

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH EDUCATIVE DEMANDS IN MOLDOVA REPUBLIC: REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract: Social inclusion is a priority in what regards social policy in Moldova republic. In this context, it represents a means of promoting the inclusion and social cohesion. The student's diversity of needs and the attempt to promote in as many schools as possible a way of friendly learning requires a regulate collaboration among teachers, the children's families and the community, with the goal of elaborating strategies of efficient teaching. The article represents a case study regarding positive practices of social inclusion in the Criuleni district where there are non-governmental organizations with initiatives in inclusive education domain. The pilot-inclusive schools, educational support centers, represent efficient tools of social inclusion and the fact that they are perceived positively by the children facilitate the achievement of their goals.

Key words: social inclusion, social policy, positive practices, learning, children

Introduction

In this article we analyze the policies from the inclusive education domain in Moldova Republic and the positive practices from the Criuleni district in this domain. Criuleni district had been chosen for analysis because here there are non governmental organizations with initiatives which had made considerable efforts in the inclusive education domain, in the last 10 years. In this article, inclusive education had been analyzed as a right of all children to receive quality education, which can assure the

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development of the individual's potential for every person in integrated contexts, in addition towards child diversity and their necessities, to contribute to the social cohesion through eliminating discrimination forms (Schumaker J (2008), A.Racu (2007)).

The data regarding the situation in inclusive education domain had been gathered through the individual,deepened interview method (8 interviews) with the representatives of the Criuleni Education District Directorate, the inclusive-school's directors, dons, managers and specialists of the community services for children with special educational demands (CES) in Criuleni district.

Public policy in inclusive education domain in Moldova Republic

Actions and decisions taken at a national level by the leaders of Moldova Republic confirm the fact that social inclusion is a priority in the Moldavian society, and education is a means of promoting social inclusion and cohesion, fact which explains rebuilding the educational system from the inclusive perspective undertaken in this direction. The impact and benefits of the educational system reform have a high resonance for both, the quality of learning activities and attitudes and behaviors of the actors involved in the learning process (parents, pupil, teachers, etc.) (Ainscow, 1999).

The official documents from Moldova Republic which establish the educational system correspond with The United Nations Charter, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and UNO Convention regarding Children's Rights. The Constitution of Moldova Republic, article 35, declares the right to learn and establishes the means through which this right is assured.

The Education Law from Moldova Republic, adopted in 1995, determines the state's educational policy and establishes the organization and functioning of the educational system. The educational policy from Moldova Republic is built on human principles, accessibility, adapting, creativity and development¹. Article 6 from Education Law guarantees the right of education for every person, meanwhile, the state is obliged to assure the equal chances of access in educational institutions, according to capacities.

The educational system had a vital role in creating premises for durable human development. A unique educational system gives the possibility of standing out.

Inclusive education is based on the principle that schools should offer to every children, despite any difference, handicap or social, cultural and language

¹ Education Law no. 547 from 21.07.1995, art.4.

differences. The diversity of needs for these pupils and the attempt to promote in as many schools as possible a way of “friendly” learning, needs a regulate collaboration between teachers, these children’s families and community with the goal of elaborating strategies of teaching and efficient learning. The teacher should be the initiator of this partnership and, also, its leader, meaning that they should have the appropriate qualification for undertaking a successful inclusive education. (Diker, Tosun, 2009).

Nowadays, Moldova Republic is paying attention to the creation of opportunities of affirmation for every citizen.¹ On March 30, 2007, The Moldova Republic had signed The UNO Convention regarding the rights of people with disabilities, and on July 9, 2010, the Convention had been ratified by the Parliament. According to article 24 of the UNO Convention regarding the right for people with disabilities, Moldova Republic recognizes the right of people with disabilities to education, without discrimination and, on the base of equal responsibilities, it assumes the obligation of assuring an inclusive educational system, at all levels of continuously learning, orientated towards:

- a) full development of the human potential, of the feeling of dignity and self respect, and also of the fundamental liberties and human diversity;
- b) full development of the personality, talent and creativity of people with disabilities, and his mental and physical abilities;
- c) creating possibilities for the people with disabilities of efficiently taking part in the society life.

According to the Convention, children with disabilities must not be excluded from the general system of education because of the disabilities, they must benefit of support and individualized assistance.

