School phobia

Gabriela Alina Anghel
Valahia University Târgovişte
anghelalina2002@yahoo.com

Abstract

School phobia is identified as a problem met frequently in today's society, where the specialists in educational and social policies are actively preoccupied to identify efficient intervention strategies to prevent and fight it. The reasons are extremely diverse: internal – having to do with the alteration of the emotional background due to stressors affecting one emotionally significantly, and external – having to do with the school environment. The multisectorial and pluridisciplinary intervention for each case in turn and the functioning of the school-family partnerships can contribute successfully to the prevention of and fight against the cases of school phobia. At the same time, the correct implementation with the child of education models achievable in relation to his intellectual potential decreases the risk of emergence of school phobia. The active school-family partnerships successfully empower the intervention strategies in solving different situations of educational crisis that favor the settling in of school phobia. This research aims to analyze the parents' perception concerning the way one can intervene in cases of children identified with school phobia. The research has been realized on a lot of parents in the rural area. The research results have led to the following conclusion: the specialists in the school framework are those who must act during a first stage in the prevention and fight against the cases of school phobia.

1.Introduction

Today's society is faced with a series of extremely diverse social problems. School abandonment is identified as a social problem that makes the specialists in educational and social policies actively preoccupied with the identification of efficient intervention strategies to prevent and fight it. In a document of the European Commission (Boza, 2011, 139-161), it is mentioned that "*early school leaving*" represents a "*deliberate action occurring before the graduation of secondary education (ISCED) or the certification in a vocational domain*". That is reason to apply didactic principle in didactic activity (Eşi, 2010, 24-34) by reporting to idea of an intuitive didactics (Eşi, 2014, 87, 92) and disciplinary field (Eşi, 2015, 7-12).The causes related to early school leaving are extremely

diverse: from those having to do with the social, institutional, family, cultural factors to the individual factors. Their intervention in the educational development plan of every child exerts influences on his subsequent evolution. In this sense, the theory of the ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner can successfully explain the occurrence mechanisms for certain positive or negative effects in the child's development and functioning in the social area. According to this theory, the child is situated in the centre of an ecosystem organized on the following levels: the micro-systemic level represented by: school, family and the peer group, the mezo-systemic level represented by the environment where different interactions occur among the substructures of the micro-system, and the exo-systemic level represented by: micro-systems, mezo-system and the extended family, macro-system described on the level of the cultural dimensions (faiths, values, ideologies belonging to the community the child's family belongs to) and chrono-systemic level, represented by the system whose components are the events in the life of an individual and of his family.

The intra-systemic but also inter-systemic imbalances lead to change in the child's attitude and behaviour in relation to school, attitudes and behaviours of the family to the child and his development needs. The reasons of early school leaving are explained in the context of the imbalances that appear on the level of each systemic structure. According to data provided by Eurostat (2015) the highest school abandonment ratio in Europe is identified in Spain, which in the year 2014 was recording a coefficient of 21.9%, followed by Malta with a coefficient of 20.4% and Romania with a coefficient of 18.1%. At the opposite pole is Croatia with a school abandonment ratio of 2.2%, Slovenia with 4.4% and Poland with 5.4%. It is considered that to reduce school abandonment is a desideratum of the European educational policies, which have set themselves as their major goal to reduce this phenomenon under the threshold of 10% until 2020. In the category of the factors leading to early school leaving, we shall remind of: family reasons: improper parental educational models, improper patterns in the family culture, abusive, aggressive, indifferent parents, who abandoned their children, migrants, parents dominated by religious doctrinal constraints or who are part of communities where formal education is not important, deviant, delinquent parents, who in their turn were not successful on the educational level, which has to do with the status of poor, disorganized families.

2.Research framework

Early school leaving is analyzed in the context of considering this problem as temporary or definitive school failure. School failure incriminates as potential causes also those reasons related to "school phobia", "school fatigue". We could consider these dimensions correlated directly with the individual factor that can contribute to school failure. We shall actually discuss problems related to the child's refusal to continue to go to school: "School phobia supposes the child's fear in relation to something specific of the school framework, either related to the educative process, or of social nature" (Boza, 2011, 142-143). The most frequent cases of school phobia are met in the case of children facing problems of integration in the school area. It can often be noticed that those children in relation to whom there is no specific intervention (measures corresponding to the needs of

integration on the level of the school group) manifest serious behaviours of non-adaptation concretized in: violence, timidity, agitation, negativism, refusal, rejection, isolation, absenteeism, school failure, slowness. School phobia can appear at an early age - when the child is integrated in the educational system or constrained by adults to have a certain conduct in relation to kindergarten, school or can settle in during the educational trajectory at various intervals from the starting point.

