

Advancing Educational Inclusion and Quality in SEE

Focus Group Report

MOLDOVA

The Focus Group Interviews took place on February, the 6th and the 7th at the Educational Center PRO DIDACTICA.

The project Target-Group represents school principals (I-IX forms). There were two groups of principals. In the first day, 10 principals from Chisinau were invited, from which 8 were present. In the second day, 9 principals were invited, but from other regions: Anenii Noi, Straseni and Ialoveni and also there were present 8 participants.

In each day, the interview lasted for 2 hours.

We followed the structure that was given to us, trying to ask questions related to the main parts of the interview.

There were no major differences and peculiarities among principals. Most of them were opened to discussions, talking more than was required and we have to mention the fact that due to the absence of some authorities, they could talk freely and without any communication barriers and obstacles.

It was a very useful and interesting activity both for us and for the school principals. It wasn't easy to monitor the discussion and to preserve the initial ideas. Most of the participants have a work experience of more than 10 years and they know very well the current school problems.

The basic and the most relevant ideas are reflected in the below conclusions.

Basic conclusions:

1. Due to the transition period that our society is facing today and to the socio-economic context, the parents' material and financial support represents an important and an essential contribution to the school's survival. In urban schools the parents' contribution is higher than in rural institutions. In most of the Moldovan schools there are registered Association of Parents, with separate accounting. Even if these are public schools, the state contribution is insufficient.
2. The percentage of the parents' active involvement in the scholar activities represents around 20-30%. The most active parents are considered to be teachers, doctors and some other intellectuals. Due to the fact that parents work in more than one working place, they do not have time to participate in their children education.
3. Until now, there was a perception that it has to be a strong partnership between families and schools. Nowadays, due to the high migration rate, around one quarter of our population is working abroad and over 100 thousand children are left without their parents with their grandparents or other relatives. Due to this fact, the level of parents' involvement has decreased a lot and school is obliged to replace the family obligations and responsibilities.
4. There is also a tendency from parents to participate only financially, and less in improving the educational process, for example, improving the curricular methodological framework.
5. Principals did not mention any major differences in integrating the parents of minorities or of children with special educational needs in the educational process, except the fact that parents from the last mentioned category try to follow their own needs.
6. In the rural schools, many parents usually think that the school has to take the responsibility to take care of their children. There is even no motivation for them to be involved. Thus, the school takes the responsibility to participate to the parents' education too.
7. Even if parents try to do their best to financially support it, the school still has big problems related to assuring the qualitative, well-functioning of the educational process.

8. The national educational policy, mainly “the state is far away from us”. At the theoretical level, the curricular reform succeeded from more than 15 years, but at the implementation level, there are serious gaps and problems. The labor market is not prepared to accept the school outcome.
9. The aging process among teachers is also a major problem in Moldovan schools. There are few young teachers that choose to make a professional career in this domain due to weak remuneration and to lack of some basic living and working conditions, especially in rural areas. This affects the teaching quality and the contents’ adjustments to the present parents and children requirements, expectations and needs.
10. In primary education, the pupil’s success is at a higher level than at the other educational levels. There is a stronger relationship between parents and teachers. In the superior education, the level of parents’ participation decreases.
11. During the last 4 years, the cooperation level between school and community has increased. Due to some foreign projects, in which this cooperation was compulsory, as a result, both parts had something to gain. *“School without community cannot exist. This partnership is the most optimal way to follow. The local public authorities, at the national level, cannot financially contribute to a well organization educational process”*. As a result, through the community projects, the level of parents’ participation has increased.

How do you feel about the way things are going in the schools these days?

What are your reasons for feeling this way? Who or what is responsible for that?

- In my opinion, the attitude towards the educational curriculum is a positive one. Now, the focus is more on the child’s abilities, skills and capacities. I think, this direction will make us closer to the European standards. Of course there are a lot of factors in our country that do not motivate the educational actors to efficiently work, and this is a serious problem. The educational process should be more democratic.

There is a need for a group of experts that would promote the same standards in general education. There are problems related to the fact that many pupils, after graduating, do not know what to do further and not all of them know how to face the rough world that we are living in.

I think that the state is far away from us. Children, youth have to know their responsibilities, especially civic ones. They have to know the legislation, to care about our country, to be more participative. Thus, it is wrong to blame only our Government for the problems that exist.