In the assuring fundamental rights of children domain, including the ones with disabilities, to education, in the Moldova Republic, a set of legislation documents had been approved (concepts, programs, strategies) with official policies characteristics of the state:

- National strategy “Education for All”, approved through the Government Decision no.410 from 04.04.2003;
- The modernization program of the educational system from Moldova Republic, approved through the Government Decision no. 863 from 16.09.2005;

¹ Study Basic Education in Moldova Republic from the perspective of friendly school-Chisinau, 2009, p. 15-16.

- The Law regarding the social protection of invalids¹, approved through Parliament Decision nr.821 from 24.12.1991;
- Pilot-program “Children with disabilities“, approved through Government Decision no.1730 from 31.12.2002
- The National Program of Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration of the persons with disabilities, approved through Government Decision no.459, from 25.04.2007;
- The strategy for social inclusion of the persons with disabilities (2010-2013), approved through Parliament Decision no. 169 from 09.07.2010;
- The National Strategy and Plan of action regarding the reform of the residential system of child care, approved through Government Decision no.784 from 09.07.2010;
- The Law regarding social services, approved through Parliament Decision no.123 from 18.06.2010.

The normative frame in the domain of assuring the fundamental rights of children, including the ones with disabilities, to education is more wider. Besides the normative acts of the Parliament, Government, it includes documents from different ministries, such as public local authorities.

An important document is the Order regarding organizing the educational process no.687 from 25 August 2010 of the Education Ministry. In order to assure the inclusive conditions of de-institutionalized children from the residential education, and schooling the children with CES², in institutions in general, the order regards the following obligations:

- a) The district's general directorates /municipal educational, young, sport:
- Assuring the proper conditions for school inclusion of children de-institutionalized and those from CES;
 - A complex evaluating and reevaluating of the children with CES, from regions, by the medico-psycho-pedagogical commissions;

¹ The Legislation of Moldova Republic uses, now, the concept of invalidity – „invalid is the person who, tied to vital activities limitation as a result of physical or mental deficits, needs social assistance and protection. Limitation of the vital activities of the person finds expression in totally or partially losing the capacity of possibility to serve himself, of placing, orientating, communicating, controlling his behavior and practice work activities” Law 821 from 24.12.1991 regarding invalid's social protection, art. 2.

² Children with disabilities are a subcategory of children with special educational demands.

- Organizing informing, documentation, continuous forming, requalification of the didactic teachers from the general and special education, trained in children education with CES;
 - Assigning a responsible person for inclusive education development and evaluation the quality of educational services for CES children;
 - Supervising the inclusion process in general learning of CES children and those from institutions from residential education;
 - Establishing, together with the district directions of financing, a way of financing of children's social inclusion with CES in general education;
 - Encouraging partnerships between certain institutions in implementing inclusive education, etc.
- b) The medico-psycho-pedagogical commissions:
- Participating at the elaboration of the individualized education plan for every child with CES;
 - Giving assistance and support for the institutions of general education, in the process of inclusion of the children with CES;
- c) The general education institutions:
- Getting CES children in schools;
 - Elaborating a individualized educational plan for CES children, including adapting his curricula and methods of assessment;
 - Identifying support services for CES children;
 - Supervising the contents of the school program, the learning dynamics and inclusion of CES children;
 - Projecting the institutional development from the inclusive education perspective.
- d) The Institute of Science Education:
- Elaborating the Guide of individualized psycho-pedagogical assistance for CES children;
 - Elaborating, in agreement with the Agency of Evaluating and Assessing the Methodology of evaluation, the conditions of promoting and finalizing studies by the CES students.

Because of the Order of the Education Ministry no.687 from 25 August 2010, in certain districts people were assigned and made responsible for the development of

inclusive education and evaluating the quality of educational services for CES children.

This Order made it possible for some nongovernmental organizations, who act in this domain, to address to the General Education Directorates from districts with the demand of paying a specialist (pedagogue, psychologist) in the institutions where inclusive practices exist.

The public policies from Moldova Republic foresee the quality of education and facilitating the access for all categories of children, orientating towards the access indicators to education elaborated by the international organizations. We must mention the activity orientated towards elaborating the new Education Code for Moldova Republic which implies more activities regarding educational inclusion, such as the inclusion of people with disabilities.

