

## STUDENT'S CORNER

# THE ADVANTAGES OF THE SCHOOL- FAMILY- LOCAL COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP. THE EXAMPLE OF AN ITALIAN SCHOOL

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### Abstract

*In this paper we show how a constant and efficient collaboration between the school and the local community is needed in order to obtain positive effects and results in the pre-scholar education. The analysis is inspired from the Italian public school in which we have been directly involved in the framework of an experience exchange program as teacher in the public Romanian pre-scholar system.*

### Keywords

Pre-scholar education, Italian public school, Romanian public school, school partnership

### JEL Classification:

I21, I28

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### Introduction

It is well known that for the continuous development of the human society, education has a major role, starting with the early age of its members. The right to receive an education is one of the main human rights guaranteed by the Constitution of any democratic state (see, for example the Italian Constitution). For this reason, the governments allocate important resources for the sustainment of the educational system. At local level, the authorities are often involved in assuring the development of the education process in all its phase, from kindergarten to university level (Hapenciuc, 2007). Last but not least, the families are asked to give an important contribution by collaborating with the teachers and the school head.

The partnership between school, families and local authorities is based on the trust and the responsibility of the partners. Thus, the mutual participation becomes a more efficient way to reach better results ( Goia, 2014 ).

The education offered in the kindergarten and schools is integrated with the education realized by other social and educational factors such as the family, the local authorities, the police forces, the health and physiological desks, the church, the economic community, the non-governmental associations, etc. All these factors have an important specific potential and significant influence on the children, and later students.

Moreover, the constant and continuous collaboration of the educational institutions and in particular of the schools with the various social partners facilitates the effective connection of the schools with the reality.

The mission of the kindergarten and of the school, in general, is not only to respond to the needs of the community in which they operate, but is part of a larger, national educational project, in an universal perspective which goes beyond the local concepts.

By means of the partnerships, the scholar institutions enhance their educational potential for a progress towards an authentic educational community; they become able to manage the local resources and to attract new funds and to use them for the benefit of the community.

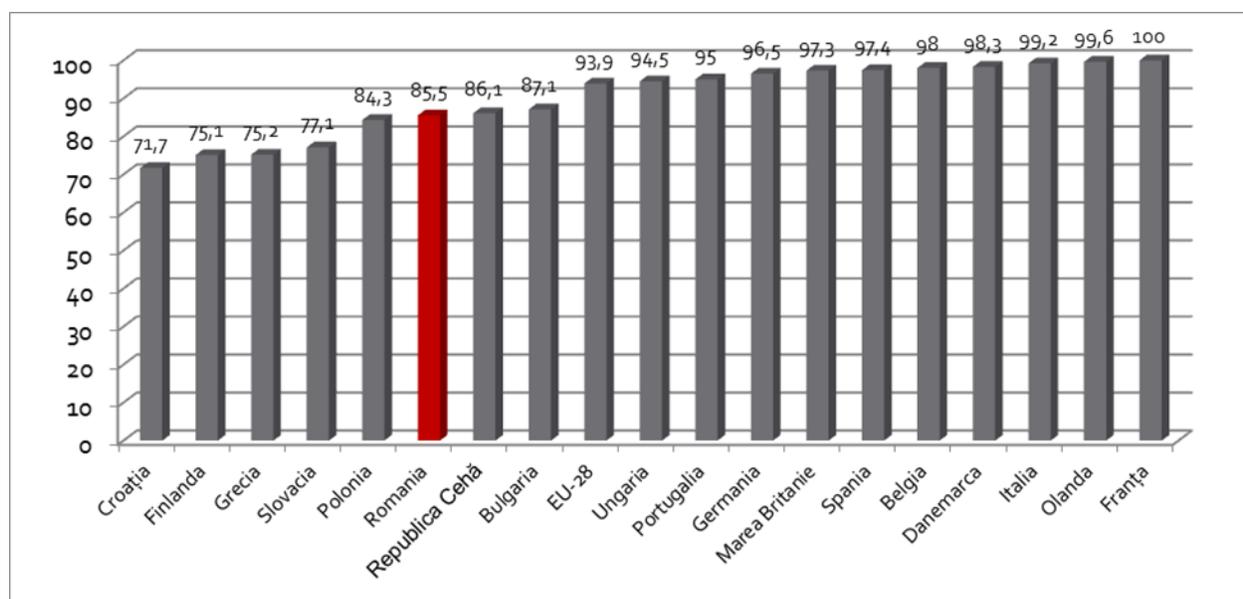
In this paper we will highlight some of the characteristics of the Romanian pre-scholar education level, followed by a comparison with the Italian public pre-scholar education. The intention is to offer a comprehensive framework of a more fortunate reality from which to get inspiration for possible improvements of the local Romanian education institutions.