Equally, one can identify a high incidence of this problem among pre-school or primary school children. At the same time, it can occur at puberty or during adolescence following an incorrect management of educational crisis situations. The definition of school phobia is realized by considering the anxiety dimension. They do not overlap. It belongs to the domain of anxiety disorders. The broad definition of the concept of *phobia* refers to an irrational, persistent fear, accompanied by troubles on the level of the vegetative nervous system manifested by: spontaneous transpirations, agitation of the person before being faced with a certain situation, unrest accompanied by psychosomatic modifications; increased arterial pressure, increased cardiac rhythm frequency, accelerated breathing, yellow or red, humid teguments, trembling, attention disorders, volitional disorders, incapacity of focusing, defective or no memorization, stereotypes etc. It is considered that almost each person in their lifetime faces at least one phobia situation.

For a child of pre-school or school age, phobia takes on the form of refusal to go to school or to do the tasks related to school. School represents the stressor that a student identified with school phobia would like to get rid of at any cost. The students' representations in relation to school have a strong negative emotional impact. School/ the class are his aggressors, which he feels the need to avoid, to remove. This altered emotional background is described in the context in which these entities (school, class) represent the area where the student records a low self-esteem situating him in a personal and social discomfort zone. The serious effects of the lack of specialized intervention can lead to depression and school abandonment. Asking the students for too much by overcharging them with tasks, with an excessively loaded programme and the gap between task/ excessive task and the intellectual and biological potential can generate ample imbalances on the personal and social level.

The attachment theory also tries to explain school phobia. Separation anxiety is discussed, present especially among preschool-age children. The physiological development and the passage to puberty is analyzed also by reference to the self-conscience dimension. The reasons of the social area that have to do with school phobia are related especially to the quality of the family environment. It has been noticed that those children coming from problematic families (violent parents, who adopt extremely severe educational models, focused on obtaining the child's performance regardless of his capacities and potential, inadequate parental models, parents with psychic problems or false representations of education, anxious parents or parents who are absent from the child's life, hyper-protective parents etc.) have serious problems of adaptation to the school environment and are implicitly vulnerable in front of this problem. At the same time, certain diseases specific of the child such as a chronic disease can alter his representation in relation to

what school success means. His incapacity to complete school-related tasks leads to a low self-esteem with implications on the will and on the desire to continue. The absence of a student-centred education increases the chance of school exclusion especially among students with low educational performances. The theory of social ecology shows that there are some interstitial zones (of transition from rural to urban) and peripheral areas (the outskirts) of the towns/cities, where the norms and values promoted lead to the disorientation of children and produce conflicts among subcultures.

The proximity of vicinity – the rich and the poor – leads to refusal in school participation. Also considered as causes of school phobia are the cases of children coming from families belonging to certain minority groups and faced with stigmatization, tagging and exclusion phenomena (for the situation of Romania we can remind of the situation of children coming from Romani communities or of children identified with somatic, psychic, physical disabilities). Other causes belong to the domain of educational policies that do not develop efficient personalized intervention measures to fight school phobia. The underfinanced educational system of Romania and the absence of coherent social policies meant to support the family in difficulty successfully contribute to the amplification of the early school leaving phenomenon.

For this reason, the identification of the causes leading to school phobia is the imperative in the intervention action. Not all the teachers are preoccupied with identifying the causes. Most of them consider it the parents' responsibility. At the same time, not all parents are aware of the fact that their child is the victim of certain intra or extra personal problems. Consequently, the preoccupation of both parties for a harmonious development and correct education should be the main directions of the personal development plan for each child in turn. The multisectorial and pluridisciplinary intervention proves to be the universal remedy.

3. Research methodology

The research aims to describe the perspectives of involvement of the parents in the prevention of school phobia with lower secondary school students.
The research goals are: identifying the perception on the importance of an active involvement of the parents in the children's school education (SO1); measuring the parents' satisfaction level in relation to the school social capital (SO2).