- I, as a principle, do not agree what is going on nowadays in schools. The activities in schools are too theoretical, from my point of view. And theoretically, pupils are prepared, but when it comes to practice, the problem appears. Pupils need other things; there is a necessity for other type of education. In my opinion, we are all to blame for this, the Ministry of Education, teachers, parents. However, this system is being dictated and imposed to us by higher authorities.

The level of home tasks is very high. There is a need for a fundamental reform in this domain.

We have to know also what pupils and parents think about this.

It’s a paradox in our country: students choose economics and law, when in our country there is very hard to say that laws exist and that the level of economy is very low.

- There is a positive and a negative aspect of the current situation. The positive one is that there still exists the teacher’s enthusiasm, of course, not in all of the cases. Of course, it is a small number of teachers that have this enthusiasm, but still... The negative part is that teachers do not have the necessary motivation to efficiently work. In fact, there is a total lack of this motivation.

- I could compare the school with a colony of bees. Everything depends on the favorable environment and on the resources available. There are favorable days and vice versa. It’s not a short-term success, but a long-term one.

- There is a need for additional efforts in order to change parent’s conception and mentality. They want and require big marks for their children, but they do not think at a long-term perspective.

- Even there were better days, what matters is that we can mobilize and establish our objectives, attracting decision-factors.

- Although we are activating in public institutions, many children do not understand that knowledge represents a basis for their life and they just abandon the studies. Of course there are children that appreciate our work and the educational process in general. The problem is that we have to find the most efficient way to motivate the others.

- School is the most important thing in a teacher's life. Lately, there is a concern related to the fact that the primary educational level could disappear. It is very hard for us, but parents are helping us a lot.

- Regarding the teachers' professional development, they want to attend different alternative courses at the „Step by Step” program, or at the Pro Didactica, but not were they are being sent by the official authorities, because this system continuous to be centralized. Even if they go, they are not interested and are not motivated well enough to successfully participate to these activities.

What has changed for the better for your school in the last few years?

Who or what is responsible for that?

- In our lyceum, the technical-material and the didactic basis has changed, due to some massive projects. This fact contributed to the process of changing people's mentality in villages.

- It is about administrating the institutional budget. We are financed from the Regional Council budget. There is a network of credits. The local public authorities have nothing to do with this. The financial activity is administered by us.

- The local public authorities have contributed to the process of reconstruction of our primary school, to some repairs etc.

- We regret that we didn't accept from the beginning the proposal to administrate the budget alone. Now, we have made these changes. Now, everything depends on the person that is in charge. We have some good results in this matter because of the school-community-Parents Associations partnership.

- There are advantages and disadvantages for the regional budget. Everything depends on the people that are in charge. The best way for efficiency is that the principle should administrate everything, but the accounting and educational activities should not be his/her responsibility.

What has changed for the worse for your school in the last few years?

Who or what is responsible for that?

- The basic problem is the professional capacities and skills of our teachers, their work motivation due to low level of salaries and due to the fact that, especially in rural schools, teachers have also other work to do (agricultural work, house-keeping etc.).

- A problem is the personnel continuous fluctuations and lack of the necessary didactic staff. For example, pupils and parents require English courses, or informatics, and because of the lack of a qualified didactic staff, this is not quite possible.

- A big problem is the process of brain-drain, also the fact that many students choose the pedagogical universities only because they do not afford others.

- Lack of the children support from their parents due to their absence.

- Pupils are not interested in studying. The reason for this is the chaos from our society. It is very hard to convince parents to participate to the school's activities.

- Our didactic staff is not well-enough prepared to activate as the persons that will develop children's skills and competences. Because of the salaries, weak motivation, teachers work for a small period and leave.

- Other problems that we are facing today are little remuneration of didactic personnel, lack of the necessary equipment in schools, lack of some extracurricular activities for children (of course, not in every institution they exist).

What are the main problems your school is facing today?

What is currently the most pressing problem for the school?

- What bothers me is that the state is not oriented towards us. We do not receive any help from the state. For example, we do not have the necessary equipment for the classes of informatics. We do not have computers, and the state does not care. Also, we bought a boiler, with the parents' help. We cannot afford to have all the time hot water – I mean these are some essential conditions that are very hard for us to ensure.