### The Romanian public pre-scholar educational system

The educational ideal of the Romanian school consists in the free, integral and harmonious development of the human individuality, in the building of an autonomous personality and in the assumption of a system of value. Moreover, the education system aims to develop the active participation of its citizens in the society, an efficient and benefic social inclusion and the employment in the job market, as stated by the Romanian education law (see, for example Law of Education in Romania ).

The need to improve the pre-scholar education can be noted from the study provided by Eurostat in 2015: the participation to the pre-scholar education of the children with the age between 4 years and the official age of beginning the school, in Romania, represents an indicator with the value of 85,5 %, as shown in **Error! Reference source not found.** With respect to the Italian case (99,2 %) and many other countries like France (100%), Holland (99,6%), the Romanian pre-scholar education can be improved and a higher percentage of children frequenting the kindergarten could be reached.

**Figure 1. Participation to the pre-scholar education system of the children with the age between 4 years and the official age for the enrolling in the obligatory school – comparative data 2012**



Source: <http://www.ise.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/PUBLICATIE-Sistemul-de-invatamant-2014.pdf>

Regarding the partnership between the school, the family and the community, Romania already has an important growth. More and more educational institutions bind partnerships with the families and with other different factors of the society ( Staiculescu, 2011). These collaborations usually include activities initiated by the teachers, the parents or by the members of the community, such as:

- Cultural activities: viewing of theater shows, movies, visits to museums, realization of art exhibition with the works performed by the children;
- Sports activities: trips, contests, games;
- Actions for the beautification and maintenance of the monuments and of the parks of the area surrounding the building of the school;
- Participation of the children to the City days with artistic programs;

- Participation to the cultural symposium, organized by the community;
- Organization of some actions in which the children visit the police institutions, the fire station, the dentist office (in the occasion of the so called Open doors days);
- Events: colleagues birthdays, Mother's day, Kindergarten's day, etc.

Every step done in the framework of the school-family-local community partnership is a new, positive experience which makes us go on farther with the believe that the next step will offer greater satisfaction, that with our efforts we can give a contribution to the modernization of the Romanian education system and build future generations of educated people in an harmony climate.

The integration of Romania in the European Union offers many new opportunities for the development of educational services. In addition, the capacity of contributing to the economic development of the country depends on the professional preparation of Romanian citizens.

The reform of the Romanian pre-scholar and scholar education system aims to the alignment of the Romanian education system with the general requests of the European equivalent system.

### **The Italian public pre-scholar educational system. The experience exchange in Reggio Emilia**

In the framework of an experience exchange program, set up between the school "Licurici Kindergarten" in Ploiesti and the kindergaten "Nerra" in Reggio-Emilia, we had the possibility to study, to observe and to understand the Italian methods and characteristics in the education matter at the pre-scholar level.

In this paper, we will show how a good collaboration between the school system, the families and the local authorities and community have led to a successful story of pre-scholar education.

