Developing a program promoting positive approach in primary and secondary education under school inclusion

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ABSTRACT

The school where I attend to my duties is in the Gara de Nord area, in a diverse community which consists of many families with little to no means, adults without a job or that act beyond the law, adults that are incarcerated (sometimes both parents from a single family) and Roma families. The school enrolls 107 children in preschool, 137 children in primary and 82 in secondary.

Children with special needs (diagnosed) are in relatively good health, exhibit issues with adapting to the school system and to the learning process – determined by social and familiar contexts. Ten of our primary and secondary students and two of our preschoolers have a handicap certificate which they were able to obtain aided by the school. They present with limited intellect, slight psychological retardation with associated issues: ADD, deviant behavior. They are part of families with low or medium education, adults with 3-9 classes, professional school, with no occupation or acting beyond the law: pimping, drug dealing with either one or both parents in jail. Income comes from small salaries, pensions, seasonal activities, illegal activities (the majority), alimony and different social benefits. Living conditions are mostly insanitary, in unsuitable places, with more people in one single room.

The families of most of the students are not interested in their academic futures, but solely on the benefits they can obtain from sending them to school.

The teaching staff has already informed the parents regarding the difficulties their children experience in regards to fitting in and learning and has advised them to have the children tested by a specialist since there's a possibility of receiving help from a support teacher. However, this was only done for a period of two years as the number of children was too small to make a difference.

Following the implementation of BASC-2 and SMALSI and evaluating the education journey of the school's children, we have observed that by applying the principle of positive integration in an inclusive school by all educational, teaching, parental, children and community member factors, one can achieve better teaching results, a better rate of participation in children's educational activities due to the promotion of inclusion and the cultivation of a positive self-image and a diminishing rate of school dropouts for the 4th and 5th grades.

Inclusive school means a detailed examination of the way barriers regarding learning and participation can be reduced for each student.

I believe that inclusion stands for the schooling of all children and youths according to the concept of "school for all", offers the possibility of self-evaluation and jotting down the progress obtained in achieving this ideal, process that is important from several perspectives: hired staff, students, parents, as well as other community members and organizations. Inclusive

school means a detailed examination of the way barriers regarding learning and participation can be reduced for each student.

By employing the BASC test I followed the highlighting of self-image for several groups of children who fit early stages of schooling, under the influence of a positive approach for the teaching process. Children (boys as well as girls) are part of varied social groups with ages between 7 and 11 years old. To this end, we tested the same number of children for 3 spectrums: personal (self, self-interview, SRP), parental (PRS) and teacher (TRS). The questionnaire assessment strategies for learning and motivation school (SMALSI) enables identification of deficient learning strategies that can affect academic performance and so guide and facilitate interventions to optimize learning. You can identify problems related to school motivation, learning strategies and difficulties arising during examinations that can interfere with academic progress.

One of the biggest adventures in our lives is the knowledge of self. It is truly tragic that some people spend their entire lives without having a precise target, getting stuck in frustrations, as they know nothing about themselves or about the way they are meant to approach problems – most of which are the actual conditions in which they live.

Without a doubt, the personal image has such a strong influence that its impact is overwhelming on the destiny of the human being, as it influences both successes and failures. The personal image is real, even though we can't touch it, feel it or see it. Failure and success are just as real. The personal image is our own opinion of the type of person we are. It is the result of past experiences, successes and failures, humiliation or triumph and carried the footprint of how were treated by others, particularly during the first years of our childhood.

In order for a person to be adaptable and efficient, he has to develop thusly from an early age and needs to be helped to maintain his availabilities to their fullest potential. In a world of searching and striving for better, referring to a truly efficient personality stops being a circumstantial and passing affair and becomes one of maximum relevance.

We must be careful what we tell our children. They might agree with what we say. Before we call a child "stupid", "clumsy", "bad" or "a great disappointment", it is important for a parent to ask the question: "is this the way I want my little girl or boy to think of themselves"?

As we grow and develop, we are faced with many mirrors from our family, colleagues and professors. These reflections of our image form the basis of the image of the self as we grow older. If we acknowledge this and regard them from a critical point of view, then we can take on careful scrutiny.

When there is a realistic perception of the self (you know your qualities, but also accept your flaws) and, implicitly, a good image of the self, the exterior realities either confirm or deny

what you already know about yourself and help improve where there is an opportunity for improvement.

A negative self-image can lead to poor motivation or can destroy it through a lack of trust and leading to avoidance behaviors. A negative self-image can create a vicious circle that the person can find difficult to escape: they don't do certain things because they don't think they can, after giving up doing those things they blame themselves and criticize themselves even harder. Thus they strengthen their negative convictions about the self and fuel a negative interior dialogue.

Hence, I have developed a program that targets three core groups: parents, teachers, and children.

In what concerns the program for children, I targeted the development of positive approach strategies to learning in order to improve self-esteem, reducing the dropout rate and improving grades. The main objectives of the positive approach program on both a primary and secondary level are:

- to help students identify the strong characteristics of their personality
- to support students in taking advantage of these strong suits in day to day life
- to promote adaptability, positive emotion and the feeling of value and worth

The program targeted the creation and development of values such as kindness, courage, wisdom and perseverance. The work sessions consisted of activities of 40-45 minutes that took place for the 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade. Most lessons consisted of discussing strong character suits (or other concepts and competencies of positive psychology), a class activity, a real world themed activity, that encourage students to apply the concepts and competencies in their lives, the conception and development of a reflection journal. We integrated a several games, exercises and activities with children with the purpose of increasing the level of integration of children with special needs. Through this program we tried to include positive education in as many subjects as possible: Romanian, History, and Civics.

From a parental perspective, their full involvement in helping their children adapt to the high standards of a forma educational structure such as going to school is a guarantee for getting over separation anxiety which many children go through, for establishing comfortable relationships with teachers and other students and a guarantee of necessary academic development. The parent counselling program encourages participants to study in greater detail the life and the way they relate to their children:

- to discover a wider array of positive and efficient alternatives in being a parent
- to develop a social support network with other parents
- to learn efficient abilities for being a parent and positive approaches to discipline

- to develop analytical abilities and to identify cause-effect issues in interpersonal relationships, to change attitudes in relation to the children-parent-teacher group, to change certain behaviors and to adopt desirable and efficient templates in children-adult relationships.

Thus, one attempts to improve school performance of children by improving their relationships with peers, with parents, with teachers and the parent-teacher paradigm.

Regarding the teaching staff, the program targets the adoption of a teaching style based on a series of positive strategies.

Unlike traditional teaching approaches, where teachers attempt to adapt the curriculum to a "common denominator" of student typologies and to move the class entirely towards using the curriculum through a single teaching and testing style, teachers who adopt a positive approach will use techniques that focus on different students as different learning styles, with different strengths and weaknesses.

Teachers use methods such as developing personalized objectives for every student, learning generators for developing motivation plans in order to achieve proposed objectives. Instead of pushing children into reaching a level set by the entire class and seen through the emphasis placed on standardized testing, this approach tries to personalize the teaching objectives based on students' individual levels. Instead of forcing students to compete against each other, learning is seen as cooperation if teachers will learn, in turn, to respect the individuality of every child.