- If all the parents go abroad, than who remains? In this way, children do not want to remain in this country either. Children understand even now that the state does almost nothing to support them.

- A problem is our classrooms. We do not have the necessary equipment. That is also a disadvantage, because instead of practicing some issues, pupils get only theoretical knowledge. There is no physical adequate preparation either. Parents get different certificates for their children for not attending the classes and not getting bad marks.

- The level of motivation among pupils is related to teacher's attitude. Due to the financial ground / position of teachers, children do not see them as the authority.

- There is an insufficient psychological state among children. Also, little practice.

- Another problem is related to children health. Many of them suffer from some chronicle diseases. There are no systematic checks and parents do not assume this responsibility. Most of these diseases come from bad alimentation.

- There are no medical and psychological employees in many educational institutions.

- We do not have to blame pupils for the fact that they do not have good results at every subject. Someone is good at something, another – at something else. Thus, the most corrupt educational stage is the final evaluation in schools and lyceums.

- There are many old teachers, for our institution, it is a problem, related to the discrepancies between ages.

- The most conservative jobs are the one of a teacher and doctor.

- Teachers that have a relevant work experience are aware of the fact that reforms are necessary. They try to use different new methods and techniques. The young personnel do not know what to do, and it becomes a serious problem.

- There are teachers that are very well prepared theoretically, but when it comes to practice, the fail. There is a need for some didactic methodological ground among teachers.

- Regarding the fact that many children There is a need for a group of experts that would promote the same standards in general education. There are problems related to the fact that many pupils, after graduating, do not know what to do further and not all of them know how to face the rough world that we are living in.

How about reforms of education in our country?

What is their main idea, purpose?

- Firstly, after the reforms made, we obtained the following outcomes: the opportunity to professionally develop the rural teachers due to the programs in which we are involved. Being organized by the Soros Foundation, by Pro Didactica, these programs had an essential role in my activity. We had a lot of success at different educational techniques and methods. Additionally, there is a collaboration perspective in this domain.

- I don't think that the present situation can be called a reform, there are no fixed evaluation standards. Everything is relative. Marks / grades should be cancelled, because they affect pupils psychologically.

- Positive facts: the education became alternative. Then the curricular reform, there are new workbooks, new programs and is very complicated to adapt. The reforms were successful, but because of the lack of financial support, our didactic staff was not prepared to these changes. There was a need for some professional development courses. These courses would have improved the situation. There is a tendency among students to choose Law or Economy. My question is: where is the motivation to go to the Pedagogical University? This is their last solution.

- In my opinion, our curriculum is flexible. It allows teachers to choose the contents. What is important is that the necessary objectives have to be accomplished. Teaching methods are also important, because the participative way is very successful.

- This affects negatively many children. The teacher knows his/her objectives, but the pupil is confused. From the big amount of information, the pupil doesn't know how to choose / select only the essential contents. Thus, pupils do not manage to cover all the materials and all the objects.

- A very big problem is the pupils have too many tasks; they lose their interest in studying.

What about the financial part? What are the problems? Who is the best advocate for the reforms? The Ministry?

- The financial problems are still very important for Moldova. We are grateful to parents that support us financially.

- The best advocate for the reform is the Ministry. It came with the initiative and we implemented them. During the last 10-15 years, both, the contents and the methodology have changed a lot.

- It is good that many NGOs supported some relevant reform ideas, like for example the Educational Center PRO DIDACTICA.

- In May, there were planned some meditation hours, but because of the lack of financial resources, this project failed (there were no resources to remunerate teachers). In 1995, there was a conference in which I proposed to finance the special schools by other private schools. Unfortunately, I wasn't heard. The same for other initiatives. They were only published, but, no one took them into consideration.

General answers regarding the participation, especially the parents' participation:

- There has to be a strong collaboration between all the educational actors.

- Community is mostly involved in implementing different projects.

- We have only one active group of parents. Others do not participate, even if they are asked to.

- Approximately 25% of parents are active. In my opinion, it is a relevant figure.

- *We have an Association of Parents. If a problem appears, or if we win a project implementation, we all discuss and collaborate to solve this matter. If there are serious cases, like children exaggerated or bad behavior, the local Council is helping us.*

- In our institution, the Parents' Association is involved in the cases with children from the risk-families.