The Project Educational Code for Moldova Republic, 2010 is referring to the concept of inclusive education and had a chapter dedicated to education for people with CES¹ (chapter VI, Title III), people with disabilities being a subdivision of it. Therefore, article 3 shows that inclusive education contains developing actions and appraise the resources, the existing experience and assuring certain form of services and support for excluded/marginalized persons, giving them equal chances of benefiting from the fundamental rights of man to development and education. According to the given project, people with CES contain people with problems in knowing and learning, communication and interaction, sensorial and physical, emotional and of behavior, social and also people who cannot obtain high performances.

Education for CES persons, according to the project Code of Education, is a part of the learning system and its purpose is to educate, teach, rehabilitate and educational, professional and social integration of the CES people. The education system is made for these people's in general educational institutions, special educational institutions and home education.

The project foresees the fact that institutions of inclusive practices education must activate: a) support teacher, who are qualified in pedagogy, special psycho-pedagogy, which offer support for children with disabilities in order to integrate them in the general educational system; b) personal assistants who provide individualized services needed to mobilize and satisfy the basic necessities of the persons with disabilities (article 41).

¹ CES people have problems of knowing and learning, communicating and of interaction, sensorial and physical, emotional and behavioral, social, and also persons able of high performances (art. 40, p. 2, chapter VI, Title III from the Educational Code project).

The special educational institutions are organized on categories on special educative demands: knowledge problems and learning, physical (motor and neuro-motor), sensorial (hearing or visual), of behavior etc., and learning takes place according to the plans from education, national curriculum, differentiated curricular programs, individualized, adapted according to the child's capacities of learning. The period of learning for children with mental deficits is of 8 years and for children with physical and sensorial deficits, tied to the degree and type of disability-10 -12 years (article 42).

For students who, due to health problems or disabilities, are deprived of the possibility to move or they are put, for a long time, in a medical institution, home education is organized or at the medical facility, on a determined period (article 43).

Therefore, the project Code Education states that inclusive education can be made at all the levels of the educational system in which CES people fit in. The Education Code project is to be approved.

Inclusive practices in Criuleni district

The existing methods of educational inclusion from the general knowledge schools in Moldova Republic are:

- a) Integration in normal classes, with children of the same age with the CES students. In this model, in the addition to the child's disability, the support teacher can be present for the child. In addition to the severe disability of the child and his behavior, the support teacher can assist the child during classes or not. This model is suited for towns with a low number of children with disabilities.
- b) Opening specialized classes in learning institutions for children with disabilities, in which they learn together, no matter the age. This model can be implemented with success in towns with a high number of children with disabilities or where there is access from the neighbor towns.

The Directorate of District Education Criuleni has orientated its activities in order to aware and promotes inclusive services in all the district educational institutions (34 schools in which 399 CES children had been identified, of whom 375 benefit of educational services in general knowledge schools and 24 of home education).

The head of the Directorate of District Education sustains that, in order to promote inclusive education services, a multi-disciplinary team must exist which would facilitate this process. This team must contain the following specialists: (i) support teacher, (ii) psychologist; (iii) occupational therapist; (iv) speech therapist.

In Criuleni district, The Collective Association "Mother and Child-Protection and Support" exists, which has made considerable efforts in inclusive education domain,

in the last 10 years. The objectives of the Collective Association “Mother and Child-Protection and Support” are orientated towards: (i) promoting and making the inclusion, in the educational process and society, of children with disabilities; (ii) creating community services for children and young with disabilities; (iii) doing certain activities for promoting and respecting the rights of persons with disabilities; (iv) giving informational support and assistance to communities and local NGOs, which manifest initiative in giving community services for children with disabilities, who give information to teachers, parents in order to form the environment of acceptance for children with disabilities; (v) awareness of the public opinion towards children with disabilities; (vi) participating the elaboration of local policies in the educational inclusive domain.

Implementing services of inclusive education in Criuleni district started with the C.A “Mother and Child-Protection and Support”. This association, in collaboration with District Education Directorate, determined the opening of 2 pilot-inclusive schools in Criuleni district: (i) Primary school from Mășcăuți (47 children with CES); (ii) Primary school from Dubăsarii Vechi (52 children with CES) and a pilot-school in district Dubsari, the high school from Doroțcaia (72 children with CES).

In the social inclusion domain, the association has created and developed community services for children with special educational demands:

- Day center „Speranța”, which annually serves 44 children with CES, from 7 towns. In the period of its 10 years of activity, 318 children have benefited from its services, 85% of them had special educational demands and were supported to be included in the educational process from general school;
- Day center form Oxentea, Dubăsari district, serves 32 children with CES;
- Day center “Empatie” from Dubăsarii–Vechi for 35 CES children;
- Day center from Hrușova for 30 CES children.

