SCHOOL DEVIANCE AND THE SIGNIFICANT ROLE OF SOCIAL WORK IN SCHOOL

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Résumé

La déviance scolaire est l'un des principaux problèmes de la société contemporaine qui représente un réel souci et qui est devenu un sujet d'intérêt public dans beaucoup de pays du monde: Angleterre, Suède, Amérique, Australie, etc. Au début on l'a mentionnée avec une certaine timidité, mais dans les années '90 ce problème était ouvertement discuté. On observe des faits et des phénomènes négatifs, certaines d'eux extrêmement graves, tel le phénomène infractionnel qui a un grand impact sur les mineurs et les jeunes. Les recherches nationales et internationales ont mis au point toute une série de modalités d'interventions, plus ou moins efficientes, dont la plus efficiente, selon nous, est l'activité de l'assistant social dans l'école, qui vise essentiellement être le lien entre la famille, l'école et la communauté.

Mots clé: inadaptation scolaire, déviance scolaire, prévention à travers développement, prevention through development prévention situationnelle,. assistant social scolaire.

School deviance in Romania

There are debates on *today's teenage generation,* with ages between 12 and 16 years, who are living in a world whose main „ingredients" seem to be sex and drugs. Parents and teachers refuse to believe that "their children are this way". Experts, psychologists and psychiatrists warn about teenagers' way of living, which is a deviant one. They believe that parents should be the ones who admit this truth and should supervise their children more carefully. The younger generation is seen as good and nice children but the image displayed in front of parents and teachers is totally different from the one they have in their "gang" of friends. Students have their first sexual intercourse at ages varying between 12 and 14 years. They just say that „ this is their life and they can do whatever they like". There are cases of indecent pictures of teenage schoolgirls taken in secondary school toilets and of schoolboys who threaten and hit their teachers.

Some say that young people lead a dissolute and deviant life, that it is a generation without any inhibitions. The internet, the electronic mail or the messenger are also used for debauched activities. Teenagers hide behind a nickname, thus eliminating any responsibility for their conduct in the virtual space.

Parents and teachers blame each other for the deviant conduct of students, who find themselves in the position of not having anyone to talk to about their problems. Therefore, a doser collaboration between parents and teachers is imperiously needed. Today's young people lack positive role models. Their problems are also the issues of the society; they find it difficult to set a limit to their actions as there are no true constraints. Teenagers express their extravagance, situation determined by *"the disharmony of families" in which they are growing and the change of social value hierarchy.* It is natural that parents should be the first to notice an inclination towards excess in their children behavior, thus proving an "affectionate observation", and making "analyses with care". A parent who does not manage to communicate with his child should receive the help of a specialist, psychologist or psychiatrist.

As studies regarding this topic have pointed out, in certain areas, especially city outskirts many risk factors pile up their influence: low employment rate and implicitly high unemployment, low social-occupational, economic, educational and cultural status, diminished family income, poverty. In some cases, there is also the influence of "street gangs", a high crime rate at the level of that particular community, etc., all of these have an impact on children and youngster behavior. In fact, experts say that schools located in areas with high crime rate face the risk of becoming the target of violent phenomena, and students face the risk of developing deviant role models, as they acquired through observation such a model. (UNICEF, 2006, 48).

Local responsibility for the quality of the educational environment is based on the school, family and community collaboration, by making local partnerships. Therefore we encourage the creation of **support networks** by involving parents and family in children education, in supporting them to achieve success, both in school and in life. A strategy to bridge the gap between students coming from families with low income and those coming from families with high income is necessary. The two great social entities have to be aware of the fact that the responsibility for children's training means very close cooperation. However, generally speaking, the two institutions, school and family, chose to blame each other for children's failures instead of tightly collaborating, which makes us emphasize the need for **the social worker intercession.** Schools are focused on cutting down school deviance, on circumstantial prevention, more than on giving support to those students who proved to be victims. One can see that we need a school background in which violence is not tolerated; we would suggest that even at the level of the community, deviating actions should not be accepted, by setting up partnerships within the community, active networks, which are most likely to create a dynamic community.

