

The Role of School-Family Partnership in Implementing Inclusive Education in Romania

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Abstract. Inclusive education plays an important part in the context of current Romanian education. Inclusive education means access to education for all children, irrespective of their characteristics, by observing and applying a model of environmental education, according to which every child has the right to be brought up within his own family and to attend the school that is best suited to his needs. To achieve this goal, all educational factors should be involved, so that effective cooperation between them might provide an appropriate educational environment. Inclusive education aims to continuously adapt education to the special learning requirements of children. Inclusive education is achieved by removing barriers to learning and ensuring attendance of all children vulnerable to exclusion and marginalization, through a strategic approach designed to meet the learning requirements of all children. A first requirement of inclusive education is to decrease and even to eliminate exclusion of children from the educational system, at least at the level of elementary education. Inclusive education based schools provide basic, accessible, high quality education meant for all children, whose purpose is to turn them into pupils and provide them with basic skills and abilities (Mara, 2009).

Keywords: inclusive education, school-family partnership, quality, basic skills, barriers

INTRODUCTION

In educational partnerships, teachers and members of school boards are responsible for providing favorable conditions for the development and education of children. Inclusive schools must recognize the individuality of each participant in the educational act and create an environment where pupils feel valued and integrated (Vrășmaș, 2001).

Parents have the responsibility to support the activity of schools, to understand the importance of education in the training and development of children, and the significance of activities that contribute to the development of skills and of pupils' aspirations to success.

Communities, including groups of parents working together, should create learning opportunities and organise events and programs that support, promote, and reward pupils' progress, creativity, contributions, performance, and excellence. Communities have the responsibility to create familiar contexts, to come up with events meant to encourage children as much as possible. The concept of “community school” refers to a place that provides programs and services for pupils, families and community members. Working in partnership should imply trust and mutual respect between partners, a constant exchange of information, sharing the same goals and strategies, as well as rights and responsibilities commonly agreed upon. The attitude of the members of the school board towards the involvement of families and community members is critical to such a partnership, this attitude often being the key element that determines the success or failure of such partnership programs. Headmasters should be able to create a type of work environment in which teachers and school staff perceive parents as full partners (Agabrian, 2005).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is meant to be mainly a type of qualitative research. The data that we intended to obtain refer to the way the parent community supports the inclusion of children with special education needs in the mainstream school system. The questionnaire that we developed was distributed to parents with children in elementary school and high school.

1. Place of research, characteristics of the batch

The questionnaire was distributed in three schools in Sibiu, Elementary School number 8, with classes I-VIII, Elementary School number 25, with classes I-VIII, and Terezianum Food Industry Technical College.

The batch to which the questionnaire was applied consisted of 55 teaching staff, both primary school teachers and high school teachers.

2. Premises and objectives

It is particularly important in the current Romanian context to foster educational partnerships meant to support activities aimed at educating and training the younger generation. The notion of “educational community” is a model of organization inspired by other fields (such as religious community, professional communities, parent community). This concept defines a model of non-formal organization of extra-school factors at local and regional level involved in supporting educational activities designed and conducted within the school.

General premise: *The educational community is a stabilizing factor meant to support the activity of teachers in the process of educational inclusion of children with SEN in the mainstream school system. The community supplements this activity by supporting school initiatives.*

Objectives:

- *stimulating teachers’ motivation to encourage parental involvement in the educational inclusion of children with SEN within mainstream education;*
- *identifying the level of parent community involvement in school matters;*
- *identifying the degree to which teachers involve parents in the education act;*
- *providing arguments for the need of school- parent community cooperation.*

3. Organization of the study, methods employed

The method employed was a questionnaire applied to all members of the batch, with questions aimed at the topic of parent community involvement in the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream education. Mention should be made of the fact that respondents were both male and female, aged 20 to 67.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first question of the questionnaire referred to the existence of a strong community tradition in Romania related to the education of young people. This item was meant to establish whether teachers are aware of the existence of such a tradition in our country nowadays. It was a closed-ended response format: yes, no, I do not know. Thus 19 respondents said that there is a community tradition in education in Romania today, 28 gave negative answers and 7 did not express an opinion on the matter.

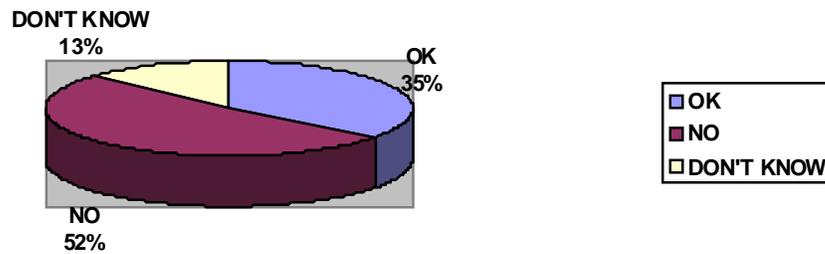


Fig. 1. Strong community tradition related to the education of young peoples

The figure 1 shows that 52% percent of the teachers think that our country has no community tradition of educating the young. The next graph shows a differentiation by profession, primary school teachers and secondary school teachers (Fig. 2):

