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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERPROFESSIONAL TEAMWORK WHEN DEALING WITH CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN ROMANIA

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#### Abstract

Inclusive education of children in Romania and around the world is a priority. Governments are beginning to realize that a person with special integrated, independent educational needs reduces the costs that the whole nation would incur. I have witnessed the disappointment of the parents of children with SEN, and implicitly of these children, when it comes to the integrated educational system in Romania, a system that is not prepared to really help their children, on the contrary, it aggravates their deficiency. The difficult requirements of all the school programs, the overloaded curriculum, the large number of children enrolled in a class, very few specialists to support children, and teachers who feel helpless when facing so many requests.

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#### Introduction:-

"... in the orchard we like to have trees that bear fruit sooner or later [...] all these fruits are good, none is to be thrown away. Why not accept in schools, more keen or slower minds? Why wouldn't we help them? We lose time but gain satisfaction and respect..." (Comenius)

The specific issues of special needs led to the necessity to train and operate teams of specialists from different fields (medicine, psychology, pedagogy, sociology, social work, legal sciences) that would always take into account the needs of the child with SEN, would unite all their efforts for the child's benefit and would know their duties within the group, obviously. Each will have an important role in the future development of the child.

**The doctor** establishes the causality of the disorder, intervenes surgically or medicinally, recommends physiotherapy and follows the evolution of the patient's health condition.

**The psychologist** detects and fits into the type of deficiency / disability, advises the subject and his family. The role of this specialist is enormous in the evolution of the patient. It is recommended that the evaluation of the child be carried out in several stages, knowing all the data related to the child, so as not to limit the child's orientation towards one form or another of education as a result of a single evaluation.

**The social worker** deals with formalities, it is the one who makes sure that the legislative provisions regarding the child's rights are respected; he/she informs the family about the legal steps and he ensure that these steps are carried out in the child's favour.

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**The teacher** will watch over the evolution of the child, his adaptation to the rules of the class, his integration into the classroom, school, and society. He is the one who stays most around the child, he is the one who warns and appeals to the other specialists (speech therapists, physiotherapists, other recovery factors).

The one who coordinates the work of all specialists is **the defectologist**, he makes sure that all team members relate.

An important role is played by **prostheses specialists**, who need to adapt to the requirements of children with SEN.

**The other parents** should not be forgotten either. It is very difficult to achieve inclusion when the parents of the other children refuse to have children with SEN in their class. Unfortunately, the steps they are taking to exclude children with SEN and their mobilisations in this direction are well known.

Family members, **legal guardians** should not be excluded from the team. The defectologist gives them information on the deficiency, how they can support the recovery process. If the connection with the family is broken, the progress at school is lost.

The difficulties of **parents who have children with SEN** are very high. In mainstream schools their children are labeled, isolated, excluded. The inclusive school tries to avoid these situations and emphasizes the school-family partnership. The parents of these children support a quality inclusive education, their involvement depending on the quality of their child's education.

Studies in the field demonstrate that when there is a real **partnership between school and family**, children's results are much better. There must be no discrimination due to the environment from which the child comes, the economic situation at home, the ethnicity. The school must be open to all children. If the family does not encourage the child, if he does not get involved in his activities, if he does not discuss with him about the aspects related to the activity at school, if he does not offer him/her protection and support in making plans for the future, the child's success diminishes dramatically.

The role of the family in the development of the child is overwhelming, since it is the first environment with which it comes into contact, it is the environment that gives him safety, and where he feels accepted and loved, the environment in which he learns what respect and self-esteem are.

The more the family is involved in supporting the child's projects, the better his performance at school, in all aspects: accumulated knowledge, networking, performance.

The school must see in the family an eligible partner, who provides her with valuable information about the child's disability and knows the child better than anybody else. Parents of children with SEN already have, before entering the school, relationships with other educational partners, becoming, in turn, important resources for the school and for other parents, as well. I believe that the family is the most important link in the team, it is the glue that welds all the effort taken in supporting the child.

How the school and the family interact depends entirely on the future evolution of the child. It should not be overlooked that the involvement of parents is not limited only to the preschool or primary level, but also extends to the upper classes. Children perceive school and family as a whole.