Children who are victims of school bullying should be convinced that they should not hide these abuses but reveal them, they should not be afraid to talk about what happened, about what was done to them or about what they have seen

that has happened to others. Adults, parents and teachers should win their trust and help them overcome such situations. If the two big social and control entities, school and family, strictly complied with their duties, if education within family was appropriate, and school had unbreakable strict rules, then students would not become part of groups which determine them to commit aggressive actions and the phenomenon of school deviance which is currently a serious issue, might be diminished.

It was shown that socialization occurs within the family, school and also community. „The degradation of family, the incompetence of „school reformers" and last but not least the decay of the community spirit, (especially of public responsibility for the behavior of each citizen) account for „ the boom" of anomic actions and of crime, the increase of the percentage of population, especially the younger segment, which places itself „outside" social values and norms." (Miftode, 2002,141). „The existence of two types of relationships represents a point of reference for the strength of the community social network. The two types of relationships are called family relations and active relations. [...] A family relation is a tie or a connection between the members of the community who do not face role barriers.[...] An active relation is a relation which involves repeated and significant interactions between two or more persons or institutions.{...} Active relations may develop through family relations or may be the result of local meetings where people are able to speak out their opinions." (Agabrian , 2006, 16,17,18).

Family relationships are connected to roles, but active relations support the creation of the community and its reaction to the various issues coming along, its response to internal and external changes. The feeling of trust is very deeply rooted in a dynamic community. To encourage the development of active relations, it is necessary to create an atmosphere which involves all members of the community.

Inefficient strategies for preventing school deviance

Maurice Cusson, in his work „Prevenirea delincventei" (Prevention of deviance), identifies the inefficient methods of preventing violence in schools. Among the flawed strategies we name:

Iindividual therapies or individual counseling, because following this intervention the level of delinquency remains constant.

Group therapies proved to be quite harmful, because it was showed that the number of teenagers "resorting" to violent actions increases instead of decreasing if teenagers undergoing a risky situation talk about their problems.

Programs aiming at developing the self-esteem of pre-delinquent teenagers. The study was conducted in Ohio, from 1963 to 1966, by Reckless and his collaborators, involving more than one thousand pre-delinquents who were distributed at random, either in a special class or in a regular one. The idea of the

project was that in order to fight against the process of self devaluation, so that pre-delinquent underage do not feel stigmatized, students should be grouped in classes in which teachers were meant to be their role models and they had to use "non-stigmatizing" disciplinary measures. At the end of the experiment, there was no difference between boys integrated in special classes and those attending regular classes.

Conferences and speeches on law observance, are also inefficient.

Conferences held by trainers - policemen, whose objective is to convince students to stand up against incitements from their entourage to perpetrate delinquent actions or to consume drugs, had disappointing results. The American program *Dare*, a program in which policemen dressed in their uniforms held 17 lectures about the means to "say no to drugs", was not only a complete failure, but also those attending these speeches have later consumed *more* drugs than those in the witness group. Many say that the programs of the Romanian National Anti-drug Agency have the same outcome.

Temptation of authoritarianism- in Miami it was demonstrated that students from schools with exaggerated discipline expressed their frustrations through a delinquent attitude.

Recreational activities- Programs meant to prevent delinquency through leisure activities: sports, travels etc, counting on the fact that students will not make anything reckless if they are occupied. Studies demonstrate that it is more cautious not to expect high efficiency from these preventive programs, especially if in 2001, Gottfredson showed that recreational activities which are not associated *with acquisition of social skills* do not trigger drug consumption decrease.

The ABC's of school deviance prevention

Among the ways of solving deviance within schools we should name the synchronization of school projects with social prevention or prevention through development, teachers should be encouraged to fight their weakness showed when they deny that such a problem exists, students risking delinquency should become capable of a life in society and the school, as controlled environment, may be built, organized and managed so that children should be always safe and to diminish opportunities to commit aggressive actions. It was demonstrated that a school which is efficient from the curricular point of view is also efficient in preventing deviance. Debarbieux emphasizes the cohesion between educational teams, namely the school head teacher should mobilize partners and each member of the staff should know each student. School can change the destiny of her students becoming *effective schooling* in which the school's head teacher applies *leadership* both for the educational staff of the school and for the students*;* teachers are harsh, maintaining their objectivity and they closely follow students' progress encouraging them on their path towards self fulfillment. Teachers maintain order

and discipline in the classroom without resorting to punishments. Parents are encouraged by the school's team to be part of the educational project, and students are able to take on responsibility in the classroom.