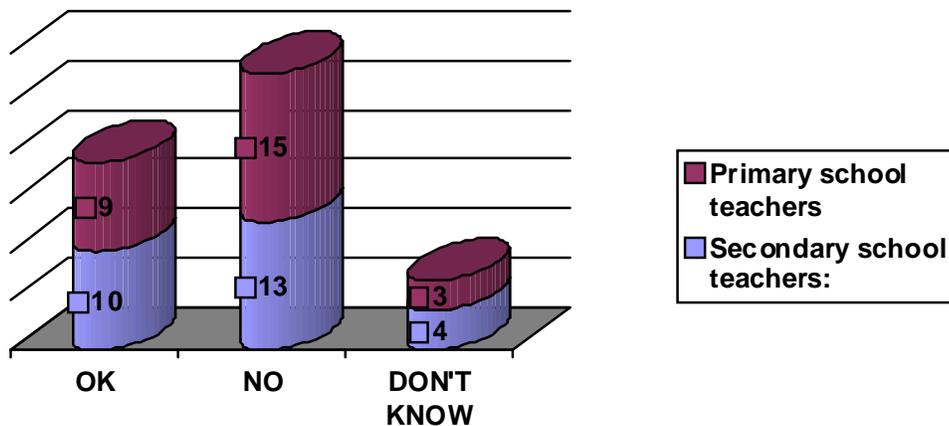


Fig. 2. The primary school teachers and secondary school teachers's opinion regarding a strong community tradition related to the education of young

According to the figure, 30%, of the primary teachers answered “yes “, 48% “no”, and 11% “I do not know”, while 37%, of the secondary school teachers agreed that Romania has a community tradition, 58% disagreed, and 15% answered “I do not know”.

A second question referred to the direct involvement of the parent community in educational activities. The response scale included four options, ranging from “never” to “very often”. It was found that 27 teachers involved the parent community in school activities “rarely”, 11 teachers “often”, 5 teachers “very often”, and 11 teachers “never”. Here is the graphic representation, as in the figure 3:

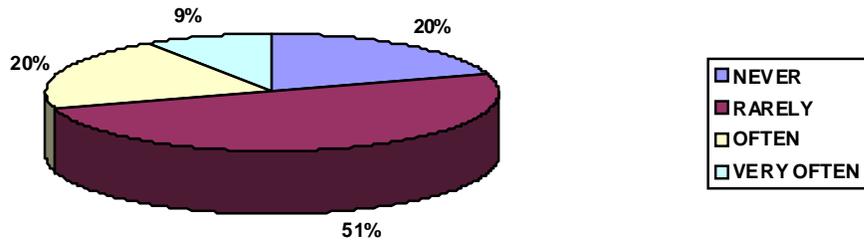


Fig. 3. Involvement of the parent community in educational activities

It was found that over half of the batch had only rarely organized activities in which they involved the community, and only 9% of the respondents had no such activity. There was a distinction between primary school teachers and secondary school teachers in those primary school teachers were found to organize such activities more frequently than secondary school teachers, which mean that parental involvement in the educational act is higher at primary school level than at secondary or high school level. In terms of difficulties experienced during their career from the local community, it was found that respondents only experienced such difficulties to a small extent or occasionally (Fig.4.)

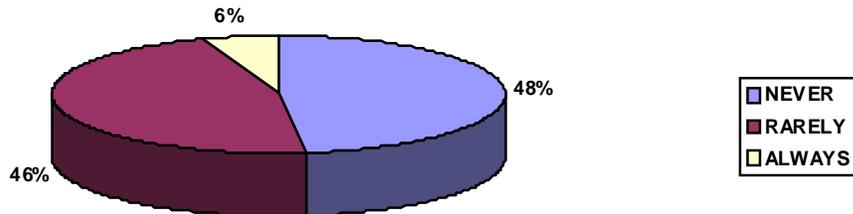


Fig. 4. Teacher's opinion regarding the difficulties experienced during their career from the local community

Moreover, most teachers view the community as an institution or as a factor meant to convey cultural values. The item concerning the idea of community as an institution meant to convey cultural values, with the answers "yes", "no", "I do not know", is presented in the following (Fig.5.):

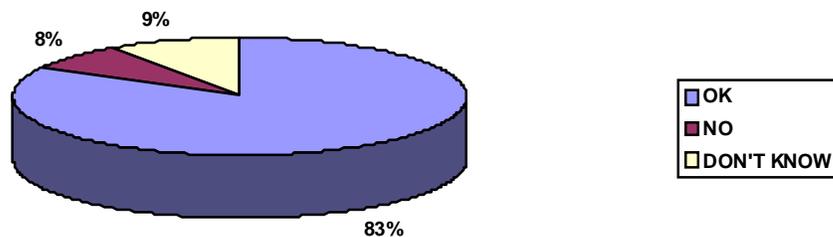


Fig.5. Community as an institution meant to convey cultural values

Teachers believe it is beneficial for students' parents to participate in some of the schools' educational activities. Thus 52 of the respondents answered "yes", only one answered "no", and two did not know. This can be expressed perceptually as in the following (Fig. 6):