- We established a partnership with parents; they help us financially and are also involved in the educational process. Parents also come with different initiatives, extracurricular activities, organize different trips, fund different activities, organize different meetings with writers etc.

- As I said, the state is based on the parents' contribution and support.

As concerns the decision-making process, there is a problem in our country.

There are lots of problems being a principle, having so many responsibilities. We have an Association of Parents. Without it, our institution wouldn't survive. Every decision is being consulted with this association.

- In our institution, the principle monitors the decision-making process, but not alone, because the big responsibility. The personnel, parents, all are being involved.

- In our institution, parents are mostly involved in the decision-making process. There are presidents of the Parents Commission in every class. Together with them, we decide on the most important school's activities.

- We have a new experience; everything is new for us because we are at the beginning. Parents are involved in all our activities, coming with new ideas, schedules etc.

- We contribute to the child's development and not to his / her multilateral development – and this is a huge mistake. We should start from here and then, develop other concrete skills and competences.

- We have to prepare them to life, and not only to some academic sciences.

- We participated in some projects, like, for example “Education for Quality”

- Last year, we had a project from USAID. We made capital repairs. There were also some similar projects that helped us financially.

- Our association implemented last year a community project in collaboration with the Social Investments Fund. But it was not for the school, but for the community. The initiative came from parents. Recently, this association won a project related to ecology.

- We opened an Informational Center for Youth, in which the access to the internet is ensured. Also, a fitness center was opened.

- In our school, the percentage of parents' contribution represents 10 %.

- Unfortunately, many parents are far away from the school problems, except doctors and teachers. It is very hard to motivate their involvement in the school's activity. We have organized a conference, „School and family – partners, factors of child's integration in the society”. We had many workshops with the personnel, with parents' representatives. A problem is parents' and children's aggressiveness. We have planned a workshop that refers to this problem.

- Usually, the most participative parents are among doctors and teachers. Parents that are financially sound, usually, do not want to participate. They just pay the required sum and they think that it is all they have to do.

- In our Constitution it is stipulated the fact that the parents' and sponsor's help is authorized. Also, in the new Code, this issue is also stipulated. However, there isn't a state document regarding this issue. Still, each principal has this responsibility to convince parents that their involvement contributes to the education of their children.

- By imposing taxation to the parents' contribution and funds, the state harms the school-parents relation. Parents do not accept to make donations, and at the same time, they are wondering why they are paying the tax.

- The president of our Parents Association is a lawyer that convinces parents to open this foundation. Thus, if it becomes compulsory, we become the sponsors of this lyceum.

- I agree. Because of these laws, parents do not want to be involved. But there has to be some motivation tools for them.

What are the main obstacles for parents' participation?

- The main obstacles are their mentality, their low cultural level, unconsciousness.

- Even if they know the problem, they accept it and take it as being normal. They live everything on school.

- The passive civil society is a problem.

- The socio-political situation.

- People's trust.

- The brain-drain process is an essential problem.

- An important factor is the social, economic and political stability. We do not trust the day of tomorrow.

- Children also do not have trust in the future. They feel their future is not safe, not clear.

- Parents are often stubborn. They do not think seriously about their children future. Here appears violence and lack of motivation.

- Taking into consideration the fact that 70% of parents are working abroad, the educational system is also affected. We are working according to the same models for many-many years. There is a need for some new standards, new techniques etc.

How do you feel about parents' participation?