Community centers are necessary to support school and social inclusion of children with CES, by giving them the possibility of assuring specialized services to children (kinetic- therapy, art-therapy, occupational therapy and so one). These services are expensive and cannot be organized in every community:” *with regret, the service offer is much lower than the necessity* “. From this reason, the association initiated the mobile service which assists children, from 0 to 6 years and children with severe and profound deficits, until 18 years. Annually, almost 60 families with children of pre-school age benefit of the mobile assistance service and 20 families with children with severe and profound disabilities. Most important is that in these services, parents are involved. The mobile multi-disciplinary team of the association “Mother and Child-Protection and Support” serves, according to necessities, psychological

services, of speech, medical, services of public opinion's awareness for children and parents, training seminars for teachers and gives certain services to the CES children's families: home and school training, material support, in case of necessity etc..

The spokesmen of the District Education Directorate, the teachers from inclusive schools participated, with the C.A "Mother and Child-Protection and Support" support, to certain seminars abroad: Lithuania, Romania, fact which allowed them to be aware of the necessity of inclusive education, to better understand its principles and activities which must be organized at the district's level, to see the experiences of other countries in this domain (*"I was surprised by the fact that people with disabilities are looked for by entrepreneursHiring them in the work field, economical agents do not pay certain taxes and have some facilities. Hiring these people is also profitable because people with disabilities have a job and can take care of themselves "*; *"I had seen manuals for these special children...It was the same manual, but it had a little sigh on the left part "s". I looked in the manual, the problems were the same, but instead of 5 points, there were only 2 in this manual ..."*).

The support of C.A "Mother and Child-Protection and Support" for pilot-schools included financing for 3 specialists: special pedagogue, ergo –therapist, speech therapist, the support teacher being financed by the local public authorities.

The support teacher, in collaboration with the special pedagogue, elaborate individual educational plans and the ergo- therapist organizes certain occupational therapy activities (application, organization charts etc.) The educational therapy activities are frequented by all the children who apply for them during school.

In 2010, besides pilot-inclusive schools, Educational Assistance Centers were opened, which offer support services for CES children. The centers had been tooled with computers, didactic materials; rehabilitation equipment, children literature and literature of speciality. The centers activate in schools and are available for all children with school ages.

Children's attitude is, mostly, a positive one. Children are the ones who accept, first of all, other children with CES. *"I had doubts regarding children, parents and colleagues. The most receptive ones were the children, because they were not brought from another educational institute, they had been together since the first grade, they simply are children who do not remember, read harder, have speaking problems...We have a little girl who cannot talk. She is now in the third grade and because she is among other children, she now says words, even speaks. "*

Criuleni district is one of the pioneers in funding inclusive services, fact which allowed them to confront with many difficulties in this chapter. The most stringent problems which need a solution in this domain would be:

(i) creating a normative support :*"it was not when we initiated the first school with inclusive practices and we do not have a normative base from which we could start. When we opened the first school with inclusive practices in Mășcăuți, we elaborated a functioning regulation which had been approved by the District Council. Prior, we addressed to the Ministry of Education with a demand to approve this regulation. Its spokesmen said that they did not have such precedents in the republic, but approved the regulation. The ministry accepted us and we activate on the base of the regulation elaborated by us."*

Still, due to the lack of a normative support, financial problems are tied. The existing normative acts do not foresee possibilities of employment for support teachers in inclusive schools: *"We had elaborated some ways of escaping the situation in order to have a support teacher who is not in the staff states and neither in function nomenclature"*. Important is the fact that the city halls *Mășcăuți* and *Dubăsarii Vechi* had been receptive to financing the support teacher, involved in capital restoring of the centers of educational support and work shops of occupational therapy.

(ii) Training the teachers. *"We have provided, along with C.A Mother an child-Protection and Support trainings and offered the continuity of the process, but the training process must be organized at the republic's level...We have launched the problem and The Institute of Science Education introduced a module for those who recycle once at every 5 years"*.

(iii) Lack of curricula, methodical guiding for teachers who have in their classes children with CES. Children with problems benefit of the needed attention from teachers, due to curricular absence, methodical guidance and special training etc. *"The children with CES...Why do we have to keep him in the last desk if we have to work with him? There is a stereotype –if he has a certificate, you cannot work with him...I do not understand what a child with certificate means. We must work individual with them, but the work is not really done"*.

