effective and sustainable learning, career orientation, personal life.

In the educational environment the client of the psycho-pedagogical counsellor can be a person or a group of people who need support, help and guidance in order to capitalize on their potentials and availability, to correct and learn new ways to function optimally, to work it adapted effectively to demands, to different environments, thus obtaining psychological comfort and a general well-being.

Regarding the low motivation for learning, its compensation is based on promoting to students the feelings of control and power, which will help them to develop decision-making skills, to discover the causes of failure, so that instead of external self-blame or attribution, students get to see that their own efforts influence their results. It is important to develop strategies of coping with difficulties and strategies of constructive response to problems and failure.

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