In the project *Positive Action Through Holistic Education, PATHE* is an American experimental approach, which was aimed at developing the academic skills of teachers determining both a good adjustment of students to the school climate, and an improved performance. The changes brought by this project consist in the fact that teachers were trained in the management of the class of students and in participating education. The educational team examined the school regulation together with the students to clarify and determine the punishment of misconduct; Teachers were trained about methods for allowing each student to learn at his/her own pace, an aid network was created between peer students; it was created a service for professional guidance and for searching jobs. Students with disorders benefited from custom surveillance, including behavioral objectives, counseling and extracurricular activities were organized. Thus, students were rarely punished and had higher grades, few repeated classes and classroom behavior was improved. Therefore, effective schooling is „ the result of a strong leadership, exerted on a team of motivated and caring teachers." It was seen that in schools with many cases of violence there is also a lack of will to act and regulation disobedience is frequently registered, teachers disregarding this aspect. Debarbieux proposes that the regulation should be drafted by teams of students, parents, teachers and representatives of the management. Once the regulation is approved, its trespassing should not be left unpunished. Clear rules, based on predictable sanctions, but also systematic reward of good behavior, should be supervised on a regular basis. Unsanctioned and unrepressed, deviance becomes trivial.

Professor Vasile Miftode, identifies the **primary triad** „liable" for the construction of the individual being, which comprises school, family and the „proximate" social environment or neighborhood. It is required „ the set up of an interdisciplinary activity which should include, besides concerned professionals (sociologist, social workers, legal specialists, anthropologists etc.) persons responsible with primary socialization,(in a first stage) and secondary socialization, (in a second stage)" (Miftode, 2002,141). School is the ideal place where aggressive students with behavior disorders can be identified. Cognitive-behavioral therapies are ranked first as degree of efficiency in non-delinquency. Situational prevention consists in supervision within school, video surveillance, if required, and a good dissemination of information.

Social prevention or prevention through development is the one in which **experts** are preoccupied with preventing young people from living in a precarious educational environment, from being converted into adults incapable of a social life. Experts interfere in the concerned families in order to help parents become trainers who are able to develop self-control and social skills of children. Experts also interfere in the school activity, assisting teachers and children for the same

purpose. They act directly on the subjects, to make them acquire the missing social skill.

Social prevention is educational approach of the targeted subject and on his microenvironment aiming to cut down tendencies towards delinquency. The objective of social prevention is to determine the child to become able to live in society, the social environment of the subject being its target.

The role of social prevention is to stop an individual evolution which might lead to maladjustment and to an antisocial nature. Prevention through development, a prevention of education, "aims at misconduct before it is manifested and covers cognition deficiencies before the child accumulates gaps which cannot be refilled" (Cusson, 2006, 74).

The return to regular educational conditions, so that the intellectual, social and moral evolution of the child should follow its path, is the main objective of prevention through development. The purpose and means of prevention refer to:

1. The development of parents' educational skills;
2. The development of the child's social skills;
3. The cognitive behavioral approach, which means to encourage the development of the child's cognitive side;
4. Family-school mix „operations".

The development programs make use of the **cognitive – behavioral** approach, whose efficiency in delinquency and even recidivism prevention was clearly showed. In the cognitive behavioral approach, the ways of behaving are learnt through observation and they are maintained through consolidation. In his intervention, the therapist starts by accurately identifying problematic behavior, its antecedents, outcomes and erroneous convictions on which the client's behavior is based. The objective of the therapy is to eliminate antisocial behavior and to replace it with proper conduct, using social consolidations (reinforcements), shaping and increasing self esteem, relaxation, role play and other techniques. „The cognitive behavioral approaches registered significant results in relation to action-oriented clients, who feel the need to do something, in relation to purpose-oriented clients, who want results and in relation to those interested in modifying a small number of conduct." (Gârleanu-Soitu, 2002, 48).

Starting from the premise that *the main agent of prevention through development is the school social worker,* we will briefly present the role, functions and abilities of the social worker in school.