- For higher classes, there is a problem related to the relationship between parents and children, even sexual problems.
- There are few examples because of the fact that parents are being rarely involved in the educational process. Of course they are participating financially, but not all of them have the necessary skills or competences to propose some ideas, initiatives etc.
- When we had to organize the Parents Association for supporting the education, we didn't succeed, because parents did not want to be involved in these associations. It was very hard for us to convince them to participate. Every year, there is an increasing migration process due to low salaries and low standard of living.
- It is very useful to have such associations, because they contribute to the school activities from the financial point of view.
- Parents that can afford to support some activities; they do not want to be involved in other activities. They just pay and that's all. And vice versa, parents that are emotionally involved in the school's activities do not have the necessary financial resources
- From those 1000 parents from our institution, half of them are interested to come and discuss face-to-face their child's success and results. Some of those that are working abroad call us to discuss and others don't.
- There are some parents that say that only they are involved in the school activities. Some of them are not involved at all.
- In our school, almost all the parents are involved in the school activities. We even have an experience – a portfolio in which their involvement is described. They are even involved in the teaching process, as assistants.
- We have also some parents that are involved in the main scholar activities.
- The problem is that families do not accept to take the responsibility to take care of their child. They consider that if they send their children to school, their responsibility ends here.
- I would like to mention the fact that the smaller is the child, the higher is the parents' involvement.
- There are even parents that come and ask us: In what form is my child? I want to see him/her.
- There is a need for a more optimistic way of thinking in our society.
- The violence that comes from different movies affects the children way of thinking.
- In primary classes, children are being negatively influenced by the inadequate behavior of their young parents.
- There is a need for a psychological assistance and advice in many cases.
- *Most of the initiatives come from our school and not from parents.*
- There was vice versa in our case. We proposed the creation of a sanitary center, but parents did not agree. Finally, we convinced them.
- *About children with disabilities: their parents are actively involved.*
- *The society of rroma usually does not make problems. They pay when they have to.*
- *Example:* Last year, a child with special educational need graduated our lyceum. It was not easy, but we helped him a lot. There has to be tolerance everywhere. He graduated very well, I would say.
- In my opinion, there have to be some common criteria according to which these children have to be taken care of. Parents usually do not want to send their children in a special school.
- I would say that there are parents that do not participate directly to the institution's activities. They do not collaborate with us.
- There are children with disabilities that have serious problems. For example, I did not see their parents at least once coming and discussing with us. These parents should involve more in the school's activities, because their children need more help in order to efficiently integrate.
- There are cases, but parents of children with special educational need focus mostly on their own interests.
- There is also a Commission for minors. They gather some funds that are allocated with different purposes.
- We had a similar problem, but it was solved, with our help and with parents' help also.

What are main benefits of parents' participation?

- Children have the psychological comfort. Their level of motivation increases.
- When parents are involved, children are much more motivated, they have respect for their parents that take care of them.
- About the tutors, in our schools there are no tutors, there is no juridical act that would allow a person to take the responsibility for a child.
- An example is the 4th form: The parents of 2 children are abroad and their grandmothers are taking care of them. When their mothers come back, they come and actively participate to all the activities, but these are only ideal cases, of course.
- About the process of migration. Parents do not follow the child's development. They promise to their children to take them abroad, but almost never do keep their promises. The child is abandoned, he/she trusted his parents, and when he/she loses hope, there is no other motivation to study.
- They support us very much. There are also some exceptions, but most of them are involved.
- In our school, parents are a lot involved in our activities.
- They are our trustful partners.
- I would say that parents are the only partners that can build a ground for our institution's existence.
- I think most of the parents are helping us a lot.
- The higher is the level of parents' involvement, the better understood are the values.

Is there anything else that you would like to add/emphasize? Have we skipped something important? How would you explain to somebody who was not present, what have we talked about during the last 2 hours?

- Exchange of experience, opinions. It is never too late to find something new.
- I felt like confessing to a priest. I feel that a change is going to occur.
- We have talked about a common truth here.
- I feel like I have accomplished something.
- I have acknowledged the fact that there is a need for a change in education.
- I have met new people, thank you for being our coordinator. Thus we find out what is going on not only in our country, but also abroad.
- We have covered things that affect us daily. May be this is an efficient way to change something into better.
- We have discussed a major problem today.
- The discussion was very constructive and efficient. The main objective of the interview was accomplished.
- After this discussion, I feel happy, because rarely someone hears our complaints and problems.
- I felt very comfortable.
- It was very nice to share opinions and ideas with my colleagues. We discussed our common problems and concerns.
- It was a very nice atmosphere here. We discussed serious, but current problems that are essential for our survival. There is a need for a stronger collaboration with other decision-factors to foster the outcomes from all these activities.
- The involvement of many decision-factors in the school, activities is very important and crucial.
- It was a very nice discussion and meeting with my colleagues. It was interesting for me, activating in a small school, to find how activates bigger institutions.
- It was a pleasure to see you all. I am sure this discussion was very useful for all of us.