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THE SOCIOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT: *In this material we highlight the importance of investing in early education and the adoption of inclusive living and training principles, conditions of personal fulfillment and well-being for an entire society. Communication between individuals, but also between society and its members, as a basic skill acquired in the educational process, reflects the stage of evolution of a society and its connection to the challenges and parameters of the future. Last but not least, we address the issue of functional illiteracy, the main vulnerability of education systems that are not focused on skills training.*

Keywords: society, inclusion, education, evolution, creativity

INTRODUCTION

At present, the quality of life and the condition of a promising evolution of mankind are under the auspices of creativity.

Education itself is being reformed from the perspective of an education focused on communication and skills, the time of assimilating information as an exclusive way of training being considered obsolete, lacking social impact.

After all, who serves an educational model without a positive purpose in individual and social plan? In a highly computerized era - access to information through technology is realized early in the life of the individual, the need to become literate is replaced by the need to functionally literate.

In parallel, with the establishment of pedagogical systems to ensure the understanding of the surrounding reality and not just the observation of phenomena, societies with a high standard

of living and focused on fundamental human rights, place inclusive education at the center of concern.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

"Etymologically, the term sociology refers to the science of society or societies, of social communities or groups"[1] (Otovescu, 2009, p.13).

Inclusion also concerns everyone to the last, following the social model, aiming at bringing people together and not separating them, even in the context of their particularities.

Beyond respect and cohesion, an inclusive society means equal opportunities and decent living standards for all, with diversity not an impediment.

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"Under the influence of German romantics, who regarded nature and society as living organisms, Herbert Spencer[2] admits that society, like nature, is the product of an evolution, that takes place due to a mysterious internal force"[3] (Otovescu, 2009, p.190). The British psychologist emphasizes, at the same time, the importance of connections between people: if "in primitive society, cooperation between individuals was imposed by the need for defense, having an exclusively mechanical character"[4] (Otovescu, 2009, p.192), "in the evolved society had a conscious, voluntary character, determined by economic needs"[5] (Otovescu, 2009, p.192).

At present, cooperation is proving to be a sine qua non of existence itself. The events of recent years - the Covid 19 pandemic starting in 2020 and the war in Ukraine triggered by the Russian Federation on February 24 a.c. - demonstrates almost without denial the importance of cooperation (between people and societies), both for the smooth running of things and for the efficient management of crisis situations.

[1] Otovescu, D., (2009). *General sociology. Fifth edition*. Craiova. Beladi Publishing House (p. 13);
[2] British sociologist, psychologist and thinker (b. 1820 - d. 1903);
[3] Otovescu, D., (2009). *General sociology. Fifth edition*. Craiova. Beladi Publishing House (p. 190);
[4] Ibid (p. 192);
[5] Ibid (p. 192);

Social evolution according to the standards of globalization and the need to respond to asymmetric risks "has brought more and more to the present the idea of human diversity, unity in diversity, valorization of diversity and opportunities offered to education and universal culture by diversity of experiences, traditions and models that have emerged over time, without making subjective hierarchies and value judgments about them"[6] (Gherguț, 2016, p.15).

Inclusive practices are not, thus, only the prerogative of modern democratic societies, compared to those of antiquity or traditional. In addition to emphasizing respect for human / child rights, the principle of "equal opportunities" aims to ensure the smooth running of society as a whole, ensuring its prosperity and well-being depending on the potential and characteristics of each individual.

Hence, the sociological dimension of inclusion, implicitly of inclusive education. Adapting the content of education to the individual particularities of students can only be translated as a concern for the smooth running of today's global society, starting from the personal good. Despite its humanitarian dimension, segregation in education (translated by models of disability and medical, focused on the disease and not the individual as a whole)[7], has the effect of labeling and negative repercussions on individual opportunities and, indirectly, on social cohesion.