The role of the school social worker

School is seen as playing an essential role in present day society. Its main task is to educate, being followed by that of providing social services. Through education, society may endure, handing over to the new generation the knowledge gathered throughout centuries. School also develops to maximum the potential of

young people, helping them to know themselves and accept them, to integrate ideals in their identity, to be responsible and to get involved in the development of society. School should also support younger generations to get adjusted to an ever changing reality. Young people should be prepared for whatever is in store for them in the future and they, thanks to their possibility of adjusting, creating and innovating, may shape it to their liking. High expectations and pressures come from the other social subsystems.

In the process of learning, students shall develop their own skills and shall find intellectual or practical satisfactions in the educational approach. In school, pupils have to develop personal and social autonomy, which will come in handy when integrating in the society. In time, parents' participation to the students' school life has intensified; the teacher-student relationship is now based on democratic principles and the social-cultural disparities in the educational environment were diminished. The main purpose of the school social worker is subordinated to the educational one, assisting students in developing their capacity of issue-solving, in becoming responsible for their own behavior and in adjusting to change. The objective of school social work is to identify obstacles in the learning path and to try to eliminate them and also to open access to school education.

Quite often, the school social worker is the only one in school or in the whole neighborhood. The professional needs to have skills for all the three levels of practice: micro, mezzo, macro. He is working first of all with students, also facilitating the set up of groups for students and parents. The actual practice of school social work consists in collaborating, consulting behavioral development and the preparation of other persons for dealing with difficult children. The school social worker has the obligation of supervising the observance of students' rights and obligations in school, and also to prevent any type of abuse. It is also necessary to prevent school maladjustment by identifying causes; a good collaboration between school social worker and family social worker for a good relation between school and family. The school social worker should also oversee the creation of specific social maturity competences.

The first day of school is significant for the child and for the family. The child becomes student, the parent is replaced by the teacher, and the informal environment is replaced by the formal one, made up of school rights and responsibilities. Students have to adjust to an environment where they become anonymous for the others; they are no longer the focus of attention, as it happened inside the family. School adjustment appears following school socialization and is characterized through the students' participation to the school's purposes, such as academic performances, motivation for discipline, schedule and conduct rules observance. School provides a training experience to children. It may be pleasant or not, depending on the experience of each child. Interaction between peer group members may be a source of pleasure or of alienation. Many children, because of

family issues, may not appropriately answer to the requirements of the school environment which usually demands students to comply and those who are not able to accurately respond, generally drop out.

In time, the parents' participation to the students' school life has intensified. The relation teacher-student was founded on democratic bases and was attenuated in relation with the socio-cultural inequalities in the educational environment. The major objective of the school was liberalizing the access to school learning. The social worker has the obligation, the role to ensure that both the rights and obligations of school students are complied with, and the role to prevent any type of abuse. In addition, the social worker must prevent school maladjustment of students by identifying its causes, a good collaboration with the family social worker and the parish social worker. Focusing on its activity, the school social worker must use his knowledge, abilities and values to improve the students' life. Focusing on his activity, he must built relationships, evaluate, work with a multidisciplinary team and help children and teenagers communicate the difficulties that determine their lack of performance in school.

The main role of the social worker in the activity with students can vary from one school to another and one neighborhood to another, according to the beneficiaries. He spends a great part of the time helping children with emotional and behavioral problems or those with special needs. Linda Openshaw identifies between the roles and responsibilities of the school social worker , four common tasks, underlying his activity, as follows : **consultation** with other members of the multidisciplinary team; **evaluation**, applied to the different roles that the social worker has in consultations and developing programs; the direct intervention, with parents and children individually, in the group intervention or with the family; assistance with the programs development.

The National Association of Social Worker (NASW) traced important guiding lines on the intercession of the school social worker, including the practice standards, the training, professional development and administrative support structure. These appeared in the NASW standards for the **school social worker,** which were adopted in 1978 and reviewed in 1992, and afterwards in 2002. Each school social worker has the duty to delineate his professional activity, guiding himself after these rules.