(iv) Reorganizing the activities of the medico-psycho-pedagogical commission and co-working with teachers *"The commission sets a diagnose and sends the child to school, but the teacher is not ready to work with him...we created this year the interdisciplinary school commission, in every school, which takes care of detecting the children with CES and supervises the instructive-educative process for them. In this commission takes part the support teacher, the schools psychologist, the social assistant from the city hall, the deputy headmaster on education and the headmaster of the educational institution"*.

One of the main segments in the process of school inclusion is the correct evaluation of the child with CES, determining his necessities of intervention and supervising the process of inclusion. All these have determined the need to reform the activity of medico-psycho-pedagogy consultation. Therefore, in 2009, at the Criuleni District Council's meeting, the decision of funding the Psycho-pedagogical and Educational Assistance service (SPEA), of the District Educational Direction. The service had been created in partnership with C.A Mother and Child-Protection and Support. The attributes of this service are wider than the ones from the medico-psycho-pedagogical commission and are based on inclusive principles and not of segregation. SPEA is a service of assistance specialized for CES children, being an integrated part of the community services which has as purpose the psycho-pedagogical assistance for all the children, parents and teachers in solving problems which occur in the child's development process.

This service collaborates with the internal school commissions which have the mission to continuously evaluate the psycho-physical health of children from every school in order to identify commotions, imbalances in the child's psycho-physical development and assuring the early intervention in the cases of children with CES. The members of the service evaluate and establish children's special demands, offer psycho-pedagogical assistance and follow the evolution in school of CES children. In giving complex psycho-pedagogical assistance, for each CES child, the individual intervention plan is elaborated and applied. Consults and recommendations are given to teacher regarding curricular adaption for CES children integrated in normal education, support services and/or specific therapies are proposed, tied to the situation, they orientate towards other community services for support to CES children. Also, in the given service, CES children's evolution is supervised. In order to integrate CES children in the education process and community, SPEA assists teachers from educational institutions in organizing a educational process for CES children, in creating an environment of acceptance, giving support to community actors for forming attitudes of tolerance and non-discrimination.

Last but not least, SPEA gives assistance to parents, in the process of CES children's inclusion, in school and in the community, it offers them consultancy in the domain of knowing and defending children's rights.

Conclusions and recommendations

The appearance of services for inclusive education in Moldova Republic is the result obtained through the efforts of non-governmental organizations and the partnership created with these institutions and the district education directorates. The spokesmen of the non-governmental sector have convinced the headmasters, teachers,

spokesmen of the district education directorates of the necessity to promote such practices.

The analyzed date allows a step forward in the following strategic directions in developing a National System in The Inclusive Education domain:

- Elaborating and approving the normative support in inclusive education domain (conception, action plan, regulations, minimum quality standards etc.). The normative acts must show the ways through which the support teacher has been employed, the conditions and ways of financing in order to adapt educational institutions to the necessities of CES children;
- Elaborating methodical guidance, special manuals for teachers who have in their classes CES children;
- Elaborating an evaluation methodology of CES children and reorganizing the activities of the medico-psycho-pedagogical Commission;
- Compulsory training for teachers in inclusive education domain and evaluating the process of initial and continuous training;
- Organizing awareness campaigns of the public opinion regarding inclusive education and promoting good practices.

For public authorities of I and II level:

- Organizing experience exchange, in the inclusive education domain. Establishing the ways of co-working with the District Educational Directorate, The Directorates of Social Assistance and Family Protection, educational institutions (general and special), city halls and nongovernmental organizations which offer services in CE's children's social protection;
- Evaluating the necessities existent in the inclusive education domain, at a community level and supporting development of the social services, according to these necessities.

For educational institutions:

- Creating a coordination group of inclusive education, at the level of the educational institution, which would offer support to teachers, parents and children;
- Assuring a partnership between school and family, informing the parents regarding inclusive education, such as involving them in promoting inclusive education.

For nongovernmental organizations:

- Creating collaboration and support networks in the inclusive education domain;

- Collaboration with educational institutions and other local public authorities and district;
- Developing social services, at the community level, such as CES children, including services of recovery for parents who nurse children with disabilities (respite services);
- Promoting existent good practices in inclusive education domain.

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