A list of the main characteristics of the reference school is given below. The contribution of the local community (family and/or public authorities) is underlined in each case:

- Small number of children for a teacher: 2 teachers for a class of 20 children, another teacher if one child with special needs is present and one teacher for the afternoon;
- Very good disposition of the spaces used by the children in their activities: large classrooms (25-30 m<sup>2</sup>), with large windows and doors for optimal natural illumination;
- Canteen for lunch serving, usually with food prepared not very far away from the school-**partnership element**: the local government of the city supports parts of the costs and families give a small contribution correlated to their income;
- Full of green vegetation garden, sports playground, internal and external space for playing, gym;
- Library, constituted jointly by the school and the family- **partnership element**: the families are encouraged to donate used books to the school, for an useful exchange between children; thus, the costs for the purchase of the books is noticeably reduced and the children and tempted to read and hence to improve their vocabulary and knowledge at zero costs;
- Bathroom for every classroom;
- A large number and types of activities performed by the children, among which:
  - ✚ Visits at the municipal art gallery museum and active participation at the drawing of a picture;
  - ✚ Visits of the police officers at the school for the teaching and respect of the street rules;
  - ✚ Visits to the didactic factory: learn how to produce soap with biological ingredients (olive oils), learn how to produce pasta and traditional sweets;
  - ✚ Visits to archeological site: learn how to excavate to find archeological evidence;
  - ✚ Visit to the science museum and science dissemination laboratories;
- Inclusion of one child with special needs in a classroom for responsibility sense development of the other children with the following positive effects: group spirit, socialization, acceptance of disability as normal, solidarity, serenity and harmonious development of the disability pupil;
- The larger spaces are easy to be converted in function of the activities:
  - ✚ The entrance hall in the morning is used to welcome the pupils and their parents; the families have thus the opportunity to talk with the teachers and communicate important information about the child while the children play on the few large toys.
  - ✚ At noon, the large entrance hall is used as canteen. The children have lunch all together, 120 pupils plus their teachers. The lunch moment becomes a precious socialization instrument.
  - ✚ In occasion of recital, the entrance hall is transformed in a theater.

- The parents who have to go to work early in the morning can leave the children in the custody of a cooperative which operates inside the school, with the authorization of the school until the official opening of the lessons. The costs are reasonable. The same organization is feasible at the end of the classes for those parents that cannot arrive in time for taking the children at home – **partnership element: local cooperatives-families-school**;
- The presence of a psycho-pedagogic specialized figure. It is essential both for the children and for the parents;
- With the economical contribution of the families, in a fair percentage, professional musicians are asked to come to the school and organize courses for the teaching of an instrument, usually the flute. In this way, the young students learn the basics of the music correctly – partnership element: local artistic reality-families-school;
- The parents are invited to give specific lectures or to teach lessons connected to their professions or abilities in the classroom of their son or daughter, such as: reading of a story, possibly with the regional specific of the family, power point presentation or experimental demonstration of a science topic;
- The parents are invited to take part in the preparation of the works made by the children in occasion of the Mom's and Dad's day (see, for example, the activities illustrated in Progetto-Scuola-Famiglia ).

### **Comparison between different education systems**

Thanks to the exchange of experience performed in the Italian school in 2013 and to the 10 years of activity in the Romanian pre-scholar education system, we can make a comparison between the two education systems.

