ENSURING EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH EDUCATION FOR DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN

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The best solution for an educational system that meets the needs of all students turns out to be inclusive education, characterized by the following principles: the right of every student to education based on equal opportunities; no student can be excluded from education or subjected to discrimination based on race, religion, colour, ethnicity, sex, language, disabilities; the school adapts to the students' needs; individual differences between students are a source of richness and diversity, not a problem.

The inclusive school is based on a curriculum adapted to the needs of the children. Curriculum adaptation can be achieved by selecting some contents from the general curriculum addressed to normal children, which can be acquired by children with special needs; the introduction of students with special educational needs in a variety of individual, therapeutic activities, intended for their recovery; the use of didactic methods and procedures, of intuitive teaching aids, likely to support the understanding of the contents taught in class.

School is the cradle of childhood where all hopes can become reality if those who take part in the learning activities, teachers and students, are aware of the diversity and complexity of human nature and capitalize on every talent or creative side given by God. The Romanian school has faced various problems, among which is the schooling of disadvantaged children or those with special educational needs.

In the category of disadvantaged children, we can include those from single-parent families or orphans of both parents, children whose parents are unemployed, have serious health problems or immoral behavior, children who live in isolated or remote areas and whose schooling depends on the existence of a means of transport and the Roma children who integrate with difficulty into the group of students.

The concept of special educational requirements implies the need for a differentiated and specialized approach to the education of children depending on the deficiencies they present. The types of deficiencies encountered in students with special needs are: mental deficiencies, hearing or vision deficiencies, physical, psychomotor deficiencies, language disorders, communication and relationship disorders, attention disorders and hyperactivity - ADHD. There are also included here the cases of children who fail at school for various reasons - institutionalized children, children from disadvantaged ethnic communities, etc.

They have the fundamental right to education, possessing their own characteristics, interests, skills and learning needs. That is why the design of educational systems and the implementation of school programs must take into account the great diversity of the characteristics and needs of students included in the instructional-educational process, which must ensure equal opportunities for disadvantaged children through the involvement of all teaching staff, parents and competent local institutions.

The school must be in permanent collaboration with the students' families (to discuss possible problems of a behavioral, material or social nature and to find solutions that lead to solving these problems), with

placement centers or orphanages, in the case orphans (in order to inform them of the school misconduct of the students and to learn about their way of life in these institutions, the extracurricular activities in which they are involved, etc.).

For students who live in isolated areas or far from the educational unit, the school tries, through a partnership with the town hall and by signing a contract with a transport company, to ensure their daily transport to the nearest educational unit.

From the perspective of the regulations adopted by the Romanian state, children with special educational needs can be integrated either in special education school units, or in special groups and classes in regular preschool and school units, or individually in regular educational units. These schools must adapt to a pedagogy centered on the child, capable of meeting the needs of each individual child. Teaching staff must adopt means to combat discriminatory attitudes, building a society based on the spirit of tolerance and offering equal opportunities for education to disadvantaged students.

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Contemporary society places more and more emphasis on diversity. Education for diversity is a response to the pluralism of all kinds that we face. Capitalizing on diversity allows tolerance; it recognizes, appreciates and facilitates processes involved in the exploration and discovery of the new, leads to the strengthening of relationships within the community and increases the possibilities of young people to achieve their goals in a pluralistic, increasingly complex society.

The role of the school is to teach young people how to live in a world marked by linguistic, cultural or social differences, by accepting them, but also by identifying and acquiring the values that unite them. Most often the presence of different people leads to disinterest and indifference, which in the end means nothing but a form of discrimination. It also manifests itself in education. Children with various disabilities, children of Roma ethnicity, immigrant students are often marginalized by their colleagues, but teachers must carry out certain activities in which the previously mentioned children can also integrate, because the prejudices of some teachers or students can generate discriminatory behavior.

For example, Roma children are one of the most disadvantaged categories of children and they need a lot of support to overcome their situation. The poverty and lack of Roma families, the prejudices that persist in the mentality of the population, the inertia of some Roma parents towards the prospects that education offers to the school-going child, all these contribute to the marginalization of Roma children, to the limitation of access to the equal chances to which all children are entitled.

The marginalization of the Roma goes from the less benevolent attitude towards the students, placing them in the last benches to leaving the classes and schools in which the Roma children study. Many of the Roma students often end up in situations of failure and school dropout. Discrimination of Roma students within the education system, poverty, ethnic traditions are becoming the main causes of school dropout.

Educational institutions must take appropriate measures to eliminate any form of discrimination present within them. Teachers need to be aware of their own prejudices, to be properly trained, to take into account the social conditions and the needs of the students. Children must be prepared to learn to live and interact positively in this diverse world. Multiculturalism is a phenomenon that enriches us with diversity. The school must form the habit of appreciating pluricultural values, the idea that there are no superior or inferior values. There are specific values that must be valued through their contribution to the nuance and enrichment of the other cultures with which they come into contact.

Education for diversity can be achieved through all educational disciplines, because they can all invite tolerance, respect for human rights, and development. Teaching staff must identify objectives and contents that can promote interculturality, and capitalize on the cultural diversity of the student class, as a resource in the instructional-educational process.

At the level of extracurricular activities, activities that involve the community can be organized, activities in which the participants get to know each other better, cooperate and experience different events together (musical and sports activities, cultural events and local holidays, twinning, etc.). Recognition, respect for ethnic, cultural or social differences and equal opportunities are challenges for the school institution. School principals and teaching staff have a multitude of tasks to build inclusive school environments.

The Romanian school must build various strategies for a pluralistic treatment of cultural diversity, such as: appreciating the cultural heritage that students bring with them and using it to help teachers and principals learn the students' cultures; the use of ethnic conflicts for the production of positive cultural and social exchanges; creating an environment of cooperation between students, teachers and students' families; facilitating everyone's success by ensuring equal and efficient access to the educational institution; removing prejudices related to race, social class or ethnicity; elimination of practices that disadvantage individuals and groups of students.

The cultural diversity of students can become an opportunity and a resource of enrichment for children and teachers, only if the school designs learning activities that capitalize on it and if it ensures equal opportunities for disadvantaged children by involving all parents, teachers and local authorized institutions.

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