A society without cohesion is currently at risk on all fronts, especially in terms of order, stability and evolution leading to a better life. The realities of the day demonstrate the obvious gap between modern societies, focusing on the individual, and those that oppose transformations and subsume the individual ideologies (societies in which women have no rights, children's rights are abstract or the right to expression does not exist, disadvantaged categories do not benefit chances and those characterized by physical peculiarities are limited in options).

"In the educational context, inclusion involves the development of open, positive interpersonal relationships between students, flexibility of school curricula, diversity of educational strategies and provision of intervention and support services for students with special needs, promotion of equal rights and responsibilities for all students, ensuring access to equal access to learning opportunities, functional partnership between the school and the family / parents

[6] Gherguț, A., (2016). *Inclusive education and pedagogy of diversity*. Iasi. Polirom (p. 15);
[7] Ibid (p. 17);

of the children, active involvement of the community in the programs and activities developed by the schools"[8] (Gherguț, Frumps, 2019, pp.13-14).

The key term in ensuring the success of the inclusive project is the active involvement of the community, the introduction of the family in the school-children equation. Adapting the logistics and pedagogical methods to the current educational goals, not being sufficient steps to the process of integration, of assimilation of each individual in the whole social. "In a social context, integration involves bringing together in the same place / space several different people and their participation in achieving common goals / activities"[9] (Gherguț, 2016, p.19).

THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL CRISIS ON VULNERABLE GROUPS

A study conducted by Save the Children Romania[10], in full pandemic, made public in October 2020, concluded that over a quarter of children did not have access to online education (28% of children and 43% of teachers did not have partial or the total material resources needed for online education)[11].

Social crises affect vulnerable groups all the more, and restricting access to education has consequences that are difficult to remedy later. For any society, education must be protected for all its members, in all circumstances. Limiting access to quality education significantly reduces children's chances of acquiring essential skills to support them in earning a living as adults.

In this context, the phenomenon of school dropout is another social vulnerability, with negative effects on the later life of children but also on social balance (those who left school, especially at a young age, are less active citizens and risk becoming even antisocial).

According to the "Report on the state of pre-university education in Romania 2020 – 2021", published by the Ministry of Education[12], school dropout - a generator of unemployment and social exclusion - has increased at all levels of education. The highest dropout rates are in the beginning

[8] Gherguț, A .; Frumos, L., (2019). *Inclusive education. Methodological guide*. Iasi. Polirom (pp. 13-14);
[9] Gherguț, A., (2016). *Inclusive education and pedagogy of diversity*. Iasi. Polirom (p. 19);
[10] together with the Federation of Education Trade Unions "Spiru Haret", the National Council of Students and the National Federation of Parents' Associations - Pre-University Education;
[11] https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/educatie/peste-un-sfert-dintre-copiii-din-romania-nu-au-acces-la-educatia-online-1386893;
[12]https://edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2021/Transparenta/Stare%20invatamant/Raport_stare_invatamant_preuniversitar_RO_2020_2021.pdf;

classes of school cycles (preparatory class and class I, respectively class V), especially in rural areas.

Any reduction in the rate of early school leaving would allow the economy to increase the number of skilled workers. At the end of March a.c., the Ministry of Education made public "The results of the first call for projects within the National Program for Reducing School Dropout (PNRAS)"[13], initiated at the beginning of 2022. Following the completion of the selection of projects[14] to be funded in the first stage of PNRAS, considered by the Ministry "the largest program to support participation in education in the recent history of Romania", 1,391 schools will benefit from funding, of the 1,474 of requests.

According to the Ministry of Education, "PNRAS is the Ministry's response to early school leaving and early school leaving, it addresses students at risk of dropping out, especially students belonging to vulnerable groups, students belonging to the Roma minority, students from rural and small urban areas, students with disabilities or special educational needs (SEN), students from economically disadvantaged communities, children at risk of social exclusion due to poverty, homelessness, single-parent families, disorganized families, students exposed to other social risks. The program is one to support the reform of the educational system, and its objectives are based on the reality and educational needs of each student and of all students in a school, and in its implementation will be found social components."

