

ADVANCING EDUCATIONAL INCLUSION AND QUALITY IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE

Country context desk research for Romania

The issue of parents' implication in school's life today in Romania looks like a battle filed. School accuse parents of low or no interest for their children education, and parents accuse school of decreasing educational quality, meaning untrained or poor trained teachers, irrelevant textbooks information and curriculum content, low funding of schools from the Ministry, permanent reforms and changes in the evaluation system and teaching.

At the end of 2007, the Ministry of Education proposed a block of new education laws to be subject to public consultations: Undergraduate Education Law, Higher Education Law, and Teacher's Statutes. After the winter holidays, in January 2008, the legislative drafts were subject to public consultations which took place in schools. Each county inspectorate or the Bucharest inspectorate was in charge of organizing these consultations with the school principle and of inviting teachers, parents, students and other local community members to take part. The participants' remarks and comments were brought together and sent to the ministerial department responsible for bill drafting.

One of the main changes that the new law wants to make is to continue the decentralization process of the education system by granting more decision-making autonomy to schools. This means that school principles would be appointed by the Local Council based on the proposals made by the school's Council of Administration, that the Trustees would be elected based on a new rule, the school principle would be separated from the Council of Administration (the principle will no longer be a member in the CA), that schools would be granted more human resources decision-making autonomy and some financial autonomy (but not full financial autonomy).

Education Ministry initiated in the last half of year some national programs of parents and community implication in school's life.

On 28th of November 2008, it was launch the national public debate on teachers' performance evaluation. The proposed method is that every teacher should be evaluated on his/her performance in the classroom. How the grades increases or decreases, on current evaluations, on national evaluation or on initial tests, compared with current evaluation and with final evaluations.

Teachers are supposed to be evaluated by administration school' council, teachers' council, parents' council, pupils, and local community.

The fact is that the ministry is trying to decentralize the educational system, and this implies a strong partnership with stakeholders, meaning community, parents and pupils. There will not be a successful operation if the supposed partners will not participate and will not take there share in the partnership contract.

Lately, shy steps are made by introducing the psychological counselor which has to give psychological counseling not only to pupils, all ages in school, but to their parents too (or tutors). Unfortunately, parents / tutors are coming to school only to observe the disaster. Only when the child has done something wrong or when grades are too low or when absenteeism stops the child to pass into the next year.

On the last European report, 19% of the children abandon school, placing Romania on the third position, after Malta and Portugal. Reasons that conduct to this disturbing fact are: low incomes of the families, lack of transportation in rural areas, teachers and students altogether, parents that encourage children to work instead to go to school, especially to rural areas, parents that leave their children in relatives' care and go to work abroad, teacher' inappropriate behavior or low implication in school's life.

Now is initiated a national program that encourages parents to engage and to propose extracurricular activities. It is intended that parents' council have an active role in managing the school's activity, along with local community.

Encouragement of proactive and social behavior of the parents is the general aim of national reform decentralization plan, through re-integration of social risk children in school's life, relying on total support of local community and school's management.

Parents' Councils will have a specific activity, to establish which are career opportunities in the community in which the school is an organic part.

Initiatives and projects

One of the projects concerning parents' involvement was implemented in rural areas like Castelu, from Constanta County. The project title was Valuing and Forming Local Traditions. It was financed by World Bank through Program for rural education, for nine months of implementation. The target group was represented by parents, pupils from Agricultural High school and young people from Castelu, Constanta County.

Presence of parents in target group was justified by the needs discovered by the preliminary analysis. They are the owners of food local networks, they need to know and to apply EurepGap standards of food preparation, their presence is essential for their experience in food preparation, but they need to know also advertising methods for promoting traditional products.

The number of participants of the activities was 300 people, total number of beneficiaries was 450 people, and number of informed peoples about the project was of 700.

The general aim was diversification of educational offer through valorization of local potential. Specific objectives were: collecting of traditional food recipes, adapting the recepies to EurepGap standards, elaborating of educational support materials for diversification of school curriculum, practical abilities developing for obtaining quality traditional food products, preparing traditional food products in school's own laboratory, developing of entrepreneurial abilities for target group.

Results of the project were: improving entrepreneurial abilities, communication skills and team work of target group, 150 traditional food recepies collected, about 100 food products prepared in high school food laboratory, about 300 visitors to the food exhibition organized at the end of the project, 10% growth of actively parents implicated in school's life, promoting materials for the high school activity.

In another project of high school from Castelu (*Co-evolution through Partnership*), coordinating by School Inspectorate of Constanta County, the target group was a group of 25 children and their parents. The project was implemented from 2002 and 2006. Parents were

involved in workshops, interactive seminars, debates, and demonstration hours of scholar group counseling, individual counseling for parents.

Results of this project were: improved behavior of target group, modifications in organizational culture and family climate, and correlations between curriculum and performance indicators, theoretical knowledge, operational abilities, and changes in attitudes related to school partnership.

The impact of the project in the community was as follows: 15% growth of parents number that are actively involved in school's life, 25% growth of communication efficiency between pupils and their parents, and among pupils, 30% growth of communication efficiency between parents with teachers, school's psychological counselor and class' dirigine (a teacher which is responsible for one class).

One project, which is now in process, is *School and Community*, financed by Soros Foundation Romania, from January 2008 and June 2009. The purpose of this initiative is to develop a pilot model of school' involvement into the community, providing services for the children that are in risk situations, after classes. It had been chosen three migrants communities, three villages, where most of the parents are abroad to work, Prejmer, Brasov County, Marginea, Suceava County and Glimboca, Caras-Severin County.

The numbers of the children whose parents are abroad and are involved in the project are: 250 children in Marginea, 50 children in Glimboca and 30 in Prejmer community. In this group, especially in Prejmer, are included roma children, who benefit of a community facilitator from the roma local community. Activities that have place in the three communities are Parents school (once a month, and having the theme *Child socialization in the family*. It's purpose is to build an initiative local group formed by the parents that had stayed home, tutors and other parents interested in this activity), Tolerance Week (once a month, every time with a different specific problem about tolerance), *Autumn Festival*, *Reading Seminar* and *Art, Traditions and Spirituality* (a great accent is put on interethnic and intercultural dialogue).

Main objectives of the project are involvement and motivation of pupils that are in risk situations to spend their free time doing useful activities, socialization and personality development, pupils' involvement in school's life for a proper integration in the social group

of the school, attracting pupils that are in risk situations in extracurricular and creative activities for the purpose of minimizing negative effects of the fact that they are, most of the time, without supervision.

Short and long term results: a package of services for the children whose parents are abroad to work, national level strategy for diminish negative effects of parents migration. Concrete changes that implementation of the project will have are: monitoring of the children whose parents are abroad, strengthen the relationship between the school and social assistance, diminished negative psychological effects and deviant behavior through psychological counseling.

This project has a complementary work in Action Research Design proposed by Romanian team in this present initiative, Advancing Educational Inclusion and Quality in South-East Europe, named News from Home. It came by adding the component of long distance communication with parents that are away. Using regular mail, e-mail and SMS messages, parents receive twice a month, short narrative reports concerning scholar activity and general wellbeing of their children.

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