 In this framework, the following working hypotheses have been delineated: if the partnerships school-family are active, then there is no risk of school phobia (H1); the more preoccupied the family is regarding the children's education, the lower the risk of school phobia is (H2). The research is of a standard type: theoretical and empirical. The research was undertaken on a lot of 47 people, made up of biological parents of the students from a school in the rural area. The rural

community is characterized by a moderate community development index. The dependent variables considered are: the case of the students who are absent without any reason (absent for at least 2 days a week). The independent variables are: the socioeconomic status of the family, active communication of the parent with the teachers, direct participation of the family to actions in the framework of the school partnership. The target group analyzed was represented by the parents of a school of the rural area where the risk of early school leaving is high (a ratio of 3%). The research instruments used were: the structured questionnaire and the interview.

4. Results analysis and interpretation

The operationalization of the concept "parents' active involvement in school education" is described as follows: weekly visits to school, discussions with teachers, participation in class, participation in school events, participation in class actions, participation in parenting courses. The diagram of the perception concerning the importance of an active participation appears as follows (Fig. 1
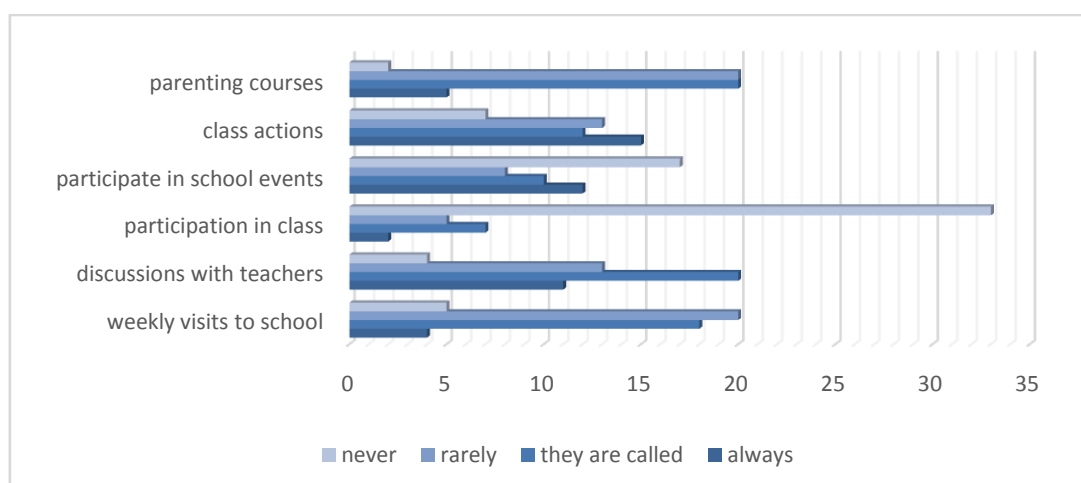

Fig. 1. Perception regarding the importance of the parents' participation to school life

Parents appreciate their participation to classes next to their children as unimportant. This fact is justified in the following contexts: the majority do not admit that such an activity would contribute to the educational success of their children, the teacher being considered the only person who can bring about change. In reality, participation now and then to the lessons in the formal education area has a positive contribution to the increase of the child's motivation in relation to school and the school tasks, the increase of self-trust, the development of the feeling of self-security and of security in relation to the others (teachers-colleagues), meeting the need of security and belonging to the social group and space.

These aspects influence the development of the feeling of safety and confidence. One can also note that parents rarely get involved in actions of active participation in school life. The active participation of the parents of the rural area is identified in the framework of actions initiated on the class level – celebrations and discussions with teachers – yet not in a significant proportion by comparison to the other types of active participations. This fact demonstrates that parents are influenced by precarious educational models for which formal education is important yet not a condition for their children's personal and professional development. This also justifies the emergence of the early school leaving phenomenon by the lack of coherence between the role of the school and the role of the parent in the child's school success. To conclude, we can appreciate the fact that the parents in the research lot do not profitably use the different forms of "meeting" with the school, indirectly contributing to the accentuation of the problem.