The school purpose is to prepare the youngsters for the integration in the society and develop their maximum potential. The contemporary education has a "social-therapeutic" character. The main objective of school is that of providing an environment for learning and development, an environment in which the children are prepared "to understand the environment they live in and where they will become active in the future." The school objectives are to equalize both the chances of access to education and the chances of success in the educational form. That is why each youngster can opt for the form of education corresponding to him.

The school social workers were involved in the process of disseminating the democratic values in education. The parents are involved in the school decisions, both in the educational and administrative field. The school maladjustment can generate social maladjustment, which is why the school social workers must prevent and reduce the phenomenon, identifying the causes of its appearance, improving the relationship between school and family and ensuring that the "skills specific to social maturity" are formed. Children accept their family as it is and they can become what the significant persons in the family expect them to be. Socializing in school is less emphasized than the one within family, which is less impelling, "the child becoming the prisoner of the world defined by his parents". (Neamtu 2003, p 834). The family prepares the child for the school activity and influences his adjustment. A situation of incongruence may appear between the socialization models offered by the family and that promoted by school (Bunescu apud Neamtu, 2003, p.835): **parallelism** appears when the values of a socialization model are not found in the other; **divergence** appears when what is positively evaluated in a socializing model becomes marginal behavior, debatable by the other model; **contradiction** results when between the two normative-value sets specific to each socializing model, there are contradictory relations - for example when the „positive" behavior rewarded in family becomes the object of explicit interdiction in school (which is usually denominated through the collocation "symbolic violence").

School socialization determined students to be performant, to consent to complying with rules, be positively motivated to comply with the activity schedule and the school behavior norms. School adjustment involves the inclusion and acceptation in the group of peers and obtaining school performances. The school success is an indicator of school adjustment; a relation of "cooperation-competition" appears among children of the same age. The students, in their interaction with teachers, with the auxiliary personnel, with the other students, are in a continuous learning process, contouring in this manner their social identity. The beneficiaries of social work from school are the students, their families, the didactic and non-didactic personnel of the school and some of the community members.

The functions of the school social worker were defined for the first time in 1977, when the social work service from the USA school was introduced by law (Costin 1995, apud. Neamtu 2003). Among these, we mention: preparing the social history and/or students development, ensuring the individual and group counseling for the students and their parents, supporting the school adjustment of students with problems not only in school; more than that, monitoring whether they adapt to the family and community environment they belong to, besides the school environment one. In addition, the school social worker must identity the school and/or community resources, necessary for the achievement of school objectives and provides services for the students and their families, for the educational personnel

of the school, for the non-educational personnel of the school and for community. The task of the social worker is to prevent school maladjustment. The teachers and other members of the school personnel can observe it in the students' behavior in classes, breaks, or during the extra-curricular activity.

Cristina Neamtu lays out some clues of school maladjustment for the teachers, who work directly with children and for parents as well. Thus, if parents see that the student does not accomplish school tasks, that he/she misinforms them regarding school results, the tasks and activities he/she must achieve, in relation with the school difficulties and the conflicting situations he/she deals with, and this may determine maladjustment. Teachers can diagnose in advance school maladjustment, if they notice that the student reads with difficulty, deciphers, confounds the letters, makes omissions or inversions, writes illegibly, with spelling mistakes, with faults in constructing the phrase, has difficulties in summarizing ideas, in seizing the logical relations among them and has difficulties in making calculations. These indicators signal the fact that the family environment generates causes of school maladjustment, either by non-stimulating intellectual development of the child, or by having a form of abuse in the family (physically, emotionally and/or sexually); either there are families who depreciate the utility of education for the child, or families who do not have access to educational resources.

The school social worker must identify the particularities of the family environment, of origin as basis for his intervention program. School maladjustment may appear even since the beginning of school or later. The motivations may be found in the family environment for the students in the beginners' grades and both in the family and school environment for elder students. Among the causes, we can identify parents' divorce, a too rigid teacher, a chronic disease, interfamily violence, an accident, parental alcoholism. At the adolescence age, characterized by the revolt to the adults' authority and the effort of standing out, originality and need for ideal, not ruling out the conformist to the group, since they no longer relate to the value judgment of adults, but to the value judgment of the group of peers (of the same age). The students labeled as "stupid", "incapable", etc. can easily become maladjusted. They will label in their turn those with school results as being "crammers", "boring", they can find themselves in other criteria of social comparison than those specific to school, forming distinctive informal groups. They can resort to consuming psychoactive substances, to truancy or school drop-out or, on the contrary, can mobilize in order to achieve a higher school status.