- In Italy, the accent is put very much on the quality of the educational services, on the creativity, liberty and the learning through discovery of the pupils.
- In Italy, in the case of the kindergartens, the curricula is established at the school level, with the freedom of choosing the objectives, all the teachers together, including the psycho-pedagogist. In Romania, the curricula is determined in advanced, the same for all, with fixed objectives.
- The spaces in the Italian kindergarten are much wider than in Romania, arranged under the form of the workroom, place for playing, place for sleeping. In Romania, there is a large number of public kindergartens in which all the activities are performed in the same room. This penalizes their freedom of movement, the creativity and contributes in some measure to the appearance of the aggressive behaviors of the children with respect to their colleagues.
- In Italy, the teacher guides the pupil indirectly and makes them arrive to the objectives autonomously. In Romania, the teacher is a direct provider of information.
- In Italy, the family and the local community are directly involved in many scholar activities. In Romania, the kindergartens have relationships with the families and the community only in some case, such as specific projects and events.
- In Italy, the number of the pupils in a classroom is smaller than in Romania, where, unfortunately exist classes with 30 children.
- In Italy, the number of teachers following the classroom is double with respect to the Romanian reality.
- In Italy, the financial investments in the education system are certainly higher and more consistent with respect to the Romania.
- According to the objectives of the education programs of the Italian school from Reggio Emilia, the satisfaction of the children and of the families is primordial. So, the main objective of the educational institution and the main characteristic of its existence should be the complete and efficient development of the instruction of children and parents.
- The achievement of the qualitative results must be characterized by the satisfaction of the children and their families of: participating in an active manner to the achievement of the services, being motivated to learn and improve the knowledge, the abilities and the attitudes as elements of the competences, trusting their own capacities and in the capacity of judging and self-evaluation.

In Reggio-Emilia there are many services for families like: services of the reception desk for the families, services of the center for the families, consultancy services of the families, play-rooms and multi-media library for kids and families' services of social-familiar cartography of the territory.

## Conclusions

The actual context imposes that the providers of the educational services, in order to obtain a differential advantage, should take into account the improvement of the quality in such a way that they are able to overtake the expectancies of the end users. In order to fulfil this objective, the educational institutions which offer services should identify the determining factors of the quality as well as the expectations of the consumers.

For these reasons, it is mandatory that the entire educational system, from the pre-scholar to the university level, is appropriately equipped with the necessary resource, human, financial and material. It is evident that it's not possible to obtain performance in an educational system without a valid and consistent material support. The material support should allow for a high level technical dotation, able to sufficiently motivate the highly qualified personnel. At the same time, the talented teachers must be adequately motivated in for the educational activity and should not be put in the position of migrating in other sectors of the economy where they would get major economical advantages or even worst towards other national economies that appreciate more their qualities, as highlighted in .

In order to increase the quality of the education and to offer high standards educational services, more factors must be combined in an optimal manner. It is necessary that each educational institution, at every scholar level, has access to sufficient material resources and funds accompanied by an efficient management process of the resources.

Specially in the case of the early age children, a high quality education absolutely needs the direct and constant involvement of the family. The education of the pre-scholar children is a process to which both parents and teachers are directly interested, the first category personally, the others professionally. It is necessary to build a common, shared, vision, by means of the institution and the use of some channels and models of constructive communication, rhythmic, in double sense between family and school, as well as the development of common projects in collaborative partnership between teachers and parents.

The investments in due time regarding the education system in Romania (starting with the early age of the citizens) will lead to excellent results reached during the teenage and of the maturity age, forming competent persons and manpower for a better and prosperous society.

In the process of the education and the development of the children is essential the involvement of the local community, of the family, of the non-governmental organizations, sports societies, etc.

The communication between the kindergartens and the families is an indicator of the quality of the education. The results of several researches (Stan, 2016), indicated that the parents are willing to receive personalized information about their children every day. In Romania, with teachers having a large number of pupils in the class group and a limited time-lapse to communicate with the parents when they come to take home their children, the communication is not always satisfactory with respect to Italy where the number of the pupils is smaller and the communication is possible in optimal conditions.

The realization and the development of the successful partnerships aimed to create the conditions for the best education of all the children is possible if several principles are respected (Stan, 2016):

- recognize and accept the necessity of the partnership;
- identify clear and realistic objectives;
- assure the commitment and the involvement, the development and maintenance of trust;
- create clear and robust understanding, assure monitoring, evaluation and learning;
- realize researches, investigations, surveys on groups of children and parents.

In conclusion, it should be noted that each country which is needed to improve the scholar education should take over from the experiences of the development countries because no nation can develop, improve and grow outside of the world circuit of values. The school has therefore the important mission to prepare and form competent citizens able to contribute to the progress and the development of their nation, in this case, of the Romanian nation.

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