The parent has rights but also responsibilities within the partnership with the school, he must be informed about the child's evolution, with objectivity and sincerity. When the situation requires it, the parent has the right to advertise what he considers to be an injustice, without fear of repercussions. The school is obliged to respond to the complaint, respecting the legislation in force, providing an answer to the parent regarding the complaint made and the measures that need to be taken.

Parental education activities, information, counseling on behaviors in certain risk situations are required. The topics of the parents' training activities can be done taking into account their proposals (proposals can be made through questionnaires, specifying the issues that are troubling them), through proposals coming from other team members, doctors, speech therapists, support teachers, counselors, psychologists, social workers, etc., who can participate in debates and present them professionally.

Thus, the theme, very varied, can provide information about:

- Human rights; the rights of the child; the rights and obligations of the parents;
- Children's health;
- The importance of education, school attendance;
- Consequences of abuse, whether physical or emotional;
- The role of communication in the development of their own children;
- Accident prevention activities;
- Careful supervision of children, in their free time, to be sure that they do not fall prey to vices or dangers on the Internet;
- Nutrition, as a determining factor in children's health;
- The importance of personal hygiene and housing, etc.

Partnership with the family is essential to create for the child an environment conducive to the development of his potential to the fullest. The establishment of mutual respect, of empathic relationships, as the basis of an authentic collaboration between educators, children, their families and specialists which is a complex process that requires time, energy, prudence, often a lot of common sense and good faith. It is important to note that in this process it is not only children who learn, but also adults.

We have given a wider space to the family, as part of the team, precisely because it has a decisive role in the educational process in which the child is involved.

The involvement of **the school manager** can influence the achievement of children's inclusion with SEN, since he is the one who, first of all, enrolls the child in that school and he/she is the one who has access to the information on the history of each child. He can also maintain the motivation of the teachers by providing support, whenever necessary; it is the glue of the multidisciplinary teamworking with the child.

The responsibilities that arise from assuming the position of manager go more and more in this direction, of inclusive education. The manager has the obligation to know the legislation in force, to make it available to the teachers, to debate it in order to be understood by all the participants in the educational act. He himself must also possess a range of appropriate skills, have knowledge of the specifics of the education of children with SEN, be a good coordinator and be able to motivate teachers to work with children with SEN.

The manager must develop constructive educational policies; identify the strengths and weaknesses of the institution he manages in order to know what it stands for and what measures need to be taken to replace those shortcomings. Examples of good practice should be discussed with teachers (whether they are from their own unit or shared by other school units), and implemented at the level of their own unit in the Operational Management Plan.

"The manager must show permanent concerns in the sense of facilitating the process of developing constructive policies, systems and structures, of capitalizing on the identified strengths, of supporting the continuous development of the school institution by creating transparent systems, within which the roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, and the allocation of the necessary resources is made in a justified manner, fair and fair." (Manea, 2014)

The manager of the institution must mediate the conflict situations that may arise in the classes where children with SEN are included, whether we are talking about conflicting states between teachers, between children or between parents of children with and those without SEN.

We can consider that in order to ensure a quality educational act, managerial capabilities and qualities are essential: flexibility, strategic thinking, psycho-pedagogical training, knowledge of the needs of the educable and those who provide education, an assemblage vision of the entire organization, the maximum use of human and material resources, the use of technology and technological gadgets (we must adapt to the direction imposed on us by the contemporary society).

Full success is ensured when there is mutual respect, collaboration, teamwork and coherence in decision making.

I left **the teacher** towards the end because this is "the glue" that ensures a good inclusion of the child and a favourable evolution of the child with SEN.

It is very important that every teacher does not feel the inclusion of children with SEN as a burden, as the only ones responsible in their education. Therefore, the support they receive must be constant, to receive advice from specialists who propose Individualized Education Plans (EIP), be supported by an infrastructure corresponding to the special educational requirement, the material basis made available is sufficient, that they must be provided with free training programmes in this direction. The teacher must understand that the traditional approach is no longer effective in an inclusive school, that they must adapt the teaching of the student and not the other way around.