The importance of the social component of inclusive pedagogy is also highlighted in this context. "The social model attributes to society the responsibility for the existence of the difficulties that people face"[15] (Gherguț, 2016, p.203), being necessary for the society to take into account their "deficiencies".

CONCLUSIONS

[13] https://www.edu.ro/PNRR;

[14] The Ministry of Education states on its website that in accordance with international practices, PNRAS uses three levers to be sustainable: school autonomy in the use of resources (grants will be implemented directly by schools, in collaboration with the local community); responsibility for results (the targets to be achieved at school level are set: a higher enrollment rate, a lower absenteeism rate, a higher participation rate in national exams, a higher percentage of students who succeed in passing the exam end of cycle with at least grade 6); assessment (monitoring students detected at risk of dropping out to be supported by individual learning plans).

[15] Gherguț, A., (2016). *Inclusive education and pedagogy of diversity*. Iasi. Polirom (p. 203);

Concerns for inclusive education date back to the 1980s, when it was considered the first generation of inclusion - a generation that corresponds to concerns focused on integrating children with disabilities into mainstream schools and developing the foundations of inclusive practices[16]. Subsequently (after the 1990s), the foundations of an inclusive school were laid with all that we know it entails today (access to public mass education, of all children in a community, regardless of vulnerability; individualized and adapted curriculum; active partnership between teachers, support teachers, specialists in special education and parents; child-centered pedagogy; overcoming all barriers to learning).

These over 40 years have brought benefits to states that have adopted the principles of inclusive education translated into a high standard of living (the Nordic countries have long been in the ranking of the happiest people in the world, "according to the Index of Cooperation and Economic Development - OECD - for a better life"[17]).

Addressing the importance of investing in preschool education for a happy child, ie in early education, the educatienordica.ro website highlights the close link between the well-being of society and the quality of the education system.

"The level of happiness and satisfaction of life is related to the system of social protection, income level, health, but especially to the best education system in the world. It is proven that the Nordic education system develops and trains the child to become an independent, responsible, socially integrated and emotionally balanced adult. The success of Nordic education involves major investment in the first years of a child's life. Funds allocated to pre-school education exceed 1.5% of GDP, compared to the average of 0.7% for OECD countries. In 2000, economist James Hackman won the Nobel Prize for demonstrating the impact of investing in education at various stages of life. For every dollar invested in preschool education, there is a 7 times higher long-term gain for the child, family and society"[18].

Romania is at the beginning of the road in terms of creating a solid bridge between school and society. Although from a regulatory point of view it is trying to align with European standards,

[16] According to Prof. Dr. Ecaterina Vrasmas, Inclusive Education and Equity, Sibiu, 2019 (http://euschoolequity.org/presentations/Educa%C5%A3ia_incluziv%C4%83_%C5%9Fi_echitatea_Sibiu_Ecaterina_Vrasmas.pdf);
[17] https://www.educatienordica.ro/sistemul-nordic;
[18] https://www.educatienordica.ro/sistemul-nordic;

in practice the system also encounters resistance and obstacles in adopting inclusive principles as a way of life.

In addition to the efficient management of financial funds and logistics in this regard, in addition to the reconceptualization of education in terms of methodology, procedures and techniques, there is a need to change mindsets. The rethinking of the individual-society relationship, the awareness of how the individual metamorphoses into society and vice versa, how each becomes the mirror of the other.

And last but not least, the acceptance of the idea - because what is it more about inclusion than acceptance? - that the individual good and investment in community members becomes the general good.

There are education systems in Europe, which, although successful in their PISA[19] assessments, are constantly aiming at education efficiency policies so that they perform as well as possible.

Romania continues to achieve low results, which is why the problem of functional illiteracy is becoming more acute, with negative effects on the level of preparation of students for active life. As a consequence, the quality of society as a whole will continue to remain at non-competitive standards at European level.

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[19] Programme for International Student Assessment;

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