We foresee the necessity of the social worker supporting these students by identifying and supporting in time the children with risk of maladjustment, so that they do not acquire specific roles of „maladjusted" or "deviant". The social worker develops a friendship relationship with the students, offers emotional support, coordinating and motivating the student for school re-adjustment. The counseling program is based on obtaining the confidence and affective adhesion of the student and identifying his needs. The parents must be supported to improve their

educational practices, must be stimulated to participate to the school life and develop their abilities of solving the conflicts they can have with the children or teachers, develop efficient means of facing stress without influencing the relation with the child, and for the parents with reduced financial possibilities, identifying resources. Among student's needs, we can identify: self-esteem development, improving intellectual abilities, learning methods for conflict solving, developing social relationship skills. The students must be determined to understand the requirements and educational practices of parents; they must learn to control the manner in which they express their feelings, etc. Since parents are directly interested in their children's progress, they must be co-opted in a school-community partnership", where they should choose by common consent the best educational alternatives for the child, sharing the responsibility for the child's evolution.

In our opinion, the main binder between family, school, community is the social worker in the school.

The abilities of the school social worker

The social worker identifies students with social problems, in view of their social reintegration. He carries out case studies and social inquiries in the case of students with special social problems, with deceased parents or found in the impossibility to provide for themselves (collaborate with the local authority); in the case of abandoned students with problems of adjustment or socialization ; in the case of students who have suffered emotional shocks and have behavior disorders, such as: isolation, alienation, fear, anxiety, suicidal tendencies; in the case of students coming from delinquent families who require a special moral instruction (replacing the family, civil and moral reeducation); in the case of students with problems of school adjustment, school drop-out; in the case of students consuming or who are exposed to the drug consumption; in the case of students frequenting groups of delinquents or are in the records of police authorities. The social worker ensures a functional relationship with schoolteachers, parents for preventing the psychological discomfort of students, and school failure. The school social worker must prove his devotion to the ethical values and principles of the social worker profession. The values are **general** (nondiscrimination, confidentiality, respect to the client's dignity, full respect of the customer's interest, the customer's involvement in solving his own problem), **individual-focused values,** such as individual dignity, respect towards the person, intimacy, right to option, confidentiality, **community-focused values:** respect of traditions and local cultural mode, cooperation with local actors and social work, adjustment in community of the social modern work, the family and community's right to choose, the community's right to autonomy, the right to social protection regarding any risk, abuse, violence. The social worker must know as well as possible the community

in which he is activating, to integrate in the community from all points of view, to comply with local traditions, the co-participation of local actors, adjusting the requirements of the social work to the local needs, the local autonomy and the right to choose. **The values focused on the social work practice** are: the obligation to ensure "social justice", protection and "social welfare", increasing the "individual, family and group life quality", within the community, and repudiating all the forms of discrimination, marginalization and "oppression" (Miftode, 2003, 261).

According to Linda Openshaw, the main skills of the school social worker are the following:

1. Evaluation;
2. Direct practice;
3. Individual counseling;
4. House visits;
5. Work with the group;
6. Mediation.

As an auxiliary teacher, he collaborates with the members of the County Center of Psycho-Pedagogic Assistance, provides methodic assistance to teachers, intervening as many times as required; he is permanently focused on developing and improving professional training; answers the requirements of the County School Inspectorate and of the Teaching Staff Resource Center for improving the training-educational process; he is involved in implementing educational projects; he collaborates with all the authorized institutions for supporting the higher interests of the child; he annually elaborates a methodological paper regarding the social work achieved with children; he elaborates different teaching materials necessary in the training-educational process; he ensures methodic assistance for teachers; he supports students by organizing and performing group activities; he provides counseling and assistance to the family.

The school social worker must make sure that it is a permanent collaboration between the family social worker, the parish social worker and the educational psychologist, the existence of a permanent connection between the social workers, teachers from schools, the entire auxiliary personnel, parents and students, the main purpose being that of "regulating" children and youngsters' behavior.

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