Given the major role of the teacher, in this ample and delicate process of inclusion, he must understand that he is the agent of change and, at the same time, the subject of change, that he must give up his traditional role and assume other roles, adapted to new generations, new technologies, new legislative regulations. The teacher is in permanent transformation, he must adapt to all children, parents and the new requests and obligations incumbent on him in the context of the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream education.

The increasing number of these children makes the role of the teacher even more challenging, in order to be able to talk about the efficiency of the educational approach. Also, not only teachers need to be prepared to adapt to the new requirements and work with children with SEN, but all school staff, from the manager, nurses, librarians, etc.

We can discuss two levels at which the teacher can act: the executor, the one who ensures that all the regulations that come in and support the rights of all children are applied and the manager, the one who manages the class of students and takes care that all of them receive the support they need, regardless of what context they are in.

The success of inclusion is largely due to the teacher, his professionalism, good pedagogical training, which allows him to adapt, to be flexible and to know how to act appropriately in the face of all challenges.

A competent teacher will manage to find suitable solutions; will make decisions for the benefit of all the educable people and all this cannot be achieved without a good methodical-scientific training, without the possession of sets of competences, without love and respect for children, pedagogical mastery.

In John Jinga's view, professional competence is "a set of cognitive, affective, motivational and managerial capacities that interact with the personality traits of the educator, giving him the necessary qualities to perform a didactic performance that ensures the achievement of the objectives projected by the vast majority of students, and the performances obtained by them to be close to the maximum level of their intellectual potential." (Jinga, 2008)

All specialists in the field of education consider that a teacher has a complex personality, self-taught, in a continuous improvement. The competences of the teacher will be reflected in the school competences of the children and, if we were to review them, then we could talk about:

- scientific competences (pedagogical training, methodical training, general culture, etc.), "so that the society is protected from the risk of practicing this profession by insufficiently trained people". (Gliga, 2002)
- digital skills (computer handling, the use of gadgets that will ease the educational process, make it more attractive);
- psycho-pedagogical competences (knowledge of children's age and individual peculiarities, knowledge of the specifics of special educational requirements, ability to adapt the subject to be taught to all children, use, in addition to traditional methods and modern, adapted methods, generation of learning situations that stimulate the potential of each child);
- psychosocial skills (to relate with all those involved in the educational act, to be tactful in communication, to mediate conflicts if they occur, to empathize with both children and their parents, etc.);
- managerial skills consisting in the elaboration of efficient strategies in order to operationalize the proposed objectives. The teacher leads the teaching-learning process, establishes the working strategies, adapts the material to all children, establishes which extracurricular activities are recommended, mediates the interactions of educables and caregivers enriches the material basis of the class according to needs, ensures communication with the local community and other agents providing education.

Certainly, having the brightest pedagogical skills will not guarantee a quality education of children. The most important is the human side, the ability of the teacher to empathize with others, the willingness to give each child

what he/she needs. Often, especially if there are children with SEN in the classroom, a lot of diplomacy and delicacy is required in communicating with children and parents.

A school is considered to respect the principles of inclusion when all the staff who achieves the inclusion of children with SEN has knowledge, not only academic, but also of:

- children's rights;
- national and international policies on access to education for children with SEN;
- methodology of inclusion of children with SEN;
- the specifics of children's development by age;
- the needs of children, adapting school to the child and not vice versa;
- adaptation of the curriculum to the specifics of children with SEN;
- classroom management of students;
- counseling strategies for families who have children with SEN;
- capitalizing on the support enjoyed by the child with SEN;
- knowledge of organizations, institutions that provide support to students and parents;

The teacher who assumes the role he has in the process of inclusion will carry out along with traditional activities specific activities of a certain type, adapted to the new directions. Thus, in an inclusive context, teachers have the following general responsibilities:

- Identification, evaluation and assistance of children with SEN;
- Providing educational support according to the identified needs;
- Developing partnerships with different professionals who assist children with SEN;
- Effective collaboration with parents;
- Promoting among students, teachers and parents the idea of accepting and supporting students with SEN;
- Community involvement to ensure equal opportunities to education for all children.

### **Conclusion:-**

Along with the teaching staff, in order to ensure a qualitative and qualified approach to the needs of the students with SEN, specialized personnel, such as the support teacher, the psychologist, the speech therapist, various therapists, other qualified staff, will also be involved in the assistance process.

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