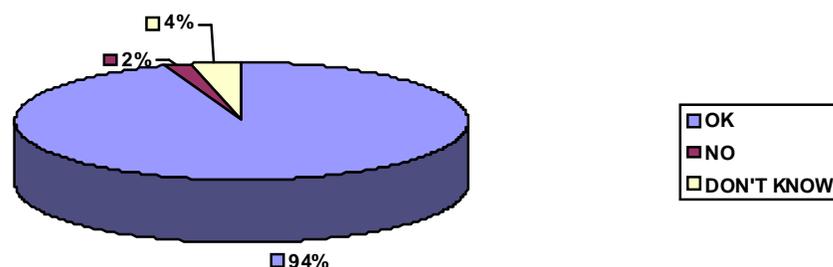


Fig. 6. Benefit for students' parents to participate in some of the schools' educational activities

The main activities in which teachers believe that parents could have a beneficial effect on the quality of education and on the inclusion of children with SEN are:

- classes parents can sit in for;
- contests possibly sponsored by parents;
- activities of decorating and equipping the school;
- school festivals and sports activities;
- meetings with physicians, psychologists and other professionals;
- literary and artistic circles;
- lectures for parents and students;
- discussions on various critical topics: the future profession, sex education, the student's skills;
- parents sharing their professional experience with the children;
- providing information on juvenile delinquency, alcohol and drug consumption among teenagers;
- classes taught by parents or by colleagues in the institutions in which they work.

When asked "Have you participated in activities that allowed your students to share their community school experience with students from other cities?", the majority of teachers answered they had never had such experience in the figure 7:

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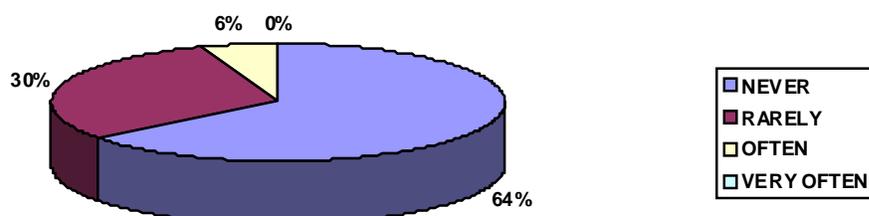


Fig. 7. Participation in activities with students form other cities

However respondents believe that such activities are incentives in children’s education. (Fig. 8). In terms of viewing the community as either a “partner” or a “deterrent” in the educational inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream education, respondents believe that the community is a partner, as in figure 9:

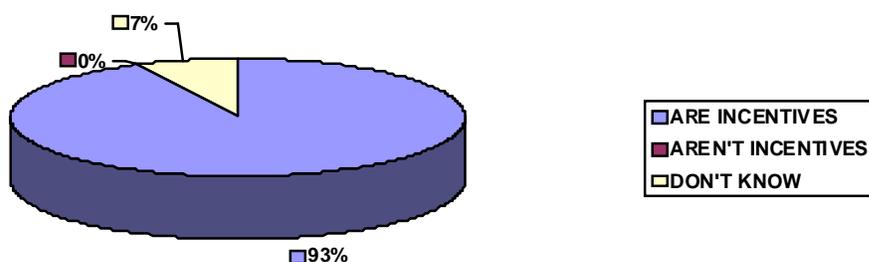


Fig. 8. Stimulating role of activities to the students form other cities

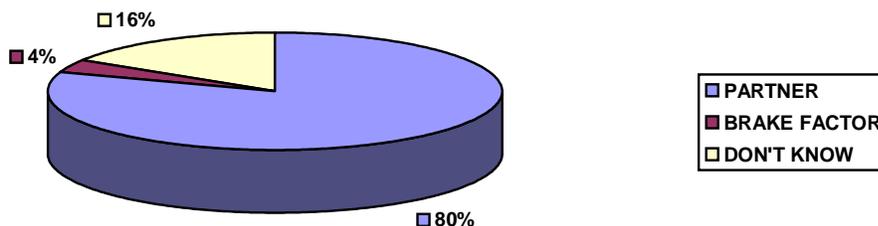


Fig. 9. Teacher’ opinion about the status of community

It may be noted that all teachers are willing to encourage their pupils with SEN to participate in extracurricular activities with their class mates, and most of the teachers are aware of the conditions in which these students live.

With regard to the way parent communities and local communities support inclusive education measures, the following activities were mentioned:

- artistic and sports activities;
- administrative activities;
- moral educational activities;
- economic educational activities.

As regards teachers’s views on pupils with SEN achieving the best results in school due to a good school-community cooperation, 98% of them agreed and 2% answered they did not know.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the survey showed that the notion of “educational community” is a key factor in the educational activity. However, even if teachers see the school- parent

community cooperation essential for the educational activity, they argue that this cooperation is not actually felt in all the activities they perform; it usually just complements what is done in school.

The community, to the extent it is present in educational activities, is seen as a “partner”, an active and beneficial supporter of many educational activities. Teachers also agree that they have been supported by the parent community not only in the educational inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream education, but also in all the other activities performed in educational institutions.

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