The child starts avoiding school and then can get to school refusal and early school leaving. In this case, the first working hypothesis is dismissed. The school social capital refers to those components of the social organization in the framework of the school institution and considering the school-family partnership. The following indicators have been considered: the parents' trust in the school institution, communication, collaboration with the specialists (psychologist, social care worker), receptiveness, activism. The distribution of the answers received appears as follows (Fig. 2)
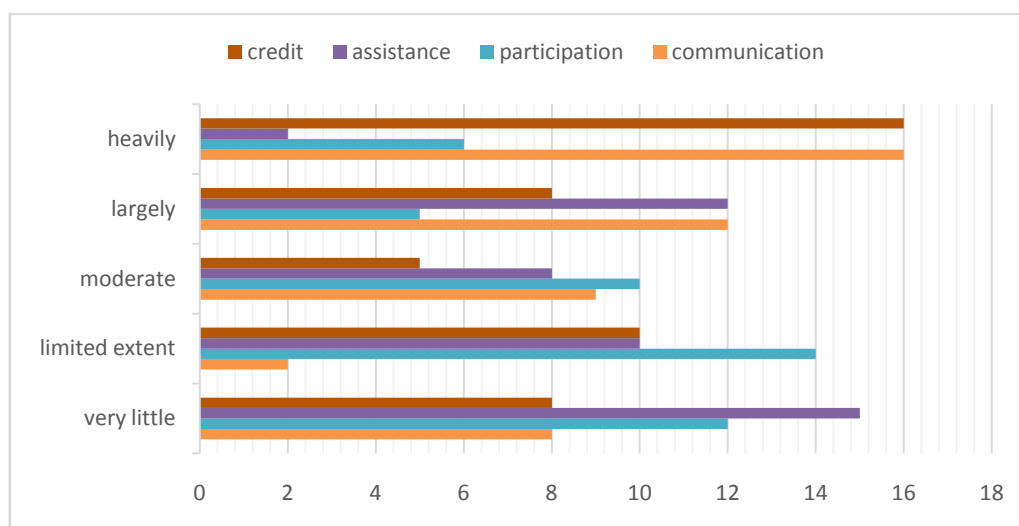

Fig. 2. Perception on the importance of the parents' active participation to school life

Communication is reflected as being the most important vector in the orientation of the parents' behaviours in relation to their children's education, to the attention on the emotions and inner feelings in relation to school. This makes us appreciate that for the parents in the rural area, the best method of communication is face-to-face (teacher-parent) communication. Formal education is perceived as important, yet responsibility in school success and solving the problems related to school phobia is rather let in the hand of the school and of the teachers. The analysis carried out dismisses the second hypothesis of our research

5. Conclusions

The theory of the models of overlapping spheres of influence [3], developed by Joyse Epstein, is confirmed. It brings to the fore the discussion on the role of the family-school-community partnership in the child's education and in that of the decision makers and actants on the level of the educational policies. The parties' participation and involvement can be substantiated in parenting actions, communication, collaboration, orientation and guidance of the resources needed to assure an educational process centred on the student and on his individual development needs

The family is identified as an agent stimulating and mobilizing the child's educational trajectory. The prevention and fight against school phobia needs to consider a multisectorial and pluridisciplinary intervention for the children in difficulty or at risk by the development of integrated services packages. A multisectorial approach of the risk of school phobia is essential and a pluridisciplinary intervention (social care worker, pedagogue, psychologist) on the level of each case indentified as risk case can successfully support the maintaining in the formal educational system of a number of students as high as possible

References

1. Boza, M. (2011). Fobia școlara, în Panisoara, G., (coord.). Psihologia copilului modern. Iași: Editura Polirom. Pp. 139-161.

2. Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

3. Epstein, J. L. (2001). *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

4. Eşi, M. C. (2014). About the Idea of an Intuitive Didactics and the Role of Intuition in the Activity of Teaching and Learning Assessment. International Journal of Social and Educational Innovation, 1, 87-92.

5. Eşi, M. C. (2015). Adapting and integrating alternative didactics in the teachinglearning-assessment system in relation to the concept of ―disciplinary field‖. In the International Journal of Social and Educational Innovation, Volume 2, Issue 3, 7-12.

6. Eşi, M. C. (2010). The didactic principles and their applications in the didactic activity. *Sino-US English Teaching*, USA, 24-34.

7. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (31.1.2011) Tackling early school leaving: A key contribution to the Europe 2020 Agenda, COM(2011) 18 final, Brussels, http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/doc/earlycom_en.pdf